

Spatial Distribution of Neighborhood Gangs and Its Impacts on Urban Community Security: A Case Study of Biskra City

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Abstract

This study sheds light on the phenomenon of neighborhood gangs in the city of Biskra by analyzing their spatial distribution and impact on community security in the urban environment. The study aims to understand the factors influencing the spread of these gangs within the city and identify the neighborhoods most susceptible to their presence, relying on official data provided by the Media and Public Relations Department of the Biskra Security Directorate.

The study adopts an analytical approach that combines both theoretical and practical dimensions. It examines the patterns of gang distribution in the urban space and explores the social and economic factors contributing to their spread, such as poverty, unemployment, and family disintegration. Additionally, it highlights the negative consequences of this phenomenon, including rising crime rates, threats to security stability, and increased feelings of insecurity among residents. Furthermore, the study provides an analytical perspective to interpret the phenomenon from a socio-spatial viewpoint and proposes preventive and security strategies to curb the spread of neighborhood gangs and enhance security and stability in the urban community.

Keywords: Neighborhood gangs; community security; spatial distribution; urban environment; organized crime.

1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of crime is one of the issues faced by various societies, with varying levels of prevalence and impacts from one environment to another. This makes it a subject of interest for researchers, decision-makers, as well as individuals and families. Crime is not merely an individual act; it has evolved into more organized and complex forms, where it is practiced within organized groups known as neighborhood gangs. These gangs have asserted themselves in the urban landscape, particularly in Algerian cities, where their presence has grown significantly in recent years, impacting the security and stability of society.

The spatial distribution of neighborhood gangs is one of the important factors that contributes to understanding patterns of crime spread within cities. The positioning of these gangs within the urban space is not random but is linked to several social, economic, and security factors. The urban space, with its various neighborhoods, witnesses disparities in the extent of gang presence, with some neighborhoods serving as more nurturing environments for these criminal groups than others. Factors such as poverty, unemployment, family disintegration, and inadequate security coverage in certain areas contribute to this phenomenon. In this context, this study addresses two main issues: How are neighborhood gangs distributed within the urban space? And what are their implications for the security of civil society? The paper aims to provide a socio-spatial analysis of this phenomenon, relying on documented data from the Public Relations and Information Department of the Biskra State Police. Through this research, we attempt to highlight the nature of the spread of neighborhood gangs in the city of Biskra as a case study, analyze the factors that influence their geographical distribution, and examine the security and social repercussions of their presence.

The findings of El Aid and Ichbouden (2021) indicate that the absence of adequate security coverage within new residential neighborhoods creates a spatial vacuum that enables the growth of local gangs engaging in verbal and physical assaults against residents. This situation threatens their safety and social stability, highlighting the urgent need to establish permanent urban security units to address such practices and deviant behaviors (El Aid & Ichbouden, 2021)

Based on this, the study adopts an analytical approach that combines theoretical and practical dimensions, by analyzing the available data to provide a scientific reading that contributes to understanding the phenomenon and foreseeing appropriate solutions to mitigate its negative effects on urban society.

2. Concepts of the Study

2.1 Space:

In the Arabic language, space refers to two terms: place and space. Place (The plural forms are "places" and "spaces.") is the defined area occupied by a physical object, while space is the opposite of place, characterized by its vastness and lack of limitations. It is the broad, empty, flat expanse, which partially includes place (Tabbara, 1995, p. 46).

The term "space" is also used by geographers, where it is a geographic term that has entered the field of sociology due to the expansion of sociologists' interests to include space. This is because the material spatial elements leave clear marks on the social structure (social relationships or behavior and cultural aspects resulting from human interaction with their environment). Every utilized and inhabited space has a function and meaning. The interest in space is reflected in the study of interactive relationships between humans and their environment. Space imposes certain relationships and contributes to their change. Spatial changes significantly contribute to social and cultural transformations (Boumakhlouf, 2001, p. 52). This can be observed at the level of residential space for the family, and the same applies to streets, neighborhoods, cities, and regions. Humans live in a geographical space, and the geographical space, with its human usage value, are two interconnected elements: human and land, society, and geographical space.

Urban space refers to the various types of general space (open spaces such as areas, neighborhoods, and streets) and private spaces (such as homes) where urban residents lead their normal lives. It is a physical, mental, and social product that includes relationships with both material and non-material elements. A person living in a certain urban space engages in specific social relationships, which give that space form, function, and social meaning. The group adapts to material objects, and the place changes under the influence of the group, while the group is also affected by it (Al-Malki, 2015, p. 54).

