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**CRIMINAL LEADERS' BEHAVIOUR:  
EXPLORING CRIMINAL CAPITAL OF 'NDRANGHETA BOSSES  
INVOLVED IN DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES**

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*"Gentlemen, I'm going to tell you who I am. I am Pablo Emilio Escobar Gaviria. My eyes are everywhere. That means you guys can't move a finger in all of Antioquia without me knowing about it. Do you understand? Not a finger. One day, I'm going to be president of the Republic of Colombia. So, look, I make deals for a living. Now, you can stay calm and accept my deal, or accept the consequences. Silver or lead."*

Pablo Escobar, *Narcos* (2015)



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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Betw	Betweenness centrality, social network analysis measure
Clos	Closeness centrality, social network analysis measure
COT	Control of the territory
Const	Ego-network constraint, social network analysis measure
Criminal capital	Criminal social capital as defined by McCarthy & Hagan (1995, 2001), i.e. the social capital when involved in criminal activities. This thesis focuses on criminal social capital, as opposed to criminal human capital. When referring to the latter concept, the entire label criminal human capital will be used
Deg	Degree centrality, social network analysis measure
Den	Ego-network density, social network analysis measure
DPR309	Articles 73 and 74 of the Italian Presidential Decree n° 309 of 9 October 1990 (D.P.R. n° 309), “ <i>Consolidation of the laws governing drugs and psychotropic substances, the prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts</i> ”. Specifically, Art. 73 addresses “ <i>The illicit production and traffic of narcotic and psychotropic substances</i> ” and Art. 74 the case of “ <i>Conspiracy to unlawfully engage in the traffic of narcotic and psychotropic substances</i> ”
DT	Drug trafficking
Effic	Ego-network efficiency, social network analysis measure
EffSiz	Ego-network effective size, social network analysis measure
EgoBetw	Betweenness of ego-network, social network analysis measure
Eig	Eigenvector centrality, social network analysis measure
Hier	Ego-network hierarchy, social network analysis measure
Mtn	Number of meetings attended
OCC416	Article 416 bis of the Italian Criminal Code on “ <i>Mafia-type Association</i> ” offence as introduced by Act N. 646 of 13 September 1982 and amended in 1992
Siz	Ego-network size, social network analysis measure
SNA	Social Network Analysis
Tel	Number of telephone calls undertaken and wiretapped
ValDeg	Valued degree, social network analysis measure

## ABSTRACT

Within every competitive setting, people exploit relational asymmetries stemming from connections that are sources of novel information and resources. Individuals in brokering positions are ordinarily a respective groups' leader. Whilst scholars have extended the concept of social capital to the criminal context, there remains a relative dearth of knowledge concerning precisely how leaders exploit their criminal capital. Manifold studies have shown that leaders usually act as brokers within criminal networks, which provides an effective balance between efficiency and security in the management of illicit activities. However, other studies have demonstrated that criminal leaders often employ additional security measures, including *inter alia* distancing themselves from riskier activities, such as drug trafficking (DT) networks and communicating via telephone.

This study examines criminal leaders' behaviors to identify whether and in what ways they vary according to the main activities performed by their networks, and with respect to the communication channels used. This study is underpinned by eight case studies of 'Ndrangheta groups involved in DT, or other typical Mafia-related crimes centered on the control of the territory (COT). The results indicate that while criminal leaders favor brokerage and security when involved in COT, they opt for closure and efficiency when involved in DT.

Ultimately, these findings cast light upon criminal leaders' behaviors, which, in turn, enhances extant knowledge on the internal structure of criminal networks.



# INTRODUCTION

Historically, social groups have been characterised by hierarchical structures and the emergence of a leader. Leaders facilitate identity formation, resource mobilisation, and the identification and achievement of goals; “*in simple terms, leaders get things done*” (Hofmann & Gallupe, 2015, p. 123). Consequently, leadership is one of the most studied concepts in the social sciences. For a long time, leadership research was primarily focused on human capital, i.e. knowledge and skills acquired by individuals (Coleman, 1988). Although multiple definitions exist, most of them conceptualise leadership in terms of the extent of influence a leader has over followers in pursuing their defined goals (Cohen, 1990; Conger, 1992; Donnelly, Ivancevich, & Gibson, 1985; Hemphill, 1955; Hollander, 1978; Kouzes & Posner, 1995; Rauch & Behling, 1984; Stodgill, 1950; Tannenbaum, Weschler, & Massarik, 1961). Social relations thus provide the infrastructure allowing leaders to exert influence in pursuing and achieving their goals. Therefore, underscoring the importance of social relations helps move forward academic inquiry on leadership which hitherto has revolved around individuals’ features.

