



Benjamin Lessin

Benjamin Lessing is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago and a 2014 SSRC Drugs, Security and Democracy Postdoctoral Fellow. He studies “criminal conflict”—organized armed violence involving non-state actors who do not seek formal state power.

His dissertation examines cartel-state conflict in Colombia, Mexico and Brazil, and won the 2013 CoE/INEGI/UNODC International Thesis Contest on Public Security, Victimization and Justice in Latin America. He also studies prison gangs' pernicious effect on state authority throughout the Americas and how paramilitary groups in Brazil and Colombia use territorial control to influence electoral outcomes. His publications include “State Policy and Drug Violence” in *Small Arms Survey 2012* (Cambridge University Press); “Three Misconceptions About the Drug War” in *Perspectivas Sobre Desarrollo*; and “Rio de Janeiro's Drug Syndicates in Comparative Perspective” in *CEBRAP Novos Estudos*. Lessing completed his PhD in political science, as well as an MA in economics, at the University of California, Berkeley, with support from the NSF, and held a postdoctoral fellowship at Stanford University.

Prior to his graduate work, Lessing conducted field research on arms trafficking in Latin America and the Caribbean for international organizations including Amnesty International, Oxfam, Small Arms Survey, and Viva Rio, Brazil's largest non-governmental organization. He was a Fulbright Grantee in Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay.