

The Weberian Gang:
A Study of Three Chicago Gangs and New Conceptualization
of Criminal Politics

By: Owen Elrifi
Accessible at owenelrifi@uchicago.edu



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Faculty Advisor: Professor Benjamin Lessing, Department of Political Science
Political Science Preceptor: Nicholas Campbell-Seremetis
Public Policy Preceptor: Sayantan Saha Roy
Department of Public Policy Studies
Department of Political Science

Abstract

This paper explores the classification of gangs as criminal actors and not as political actors. I propose that urban street gangs often resemble and reflect the actions of the Weberian state in their communities and that this makes them inherently political, even if they do not make explicitly political claims against the state. To test this, I develop a theoretical framework by which to compare gang characteristics to state characteristics. Through ethnographic case studies of three Chicagoan gangs in the latter half of the 20th century, I demonstrate the utility of my framework in analysis and evaluate the similarities between gangs and states.

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Introduction

In 1919, Max Weber famously defined the state as “the human community that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of force within a given territory.” This definition revolutionarily shaped political science literature regarding on inter- and intra-state relations, including providing a framework and insights on how to conceptualize challenges to the state by outside actors.

The first puzzle in studying gangs is that the existing Political Science literature largely neglects to view gangs and gang members as political actors and instead focuses on them as criminal actors. This classification is in part because gangs do not necessarily have explicit political goals in the way that other non-state armed actors, such as insurgent groups, do. Despite this truth, I argue that many gangs are inherently political entities because they can take on the role of the Weberian state within their communities.

Chicago gangs in the late 20th century exhibited this monopoly of force, as well as fulfilling a number of other state functions and criteria outside of Weber’s initial definition. The lack of political science/political violence literature surrounding gangs, therefore, represents a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of gang activities and impede us from gaining deeper insight into how gangs structure themselves, how they operate, and how policymakers can effectively address the potential public safety concerns that they engender.

In this paper, I develop a theoretical typology by which one can evaluate if a given gang is Weberian in nature and I discuss the implications of the existence of

Weberian gangs. The proposed theoretical typology uses a function equivalence analysis between the state as such and the particular gang being analyzed. I then write ethnographic reports of three prominent gangs in Chicago during the latter half of the 20th century and use these case studies to evaluate my typology. After demonstrating the utility and robustness of my typology, I explain the factors that allowed the gangs in my case studies to become Weberian gangs.

Methodology

My argument for the classification of gangs as political actors will hinge on a robust literature review and subsequent evaluation of gangs and gang activities in comparison to states and state activities. The case that they are organizationally similar will be built upon a review of general principles, namely a monopoly on coercive means, a centralized bureaucracy, the collection of rents, and the provision of public goods. For states, these are requisites; I will show that they too are key elements in Weberian gang orders.

Once I have shown that gangs have many of the same characteristics and functions of Weberian states in their local communities, the second and more relevant puzzle with respect to my project is what specific conditions allow gangs to actually act in such a fashion. Indeed, not all gangs take on this Weberian role, and many compete for territory or resources within their localities. Are there environmental conditions that allow for gang growth and development in particular areas? Are there endogenous

characteristics to specific gangs that have historically allowed them to take on Weberian roles?

A robust quantitative analysis taking a multitude of variables from huge datasets into account would be able to adequately answer this question. It is precisely this gap of knowledge in the discipline of Political Science that puts this question out of our reach for now. As such, I do not seek to give an explanation for Weberian gang development as such; by using case studies of three Chicago gangs I seek to limit the influence of confounding variables in the development of these gangs as well as expand the scope of my analysis. In evaluating how The Vice Lords, Gangster Disciples, and Black P Stone Nation gangs all developed into Weberianesque powers in the mid-20th century across the South and West sides of Chicago, despite being subject to similar economic, social, and political external pressures from their environment, we can learn what variables may contribute to the effective development of these gangs into local Leviathans. A thorough analysis will require asking my research question through both frames of internal gang characteristics inherent to particular gangs themselves, but also what the realities of their communities are in allowing them to operate as they do. I propose that in the Chicago cases, external factors such as poverty, weak social controls, and state failure gave these gangs the soil by which to develop, and in turn, characteristics endogenous to the gangs themselves allowed them to take advantage of the opportunity presented them.

For this paper I will employ a number of different qualitative methods. I will explore the history and role of gangs in their communities through archival research. My focus will be on Chicago newspapers, namely the Chicago Tribune and the Chicago Sun-Times, though I will not limit my scope to exclusively these papers; in fact, if media

outlets outside of Chicago were reporting on Chicago gang activity, that may be an indicator of the sphere of influence of these gangs, and may support the idea that they are powerful Weberian actors. I will use documents internal to different United States governmental agencies including but not limited to the Department of Justice, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Federal Bureau of Investigations as much as possible to corroborate historical information. I will also use (the limited supply of) academic articles relating to the history and development of the gangs in question.

The history of gangs is not clear-cut; different sources report different dates of origins for different gangs, different gang members/leaders claim credit for different accomplishments, and there are incentives for gang members or affiliates to misrepresent information about their organizations. Additionally, many of the resources providing information on gangs are clearly biased. Police and intelligence agency reports and prominent editorials relating to these gangs and their history paint gangs as uniformly bad intentioned and evil and the gangsters that comprise them as hardened criminals without remorse or conscience. Given that most Chicagoland gang members are (and historically have been) between the ages of 14 and 20 and predominantly black (Miller 1975; Eligon 2016; Knox, 1995), the undertones of racism (intentional or not) are unmistakable in these scholars' work.

On the other side, if law enforcement and some journalists describe gangs as menaces to their community, gang members (former or current) and sympathizers may have incentives to exaggerate the benevolence of gangs in their communities.

I do not seek to editorialize nor entirely discredit the contributions of these scholars or gang members to the existing literature on gangs, but to reaffirm the

importance of impartiality in academia and scholarship. I will accordingly try to extract facts from these sources without importing their biases for or against the organizations and members.

At the outset of this project, I sought to conduct interviews with a number of former gang members from of the Gangster Disciples, Vice Lords, and Black P. Stones, and citizens of areas that were gang-controlled during my time period of interest. The responses of people from within these Weberianesque organizations, or who have interacted with such organizations, would have given me a clearer primary account of the routine and big-picture activities of these gangs, the social dynamics, the formal and informal governing structures, the gangs' missions, and the interactions between the gang and the larger community. Unfortunately, constraints on time and access to former members from these gangs prevented my from gathering a large enough sample size of interviews from which I could make meaningful statements about any of these questions. As such, I will include data from the few interviews I did conduct, but I make no generalizable claims about the quotes I received, nor pretend that any of the statements expressed by any interviewee reflects anything other than his or her own opinion. In order to protect and respect all interviewee's privacy, all interviewee's will be given pseudonyms.

As with any data collected by survey, responses may be altered by the framing, phrasing, context, and structure of questions asked. I have done my best to craft well thought out and impartial questions, and to eliminate my own biases from any questions I ask, having carefully studied the teachings and methods of University of Chicago professors Chad Broughton and Patricia Conley. Though I received exemption from the

University of Chicago IRB, interviewees were informed of potential risks and benefits of this research. Attached in the appendix of this paper are templates of the consent form drafted for the IRB (from which I adapted my pre-interview disclosure to participants) and a template of the questions off of which I based my interviews.

The ethnographic component of this research deviates from standard practice in Political Science literature; this deviation is intentional. By grounding my hypotheses in prevalent political theory and supplementing my case study work with a rigorous analysis of local context, I seek to maximize both internal and external validity of my argument by controlling for relevant and controversial factors in my local analysis and demonstrating the soundness of my extrapolations by appeal to commonly accepted theory.

The stakes of these claims could lead to a series of conclusions across disciplines that include a reconceptualization of criminality and/or criminal organizations. The results could manifest in more effective targeted policy strategies to address the problems that are associated with street gangs. It also will serve as a model of analysis for future studies evaluating American street gangs, their capacity to emulate a state both structurally and functionally, and may be applicable to youth street gangs elsewhere across the country or elsewhere in the world.

Literature Review

Legitimacy

Control and/or the notion of sovereignty rely on authority and the legitimization of authority. Weber (1922) believes that authority and legitimacy are inherently linked; he

offers insight into three different mechanisms by which authority is won. The first is charismatic authority, grown out of an individual's political savvy: her ability to win people over by virtue of her personality and virtuous traits. The second, traditional authority, is secured not by an appeal to individuality, but through an appeal to custom or tradition. This is the mechanism by which Weber believes monarchical rule persisted across cultures prior to the emergence of democracy; inheritance through family or kinship was a call to the continuation of a traditional line of rule. Finally, he describes legal-rational authority, under which power is derived from established institutions or legal offices. The holder of a given office has claim to power as established for that office, and the holding of that office is the only reason that they can claim such power. Weber goes on to explain that states have historically developed power and claimed authority by first appealing to the charismatic form, then to the traditional, and finally to the legal-rational.

These interpretations of authority are not only claims to power as such, but rather, in Weber's mind, legitimate claims to power. Weber does not define legitimacy by any form of external standard. Instead, he claims, power is legitimate insofar as those coerced by the power (or, those governed, if you will) believe that it is legitimate. His bases for legitimacy mirror his understandings of authority; in any branch of his tripartite codification of authority, authority is legitimate because to claim power requires one of these appeals to the coerced.

David Beetham, in his *Legitimation of Power*, critiques Weber's view of legitimacy, arguing that it is incomplete. He points to the abilities of modern communications and propaganda, and wonders if power is legitimate "because the

powerful have been successful in the public relations campaign...? Is the question of their legitimacy not therefore in the hands of the powerful themselves?" (Beetham, 1991). The standard by which to evaluate legitimacy, he posits, cannot be manipulable by people in power. In amending this definition, he offers three criteria of legitimacy: first, that it conforms to a set of pre-established rules. Second, these rules arise and are justifiable from a set of beliefs, values, or morals that both the dominant and subordinate share. Finally, there is substantive consent by the subordinate to the authority of the particular dominant. This interpretation of legitimacy reframes the concept not only in normative terms, but in empirical, measurable ones too.

