

Title: How Politics Sustains Violence in Chicago

Abstract: This study charts a new direction for understanding and addressing the problem of neighborhood violence, one that focuses on the under-examined role of adversarial relations (or turf wars) among politicians, gangs, and the police. Through a case study of the Little Village neighborhood of Chicago, I investigate why shootings and arsons were concentrated on clusters of blocks in the neighborhood's eastside. Using a mix of ethnographic, historical, and statistical data, I discovered that a political turf war between Chicago's Democratic Party and the neighborhood's independent political leadership curtailed community efforts to prevent violence. While Little Village's westside was home to a ward with politically independent leaders who brought violence prevention resources, the majority-Democrat city council routinely gerrymandered ward boundaries in the neighborhood's eastside to prevent it from becoming another politically independent ward. With no ties to the city's political system, blocks on the eastside had insufficient resources and no organizational infrastructure to prevent violence. This study demonstrates how cities and communities plagued by violence need to heal not only from bodily wounds inflicted by violence but also the wounds inflicted by competition for political power.

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