



• Seminar

Criminal Leviathans: Why Gangs Govern Prisons and Peripheries

Benjamin Lessing
University of Chicago

Criminal Governance in a High-Capacity State? Exploring Modes of Criminal Regulation in Chicago, USA

Juan Albarracín
University of Illinois

Chairs

Juan Masullo & Andrea Ruggeri
University of Milan

10 June 2026

h. 15:15-16:30 AND 16:45-18:00 | Seminar room (Passione)
Department of Social and Political Sciences
Via Passione, 15 – Milan



Benjamin Lessing is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago. He studies armed conflict and governance by criminal groups that do not seek formal state power, such as drug cartels and prison gangs. He is the author of the books *Making Peace in Drug Wars* (Cambridge, 2018) and *Criminal Leviathans* (Cambridge 2027). He holds a PhD in Political Science and an MA in Economics from UC Berkeley, and was a postdoctoral fellow at Stanford. Prior to his graduate training, Lessing lived in Rio de Janeiro for five years as a Fulbright scholar and researcher for NGOs including Amnesty International, Oxfam, Justiça Global, and Viva Rio.

Juan Albarracín is an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Illinois Chicago. He is the co-author (with Guillermo Trejo and Lucía Tiscornia) of *Accountability Shock. Why Transitional Justice Prevents Criminal Wars in New Democracies* (Cambridge University Press, 2026) and has published articles in the *Journal of Peace Research* and *Political Research Quarterly*, among other journals. His current book project *Undermining Democracy from the Peripheries. Criminalized Electoral Politics in Brazil* is under review by a major university press.