The State and its Development

Theories of state development suggest the relation between criminal street gangs and the state as such almost explicitly. Mancur Olson (1993) pioneers a theory that states develop out of criminal practices; namely, racketeering and theft. Entrepreneurial bandits drive state development by adjusting their strategy from one-time raids on settlements to longer-term extraction schemes. Critically important to this theory is the relationship of the bandits' time horizons and level of resource extraction; in order to maintain the populous of the settlement without having them leave, the bandits had to shift from withdrawing all of the resources from the settled peoples. Instead of raiding and pillaging, bandits entered into these settlements and remained as de facto governors, providing public security from other roving bandits through their arms and militias in exchange for a smaller share of the surplus crops of the society; this is Olson's

imagination of the original form of taxation. The populous, in turn, claims Olson, legitimated the presence of these bandit governors by staying in place.

As these stationary bandits began to proliferate, a new economic incentive arose: the need to compete with other stationary bandits and their settlements. Bandits simultaneously had to realize the most profit that they could to maintain their military capacity while keeping their extracted rents low; citizens of these primitive states allegedly had the option to “vote with their feet” and therefore each stationary bandit had to make their racketeering scheme the most attractive. This resulted, in Olson’s story, in the provision of public goods and services, both as a tool by which to appeal to the masses, but also a means by which to increase productivity and resultantly profit. As these races to the top iterated over time, administrative and bureaucratic systems developed that became the government of the state (Olson, 1993).

This model is useful in the analysis of states at large, but is particularly relevant to this project as it clearly models state development out of what would be criminality. Olson’s stationary bandit theory, in name and practice, appears to have a number of parallels to gang establishment; gangs provide public goods and act as a security apparatus against rival gangs, and in return, they collect rents (in one form or another) from their surrounding neighborhoods.

Charles Tilly (1985) proposes a different model of state formation, in which “war makes states and vice versa.” Part of his argument is that inter-state conflict drives state development by way of creating standing armies through a balance of capital and coercive means. Tilly and Olson effectively look at the question of state development from two different angles: whereas Olson focuses on the economic pressures that

stationary bandits faced to develop the state, Tilly considers the military competition from other states as the primary mechanism by which the state developed. This too could describe the development and expansion of gangs, and would certainly position them as a substitute for a formal state. For our purposes, whether states were primarily racing other states to build a bureaucracy or a standing army doesn't matter – any substantive connection between these state motivations and the motivations of street gangs in terms of development, maintenance, or activity that could be made would be justification for studying street gangs from a political science perspective.

Political Violence

While research on gangs is largely lacking in the political science literature, as noted before, the political violence literature has grown significantly over the last decade and a half. Much of the research in this arena focuses specifically on studying different elements of civil wars and of insurgent groups. Insurgent groups differ from gangs in a key way: they explicitly challenge the state-controlled monopoly on violence to gain control of it and change the governing regime, whereas gangs make no such claim. Nonetheless, as non-state armed actors, the parallels between the structure and activity of gangs and that of insurgent groups are striking and are another convincing reason to classify gangs as primarily political actors. Still more compelling are the ideological similarities between gangs and insurgent groups – indeed, even without explicitly stated goals to challenge the state, gangs performing analogous activities to those of insurgents, borne out of the same philosophical roots is a phenomenon that demands to be critically examined through a political science framework.

Three broad theories of civil war onset prevail in the political science literature, and their analyses of insurgent motivation all provide plausible ideological bases for gang formation and development. Theories of state weakness and interaction, theories of economic “greed”, and theories of ethnic “grievance” as civil war onset mechanisms have potential explanatory power for gang motivations to engage in criminal activities and to establish the institutional structure that they do. If any of these arguments do map onto such motivations, the connection may suggest some particular conditions or strategies that allow gangs to build support and take on a Weberian role.

Fearon and Laitin (2003) argue that insurgents taking advantage of opportunities states’ bureaucratic weakness is the primary mechanism for civil war, and explicitly reject the notion that ethnic grievance is a sufficient predictor for onset (but, notably, do not reject the idea of it as a contributor to those conditions). They particularly argue that poverty is a key indicator of the weakness of the state and the uprising of insurgents, though they explain that political and organizational weakness are also sufficient for their argument.

Theories of economic greed agree with poverty as a pre-condition for insurgency, but instead of viewing it as the failure of a weak central state, they consider the impact and incentives it creates in individuals. Collier and Hoeffler (2004) claim that insurgent groups and their constituents effectively do a cost-benefit analysis before engaging dissenting, and in cases in which the net benefit is positive, rebel. On the organizational level, this takes into account the opportunity costs of revolution, the present ability to finance an uprising, as well as the expected financial benefits of controlling the state, assuming they succeed. On an individual level, insurgents make similar calculations,

weighing their likelihood of being imprisoned or killed against the financial incentives of working for the insurgency both in the short term (a paycheck) and in the long term (a share of the benefits). This economic frame seems incredibly applicable; both individuals and gangs may take these calculations into consideration, even if not consciously, but they certainly are theoretically compelling as drivers of the development and operation of gangs.

Ethnic grievance theory suggests ethnic groups mobilizing as a result of political and economic exclusion best explain civil war onset. The argument asserts that individuals derive a sense of self-worth from associating with their ethnic group, and that competing ethno-nationalist claims within the state leave some groups as “winners” and some groups as “losers” in the share of resources and power divvied by the state. It follows that the excluded groups then challenge the state for sovereignty as a means by which to fulfill their group claims (Cederman et al., 2010; Horowitz, 1985). This explanation may also explain the rise of some Weberian gangs; most American gangs are ethnically homogeneous and comprised primarily of black or Hispanic members (Knox, 1995), groups that have been historically mistreated and underrepresented in the United States.

Each of these explanations is plausible for the formation and growth of Weberian gangs, but also are plausible stories for the existence of gangs that do not become Weberian. In both civil war onset and gang formation, there is likely an element of path dependence that makes aggregate explanations less powerful, but equally likely is that these factors interact with one another to provide a set of multiple motivations to create and/or participate in a non-state armed group.

Gangs

One of the difficulties in studying gangs in the discipline of political science is a lack of available research. An analysis done by Nicholas Barnes (2017) shows that for searches of “organized crime, gangs, cartels, vigilante groups, trafficking organizations, and mafias” in top-ten Political Science journals had fewer than 20 cumulative articles available. By contrast, searches for “civil war, rebellion, insurgency, and terrorism” yielded over 40x the results despite the fact that all groups studied/in question are non-state armed actors.¹ This disparity reinforces the conception of gangs as non-political actors and strictly criminal ones. Though other social science disciplines have studied gangs in significantly more depth, we as a field are neglecting to apply political analysis to the phenomenon of gangs. This is a disservice to our full understanding of their role in the socio-political environments of their contexts.

Widely regarded as one of the first in depth studies of gangs as such, Friedrich Thrasher’s 1927 book *The Gang: A Study of 1313 Gangs in Chicago* provides a widely accepted definition of gangs:

[A gang is] an interstitial group originally formed spontaneously, and then integrated through conflict. It is characterized by the following types of behavior: meeting face to face, milling, movement through space as a unit, conflict, and planning. The result of this collective behavior is the development of tradition, unreflective internal structure, esprit de corps, solidarity, morale, group awareness, and attachment to a local territory. (p. 57)

¹ See Figure 1 in Appendix

Though all these elements are important to Thrasher's conception of the gang, most notable and widely recited is the idea that a gang is a spontaneously formed peer group that collectively develops out of conflict. This understanding may provide one answer to why Sociology has more adequately studied gangs than Political Science: if a crucial element of the gang relies on a unique path dependence, analyzing larger trends fundamentally relies on an in-depth understanding of each gang being analyzed.

Of equal or greater relevance to this project is Thrasher's assertion that gangs develop deep internal connections both with one another and with the structure (gang) itself, as well as an external connection to their territory. The latter is a clear connection to Weber's definition on the state, but the internal connections are also notable. Though in the modern nation-state international system there is a clear conceptual distinction between the state (an administrative/bureaucratic system) and the nation (the social identity encased within the state) (Arendt, 1951), the two indisputably play into the development of one another, in a continuous feedback loop. Similarly, these internal connections within the gang and the connections to the socially constructed identity of the gang itself must in turn inform its organizational or administrative development. This parallel is only made more powerful as gangs explicitly give themselves names such as the "Black Gangster Disciple Nation" and form alliances with names such as the "People Nation" and "Folk Nation." Invoking this language, whether intentionally or not, solidifies the idea of constructing an organization or gang out of the collective identity of its constituents.

Dennis Rodgers, a researcher at the London School of Economics, studies gangs in Nicaragua and proposes a similar idea of "violent governmentality" in that context.

Rodgers provides a useful frame to understand the coexisting forms of governance, order, violence, and legitimacy that come from the state itself and the massive gang presence in poverty-stricken Nicaragua. He proposes that while we have historically understood sovereignty as an exclusive characteristic of the state, a “social sovereignty” exists for organizations that create institutions that serve as formal and informal social controls for a target population (Rodgers, 2006). This view is useful in understanding how gangs like those in Nicaragua can work to achieve similar goals and amass similar legitimacy, coercive capabilities, and structures to the state in which they operate. This conceptualization of coexistent sovereignty will underlie my case analyses; while I will make the case that certain gangs have Weberian power over their areas of operation, I do not mean to imply that the state is entirely absent or is ceding their sovereignty to those gangs. Instead, they often (implicitly) recognize the legitimacy and capability of such gangs, while claiming sovereignty and legitimacy over the same area.

Theory

Weber’s criteria for the state, as given by his definition, are legitimacy, coercive ability, and geographically defined territory (Weber, 1919). While these are relevant characteristics for statehood as such, states also perform functions that Weber does not explore. To analyze gangs as state analogs it is critical to compare both the structure and function of both groups as such – if a gang looks like a state but does not act like one, there is no value in analyzing gangs through the lens of a state.

Integrating Weber’s definition of the state with Olson and Tilly’s conceptualizations of state development and function, I functionally define the state as a centralized, revenue-generating bureaucracy that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of force within a given geographically defined region and provides public goods and services to its citizens.