One way in which leadership scholars have shifted their analytical lens is by focusing on social capital, defined as any aspect of the social structure that generates value and influences the actions of individuals within said structures (Coleman, 1988). Social capital thus concerns the resources arising out of relations among individuals. Relations provide both access to and control over information and resources, whilst the management of these relations provides opportunities for achieving leaders’ goals. Indeed, research has demonstrated that social capital facilitates the process of job seeking, status attainment, and promotions in legitimate occupations (Allison & Kwon, 2002; Lin, 1999, 2001; Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001).

Considering such research, scholars have extended the concept of social capital to cover criminal settings, developing a specific criminal version of social capital: criminal capital. Criminal human capital refers to criminal knowledge and skills used in committing offenses, while criminal social capital designates one’s degree of embeddedness within criminal networks (McCarthy & Hagan, 2001). Within all competitive environments, people exploit connections that are sources of novel information and resources because they generate relational asymmetries (Burt, 1992; Granovetter, 1973, 1983). Individuals in privileged positions are invariably the leaders of their groups and brokers of demanded resources. The same idea applies in criminal settings. Since criminals operate in stateless environments, which

means they cannot rely on standard legal mechanisms for regulating transactions and disputes, brokering becomes even more crucial (Kleemans, 2014; Kleemans & De Poot, 2008; Kleemans & Van Koppen, 2014; Paoli, 2002; Reuter, 1983). This explains how embeddedness within criminal networks generates a specific type of capital, which McCarthy & Hagan (2001) designated as criminal social capital (hereafter referred to as criminal capital).

This perspective on criminal capital perfectly fits with the network approach to criminal organisations. According to this approach, criminal organisations are understood as networks of relations among co-offenders based on kinship or criminal collaboration (Jackson, Herbrink, & Jansen, 1996). The network approach focuses on relations between individuals, identified as “*the least common denominator of organised crime*” (McIllwain, 1999, p. 304), in order to analyse the internal configuration of criminal groups (Sciarrone, 2009). The analytical focus here could involve the relationships between co-offenders, as well as with other criminal groups, and representatives of the legal economy, including entrepreneurs and politicians. The Social Network Analysis (SNA) was originally developed by Moreno (1953) in his psychological research, but has subsequently become an expedient tool in multiple fields of study, including the study of covert networks.

Empirical studies on criminal organisations have garnered crucial insights into the formation, internal organisation, and development of various types of criminal groups, but they have paid scarce attention to criminal leadership. This lacunae in extant research is problematic because it precludes a detailed examination of the most relevant figures within criminal networks, which, in turn, limits our understanding of organisations’ overall structures and mechanisms. Consequently, it is necessary to understand how criminal leaders organise their networks of relations, both to obtain specific positions and manage the flow of information and resources. This study adopts a network approach to organised crime and draws upon previous studies on leadership to analyse leaders’ behaviors within several ‘Ndrangheta criminal groups involved in different criminal activities.

This thesis aims to identify the behaviors that enable criminal leaders to take advantage of their criminal capital, in addition to examining potential variations in their attitudes due to the type of communication (i.e. telecommunication or in meetings) and illicit activities they are involved in. Criminal leaders’ behaviour is explored in terms of participation in events and strategic positioning. Based on the review of extant knowledge on criminal leaders, criminal networks, and more general social and criminal capital, one could hypothesise that leaders

would tend to act as brokers. This is because this position allows them to control the flow of information and resources among members, without increasing their visibility. When involved in risky activities, like drug trafficking (DT) operations, criminal leaders would be less prominent to protect them from possible law enforcement interventions. As an additional security strategy, they would reduce their participation in telecommunications, as most skilled criminals are wary of the risks of interception. When at all possible, they would opt for other means of communication, such as meetings. Adopting a case study approach affords a detailed examination of leaders' behaviors through the comparison of SNA measures<sup>1</sup> of members of four 'Ndrangheta groups primarily involved in DT and four other members engaged in typical Mafia-type activities for control of the territory (COT). Descriptive statistics and results of logistic regression models<sup>2</sup> show that leaders' behaviors varied according to both the groups' main illicit activities and the source of data used (i.e. wiretap and meeting networks).