Thus, it can be said that urban space is both a physical space consisting of buildings, streets, neighborhoods, and facilities, and a social and cultural aspect represented by behaviors, people, and their social relationships. The relationship between the material and social-cultural aspects is one of mutual influence.

Space is essentially a geographic space, but it carries within it conflicts, disputes, and struggles over land, along with the problems that accompany them. Space ideologically represents national or imperialistic politics. Since the social

aspect cannot be separated from space, geographical space becomes a historical space. Maspero argues that space cannot be studied in isolation from the social structure, and here the role of social practices in the structure of space becomes prominent (Tabbara, 1995, p. 48).

2.2 Neighborhood Gangs:

The word "gang" comes from the Arabic term 'asabah (which means a group or association, and is related to the meanings of headband, crown, and group of people, horses, birds, or animals), with its plural forms being 'asa'ib and 'asabaat. The term 'asbah refers to a group of a man's sons, relatives, and kin (Akbaoui, 2022, pp. 87-110).

In terms of definition, Miller describes it as a group or association of individuals united by common interests, with a specific leadership, who work either collectively or individually to achieve certain objectives, including engaging in illegal activities and controlling a specific area or space (Othman & Berkou, 2022, pp. 77-97).

Klein defines it as a group of young people and adolescents who are constantly present in the streets and are involved in illegal activities. This is central to their own identity (Othman & Berkou, 2022, pp. 77-97).

In Algerian legislation, according to Presidential Decree No. 20-03 dated August 30, 2020, concerning the prevention and combatting of neighborhood gangs, a neighborhood gang is defined as "any group, regardless of its name, consisting of two or more people from one or more residential neighborhoods, engaging in one or more acts with the aim of creating an atmosphere of insecurity in residential areas or any other spatial area, or with the intent of imposing control through moral and physical attacks on others or putting their lives, freedom, and security at risk, or harming their property with the use of knives...". (Law No. 20-03, 2020, p. 5)

2.3 Neighborhood:

A neighborhood is the immediate area that an individual uses after the inner space (the home). It is the field of daily life, reflecting patterns of behavior through the understanding of social activities and the various daily practices carried out by the residents of these neighborhoods, especially urban families (Boumakhlof, 2001, p. 75). Sometimes, the neighborhood is considered the only outlet in the absence of recreational and leisure facilities, particularly for men and children, due to the limited space in homes.

A neighborhood is a social unit where various types of interactions occur among its members, along with social relationships, solidarity, neighborhood ties, cohesion, and harmony between its residents (violence and crime among youth in marginalized residential neighborhoods).

The neighborhood is defined as a district or residential complex in a city, university, or commercial area. It consists of a group of adjacent alleys, varying in number from one neighborhood to another. Within it, there are corridors and small streets, surrounded by a set of streets that separate it from other neighborhoods, making it a part of the city. (Mezhoud, 2021, pp. 10-25)

2.4 Security :

Unlike fear, which is the opposite, security refers to peace of mind, tranquility, and safety concerning both the individual and property. Security includes food, social, and economic security, meaning all aspects of life, as well as the safety and stability of the community. It is a psychological state experienced by an individual when their psychological, material, and biological needs are met (Karkouri, 2020, pp. 185-199)

2.5 Urban Community :

Linguistically, the term "community" comes from the word *ajtama'a*, meaning to gather, to unite, or to agree on something.

In a technical sense, a community is defined as a gathering of individuals who cooperate under a certain system that defines their relationships and drives them to achieve common goals, bonded by both spiritual and material ties (Al-Bayati, 2014, p. 17).

The term "urban community" refers to the residents of a city who live in a defined geographical environment, organized administratively, and follow an urban lifestyle.

Ihsan Muhammad Al-Hassan defines it as: "A group of individuals residing in an urban environment (the city), characterized by a particular lifestyle that responds to the features of the city, its conditions, and the way it transforms. The basic characteristics distinguishing an urban community are size, density, and heterogeneity, which are related to several issues concerning the nature of urban life and the identity of urban citizens" (Al-Hassan, 1999, p. 555).

3. The Chicago School and Gangs

There are several approaches and perspectives for explaining gang crimes, including biological, economic, psychological, social, and geographical perspectives. However, we focus on the ecological approach represented by the

Chicago School.