To evaluate gangs as Weberian actors, I propose decomposing these different elements of the state and evaluating the degree to which the gang of interest resembles the state across these dimensions. A template for analysis with examples of gang analogs is as follows:

State Property	Gang Analog
Defined Territory	Turf
Legitimacy	Community support of gang activities
Monopoly on Violence	Evidence of arms; lack of challengers in turf;
Revenue Generation/Taxation	Evidence of taxation; rents from illicit markets
Public Good Provision	Public Good Provision; subsidizing private goods
Centralized Bureaucracy	Bureaucracy; structural hierarchy with differentiated roles/responsibilities

The state properties in which I am interested are not intended to be a comprehensive list of state characteristics or responsibilities, nor must a gang have a perfect analog to each property in order to have some form of “Weberian” control over its community. Instead, this framework is a tool for analysis that may be useful in understanding gang dynamics; I do not seek to quantify “how Weberian” a gang is, but rather acknowledge an underlying similarity between the structure and function of the gang and the state as such.

It is also worth noting that even in analyzing states, these different elements are not easily differentiated. The territory, legitimacy, and the monopoly on violence criteria I propose are inherently linked through Weber’s definition of the state, and may have to be examined together in order to understand if each condition exists in isolation. Public good provision is entirely conditional on a gang, state, or organization’s ability to generate enough revenue to provide such goods. A bureaucracy may be created out of, or in anticipation of, these violence or revenue management administrative functions. In short, the development of each and all of these criteria may have critical roles in bolstering the development of each of the other criteria within a gang’s growth. The development of the listed characteristics or attributes may be simultaneous with the activities and functions of a Weberian gang, or they may be separate. I make no claim on the order of development of these state functions and characteristics within gangs; the path dependent component of Weberian gang development is individual to each gang of such stature, and not necessarily a standardized process.

The first two inextricably linked elements of a state, pulled directly from Weber’s definition, are the geographically defined region in which the state operates, and the

monopoly on violence within that region. It is important to think about the conceptual relationship between the two facets: it is the monopoly on violence, the exclusive ability to use force that is both created out of and ensures this geographic area. State borders can only exist insofar as states can effectively project their coercive capabilities up to those borders and defend them from internal or external belligerents. The monopoly on violence simultaneously can only exist if bounded; no state has the power projection capabilities nor administrative efficacy to truly control boundless territory without competition, and thus by defining the monopoly over a bounded region, it can exist both in theory and in practice.

Just as states have geographically defined territories ensured by and over which they exert their monopoly on violence, gangs have turfs that operate the same way. Brantingham et al (2012) establish a spatial model that maps hundreds of incidences of gang violence between multiple gangs in Los Angeles, California. Their data bears out a “competition-driven hypothesis theory” in which (violent) competition between gangs determines the borders of the gangs’ territory, but that within each gang’s territory, violence is effectively nonexistent. This indicates that each gang has a functional monopoly of violence over its own turf, as there is no competition over the “marketplace” of violence. It also means that while there is some amount of inter-gang competition for the limited resources/territory in the area, this competition draws the borders by which gangs (and their constituents) recognize one another’s authority and legitimacy.

This story mirrors that of the modern day nation-state. States developed according to Olson (1993) and Tilly (1985) by competing for resources and building standing armies to support their greed. Just as states drew their borders out of violent competition

and enforced them through the development of standing armies (Tilly, 1992), gangs too draw borders at the extension of their monopoly on violence and seek to advance or maintain them through the recruitment of “soldiers.”

Tilly characterizes this recruitment of soldiers as both the cause and the result of taxation. European states originated, he argues, by spending money to develop standing armies as a means by which to expand and generate new revenues. Primitive taxes were the means by which to fund these militaries. As states grew, so did competition over resources, and states then invested more of their capital into the development of armies to compete effectively. States, however, seeking to maximize their own profits, balanced military investment with investments in public goods such as infrastructure that increased internal efficiency (Olson, 1993).

Gangs’ fundamental costs and investment decisions are the same as those of states. Levitt and Venkatesh (2000) use internal gang panel data to analyze the organizational financial structure of a “corporatized” street gang. Importantly, their study only examines a small “set” of the gang, not the entirety of the organization. One of the largest costs that Levitt and Venkatesh estimate is the wage paid to the gang members enlisted in protecting the gang’s turf from competitors. These soldiers were reportedly paid a base rate of \$470 a month, which converts to approximately \$780 a month in 2019 dollars.² Much like the larger United States, the gang devotes a huge proportion of its budget to a military apparatus and, the authors argue, provide employment where there is a dearth of “legitimate” opportunities for work. These data support three points. First, the gang’s investments in coercive means are comparable to that of a state and directly contribute to the goal of a monopoly on violence over the gang’s turf. Second, as Levitt

² Calculated using the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ online “CPI Inflation Calculator.”

and Venkatesh explain, the gang is offering jobs to community members that pay, on average, better than “legitimate” sector jobs for comparable work. The positive psychological effects of work are well documented, and here we see gangs effectively running a public employment program – this evidences the provision of public goods by gangs in substitute for other forms of government. Third, the amount of money being invested in coercive capacity for gangs is indicative of a set of reliable and significant revenue streams. If the first point gave credence to Tilly’s theory of coercive-capital state growth, the latter two support Olson’s notion of economic development through profit-generating public good investment.

By Levitt and Venkatesh’s estimates, this now-defunct gang reported earning over six hundred thousand dollars of drug profits annually – equivalent to over a million dollars a year by today’s standards³. The authors note that this number is likely incredibly underreported, as gang leaders who controlled the books had significant discretion in the distribution of revenues and in the gang’s business negotiations themselves, and had clear incentives to extort unreported gains. In addition, their data show that “rank and file” gang members reportedly pay dues into the organization. The rank and file, the authors report, does not have to act as soldiers for the gang, but do reap the benefits of “protection, status, and a reliable supply of drugs for those who deal independently” (Levitt and Venkatesh, 2000, p.762). This directly mirrors the state providing protection and additional goods and services to its taxpayers.

In Latin America, there is extensive evidence of gangs providing public goods. Most famously, Pablo Escobar was well loved across Colombia for his investment in poverty-stricken communities. Between “building houses and caring for the poor” (New

³ *ibid.*

York Times, December 4, 1993) and helping bump the economy by intertwining his cartel with the Medellín's popular soccer club Atletico Nacional (The Versed, April 18, 2017), individuals and communities rallied around and legitimized Escobar and his Medellín Cartel for their provision of public goods. Flanagan (2014) describes Mexican cartels' ad hoc provision of a range of public goods such as housing, health and mental health services, infrastructure, education, justice administration, and short-term emergency relief. While the phenomenon of gang-provided public goods may not be prevalent or widely known in the United States, its existence is clear from the Latin American cases.

Finally, a centralized bureaucracy characterizes states. Typically, this is the organizational arm of the state originally designed to coordinate and enforce tax collection, but the scope of modern public bureaucracy often extends past this rudimentary function and into other administrative matters. Gangs too, in order to be Weberian, must have some centralized bureaucracy that shapes their organization.

Case 1: The Gangster Disciples

History

The Gangster Disciples, presently one of the most well-known and notorious gangs in the United States, originated in 1960 in Chicago's Hyde Park community as a small group called the Devil's Disciples. The Devil's Disciples quickly grew in the early sixties, expanding their reach and shifting their primary territory in the Chicago's

Englewood community, until in 1966, a prominent member by the name of David Barksdale reformed the gang into the Black Disciples (Knox, 1995).

Around the same time, Larry Hoover was rising in the ranks of another Englewood based gang, the Imperial Gangsters. At this point, reports from scholars, the Department of Justice, and former gangsters diverge in terms of exact dates, but they all agree this began a period of amalgamation in which small gangs began to form alliances in order to consolidate power. By 1967, Hoover had established himself as a player in the gang world, and emerged as the leader of the newly formed Black Gangsters. Barksdale, having amassed over 5,000 members of the Black Disciples took notice of Hoover and his gang, and brokered a treaty between the two groups. Fueled by a mutual hatred of Vice Lords and Black P. Stones, in 1969 Barksdale and Hoover fused their organizations to form the Black Gangster Disciple Nation (BDGN) (DOJ, 2003).

After the merger, Hoover received an impressive role in the BDGN, however Barksdale was hailed not only as the leader, but had earned himself the moniker “King David.” To this day, the phrase “King David” and symbols deriving from this exaltation (including a six pointed star, identical to the Star of David) are integral to the Gangster Disciples organization.

Entering the new decade, the Black Gangster Disciples were not only entrenched in the drug trade in Chicago, but were increasing their sales volume. Despite relative success in avoiding the police up until that point, on November 5th, 1973 Hoover received a 200-year prison sentence for the kidnapping and subsequent murder of William Young, a member his own gang who was allegedly stealing from their narcotics supply. At this

point in time, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration estimated that the Black Gangster Disciples were selling two kilograms of cocaine per week (DEA, 1997).

A year later, on December 11th, 1974, “King” David Barksdale died as a result of injuries from a previous shooting. Barksdale was the charismatic leader that Weber described, meaning his death prompted the factionalization of the recently formed gang. Deputies scrambled to replace Barksdale, resulting in the split between Jerome “Shorty” Freedman and the modern Black Disciples gang and Larry Hoover and the modern Gangster Disciples.

Hoover’s ability to emerge as a leader and preside over the remnants of the BDGN from behind bars is indeed a testament to the respect he commanded, and may be the reason he inherited the title of “King” from Barksdale among his new gang. Incarceration seemed to not hinder Hoover, and in fact may have extended his reach and ability; Hoover had the plausible deniability of being imprisoned while he gave orders and conducted business to and with the gangster disciples, and he now had another recruitment pool by which to grow his gang: inmates of the Illinois Department of Corrections (Knox, 1995).

