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LAW ENFORCEMENT AND CRIMINAL NETWORK RESILIENCE:
THE IMPACT OF LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTION ON THE STRUCTURE OF MAFIA-
RELATED DRUG TRAFFICKING NETWORKS

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ABSTRACT

To understand mafia persistence over time and address the problem of the impact of law enforcement interventions on criminal groups, some scholars have introduced the concept of resilience into organized crime research; this refers to the ability of criminal groups to deal with ongoing changes and reorganize themselves accordingly.

Adopting a network approach to organized crime and drawing on previous studies on criminal network resilience, this study analyses the evolution of two 'Ndrangheta criminal groups over around two years, seeking to understand how they adapted to the external pressure of law enforcement agencies, and to identify the mechanisms that drove their evolution and the structural changes that they experienced.

The results show that the two mafia groups had several sources of resilience. The possibility to rely on non-economic ties, which are not the consequence of their participation in illegal markets, enabled the mafia groups to rapidly, though partially, replace the actors arrested. A less prominent role of the formal hierarchy of the 'Ndrangheta in criminal networks mainly involved in drug trafficking instead gave rise to a more flexible internal configuration.