The Chicago School is considered a pioneer in research on crime, delinquency, and juvenile deviance. In 1927, Frederick Thrasher published a book titled *The Gang: A Study of 1,313 Gangs in Chicago*, based on his doctoral thesis about gangs in Chicago, which he estimated involved at least 25,000 adolescents and young people. In the introduction to the book, Park wrote that gangs should be studied in their habitat and specific environment. They emerge spontaneously, but only under favorable conditions in a specific context or environment. This leads us to study them and convinces us that they are reformable and controllable. (Colin, 2012, p. 82)

Shaner focused on describing the natural history of gangs and showed that gangs and delinquents reside in neighborhoods located between middle-class areas and the more affluent neighborhoods of the city, as well as the city center, which he referred to as the "transitional zone." This area is populated by migrants and refers to socially and even geographically marginalized regions. This shows a breakdown in the structure of the social system. Gangs occupy poverty belts, where dilapidated housing leads to the growth and expansion of gangs due to economic, moral, and cultural boundaries that create gaps. Therefore, the gang is a response to the dysfunction of the social system, offering an alternative to what society has failed to provide, defending repressive and undesirable behaviors, and filling a void by offering an outlet. This group suffers from poverty, unemployment, and educational failure. They live in isolated neighborhoods, lacking recreational facilities, and gradually form violent groups, joining criminal gangs. At this stage, delinquency can be considered a factor that contributes to the process of searching for social and personal identity (Colin, 2012, pp. 83-84).

As mentioned earlier, the gang forms spontaneously, starting with a group of unemployed adolescents who hang out together, drinking alcohol or using drugs. These groups then solidify through conflict with other rival groups. A gang may disappear, and a new one may emerge or reorganize itself. Each gang controls a specific area (a particular space), which it knows well and does not stray too far from, in addition to engaging in criminal activities.

Thrasher argues that there are multiple types of criminal gangs, and they are not all alike. Some gangs are short-lived, called *transitory gangs*, while others are *durable gangs* that persist over time and remain cohesive. Thrasher concludes that the gangster is undoubtedly a product of a breakdown in the social system,

stemming from disturbed conditions and multiple factors such as an unsuitable family life, poverty, a corrupt environment, ineffective religion, failed upbringing, and a lack of leisure time. All of these form the breeding ground for gang development. Thus, crime arises in a world suffering from both moral and economic crises.

4. Types and Characteristics of Street Gangs

4.1 Types of Street Gangs :

We distinguish between two types of street gangs (Khelfa & Soltani, 2022, pp. 21-22):

- **Street Gangs Specializing in Theft and Murder :**

According to Article 353, paragraph 3 of the Algerian Penal Code, it is required that more than one person be involved in committing thefts to be described as principal perpetrators and accomplices. As per Ordinance 20/30, these gangs usually target thefts on public roads. They are considered dangerous and typically carry out sudden thefts, most often using threats with bladed weapons. These acts may also include murder or breaking into homes under false pretenses or using fake identities, such as posing as electricity company workers or similar.

- **Street Gangs Specializing in Drug Promotion and Trafficking :**

First, we must distinguish between promotion and trafficking. Promotion refers to the act of facilitating access to drugs, either by offering them for free or coercing others into using them—whether through force or deception, such as secretly placing them in food or drinks, or by providing a location for drug distribution.

Promotion typically occurs among street gang members during their gatherings, whether at parties or while planning criminal drug-related operations.

As for drug trafficking, it includes selling, extracting, preparing, producing, transporting, storing, distributing, or delivering drugs.

4.2 Characteristics of Street Gangs :

- Composed of more than two individuals, but fewer in number than organized crime groups.
- Typically use bladed weapons such as knives, swords, and sharp tools.
- Gang members often consume drugs during the commission of criminal acts, especially stimulants that induce euphoria to overcome fear and enhance their ability to perform dangerous acts.
- Usually formed by individuals living in the same neighborhood.

- Generally composed of youth, and sometimes even adolescents.
 - Common activities include theft, drug trafficking, vandalism, asserting control over a specific area, assaults, fights, and violence, which serve as means of asserting presence, displaying power, and creating an atmosphere of insecurity.
 - The methods used by street gangs vary depending on the type of neighborhood. In poor neighborhoods, gang crimes are characterized by public thefts, the use of bladed weapons, threats, and violent home invasions leading to casualties and severe assaults. In contrast, in affluent neighborhoods, the crimes tend to be more sophisticated, involving the use of technology and means that leave no trace of the crime.
 - Sometimes include members with ideological, sectarian, ethnic, or territorial affiliations.
 - Exploit certain groups, particularly women, minors, and adolescents, for drug promotion, transportation, concealment, or sale—especially in schools, universities, vocational and educational institutions, hotels, and nightclubs—as a way to avoid detection by law enforcement authorities.
- (Article on Criminal Behavior)

4.3 Factors Behind the Emergence and Spread of Street Gangs:

The phenomenon of street gangs represents one of the major security and social challenges faced by many cities. These gangs arise and expand due to a combination of interconnected factors that can be classified into social, economic, and security-related causes, in addition to cultural and urban influences. The most prominent of these factors include :

4.3.1 Social Factors :

- **Family Disintegration :** The absence of stability within the family—whether due to divorce, domestic violence, or neglect—drives some youth to seek social alternatives such as gangs to compensate for the lack of family support.
- **Weak Social Bonds:** The rise of individualism and the weakening of the role of neighbors and the local community contribute to the spread of criminal phenomena in the absence of a strong social deterrent.
- **Deviant Upbringing :** The influence of peers and the surrounding social environment plays a significant role in directing individuals toward crime, where bad company greatly contributes to attracting youth to join gangs.