Since 1974, the Gangster Disciples have been continuously growing its ranks and expanding its territory. By the mid-90’s to the early 2000’s, the Chicagoland population of the Gangster Disciples has been estimated to be between 30,000 and 50,000 members (Knox, Gangster Disciples, 1995; U.S. D.O.J. National Gang Threat Assessment, 2009) and the nationwide population of Gangster Disciples as been estimated to be as high as 100,000 members (U.S. D.O.J. National Drug Intelligence Center, 2003). George Knox, founder of the National Gang Crime Research Center (NGCRC), writes that “[Hoover’s]

gang's territory stretched from Chicago to Gary, Indiana," and claims that "as recently as [the] spring of 1995," the Gangster Disciples had control over 17 residential buildings in the Robert Taylor and Stateway Gardens public housing complexes (Knox, 1995).

Function Equivalence

Underlying this description of control offered by Knox was the Gangster Disciples' ability to enact force as violence over the designated territory; they 'controlled' this territory and these public housing buildings because no challengers could out-gun them. Similarly, during a 1996 trial following a 1995 FBI sting that resulted in the arrest of 39 senior Gangster Disciples leaders, a former GD chief of security testified that "If people who weren't supposed to be "working, or selling drugs, (were in our area) we would shut them down" ("Gangster Disciples' Secrets Laid Bare", The Chicago Sun-Times, Feb. 4, 1996).

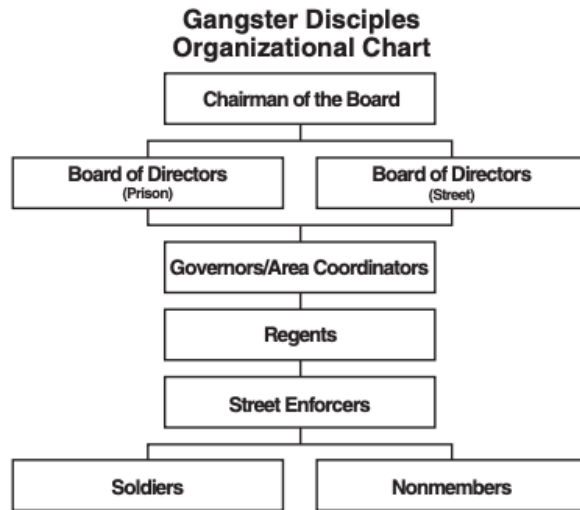
In addition to the euphemized description of the use of force to protect its land, the action taken by the gang and conceptually central to the state, the trials that came out of the "Operation Headache" revealed a wealth of information about the complexity of the Gangster Disciples' Leviathan. Crawford, in return for legal protection, described the bureaucratic structure of the organization, including describing a military style system of enforcers to protect their territory, as well as financial data showing their revenues from drug economies and taxation scheme and costs from contributions to a set of community organizations that provide goods and services.

Mary Mitchell summarized the strongly vertical, military-inspired structure of the Gangster Disciples that Crawford described to prosecutors: " 'governors' control who

sells drugs in a given area. 'Regents' and 'coordinators' carry out the orders and collect money from the rank and file" ("Gangster Disciples' Secrets Laid Bare", The Chicago Sun-Times, Feb. 4, 1996). Above the governors making strategic and high level decisions are two sets of boards of directors, one for operations within the corrections system and one for street operations. The chairman, Larry Hoover, is the only person with say above the board. A 2003 National Drug Intelligence Center report confirms:

Governors/area coordinators are responsible for directing and coordinating drug distribution in their assigned geographic areas... Governors/area coordinators also are called upon to resolve disputes among gang members, collect dues, and report to the boards of directors...Regents, who coordinate drug distribution and manage the daily operations of the street enforcers and soldiers, report directly to the governors/area coordinators. Street enforcers are responsible for ensuring that all members follow the regents' orders. Soldiers are responsible for the distribution of drugs as well as other criminal activity. Soldiers distribute drugs as a means of paying their dues. Furthermore, nonmembers who sell drugs on the gang's turf are required to pay a street tax, a portion of the profits they receive from drug sales, to the organization.

Leaked internal GD documents corroborate the structure described by Crawford, and the Department of Justice's National Drug Intelligence Center summarizes the bureaucracy in the following chart:



[GD Organizational Chart \(DOJ, 2003\)](#)

The NDIC report also corroborates DEA claims of the massive drug operation run by the Gangster Disciples. Estimates suggest that in the mid-90's, the Gangster Disciples were bringing in revenues of over \$100 million a year in Chicago alone (Knox 1995), though the real number is likely higher (Levitt and Venkatesh, 2000). Daniel, a former Regent of the gang described the street taxes to me in more detail: “yeah, everyone had to pay a lil bit back into the organization, you know? You paid a couple bucks back for every sale but it got less as you got up the ranks. But we all knew we was helping the cause.” Crawford’s testimony agreed, citing a \$7 per week tax for non-ranking members, and adding that ranking members would be expected to come up with larger sums of money (upwards of \$30,000) on one off bases (Chicago Sun-Times, February 4, 1996). With a functioning tax collection bureaucracy, huge revenues coming from drug sales,

and long-term financial stability and growth, the Gangster Disciples are inarguably financially structured like states.

Complementing the financial structure of the gang was its pseudo-military organization. Described above by the NDIC and the testimony from the 1996 trial, the actual bureaucratic structure of the gang reinforced its monopoly on violence, including roles for “soldiers” and “enforcers.” This structure in conjunction with the massive membership of the gang and its deep pockets (i.e. latent power), this operation has massive power projection capabilities, arguably mirroring that of a state. On top of this, access to guns is unlimited: David told me “everybody’s got a gun. When I was like 15 I bought a sawed off shotgun and a 30 revolver for \$30... you can get a gun before you can get a summer job.” He expanded, repeating throughout our interview, “these guys got the largest guns. Like the biggest guns out there.” He described the acquisition process, in which gang youths would break into freight trains carrying guns to distributors and steal them for their organizations. Jack, a former Governor of the GDs, around the time David was in the gang, provided his insight: “Those guns usually came from Boston. Every gang usually gets a gunman - someone that has the ability to obtain large amounts of guns at one time... where they come from, actually, you never know. From out of state. Those guns were usually distributed to people who were considered to be ‘security’ - the individuals whose titles in the organization had to do with security - from streets to prisons as well.” This organized military operation mirrors that of the state and entrenches the Gangster Disciples as the coercive monopolist in Englewood and across their territory.

This is recognized in the community very clearly through the widespread membership of the gang; with 50,000 members from the Chicago communities in which they operate, the Gangster Disciples have legitimacy in numbers alone. Moreover, however, there is massive external legitimacy bestowed upon the Gangster Disciples as a result of their political and community benefit organizations. On the political side, in 1993 numerous U.S. political officials, including former mayor of Chicago Eugene Sawyer, Aldermen Allan Streeter (17th) and Virgil Jones (15th), State Rep. Coy Pugh (D-Chicago), and Rev. Jesse Jackson pushed for Larry Hoover's release from prison and many advocates continue this effort (Chicago Tribune, August 4, 1993). In January of 1994, President Bill Clinton invited Wallace "Gator" Bradley of the Gangster Disciples' political wing, 21st Century V.O.T.E. to the White House to brief him for his State of the Union Address (Chicago Tribune, Feb 18, 1994).

Bradley's invitation was a function of the massive communal support that the Gangster Disciples had generated from the launch of their new Growth and Development initiatives. Though the Gangster Disciples had historically supported their community in informal ways, such as sending payments to the families of slain members (DOJ, 2003), a 1993 announcement from Larry Hoover established a formal commitment and focus from the GDs on community improvement. Within 2 years, several Growth and Development organizations such as Save the Children Inc. had received federal grant money for an anti-poverty program. The GDs also ran an expert-acclaimed violence prevention program at Englewood High School (Chicago Tribune, July 13, 1995), channeled 21st Century V.O.T.E.'s efforts into engaging local youth in politics, and organized a national gang summit in Chicago with the goal of a nationwide gang truce movement (Knox

1995). This not only built the GD’s legitimacy among their community and across the nation, but also constitutes a provision of public goods that directly mirrors the state.

State Property	GD Analog
Defined Territory	Robert Taylor and Stateway Gardens Homes; Englewood
Legitimacy	100,000 membership; massive community and political support
Monopoly on Violence	No competition over sales in public housing; Crawford testimony
Revenue Generation/Taxation	Drug Sales (DEA data), Gang Dues
Public Good Provision	Save the Children Promotions Inc., 21 st Century V.O.T.E
Centralized Bureaucracy	Chairman (Larry Hoover) and Board of Directors Structure

Case 2: The Vice Lords

History

The Vice Lords were founded in 1958 by youths enrolled in the reformatory at the Illinois State Training School for Boys at St. Charles, unaffectionately referred to as “Charlie Town”. These boys were primarily black and hailed from the North Lawndale neighborhood of Chicago. They organized in an effort to push back against the draconian

punishments that the Charlie Town staff imposed on them, but later would rally around ideals of black liberation, Islam, and social justice. Initially, they rejected the idea of criminal activity, and operated as more of a social club.

As the original members of the Vice Lords matriculated back into Lawndale in the early 60's, they were incredibly effective at recruiting new members. They centered themselves around 16th street and Lawndale Ave, dubbing their turf "Vice Lord City" (Dawley, 1992).

The success of the Vice Lords may have been critically tied with their timing in entering the Lawndale neighborhood. As they began to emerge and grow, three gangs in the Lawndale area (the Cobras, the Imperial Chaplains, and the Clovers) were busy at war with one another. Lincoln Kaiser (1969), the author of a book chronicling the history on the Vice Lords, suggests that their success came because they "filled a power vacuum" left in the neighborhood by the decline of the Clovers.

The Vice Lords began to grow at an unprecedented rate, as members of the community joined for protection from the warring gangs, and as members from those gangs defected to the Vice Lords. As their size grew, so did their organizational legitimacy among the gangs in the area, and the Vice Lords were able to broker a number of deals between many smaller gangs. They were incredibly successful in absorbing many of the small gangs in the area under their colors, either by integrating the members directly into the Vice Lords, or by offering organizations autonomy as long as they affiliated themselves with the Vice Lords. Keiser (1969) referred to this rise in Vice Lord affiliate gangs as the "Vice Lord Federation."

