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# Suspicious Fires in Slums: A Comparison Across Cities

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## Investigative Capacity

- Both governmental and independent investigations can be compromised:
  - Government investigations are subject to influence by political considerations
  - Financial sponsors of media outlets may also be linked to same, suspect private interests

## Inherently high risk of fires in slums

- Accidental fires do frequently occur because of hazards present in slums: gas stoves, unsafe electrical conduits, wood houses, etc.
- Immense problems in establishing evidence for criminal activity

## Political Considerations

- Alignment of political and private interests engenders transparency and fairness; corruption is a serious concern
- Federal systems of government can lead to policy incoherence between federal, state, and local governments
- Level of government investment in slum-upgrading projects varies wildly depending on the governing coalition, but has historically left needs unmet

## Land tenure and legal recourse

- Ownership of land is often contested, and legal suits can last decades
- Legal distinctions on ownership are often made based on number of years of residence
- Suits filed by property-owners to repossess land create further challenges for slum-dwellers seeking legal ownership of land

## Economic Variables

- Cities in developing countries face “heterogeneity of infrastructure,” a term which refers to the unequal access to essential public utilities, meaning that available, developable land is tremendously scarce
- Housing deficit is large in developing countries due to asymmetries in demand and supply, leading to a large informal housing market.



In 1996, 176 countries signed the “Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements” which was interpreted as an agreement to end evictions in slums. The United Nations and other international organizations have additionally argued that slums evictions can have important economic consequences both for individuals and for local economies. Nevertheless, violent slum evictions seem to be persisting throughout the developing world.

This project is a comparative study of urban slums in developing countries which have recently or historically witnessed suspicious fires. Accidental fires in slums are not uncommon, but the incidents which I seek to compare are thought to be intentional and linked to development interests. While the dwellers of precarious settlements have been subjected to slum removal, relocation, and eviction for centuries, arson as a means of slum removal is a particularly remarkable phenomenon because of the lethal nature of this instrument, and the difficulty of determining the responsible party (or parties).