4.3.2 Economic Factors :

- **Poverty and Unemployment :** The lack of job opportunities and sufficient income is a fundamental factor pushing some youth to engage in illegal activities such as theft, drug trafficking, and extortion.
- **Social Marginalization :** A sense of exclusion and marginalization within society may lead individuals to seek recognition and belonging through gangs, which offer them a sense of identity and power.
- **Informal Economy:** The spread of parallel markets and illegal commercial activities provides a fertile environment for the growth of gangs that exploit these spaces to fund their illicit operations.

4.3.3 Security Factors :

- **Weak Security Coverage :** The absence of police patrols in some neighborhoods or the lack of rapid intervention allows gangs to expand and increase their influence.
- **Lax Law Enforcement :** Leniency by some security agencies or lengthy legal procedures may fail to effectively deter gang members, encouraging them to escalate their criminal activities.
- **Corruption and Collusion :** In some cases, corruption within certain security or administrative institutions affects the effectiveness of combating organized crime, allowing gangs to operate with relative freedom.

4.3.4 Cultural and Urban Factors :

- **Lack of Recreational and Cultural Spaces :** The shortage of sports and cultural facilities drives youth to the streets, where they are easily recruited by gangs.
- **Chaotic Urban Planning :** Marginalized and informal neighborhoods that suffer from poor infrastructure and services provide a suitable environment for the spread of gangs due to the difficulty of security monitoring.
- **Media and Technology Influence:** The spread of a culture of violence through films, video games, or social media contributes to embedding criminal behaviors among youth.

4.3.4 Educational and Pedagogical Factors :

Educational and pedagogical factors play a central role in the emergence and spread of street gangs, as the level of education and quality of upbringing within the family and school directly affect individuals' behavior and orientation.

In many cases, poor educational conditions contribute to pushing youth toward deviant behavior and gang involvement. The most notable of these factors can be summarized as follows :

4.3.5 Weak Family Upbringing :

- The absence of parental supervision and proper guidance leads children to fall in with bad peers, making it easier for them to be recruited into gangs.
- The use of violence in family upbringing may drive children and adolescents to seek strength and belonging within criminal groups.
- Neglecting emotional connection and communication between parents and children makes youth more vulnerable to external environmental influences.

4.3.6 School Dropout and Poor Academic Performance :

- Dropping out of school is one of the main factors contributing to youth joining gangs, as they lack guidance and the skills needed to build their futures.
- Poor academic performance and a lack of educational incentives push some students to seek alternatives that provide them with a sense of recognition and belonging—something gangs offer.
- The absence of academic support programs and career guidance leaves some students feeling lost, making them easy prey for criminal groups.

4.3.7 Weak Role of Schools in Value Education :

- The declining role of schools as educational institutions and the lack of focus on instilling ethical and social values contribute to the emergence of deviant behaviors.
- The absence of awareness programs about the dangers of gangs and school violence leaves students unaware of the risks involved in joining such groups.
- The weakness of extracurricular activities such as sports, arts, and cultural events leads youth to remain without positive interests to fill their free time.

4.3.8 Lack of Positive Educational Role Models :

- The lack of successful youth role models in society to inspire future generations drives some teenagers to imitate deviant figures presented by the media or their social surroundings.
- The limited influence of teachers and educators, due to weak interactive

relationships with students, makes schools less effective in directing students toward positive behavior.

5. The Distribution of Street Gangs within Urban Residential Areas

The residential geographic space inhabited by the youth involved in the phenomenon of street gangs, including the nature of housing and the surrounding conditions, directly influences their behaviors and culture. The residential neighborhood is a physical place that outwardly reflects the cultural identity of its inhabitants (Sid Ali & Souakri, 2019, pp. 167-181), as also highlighted by Schumpeter Dolot in his approach to spatial context. Cultural identity is linked to architectural identity, which is embodied through the form and characteristics of architecture. Thus, the neighborhood is one of the institutions of socialization. A neighborhood that lacks appropriate living conditions can become a breeding ground for counterculture and youth deviance due to its isolation or its inhabitants' feelings of marginalization and social exclusion when compared to other residential areas.