In 1966, the Vice Lords made an effort to restructure their organization as they began to face problems with internal disorganization and external competition from other large gang federations, such as the Black P Stone Nation (Knox and Papachristos, 2002). They developed a central board comprised of representatives from each branch, with a president elected by the board members (Keiser, 1969). In 1967, the gang was legally incorporated as a business, and was receiving U.S. government grants to create and administer self-help programs for youth.

It is hard to measure the exact scale and scope of the Vice Lords sphere of influence because the Vice Lords had a multi-level federation of independently run gangs operating under their standard. Importantly, these gangs were identified as Vice Lords; more than gangs that were merely allied, the smaller, absorbed gangs became fundamentally recreated as Vice Lord factions. They incorporated Vice Lord symbols, speech, creeds and values into their organizations fundamentally, but gangs could continue to operate autonomously in their neighborhoods. This means that when records were kept (and kept faithfully), either of finances or of chapter specific information, they weren't amalgamated anywhere centrally.

With that in mind, records from the Vice Lords suggest that they ran at least 15 legitimate businesses and significantly contributed to the community development of Lawndale (Knox and Papachristos, 2002). Dawley 1992 (p 140 – 145) lists some such projects, including the Tenants' Right Action Group, focused on blocking illegal evictions locally, Art & Soul, a free art studio for neighborhood kids, The West Side Community Development Corporation, a business incubator for minority owners, and the

Management Training Institute, funded by the U.S. Department of Labor as a minority executive training program.

In the 1980's, the Vice Lords again changed their organizational structure, this time reflecting a cultural shift in the gang. As the Black Power movement began to decrescendo in the late 70's and early 80's, the Vice Lords started to more formally adopt and promote the ideologies of black liberation, social and economic justice, and Islam. Constitutions of nearly all Vice Lord factions and affiliates began to overwhelmingly reference "Allah" and "Divine Retribution," as well as incorporating prayers and essays about the Quran into their official literature. Their institutional structure changed relatively trivially in terms of function, but the titles of board members and gang leaders now reflected royalty, alluding to being warriors and leaders of a nation that was comprised of Vice Lords but congruous with the Nation of Islam (Knox and Papachristos, 2002).

The Vice Lords have continued to flourish and grow since this structural shift. The Department of Justice estimates their reach to cover 28 states and their overall membership to exceed 30,000 members (National Drug Intelligence Center, 2003). Despite the difficulty in aggregating data on the multiple branches of Vice Lords, a government crackdown on an upstream narcotics supplier may give some indication of the financial prowess of the Federation as a whole; a 2007 DEA sting "resulted in the seizure of 2,061 kilograms of cocaine, 411 pounds of methamphetamine, 58.5 kilograms of heroin, 22 weapons, and approximately \$26 million worth of assets including 27 vehicles and 25 properties" (FBI and CPD, 2017). Using drug price estimates from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Chicago DEA, street level

distribution of these drugs could have yielded revenues of close to \$300 million at the time of seizure (UNODC, 2010; Chicago DEA, 2000). Notably, this is only the result of one seized shipment, and this analysis assumes no price discrimination, that dealers sold at market price and didn't have market power, and that consumers purchased the drugs in "typical" (i.e. not bulk) quantities, under a couple grams at a time. The same FBI/CPD report estimates that shipments of this size were delivered to the Conservative Vice Lords drug-trafficking branch (specialized, within the gang) monthly, which would correspond to over 3.5 billion dollars of revenue annually (FBI and CPD, 2017).

Function Equivalence

The Vice Lords are widely cited by researchers, federal agencies, and community members as exerting control over the Lawndale neighborhood in Chicago, though their reach and influence has since expanded broadly. A Department of Justice report claims that Vice Lords "had established control of the distribution of cocaine and heroin on Chicago's West Side... VLN gangs used intimidation tactics against their own members as well as rival gangs and law enforcement in order to control and further expand drug distribution" (DOJ, 2003). The language used by the United States government demonstrates the external legitimacy of the Vice Lords and the monopoly of violence that they exercised in their areas of operation. In an interview, one former Lawndale resident, now a prominent Chicago activist, told me "one of the greatest mentoring programs on the south side [of Chicago] is called the Vice Lords." This claim is echoed both by the Vice Lords' internal push to be an active force in the community and other Lawndale

members' patronage of Vice Lord-operated businesses and contributes to the internal legitimacy of the Federation.

The National Drug Intelligence Center's 2003 report said of the Vice Lords:

“Vice Lord Nation is one of the most violent associations of street gangs in the United States. VLN gangs are responsible for numerous homicides, particularly in Chicago. In smaller cities and towns across the country, VLN members regularly commit assault, extortion, intimidation, and homicide in order to further or protect their criminal activities. Most violence is directed at rival gangs or at dealers who neglect to pay extortion fees. Violence also is used to ensure that members adhere to the VLN bylaws.”

This endorsement of the Vice Lord Nation's ability to easily levy coercive punishments particularly against their rivals or dealers who sell drugs on their turf without giving a cut to the Vice Lords constitutes a monopoly on violence over that turf.

In addition, it's clear that the Vice Lords had access to a plethora of guns and weapons, most likely through the purchase of such materials in states neighboring Illinois with far more lenient firearm laws. Chicago Tribune articles ranging from 1971 to 2018 describe the influx of guns into Chicago and the hands of the Vice Lords through backdoor distribution channels ([Chicago Tribune](#), May 22, 2018; [Chicago Tribune](#), November 29, 1993; [Chicago Tribune](#), May 19, 1971). While all three articles suggest that the Vice Lords' weaponry largely come from out of state, the most recent article

points to a new means by which gangs (including the Vice Lords) can acquire high-powered weaponry: the Internet.

The drug quantities seized by the DEA in 2007 as well as their estimates of annual shipment levels indicate the scale of the Vice Lord financial operation. Although the estimates given are of revenue and not profit, it's also worth recognizing that the feds only identified one drug-trafficking organization affiliated with the Vice Lords. Others may exist, and importantly, the seized drug shipment did not contain any marijuana, which was identified by the National Drug Intelligence Center as one of the Vice Lords primary sources of revenue (NDIC, 2003). Knox and Papachristos (2002) also suggest that Vice Lord members paid dues to their organizations, though only 41% of interviewed members reported to having to do so (n = 91). This scheme of taxation as well as participation in global markets is entirely reminiscent of a state, and demonstrates not only the financial operation of the Vice Lords as analogous to that of a state, but further that the scale of such an operation is similarly analogous.

The use of the Vice Lords' revenues for investment in the community is congruous to Olson's description of state investments into public goods in their citizens. Though the Vice Lords may not have had control of explicit taxation of participants in their programs the way states have coercive power over their citizens, the business development focus of the Vice Lords has the same underlying goal of boosting local productivity and earning through the provision of public goods. In fact, the buy in of the United States federal government into several of the Vice Lords' programs bolsters their legitimacy as such and demonstrates the parallel incentives and thought processes of the gang and the state.

The Vice Lords explicitly, if not faithfully, broadcast this mindset of investment in the community and its citizens. In a letter to Mayor Richard J. Daley in June 1969, Kenneth Parks, the acting president of the Conservative Vice Lord Nation, expressed his desire to partner with the city of Chicago to address the problem of gun violence in the city. He ends the letter offering: “We can meet with you whenever and wherever you wish. We feel that this meeting could benefit the whole Chicago community.” A full copy of this letter (Figure 2) is attached in the appendix.

Finally, the bureaucratic reforms made in the Vice Lord organization in the 60’s and the 80’s are indicative of the structural complexity of the gang. The Vice Lords are particularly unique in their organization in that they allow the independent operation of their affiliate gangs. The Vice Lords emulate a sort of federalist structure in this sense; much as the United States imbues sovereignty to each state while maintaining a supreme federal sovereignty so the Vice Lord Nation retains an overarching sovereignty over its sovereign member gangs. Notably, the Vice Lords also participate in inter-gang alliances, and are members of the People Nation set of gangs that war with the Folk Nation. This fact strengthens the Vice Lords’ legitimacy as well as paralleling a federalist government structure.

State Property	VL Analog
Defined Territory	Lawndale, west side of Chicago
Legitimacy	30,000 membership; massive community and political support; DOJ description
Monopoly on Violence	Interstate arms-trafficking
Revenue Generation/Taxation	Drug Sales (DEA data), Gang Dues
Public Good Provision	Multiple community based organizations with federal gov't funding
Centralized Bureaucracy	Advisory Board representing different Vice Lord factions w/ elected leadership

Case 3: The Black P Stone Nation

History

The origin and growth story of the Black P Stone Nation closely resembles that of the Vice Lords. Like the Vice Lords, the Black P Stone Nation was founded in the late 1950's by a youth named Jeff Fort in the St. Charles Reform School in suburban Illinois. The name of the gang was inspired by their neighborhood of origin; in 1959 the gang had a meager membership located around Fort's residence on 64th street and Blackstone. Like the Vice Lords, they were able to quickly amass support through uniting smaller gangs and later solidified their institutions and structures by integrating Islam into the fabric of the organization.

Interestingly, despite their ultimate embrace of Islam, the Black P Stones were largely propped up by a Presbyterian pastor named Reverend Fry. Fry helped establish the organizational structure of the gang and funneled church resources into supporting the gang; Fry would allegedly use church funds to bail Black P Stones out from prison and allow members to conduct meetings at the church itself (Knox, 2001). He also helped the gang apply for and receive grants and funding from non-profits and foundations for BPSN-sponsored community programs (Chicago Magazine, November 1, 1988).

Between 1965 and 2003 the gang's membership shot from 200 to over 8000 (NDIC, 2003; Chicago Magazine, November 1, 1988). While 8000 seems small in comparison to the Gangster Disciples or the Vice Lords, its important to note that the scale of a gang (much like the population of a state) is not indicative of its administrative capacity or ability to maintain its control over its territory.