The novel contribution of this study lies in its focus on the relation between criminal capital and criminal leaders; specifically, how this relation varies according to the activities performed and the communication channels used as a source of data. The results show a clear pattern for the networks involved in the COT: leaders avoid or limit as much as possible their participation in telephone calls and tend to occupy brokering positions, especially in networks drawn from meeting attendance. This internal structure pinpoints leaders' shielding tactics in the COT and demonstrates the social embeddedness of organised crime. Conversely, leaders of DT networks actively participate in telephone calls and have many contacts with members of the criminal networks, who are themselves connected to one another. This dense structure is most likely designed to guarantee efficiency of profit-driven groups, whilst simultaneously increasing trust among its members. As discussed in the final chapters of the thesis, these findings have significant implications for both research and law enforcement activities.

This thesis develops as follows. The first chapter discusses sociological accounts of leadership. It reviews extant literature on leadership theories (paragraph **Errore. L'origine riferimento non è stata trovata.**), underlining the shift from approaches focused on human capital to those

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<sup>1</sup> Several network measures were included in the study. Among them, betweenness centrality is deemed to capture actors' brokering capacity (Freeman, 1979)

<sup>2</sup> To be precise, Firth's logistic regression models better account for the small number of cases in one of the two categories (i.e. only few leaders in networks).

addressing social capital. It then proceeds to discuss studies on how social capital creates competitive advantage (paragraph **Errore. L'origine riferimento non è stata trovata.**).

The second chapter shows the transposition of the aforementioned theories within criminology. It firstly introduces the relation between conventional social capital and criminal social capital (paragraph **Errore. L'origine riferimento non è stata trovata.**). It then focuses on criminal capital and criminal leaders, explaining how the application of the network approach to criminal groups allows for the identification and measurement of the strategic positioning that creates leaders' criminal capital (paragraph **Errore. L'origine riferimento non è stata trovata.**). The chapter concludes by outlining the research problem, the research questions, and the objectives of the research (paragraph **Errore. L'origine riferimento non è stata trovata.**).

The third chapter describes the data and methods used for this study. It provides details on the rationale for the case studies selected (paragraph **Errore. L'origine riferimento non è stata trovata.**), method of data collection and cleaning (paragraph **Errore. L'origine riferimento non è stata trovata.**), as well as on the classification of leaders (paragraph **Errore. L'origine riferimento non è stata trovata.**). It then presents the methods used for the analysis (paragraph **Errore. L'origine riferimento non è stata trovata.**), specifying which SNA measures were calculated and included in subsequent statistical analyses.

The fourth chapter presents the results of the analysis. It firstly provides details on each network's topology and connectivity (paragraph **Errore. L'origine riferimento non è stata trovata.**) and the results of preliminary statistical analysis (paragraph **Errore. L'origine riferimento non è stata trovata.**). It then focuses on leaders' strategic positioning (paragraph **Errore. L'origine riferimento non è stata trovata.**), subdividing the presentation of results according to the main activities performed by the illicit groups, i.e. DT and COT networks.

The fifth chapter discusses the results in light of extent knowledge on leaders of criminal networks. It outlines the most relevant aspects emerging from the analysis of leaders' behaviors in both participation in meetings and telephone calls, and the differences emerging from their involvement in different criminal activities (paragraph 5.1). It then addresses the main limitations of this study (paragraph **Errore. L'origine riferimento non è stata trovata.**), before highlighting the key contributions and implications of the study for research and policy-makers (paragraph **Errore. L'origine riferimento non è stata trovata.**).

The subsequent chapter concludes by summing up the results and the relevance of the study.