The residential neighborhood is a social unit where various types of social interactions take place, and relationships among its residents are formed, such as neighborly relations, cooperation, and participation. In this context, architecture emerges as a human action that combines matter and spirit, reflecting the culture and reality of society.

From theoretical literature, it becomes evident that there is a relationship between the type of residential areas and the spread of street gangs. For instance, poor, closed, informal neighborhoods, as well as collective neighborhoods with a social-rental character in Algeria, are among the areas where street gangs are most prevalent.

When discussing the residential neighborhood, we must also refer to the house itself, which serves as a mirror reflecting the family's social, economic, cultural, and intellectual status. Family life is centered within homes, and neighborhoods differ in terms of their high or low standing based on the status of their residents, the quality of the land (its real estate value in terms of price and use), and the availability of services. Street gangs usually do not commit their criminal behavior within their own neighborhood but rather rely on stealing from shops, institutions, women, and looting others' money and property. However, violence is often directed toward individuals within the neighborhood or those passing through it. These groups are also known for causing disturbances in the neighborhood and attempting to assert dominance.

6. Street Gangs in the City of Biskra – An Analytical Reading of the Data

Through our communication with the General Directorate of Security of the Wilaya of Biskra, specifically the Communication and Public Relations Unit, we obtained a set of data related to street gangs in the city of Biskra, which we present as follows:

- Among the main reasons driving youth to join street gangs, poverty ranks first, followed by school dropout, and then poor social upbringing.
- As for the most involved categories, it is primarily the youth, most of whom are male. According to 2021 statistics, the number of those involved reached 99 individuals — 90 men, 1 woman, and 9 minors, according to the Communication and Public Relations Unit.

6.1 The Impact of Street Gang Crimes on Commercial and Residential Spaces in the City of Biskra and the Security of Its Roads:

Street gang crimes directly affect various urban spaces in the city of Biskra. Their repercussions extend to commercial and residential areas, in addition to their negative impact on road security.

6.1.1 Commercial Spaces:

- Acts of violence and extortion committed by street gangs lead investors and merchants to refrain from operating in certain areas, which limits economic activity.
- This reflects negatively on trade, as customers feel unsafe, decreasing the demand in markets and shops.
- Some gangs may impose their control over traders by demanding payments or exploiting illegal activities, leading to the spread of the black market and the deterioration of the local economy.

6.1.2. Residential Spaces:

- Clashes between gangs increase violence rates within neighborhoods, which affects residents' stability and forces some families to relocate in search of a safer environment.
- This results in a decline in property values in neighborhoods experiencing high crime rates, negatively impacting the housing market in the city.
- The spread of gangs contributes to increased rates of theft and assaults, pushing residents to adopt additional security measures such as installing surveillance cameras or hiring personal guards.

6.1.3. Road Security:

- Gang activities lead to an increase in highway robberies, making certain routes unsafe, especially during nighttime.
- The spread of violence in the streets disrupts traffic in some areas, hindering citizens' mobility and affecting the city's daily operations.
- Clashes between gangs may also damage road infrastructure and public property, such as burning tires and blocking roads during conflicts.

In general, the spread of street gang crimes poses a clear threat to the economic and social life of the city of Biskra, requiring effective measures to enhance urban security and reduce the impact of this phenomenon on various urban spaces.

One of the most prominent forms of these crimes is the vandalism of public lighting. Gangs deliberately disable it to avoid detection, which helps them hide and move in the dark. Some gangs also occupy sidewalks by setting up tables to sell goods as a cover for their illegal activities, such as trafficking and selling drugs and psychotropic substances, in addition to disposing of stolen goods.

Among their common practices is the establishment of informal parking lots in the streets and squares of neighborhoods, where residents and passersby are forced to pay money for the alleged protection of their vehicles. These gangs are also involved in violent brawls, using bladed weapons such as knives and swords, which spreads fear among traders and results in threats and extortion. Furthermore, thefts and physical assaults are rampant, targeting pedestrians, especially at night, either for robbery or to showcase power and establish dominance over neighborhoods.

Table No. (01): Number and Types of Crimes Committed by Street Gangs in Residential and Commercial Spaces

CrimesNumber	Year 2019	Year 2020	Year 2021
Carrying a bladed weapon	105	370	259
Street brawls	22	31	39
Drug-related crimes	155	427	357
Psychotropic pills	68	174	239
Total	233	601	596

Source :(Media and Public Relations Cell, Biskra Police Directorate)

As we can observe, the crimes committed by street gangs have a direct impact on urban life, particularly through damage inflicted on the economic, health, and service sectors due to acts of looting targeting public institutions.