In 1967, The Woodlawn Organization (TWO), a newly formed non-profit operating in Woodlawn, had received nearly \$1 million in grants from the Office of Economic Opportunity on the promise of reducing gun violence on Chicago's south side. Leaders of both the BPSN and the Gangster Disciples publically supported TWO and encouraged their members to attend their job skills training programs and engage in the community without contributing to the neighborhood violence (The Atlantic, May 1969). One of the critical components of this program was the attempt to speak to gang members as peers; Jeff Fort, Eugene Hairston (Fort's right hand man), and a slew of other BPSN officers were hired by The Woodlawn Organization as program facilitators because according to Reverend Arthur Brazier, TWO's executive director, "many of these youth

do not relate to professionals because the professionals with middle-class attitudes do not relate to them” (The Chicago Reader, November 13, 1997).

Unfortunately for Fort, law enforcement officials were skeptical of the gang leader presence in The Woodlawn Organization, and in 1971 Fort was convicted of misappropriating federal money to the Black P Stone Rangers. Much like Larry Hoover in the Gangster Disciples, by this point Fort had solidified his presence in the gang and recruited enough of a following that his imprisonment did not cause serious disruptions in the operations of the gang. This was a serious turning point for the gang however, because it was in the Leavenworth Penitentiary in Kansas where Fort converted to Islam (Chicago Magazine, November 1, 1988).

The immediate manifestation of Fort’s conversion was the renaming of the Black P Stone Nation. When Fort left prison in 1976, one of his primary orders of business was to integrate his newfound faith into his organization. While the gang still operates under their English name today, in the 70’s and 80’s the group was known as the El Rukns; El Rukn is the Arabic phrase literally translated to “The Black Stone.” Interestingly, despite the secular roots of the gang, the name of the street Blackstone Avenue refers to the black stone in the Kaaba, the holiest shrine of Islam, where millions of Muslims make a religious pilgrimage to worship. Unconvinced with the legitimate conversion of the group, then-Cook County State’s Attorney and future Mayor Richard Daley commented, “If El Rukn is a religious group, its sacraments are narcotics trafficking, intimidation . . . and human sacrifice” (Chicago Magazine, November 1, 1988).

The El Rukn/BPSN gang has continued to grow and expand, venturing into new political and community based endeavors as they’ve earned more profit through their

drug sales operation across the Great Lakes region of the Midwest (NDIC, 2003). The 70's saw an expansion of BPSN/El Rukn territory and the creation of various organizations such as the El Pyramid Maintenance and Management Corporation to generate revenue and cover up their drug operation. In the 1990's, the BPSN turned their focus of American electoral politics, organizing youths through their affiliates "Grassroots Independent Voters of Illinois" and "Citizens Responding to Emergency Situations. (DOJ, 2003).

While the 70's and 90's were relatively unremarkable in the development of the BPSN apparatus, the 1980's were incredibly controversial. In his book, *The Future is Here: Street Gang Trends*, Robert Dart, the former commander of the Chicago Police Department's Gang Intelligence Unit describes the BPSN's alliance with hostile foreign governments and complicity in terrorist plots against the United States:

In the summer of 1986, Libyan operatives from Colonel Moammar Gadhafi met for the first of two clandestine meetings in Panama with Chicago street gang representatives. Speculation about the purpose of these meetings ranged from negotiations for asylum from prosecution in Chicago to seeking money to carry on terrorist activities. It was then that they (i.e., the El Rukns) purchased a LAW missile from FBI agents with the intent to create terrorism by targeting a law enforcement facility or specific gang officers, or both. Later it was reported that this gang sent members half way around the world to Libya and other Middle East countries. (Dart, 1992: p. 89).

The government swiftly and sharply cracked down on the BPSN, sentencing many of their contemporary leaders to prison on conspiracy and terrorism charges. Some

argue that this association with terrorism may have irreparably damaged the organization; some estimates suggest that the BPSN organization had attracted up to 30,000 members during the late 70's (NDIC, 2003), but that this controversy caused numbers to plummet. It was also after this that Fort, who received an additional 80 years on a jail sentence he was serving for murder, walked back the BPSN's commitment to Islam. Islam remains central in the internal documents, tenets, and values of the BPSN; however, its role has dramatically subsided since the December 1987 trials. In 1988, the BPSN reorganized itself following this administrative shock, ditching the El Rukn name.

Function Equivalence

The Black P Stones are widely agreed to be one of the most dangerous gangs in Chicago, despite their smaller numbers than the Gangster Disciples or the Vice Lords. Indeed, even in descriptions of the Stones and their capabilities, more authors are willing to use terms like "control" or "domination" of territory than for these larger gangs. I will suggest that this is because while the Gangster Disciples and Vice Lords expanded broadly around the country, the Black P Stones focused the development of their organization specifically in Chicago and surrounding Illinois suburbs. I also contend that the language of "control" and "domination," especially in the context of gangs and their territories, strongly insinuates a dimension of coercive capability in the protection of such turf. Though this is not enough alone to make the claim that BPSN had a monopoly of violence, it should support the argument that they do; if others perceive BPSN's presence as "dominant" or "controlling," the gang must be doing something (presumably, using violence) to create such a perception.

Indeed, Sale 1971 claimed that the Stones “controlled a turf known as Jackson Park,” while Knox 2001 asserts that “it is reasonable to assume that the area is still dominated by BPSN today (65th and Blackstone on Chicago’s southside).” The BPSN occupation of the Woodlawn and Jackson Park communities was not an insignificant one, but rather one agreed to be deep and monopolistic. An August 9th, 1985 Chicago Tribune article expands, “now based in a fortified "temple" at 39th Street and Drexel Avenue, the gang [BPSN] controls South Side prostitution and narcotics sales, according to authorities. Now based in a fortified "temple" at 39th Street and Drexel Avenue, the gang controls South Side prostitution and narcotics sales, according to authorities.”

The BPSN built legitimacy through the recruitment of new members (like the GDs and VLs), and through appealing to communities of faith. Knox, the head of NGCRC explicitly describes Reverend Fry’s involvement with the gang and their use of the Church as a force that “increas[ed] its ability to recruit youth,” and one that “add[ed] to its legitimacy” He later adds that the use of Muslim beliefs in the fabric of the gang “[gave] a cloak of legitimacy and social acceptability for an organization that at its core is basically criminal in nature” (Knox 2001).

Leaving Knox’ editorializing aside, like many other gangs, drug sales were integral to the BPSN financial operation. Interestingly, though many sources report gang revenues from a wide range of criminal activities outside of drug sales (e.g. car theft, extortion, etc.), few gangs are accused of engaging in prostitution.

It is also clear that the Black P Stone Nation benefitted from the use of federal grant money intended to be used exclusively for The Woodlawn Organization programming. There is a range of estimates of how much of the \$957 million dollar grant

was extorted, with anti-gang advocates claiming that Fort was able to funnel nearly all of the money into the BPSN. Records indicate that youth participants of TWO's programming, regardless of whether they were gang-affiliated, were paid \$45 weekly. Fort's contracted salary for working on the Youth Project was \$6000 and was the center of the extortion case; the primary argument for his wrong-doing was that he accepted this money without being adequately qualified for the job (Chicago Reader, November 13, 1997). Regardless, a Chicago Reader article from 1993 may most accurately describe the situation: "Fort, now in federal prison for life, attended Richard Nixon's inauguration, and the Blackstone Rangers shared amply in nearly \$1 million of federal antipoverty funds sent to Chicago. Fort used some of the money to form El Rukn, which grew to be the most powerful drug-running organization in the city" (Chicago Reader, Jan 26, 1993). Regardless of the magnitude of the money that Fort inappropriately claimed, he wisely invested it in high-yield assets (i.e. drugs) and in the organizational growth and revenue generating capacity of the BPSN.

The BPSN control exerts over Woodlawn and Jackson Park is strengthened by the gang's immense access to high-powered, military-grade weaponry. Since the late 60's, the Stones have had well-stocked supply of the handguns, semi-automatic rifles, and machine guns. Chicago Police Department raids on Reverend Fry's First Presbyterian Church in 1967 revealed "an arsenal for the Blackstone Rangers" (Chicago Magazine, November 1, 1988; The Atlantic, May 1969).

The Black P Stones continued to grow their stockpile of weapons over the following decades, bolstering their relatively small membership with relatively enormous tools of destruction. The 1987 crackdown on BPSN leadership surrounding the Libyan

terrorist scheme allegations revealed weapons on par with that of the United States' military. Time Magazine described some of the findings of a raid: "Though El Rukns never collected from Gaddafi or carried out any of its plots, it was well equipped to do so: on a raid of the gang's headquarters, lawmen found an arsenal that included an antitank device capable of downing an airplane or piercing 12-in.-thick steel plates" (Time Magazine, December 7, 1987). An FBI agent's testimony in the case corroborated that Stones had attempted to purchase even more weapons of this nature, including "at least five U.S. Army anti-tank rocket launchers, several bulletproof vests and a case of hand grenades" (Chicago Tribune, August 8, 1986).

Despite their incredible coercive capabilities, the Stones sought to bring peace to their neighborhoods. Their involvement with The Woodlawn Organization not only provided the public with education and jobs training, but also served as means by which to broker peace with the Disciples. In addition to this work, the BPSN put on publicly accessible musicals to promote arts for community youths and hosted black power rallies for members of their communities to organize around civil rights (The Atlantic, May 1969). The public goods provided by the Black P Stones were less tangible than those provided by the Gangster Disciples or Vice Lords in their locale, but arguably of no less importance.

The Black P Stones began with an interesting organizational structure. On the recommendation of Reverend Fry, Jeff Fort and Eugene Hairston decided to split the gang into two-tiered organization, graded by age. Hairston was responsible for running the older faction; Fort, the younger. This structural decision was allegedly reached as a means by which to segregate younger members from the more violent activities of the

gang. A consequence of the monopoly on violence is the responsibility to use such capacity to protect territory on the level of the state, but simultaneously to protect the people that make up the nation that supports the state structure. Therefore, by putting intention in their bureaucratic organization, the Stones act like a government insofar as they are concerned with public safety and protecting their “citizens.”

The influence of Islam on the gang, which continues despite the rejection of the El Rukn moniker after the 1987 convictions, seeped into the organizational structure of the group. In an internal document titled “Attachment to Proclamations 1 & 1A”, Fort, under his Muslim name Abdul Malik, enumerates propositions of gang structure:

(1.) Within the A.B.P.S.N. within society each branch shall have an Al-Akbar.

