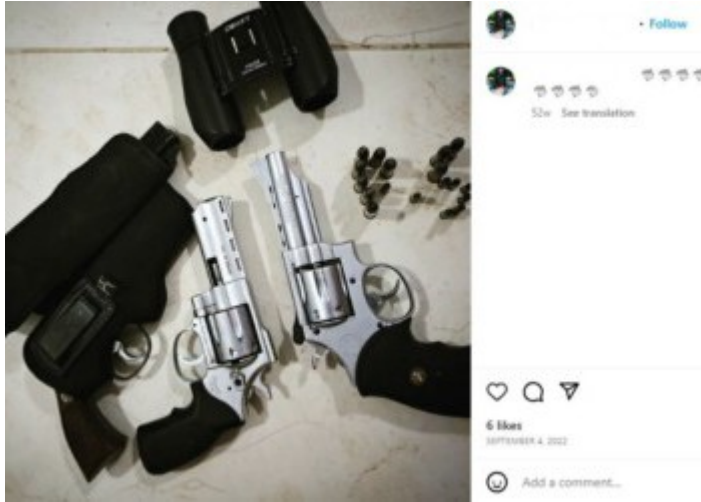


News Venezuela

Venezuelan Extortion Gangs Exploiting Instagram to Amplify Threats

by *Venezuela Investigative Unit*
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Extortion gangs in Venezuela are using social media to broadcast threats

Venezuelan extortion gangs are increasingly moving beyond issuing direct threats, instead broadcasting wide-reaching acts of intimidation to residents via social media sites like Instagram, and exerting greater social control in the process.

A recent example came on July 29 when an armed group recorded the murder of a rancher in the northwestern state of Zulia who had refused to pay extortion fees, [Primicias reported](#). The gang uploaded the video of his murder to social media, leaving a clear message for any other victims considering resisting their demands.

Residents of the municipality of La Cañada de Urdaneta, where the rancher was killed, told InSight Crime that such videos have been common for years. But since last year, this grisly form of coercion has been applied to enforcing standards on the town's shrimping industry.

Shrimping boat owners turned to extortion gangs for help after finding themselves being cut out by the fishermen who work for them. While fishermen are supposed to bring their hauls back to the boat owners, some sell the shrimp directly to informal traders along the town's beaches. Traders willing to cut out the boat owners were carrying red buckets to tell the fishermen they could do business.

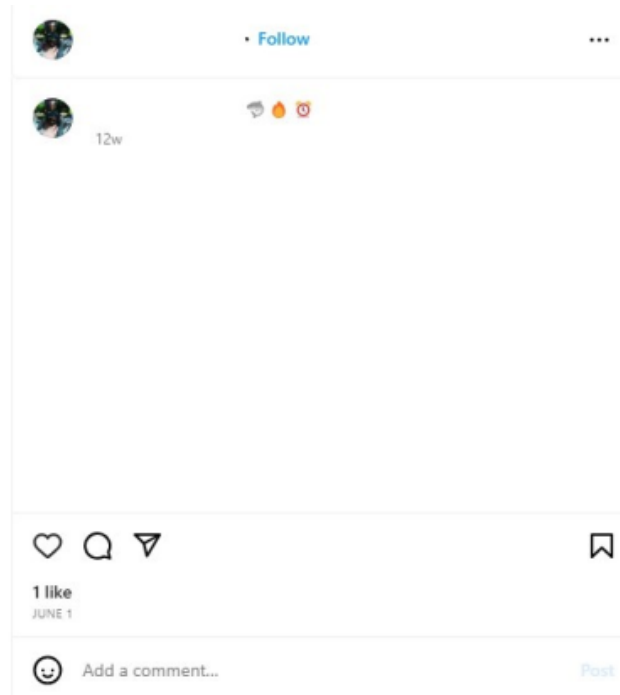
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The main perpetrators of this violence appear to be a gang run by Guillermo Boscán Bracho, alias “Yiyi,” who InSight Crime previously profiled as part of a broader investigation into the **Meleán** crime family.

The extortion gangs cracked down hard on boat owners. “A woman was shot last December,” said one individual who works in the fishing business who wishes to remain anonymous. “Yiyi had her killed because she was carrying a red bucket for the illegal purchase of shrimp.”

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Extortion gangs are using Instagram to broadcast rules to residents. Source: Instagram

In January, the gang **killed** three other fishermen in Lake Maracaibo and uploaded the murders to social media along with a warning that any who do not obey the gang will face a similar fate.

In May, these threats spread to the nearby community of San Francisco, also along the Zulia coast. One Instagram **post** warned fishermen they should “beware the consequences” of carrying a red bucket, along with a message telling them to “avoid being eliminated.” A **video** published on the same account showed a terrified fisherman being threatened along with another warning that the next person found fishing without permission “will not be forgiven.”

This profile has **numerous posts** along the same theme, threatening fishermen to only sell to their bosses or face the consequences from “Yiyi.”

InSight Crime Analysis

The employment of Instagram to lay down rules to fishermen and traders in Zulia is the latest evolution in how the state's extortion gangs use social media to assert control.

In Zulia, a shift from WhatsApp to Instagram over the last 18 months has seen Yiyi's gang change their ways. Local residents told InSight Crime that extortion gangs had used WhatsApp to collect payments since 2016 but switched to Instagram once victims stopped using WhatsApp for fear of being extorted.

"They are operating 100% via Instagram and they upload stories and threats every day," said one resident in the municipality of San Francisco who wished to remain anonymous.



Extortion gangs are posting threatening videos on social media. Source: Instagram

The public nature of many of the Instagram profiles comes with the added advantage of allowing their threats to be more widely amplified.

SEE ALSO: [The Shattered Mafia Behind Criminal Chaos in Zulia, Venezuela](#)

Criminals prove the legitimacy of their profiles by first publicly threatening victims and, if their demands are not met, later posting videos of those same people being executed. While the Instagram posts include the gang members' criminal aliases, they avoid including any physically identifying features.

Impunity is not guaranteed though. Within a week of uploading the video of the rancher in La Cañada de Urdaneta, police killed his murderer and arrested two of his alleged accomplices, including the individual who recorded and uploaded the killing.

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