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Factories are often subjected to theft and looting, such as stealing iron, cement, wages, or equipment, either as part of gang rivalries or because street gangs are deliberately hired to vandalize a business or shop as an act of revenge.

In neighborhoods known for gang crimes, even the healthcare sector has not been spared — hospitals, medical clinics, and pharmacies have all suffered. These crimes have resulted in financial losses. Pharmacists are often exposed to extortion and threats, and are sometimes forced to sell psychotropic pills or even falsify prescriptions.

Additionally, some street gangs specialize in stealing internet and telephone lines as well as copper cables, leading to service outages in some neighborhoods. There have also been thefts of water pumps in communal housing areas.

All of these factors complicate urban life and hinder local urban development. A press release issued by the Communication and Public Relations Unit of the Biskra Wilaya Police on 12/06/2022 reported the arrest of 31 individuals involved in the theft of copper and internet cables. The total number of related cases reached 12 in 2022, involving 31 individuals. Significant quantities of wires, cables, and various types of electrical equipment were recovered throughout the city of Biskra.

6.2 The Most Common Crimes Among Street Gangs in the City of Biskra:

The crime of theft ranks first, whether it occurs inside homes, vehicles, through pickpocketing, or violent robbery. Theft is most prevalent during the summer due to homes being left empty and the city's population density decreasing as people head to the coast. Drug-related crimes rank second, as Biskra is considered a transit area rather than a border zone, which results in drug trafficking being less common than theft. Lastly, violations of laws and regulations are also noted.

By tracking the recorded cases over the last three years, we notice that property-related crimes are the most frequent, with a total of 2,923 cases in 2021. These include all forms and types of theft, confirming that theft is the most widespread crime in the city of Biskra.

Table No. (02): The Most Common Crimes Among Street Gangs in the City of Biskra

Type of Crime	Year 2019	Year 2020	Year 2021
Crimes against individuals	1231	1509	1603
Crimes against property	2004	2549	2923

Crimes against family and public morals	107	83	92
Cybercrime-related cases	189	206	213
Drug-related crime cases	223	601	596
Economic and financial crimes	192	357	331

Source:(Media and Public Relations Cell, Biskra Police Directorate)

It is worth noting that several legal texts have recently been enacted to combat crime, the latest being Ordinance 20/03 concerning the prevention and suppression of street gang crimes. At the urban security level, the police carry out raids targeting crime dens, arrest offenders, and attempt to impose security throughout the city.

We also note that street gangs have contributed to distorting the urban fabric of the city of Biskra by constructing shacks and informal housing, as well as building makeshift commercial spaces using primitive materials like asbestos and tin. These structures are often erected on public property owned by the state, as part of attempts to seize urban space, thereby committing construction violations.

6.3 The Impact of Street Gangs on the School Life of Adolescent Students:

Street gangs seek to recruit adolescents and minors for their operations, such as drug trafficking. They engage in various forms of display in front of schools, including roaming with trained dogs and committing verbal and physical assaults against students. They exploit and lure students with money and aim to get them addicted in order to gain control over them. This creates an atmosphere of insecurity for school administrators, parents, and even students, prompting many parents to personally escort their children to and from school out of fear of street gangs.

6.4 The Spatial Distribution of Street Gangs in the City of Biskra:

Most street gangs are concentrated in poor and vulnerable neighborhoods that lack infrastructure, service facilities, and have narrow, poorly lit streets that hinder police patrols, especially at night. Additionally, some public housing neighborhoods with social rental characteristics are also hotspots. These areas are often known by specific nicknames, such as “Libya Alley” (240 Housing Units in the Western Zone), formerly known as “Colombia Alley,” as well as “Dog Floor Alley” and “Al-Bukhari.” These neighborhoods are nearly enclosed.

Public and commercial squares also serve as activity zones for these gangs. For example, in Al-Bukhari neighborhood, gangs occupy sidewalks and roam among pedestrians with the intent to steal. During the day, they sell ordinary goods on street tables as a cover, while at night they deal drugs, engage in

drinking and hallucination sessions, and plan crimes.



Fig.1.Map of the Distribution of Street Gangs in the City of Biskra

It is noticeable that street gang crimes are continuously increasing as a result of the city's expansion and the rise in population density due to rural migration and migration from neighboring cities such as Khenchela, M'sila, Tebessa, and Batna. The following table illustrates this:

For example, in the year 2020, the number of recorded gang-related crimes was 4 cases, all of which were processed. The number of individuals involved reached 47, including 35 adult males and 12 male minors. Among them, 29 were imprisoned and 18 were summoned.