This Al-Akbar shall appoint three generals and three officers. The “Malik” is also putting together a group called the Main 21.

(2.) The Government body of the A.B.P.S.N. consists of Al-Akbars, Generals, Main 21, and Officers. The total body in general will be called “Mahdi”... just as the Government body of the Masjid Al-Ka’bah consists of Amirs, Muftis, and Sharieff’s. This government body being called Iqaams.

(3.) Together the Iqaams and Mahdis represent the entire body of this nation

Fort clearly delineates a vertically structured organization with a tier of officers and a general body of members, showing the central bureaucracy required of a Weberian actor.

State Property	BPSN Analog
Defined Territory	64 th and Blackstone; Woodlawn and Jackson Park neighborhoods
Legitimacy	8000 membership; Religious community support;
Monopoly on Violence	Military-grade weapon capability; lack of competition over turf
Revenue Generation/Taxation	US federal money; gang dues; drug rents
Public Good Provision	Multiple community based organizations with federal gov't funding
Centralized Bureaucracy	Two tiered structure; Islam-based vertical hierarchy

Conclusions and Further Research

The cases of the Gangster Disciples, Vice Lords, and Black P. Stone Nation in Chicago illustrate the conceptual existence of the Weberian Gang. This conceptualization of traditionally criminal actors as political ones that have state characteristics and perform state functions marks a new understanding of the ecosystem and role of gangs in their communities. Traditional understandings of gangs as solely criminal or social lack a layer of analytical nuance introduced in the Weberian gang framework. Conceptually, this offers a new frame by which we can study and evaluate gangs, their members, and their

motivations that may yield more satisfying answers than profit being the driving force of all three.

The practical implications of this framing extend past understandings of individual gangs internally. Weberian gangs and their interactions can be modeled like Weberian states and their interactions. In a widely cited 1993 paper, Barry Posen describes the 1992 breakdown of the former state Yugoslavia in terms of the security dilemma. As the Yugoslavian state bureaucracy crumbled, ethnic factions began to arm themselves as a means by which to ensure their security without the state as a guarantor of public safety. The buildup of arms in each group, while defensive in nature, appeared to the others as aggressive posturing for invasion or reconsolidation under new terms. This phenomenon, known as the security dilemma, incited a series of violent conflicts across the region as factions preemptively and preventatively struck one another (Posen, 1993). Similarly, when the FBI cracked down on the Gangster Disciples in 1995, it disintegrated the GD bureaucratic apparatus in Chicago. Though the Gangster Disciples were spread around the U.S. by that point and had diffuse enough leadership to recover as an organization, a similar fractionalization and security dilemma arose for GD members who found themselves without leadership. Lance Williams, a Chicago criminologist, described the consequences of this decapitation tactic: “It’s like cutting the head off a snake—you leave the body in disarray and everyone begins to scramble for control over these small little areas. And that’s where you get a lot of the violence, because the order is no longer there... When you lose the leadership, it turns into chaos... What we’re dealing with now [heightened gun violence] is basically the fallout of gang disorganization” (Slate Magazine, September 23, 2016). Wallace “Gator” Bradley, the

face of the Gangster Disciples' political activities, concurred, claiming, "Back then, if there was violence, they were fighting over something—they were fighting over drug turf. The violence you're seeing now, it's almost attitude-driven." Operation Headache created a power vacuum in the GD bureaucracy that in turn evoked a security dilemma and mirrored the situation in Eastern Europe from just years before. Perhaps if law enforcement strategists had esteemed these gangs as they did states, they could have predicted this outcome. Not only do the Gangster Disciples look, think, and act like a state: even their interactions with other actors can be modeled with existing political theory.

Before researchers can model Weberian gang interactions or do further research on Weberian gangs, they have to be able to identify them. My proposed typology's utility is borne out in my case analyses; indeed, gangs that have the enumerated characteristics and functions of the typology can and should be considered Weberian actors. Before proposing research extensions of the typology and of this Weberian framework, I will offer three critiques of my typology.

First, it doesn't weigh the different criteria differently. While I maintain that all six criteria of state function equivalence are necessary conditions for a gang to be considered Weberian, it is worth noting that at the heart of the definition of the Weberian state is the monopoly on violence. Many organizations of different natures are legitimate in their settings, many non-profit organizations provide public goods, and all sustainable organizations have some form of bureaucracy. The monopoly on violence in particular is what separates Weberian actors from other organizations, and therefore it is imperative to have concrete evidence of strong coercive capabilities to demonstrate that a gang is in

fact a Weberian gang. This said, the other functions are of critical importance to the actual governance performed by the state/gang, and should not be discounted; it is the union of all factors that creates a Weberian actor, but the monopoly on violence is an exclusively Weberian concept.

Second, it is worth considering the role of a formal legal and judicial system in the Weberian state. I contend that this is a non-essential criterion as informal legal and judicial institutions, or governance, broadly, are consequences of the other state characteristics and functions, particularly of the bureaucracy criterion. With this said, each of the three gangs I evaluated did create formal constitutions with enumerated rules, and which were enforced with violence. They all had both formal and informal retribution systems that a former Gangster Disciple told me levied “hood justice.” Additionally, we typically view the basis of law and judgment, as it exists in modern states, as some sort of moral obligation or value based responsibility to the population served. These gangs too rooted their activities, criminal or otherwise, in the commonly held value of public benefit. The constitutions of these gangs often explicitly state their values and sense of obligations to the communities in which they operate. While formal, documented institutions of this sort may not be necessary conditions for Weberian status, their existence is an interesting element of these Weberian gangs and warrants further research.

Third, my function equivalence considers only the administrative state, and not the nation, with which the modern state is deeply intertwined. Though I chose to disaggregate the bureaucracy and the social construction of these organizations, each of the gangs I analyzed described themselves as nations. This self-conception as the social

body of the state is strengthened as gangs develop unique language/slang, claim unique color schemes and patterns, and create logos and symbols. Nationalism, or some appeal to the shared citizenship between gang members, may too be worth considering or examining among gangs writ-large, to determine if it is a uniquely Weberian gang characteristic, a means by which to achieve Weberian power, or exogenous to the question altogether.

With the ability to characterize gangs as Weberian or not, academics have a new way to analyze gangs of different sizes and with different mentalities. Perhaps the most natural extension of this work is to determine what conditions allow for the rise or development of Weberian gangs from Thrasher's spontaneous peer groups. My proposed hypothesis of Weberian development arising from some combination of the prevailing civil war onset explanations (state weakness, ethnic grievance, and economic opportunity) holds in my cases and is perhaps a starting block. The Gangster Disciples, Vice Lords, and Black P Stones developed in poverty-stricken Chicago neighborhoods that were starved for public goods and services. The state was weak in these regions, and the gangs exploited that. The Vice Lords and Black P Stones expanded by organizing and mobilizing on the message of Muslim and black solidarity in the face of racism and adversity, supporting an ethnic grievance hypothesis. The economic opportunity argument seems inescapable, as gangs generated huge revenues and employed many youths who, according to a community worker from Woodlawn, "could not otherwise access the legitimate economy." Any one of these factors could have been the ground on which any of these gangs was able to become Weberian, but only once we have identified

more Weberian gangs and can do larger sample size studies will we be able to properly answer the question.

The theoretical typology I propose in this paper serves as a tool by which we can define large, governing gangs as Weberian and do more robust analyses on gangs of this nature. Of equal importance is the underlying theoretical conception of gangs as political actors that emulate the Weberian state. Without being able to properly classify or conceptualize these actors, we will be unable to truly understand them, and public policy will continue to fail to address the problems associated with such gangs. We need to understand, in fullness, the political nature of these Weberian gangs, and use that understanding to inform our research and policy moving forward.

Policy Recommendations

1. Law enforcements agencies must develop new standards by which to classify gangs based on their local role(s).

The practical implications for the full reevaluation of gangs as Weberian actors lead to different conclusions about policy responses that consider these gangs. This new theoretical conceptualization of gangs as Weberian actors must be complemented with a practical, legal reconceptualization of these gangs. As of 2011, the last year in which the FBI released a “National Gang Threat Assessment,” the Bureau only made distinctions between gangs if they operated on the streets, in prisons, or through motorcycle clubs (FBI, 2011). This is immensely impractical; under this system, Weberian gangs are

grouped in with other, smaller street gangs that do not operate on the same scale or with the same considerations as them. A new classification system must include some metric that tracks the level of entrenchment a gang exhibits in their community as well as the range of activities they perform. Law enforcement documents profiling different gangs primarily focus on membership numbers, drug-trafficking involvement, and violence resulting from turf conflicts but neglect to consider public good provision or community support of those same gangs. A failure to recognize these other functions of the gang not only is incomplete and incorrect, but also impedes the ability of such agencies to respond to gang-related public complications effectively. My typology provides a template for one way of evaluating these additional dimensions of Weberian gangs.

2. The FBI should target upstream drug and weapon distributors instead of using leadership decapitation tactics on gangs.

While recreating the standards by which we classify and study gangs is critical, this new understanding of Weberian gangs needs to be reflected not just in policymaking, but also in policy implementation. Even subscribing to an anti-gang framework, considering gangs as merely criminal groups and not Weberian actors is dangerous and irresponsible. In 1995, the FBI's leadership decapitation tactics employed against the Gangster Disciples created a power vacuum that led to the rise of many smaller, more violent gangs that competed over the newly open drug turf (Slate Magazine, September 23, 2016). This could have been predicted if the Gangster Disciples were classified as Weberian, and therefore it could have been avoided. If the FBI were concerned with the violence that surrounded the Gangster Disciples or the drugs that they sold, smarter

solutions would have targeted the suppliers of these illegal assets, keeping the GD organization intact but damaging their ability to carry out the activities that the government found problematic. Reducing the supply of guns or drugs would have stifled the quantity of these goods that the Gangster Disciples could have used or distributed, and it would have increased their costs to acquire them. So instead of destroying the gang, as FBI sought to do, it created social disorder that translated itself into undirected violence before the GDs were able to reorganize themselves, rendering the FBI's efforts entirely moot. This needs to be a lesson that the FBI learns moving forward.

