

"Toward a Political Sociology of Urban Violence"
Robert Vargas (University of Chicago): 11 December 2019

Abstract:

This talk will share results from several new projects that aim to make a first step toward introducing a new political economic framework for the study of violence in cities. Building upon the work of critical geographers like Henri Lefebvre and Neil Brenner, I argue that the study of political territories within cities can help scholars better understand the linkages between political institutions and the micro-level interpersonal interactions that generate violence. Using digitized maps of all city council political districts in the cities of Chicago, St Louis, and Milwaukee from their founding in the 19th century to the present, this study identifies six types of distinct political territories in these cities with varying levels of power. I will then present some very preliminary results indicating how change in these territories is highly correlated with changes in the spatial concentration of violence.

Robert Vargas:

Robert Vargas is a Neubauer Family Assistant Professor of Sociology and founding Director of the Violence, Law, and Politics Lab at the University of Chicago. His research examines how redistricting laws, bureaucracies, and public policies shape the conditions of cities, with a particular focus on violence and health care. His award-winning book, **Wounded City: Violent Turf Wars in a Chicago Barrio** (Oxford University Press, 2016), shows the relationship between ward boundary redistricting and block-level violence in the Little Village neighborhood of Chicago. Professor Vargas is currently involved in two major ongoing quantitative research projects. First, he is examining the effects of redistricting on spatial inequality. Second, with funding from an NSF Early Career award, he will continue his research on the political economy of urban violence through a quantitative historical project on homicide in Chicago, New Orleans, and San Francisco from 1870 to the present. Please visit the Violence, Law, and Politics Lab website www.vlplab.com for more information on these projects.