However, in 2021, the number of cases rose to 11, with 99 individuals involved—90 adult males, 8 male minors, and 1 adult female. Of these, 28 were sentenced to provisional detention, and 71 were directly summoned, according to the Communication and Public Relations Unit of the Biskra Provincial Police Department.

Street gang crimes cover a wide range of sectors, including crimes such as currency counterfeiting, tax evasion, money laundering, and the sale of drugs and alcoholic beverages without a license. In this regard, we present some statistics in the following tables :

Table (3): Economic and Financial Crimes

Type of Crime	2019	2020	2021
Tax evasion	20	124	22
Forgery and use of forged documents	13	08	09
Smuggling	16	69	88
Abuse of position	06	06	08
Fraud and scams	13	20	20

Table (4): Cybercrime Cases

Type of Crime	2019	2020	2021
Violation of personal privacy	82	91	37
Internet fraud	08	07	20
Internet-based moral offenses	02	03	02
Internet blackmail	20	13	10

6.5 Street Gangs and Moral (Sexual) Crimes

Prostitution is prevalent in marginalized neighborhoods and some public housing areas with a social rental character. This reflects the lack of social control in these neighborhoods and within families, which negatively affects children and often leads them toward delinquency. They grow up in corrupt family and social environments without any moral deterrents. In addition, cases of rape against women and minors of both sexes have increased, along with the formation of extensive prostitution networks.

Table (05): Moral Crimes Committed by Street Gangs

Type of Crime	2019	2020	2021
Rape crimes	15	08	14
Establishing a place for prostitution	03	07	05
Indecent act	07	05	21
Indecent act against a minor	34	22	09
Inciting a minor to moral corruption	18	06	09
Soliciting in public places	03	05	04

Source:(Media and Public Relations Cell, Biskra Police Directorate).

6.6 Street Gangs and Urban Space Ownership

Street gangs constantly seek to dominate space, particularly targeting areas

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like car parks, street sidewalks, the surroundings of schools and high schools, and neighborhood sports fields—places frequented by youth and teenagers to lure them, recruit them, and distribute their drug products. This comes first in their priorities. Next is their control over residential neighborhoods, commercial zones, and public spaces. Their occupation of car parks allows them to impose illegal fees without any registration or legal basis. The same applies to their takeover of sidewalks, where they set up tobacco stands and other goods as a front to sell and promote drugs—significantly contributing to the spread of street gangs.

These gangs also seize residential spaces, particularly building basements and entrances, which facilitate escape and hiding, especially since one of their members often lives in the same building. Public squares and commercial areas are also prime spots for committing theft and distributing their toxic substances.

Table (06): Property-Related Cases

Type of Case	2019	2020	2021
Simple theft	304	781	959
Aggravated theft	228	244	250
Home burglary	381	343	358
Mobile phone theft	344	447	624
Vehicle theft	47	50	41
Property vandalism	176	215	162

In general, street gangs tend to position themselves in areas that either lack police stations or are distant from security and oversight agencies. There is also a notable spatial variation in the spread of street gang crimes.



Fig.2. A map showing the distribution of security headquarters in the city of Biskra.

7. The Impact of Gang Crimes on Community Security:

The widespread rise in neighborhood gang crimes and the increasing number of gangs have placed the city of Biskra among the top Algerian cities with the highest crime rates and lowest levels of public safety. This situation has had a negative impact on the residents, who now fear for their lives, property, and children. Every home and apartment is now equipped with iron doors and barred windows and balconies, giving buildings a prison-like appearance and distorting the city's architectural aesthetics.

Women, in particular, are often subjected to theft and assault in broad daylight, indicating that these gangs act without fear, while citizens are too afraid to intervene or protect others from being attacked. Even children are not spared from this violence. All of this has greatly hindered the local development of the city and negatively affected tourism — safety attracts tourists, while crime drives them away. People now live in fear, even inside their own homes, concerned about being invaded or assaulted.

Neighborhood gang crimes have a direct impact on community security, leading to escalating violence and crime within urban neighborhoods. This creates an atmosphere of fear and insecurity among residents. These crimes also undermine the rule of law, as gangs impose their own methods of resolving conflicts, weakening trust in security and judicial institutions. Moreover, gang

activity fractures the social fabric by deepening marginalization and exclusion, and increasing tensions between different groups within the community.

Economically, this phenomenon discourages local investment and causes capital flight, hindering sustainable development and lowering the quality of life in affected areas. Therefore, reducing gang-related crimes and enhancing community security requires the combined efforts of security, social, and economic institutions, through comprehensive strategies focused on prevention, enforcement, and rehabilitation.

Sociological studies indicate that the spatial distribution of criminal phenomena within the city is not random, but is closely linked to the social and spatial structure of neighborhoods. Deviant behaviors tend to concentrate in areas characterized by urban fragility, weak social control, and a lack of basic services. Hammadi (2022) confirms that urban crime takes on spatial patterns that reflect disparities in urban development, as gangs and criminal groups tend to cluster in spaces marked by social and economic marginalization, making them hotspots that threaten the security and stability of the urban community (Hammadi & Boumakhlouf, 2022)

8. Mechanisms to Combat Neighborhood Gangs:

To combat the phenomenon of neighborhood gangs and reduce their negative impact on community security, a set of mechanisms should be adopted, covering security, social, and economic aspects. The most prominent of these include:

1. **Strengthening Security Efforts:** This involves increasing police patrols in areas with gang activity, and utilizing modern surveillance technologies such as smart cameras and artificial intelligence to monitor suspicious movements.
2. **Tightening Legal Penalties:** This requires reviewing laws related to organized crime and strengthening penalties for individuals involved in neighborhood gangs, while ensuring strict enforcement of these laws.
3. **Activating the Role of Civil Society:** Support for local associations and organizations to organize awareness campaigns targeting youth and adolescents, clarifying the risks of involvement in gangs for both individuals and society.
4. **Enhancing the Role of Educational Institutions:** By incorporating educational programs on the dangers of violence and delinquency into

school curricula, and creating extracurricular and sports activities that attract youth and provide them with positive alternatives.

5. **Improving Economic and Social Conditions:** Providing job opportunities for young people, supporting small businesses in vulnerable areas, and improving public services such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure.
6. **Rehabilitation of Offenders:** Establishing rehabilitation centers for gang members who wish to repent, and offering training programs to help them reintegrate into society in a positive manner.
7. **Strengthening Coordination Between Security and Judicial Authorities:** By creating specialized teams to combat neighborhood gangs and improving cooperation between the police, judiciary, and relevant authorities to ensure an effective and swift response to organized crime.
8. **Urban Planning Reforms:** Improving the environment of vulnerable neighborhoods by providing green spaces, cultural and sports centers, to reduce the factors that contribute to the emergence and spread of gangs.

The success of these mechanisms depends on the collective efforts of various community actors, including the government, security forces, civil society, and educational institutions, to ensure a safer and more stable urban environment.

9. Conclusion :

This study confirms that the phenomenon of neighborhood gangs has become one of the security and social challenges facing Algerian cities, including the city of Biskra. The spread of these gangs has led to negative impacts on community security and urban stability. The findings show that the spatial distribution of these gangs is not random; it is linked to various social and economic factors such as poverty, unemployment, and urban marginalization, making certain neighborhoods more vulnerable to criminal activities.

Through the analysis of data from security authorities, it is evident that these gangs pose a clear threat to the safety of individuals and property, contributing to rising crime rates and increasing the sense of insecurity among residents, in addition to hindering urban development efforts.

Based on these findings, it becomes crucial to adopt comprehensive strategies to address this phenomenon, which should not be limited to security solutions, but also include preventive measures with social and economic dimensions. These measures include strengthening social integration, providing job opportunities for youth, and improving living conditions in vulnerable

neighborhoods. Furthermore, enhancing cooperation between security institutions and civil society is essential to establish effective mechanisms for reducing the spread of these gangs and minimizing their negative impact on urban security.

In conclusion, the study of neighborhood gangs and their issues in urban areas remains an ongoing matter that requires further research and analysis, with the goal of developing more effective policies to address this phenomenon and ensure the stability and security of Algerian cities.

Based on the discussion in this research paper, we offer the following recommendations for addressing the issue :

- ✓ **Enhance security coverage** in neighborhoods vulnerable to the spread of neighborhood gangs by intensifying security patrols and activating surveillance mechanisms.
- ✓ **Launch social and developmental programs** targeting vulnerable groups, especially youth, to reduce the factors that contribute to gang involvement, such as poverty and unemployment.
- ✓ **Activate the role of civil society** by involving local organizations in awareness campaigns about the dangers of neighborhood gangs, and promoting values of solidarity and social cohesion.
- ✓ **Improve urban planning** by developing marginalized neighborhoods and providing a secure urban environment, which reduces the emergence of gangs in isolated or informal areas.
- ✓ **Strengthen cooperation between security and judicial institutions** to ensure an effective and swift legal response to neighborhood gang crimes, while increasing penalties for organized crime.
- ✓ **Integrate awareness programs** in educational institutions to inform youth about the risks of organized crime and encourage them to engage in alternative activities such as sports and arts.
- ✓ **Establish rehabilitation and psychological support centers** for gang members wishing to repent, helping them reintegrate into society in positive ways.

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