3. The federal government should make significant investments in areas of gang influence or control.

In general, as with states, analysis of and policy facing Weberian gangs will have to be assessed case by case with an understanding of their historical and social context. Broadly, however, there do seem to be tangible policy interventions in the formation of Weberian gangs. Consolidating my proposed Weberian gang existence conditions of economic opportunity, ethnic grievance, and state weakness, it seems that federal government investment into underserved and ethnically fractionalized communities would nullify the incentives of joining gangs. Government-sponsored jobs skills training programs could provide low-income individuals access to employment opportunities previously unavailable to them and allowing them to access the legal American economy, a lower-risk alternative than illicit gang markets. Understanding that costs could be prohibitive to massive and widespread financial investment, the government can and should use gangs to assess where they should allocate their monies and their efforts. If the

Black P Stones and the Vice Lords were both able to build massive support by using an Islam-centered message and advocating for racial equality, it suggests that there was sufficient demand for these messages that a market existed and could have been capitalized on by an alternate provider, public or private. The ability to identify which public goods gangs are providing or private goods they are subsidizing means that the government can take the same approach and deter people from accepting the gangs' alternatives. This would directly affect the gangs' ability to effectively build legitimacy or spread their platform, and could be implemented either preventatively, before a gang becomes Weberian, or when a gang is already Weberian, as a way to whittle at its membership and legitimacy.

The concept of Weberian gangs offers an entire new frame through which to craft policy addressed at gang-related issues. Regardless of whether your policy position is to eliminate every gang in the United States or to work with them, understanding how these local Leviathans structurally resemble Weberian states is essential in creating effective interventions that promote public wellbeing.

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Appendix

Form 1: IRB Consent form for all study participants

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

Study Title: Chicago Gangs and Weberian Structure

Principal Investigator: Ben Lessing

Student Researcher: Owen Elrifi

IRB Study Number: IRB18-1525

I am a student at the University of Chicago, in the College's Department of Public Policy. I am planning to conduct a research study, which I invite you to take part in. This form has important information about the reason for doing this study, what we will ask you to do if you decide to be in this study, and the way we would like to use information about you if you choose to be in the study.

Why are you doing this study?

You are being asked to participate in a research study about gang structure and activities in Chicago over the last couple of decades.

The purpose of the study is to determine how gangs organized themselves, what sorts of activities they took part in, and what sort of relationships they have with their local communities.

What will I do if I choose to be in this study?

You will be asked to answer a few questions about your involvement in or relationship to different Chicago gangs. You may choose to opt out of answering any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

Study time: Study participation will take approximately 20-40 minutes.

Study location: All study procedures will take place at an agreed upon meeting place between you (the interviewee) and me (the interviewer).

I would like to audio-record this interview to make sure that I remember accurately all the information you provide. I will keep these tapes on a secured University of Chicago cloud (UChicago Box) platform and they will only be used by me. If you prefer not to be audio-recorded, I will take notes instead.

I may quote your remarks in presentations or articles resulting from this work. A pseudonym will be used to protect your identity, unless you specifically request that you be identified by your true name.

What are the possible risks or discomforts?

Your participation in this study may involve the following risk(s):

- You may be uncomfortable with some of the questions and topics we will ask about. If you are uncomfortable, you are free to not answer or to skip to the next question.

As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality of the information we collect from you could be breached – we will take steps to minimize this risk, as discussed in more detail below in this form.

What are the possible benefits for me or others?

This study is designed to learn more about gangs. The study results may be used to help guide policy and/or understand more about how gangs operate organizationally. Taking part in this research study may not benefit you personally, but we may learn new things that will help others.

How will you protect the information you collect about me, and how will that information be shared?

Results of this study may be used in publications and presentations. Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible. If results of this study are published or presented, individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used. After publication, all information linking your pseudonym to your person will be destroyed.

To minimize the risks to confidentiality, I will store your information safely in physical paper files or double-password protected audio files only accessible to me.

We may share the data we collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers – if we share the data that we collect about you, we will remove any information that could identify you before we share it.

If we think that you intend to harm yourself or others, we will notify the appropriate people with this information.

Financial Information

Participation in this study will involve no cost to you. You will not be paid for participating in this study.

What are my rights as a research participant?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to answer. If at any time and for any reason, you would prefer not to participate

in this study, please feel free not to. If at any time you would like to stop participating, please tell me. We can take a break, stop and continue at a later date, or stop altogether. You may withdraw from this study at any time, and you will not be penalized in any way for deciding to stop participation.

If you decide to withdraw from this study, the researchers will ask you if the information already collected from you can be used. You may grant or deny this request.

What if I am a University of Chicago student or employee?

You may choose not to participate or to stop participating in this research at any time. This will not affect your class standing, grades, employment, or any other aspects of your relationship with the University of Chicago.

Who can I contact if I have questions or concerns about this research study?

If you have questions, you are free to ask them now. If you have questions later, you may contact me via cell phone (text or call) at 914-623-3222, or by email, at owenelrifi@uchicago.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, you can contact the following office at the University of Chicago:

Social & Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board
University of Chicago
1155 E. 60th Street, Room 418
Chicago, IL 60637
Phone: (773) 834-7835
Email: sbs-irb@uchicago.edu

Consent

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form.

Participant's Signature

Date

Form 2: Sample Interview Questionnaire: To be used as a rough template for interviews with (former) Gangster Disciples. "Gangster Disciples" will be replaced with "Vice Lord" or "Black P Stones" as appropriate.

Interview Guide for Former Gangster Disciples:

- When did you become involved with the Gangster Disciples?
 - Why did you become involved with the Gangster Disciples?
 - What are their recruitment methods? What did they offer that made you interested in joining?
 - How long were you in the Gangster Disciples?
 - What sort of tasks were you asked to do for the GDs? How often were you supposed to complete these tasks?
 - How did the GD code impact your life?
 - Why did you leave the GDs?
 - Do you think the GDs were a good force in your community or a bad one? Why?
 - Did you ever feel like you were responsible for your community?
 - Did you ever perform tasks for the GDs/for your community that you think the government should have? What were they?
-

Figure 1: Trends of Political Science citations by keywords

From Nicholas Barnes 2017 – “Criminal Politics: An Integrated Approach to the Study of Organized Crime, Politics, and Violence.” Pg 971

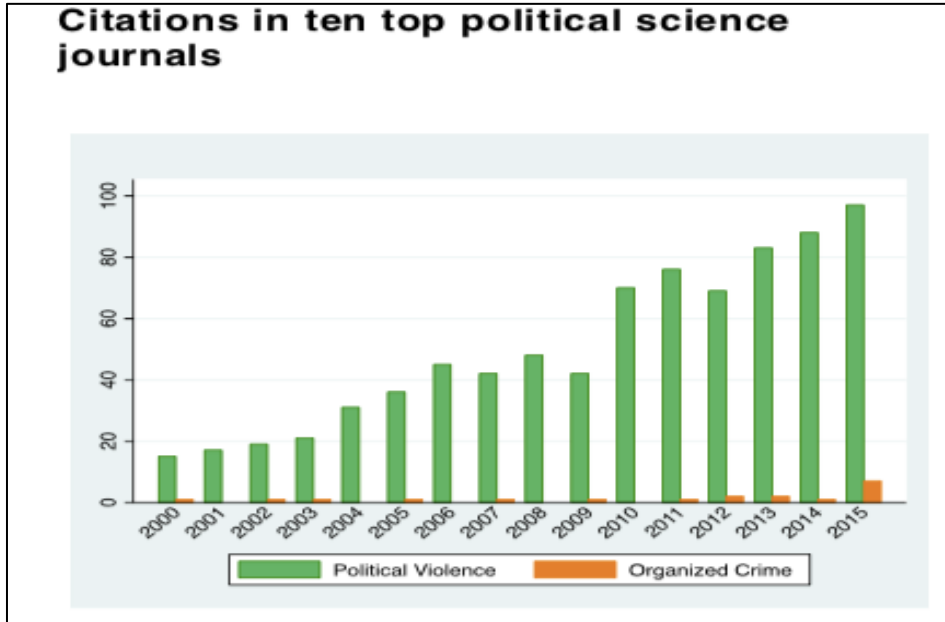


Fig 2: Vice Lord Letter to Mayor Daley 1 (From Dawley, David. *A Nation of Lords: The Autobiography of the Vice Lords*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1992.)

CONSERVATIVE VICE LORDS INC.



June 2, 1969

No Response

Mayor Richard J. Daley
City Hall
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Mayor Daley:

Newspapers and television have been filled with stories of gang violence. The Chicago public feels terrorized by the shootings on city streets, and the Chicago "Sun Times" has reported that you have conferred with State's Attorney Hanrahan, Police Superintendent Conlisk, and others to find new ways to cope with street-gang violence.


The Conservative Vice Lords are equally interested in reducing the violence on our streets. We are a not-for-profit corporation committed to the development of positive opportunity for our black brothers and sisters. Unlike many groups, we talk about what we have done rather than about what we intend to do. Our words are supported by action. We own and manage a restaurant, clothing boutique, Tastee Freez, pool room, and art studio, and we serve our community with programs in beautification, tenants rights, and youth training.

We have received program support from the Rockefeller, Ford, and Field Foundations, and we have managed a Neighborhood Youth Corps program and Department of Labor "Management Training Institute."

Street violence jeopardizes the programs we have developed. Consequently, we are concerned with reducing this violence as well as encouraging public officials, news media, and the general public to distinguish between constructive and destructive group activities.

We would like to talk with you to discuss our views on new ways to cope with street youth. We feel that our perspective can contribute to your understanding of the problem and thus promote an effective plan to establish peace in our community.

We can meet with you whenever and wherever you wish. We feel that this meeting could benefit the entire Chicago community.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Parks
Acting President

cc: Alderman George Collins

CVL INC. • 3720 WEST 16TH STREET • CHICAGO 60623 • (312) 521-9745