

# Private Conflict, Local Organizations, and Mobilizing Ethnic Violence in Southern California

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## Abstract

Prominent research highlights links between group-level conflicts and low-intensity (i.e. non-militarized) ethnic violence. However, the processes driving this relationship are often less clear. Why do certain actors attempt to mobilize ethnic violence? How are those actors able to mobilize participation in ethnic violence? I argue that addressing these questions requires scholars to focus not only on group-level conflicts and tensions, but also private conflicts and local violent organizations. Private conflicts give certain members of ethnic groups incentives to mobilize violence against certain out-group adversaries. Institutions within local violent organizations allow them to mobilize participation in such violence. Promoting these selective forms of violence against out-group adversaries mobilizes indiscriminate forms of ethnic violence due to identification problems, efforts to deny adversaries access to resources, and spirals of retribution. I develop these arguments by tracing ethnic violence between blacks and Latinos in Southern California. In efforts to gain leverage in private conflicts, a group of Latino prisoners mobilized members of local street gangs to participate in selective violence against African American adversaries. In doing so, even indiscriminate forms of ethnic violence have become entangled in the private conflicts of members of local violent organizations.

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# 1 Introduction

On an evening in August 1992, the homes of two African American families in the Ramona Gardens housing projects, just east of downtown Los Angeles, were firebombed. While the families were not affiliated with a street gang, they were widely believed to be targeted by Big Hazard, a Mexican American gang with high levels of informal authority in the neighborhood. For nearly two decades following the incidents, the African American population in this predominately Latino neighborhood evaporated to virtually zero. However, by 2010, with improvements in policing and a weakening of Big Hazard’s power in the area, black families began moving back into the neighborhood. By 2013, a profile in the *Los Angeles Times* highlighted improvements in interethnic relations in Ramona Gardens. Despite this progress, in May 2014, the neighborhood experienced events eerily similar to the firebombings of the 1990s. First, a leader of Big Hazard held a meeting with five other members, instructing them to use malotov cocktails to “get the niggers out of the neighborhood.” On May 11, Mother’s Day, the group then firebombed four apartments, three of which housed African American families. In the months that followed, even in the midst of a federal investigation, gang members continued to threaten black members of the community, warning them to leave Ramona Gardens or risk their homes being firebombed.<sup>1</sup>

Ethnic violence is prevalent in both the developing and developed world. Even in relatively stable political climates, low-intensity forms of ethnic violence—like hate crimes, nativist attacks, and ethnic riots—often persist. The central contention of this paper is that closely examining conflicts and violence between blacks and Latinos in Southern California provides new insights into the processes driving low-intensity ethnic violence. Specifically, although influential studies show that low-intensity ethnic violence is more likely to occur when economic, social, or demographic factors heighten conflicts between members of eth-

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<sup>1</sup>For details on the 1992 attack, see Becklund (1992). Becerra (2013) highlights improvements in the area beginning in the late 2000s. Details of the 2014 attack are elaborated in *United States v. Hernandez et al* (2015).

nic groups,<sup>2</sup> the causal processes driving these relationships are often less clear. Even in the context of group-level conflicts or grievances, why do certain actors attempt to mobilize ethnic violence? How are those actors able to successfully mobilize participation in ethnic violence?

Studies of ethnic entrepreneurship help address the first question by identifying incentives for political elites to foment low-intensity ethnic violence (Brass 1997; Wilkinson 2004). However, elite-based theories typically provide less insight into *how* political elites are able to elicit broader participation in ethnic violence (Horowitz 1985; Fearon and Laitin 2000). In this sense, the work of Kalyvas (2003; 2006) provides a valuable insight: local actors may participate in violence organized along ethnic lines in order to gain leverage in private conflicts. However, Kalyvas develops these arguments in the context of large-scale civil wars, in which interactions between local actors and centralized political actors are crucial in driving violence. In contrast, low-intensity ethnic violence is often prominent in relatively stable political environments that exhibit neither militarized group-based violence nor elite ethnic entrepreneurs. In such contexts, I argue that interactions between private conflicts and institutions within local violent organizations are crucial in driving the mobilization of low-intensity ethnic violence.

The theory developed in this paper is summarized as follows. Actors in protracted private conflicts with out-group members often have incentives to mobilize violence against their out-group adversaries. However, not all members of a given ethnic group are equally able to mobilize participation in these selective forms of violence. Rather, organizations that are populated by actors who are experienced in or predisposed to violence have comparative advantages in mobilizing violence. Actors who control institutions within such organizations are thus particularly able to mobilize violence against their out-group adversaries. However,

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<sup>2</sup>For examples of links between economic, intergroup cleavages, and violence, see Olzak (1992); Pinderhughes (1993). For examples of links between political factors, cleavages, and violence, see Tolnay and Beck (1995); Dancygier (2010); Kopstein and Wittenberg (2011); Dumitru and Johnson (2011). For examples of links between demographic, cleavages, and violence see Hesse et al. (1992); Olzak, Shanahan and McEneaney (1996); Bergesen and Herman (1998); Back and Nayak (1999); Green, Strolovitch and Wong (1998); Balcells, Daniels and Escribà-Folch (2016); Klačnja and Novta (2016).

promoting these selective forms of violence also drives the mobilization of indiscriminate forms of ethnic violence, in which residents are targeted based on their ethnic identity. Three mechanisms drive the mobilization of indiscriminate ethnic violence. First, information problems result in difficulties in identifying direct adversaries in private conflicts. Second, actors may attempt to deny adversaries resources by using indiscriminate ethnic violence to displace out-group populations. Third, the previous two forms of indiscriminate violence may lead to retaliatory spirals of ethnic violence. Through these processes, the mobilization of impersonal and indiscriminate forms of low-intensity ethnic violence becomes entangled in the private disputes of members of local violent organizations.

I illustrate these arguments by tracing the development of ethnic violence in Southern California. The goal of the analysis is to open the “black box” between interethnic conflict and ethnic violence. In this sense, the case of Southern California is particularly well-suited. Many of the factors that group-based theories posit to cause violence—economic competition, demographic transitions, perceptions of political and cultural threats—are ubiquitous in black-Latino relations in the region. Closely examining the local processes underlying low-intensity ethnic violence in the region allows for a better understanding of the mechanisms through which conflict between members of ethnic groups results in the mobilization of low-intensity ethnic violence.

With the goal of theory-building, I use legal documents, media and secondary sources, and interviews to trace the development of black-brown ethnic conflict and violence in Southern California. Even in the context of broader intergroup conflicts, ethnic violence between Latinos and African Americans in the region was rare for most of the 20th Century. However, since the early 1990s, members of street gangs have become the primary participants in local ethnic violence (LACCHR 2014). This has taken place despite the rarity of general interethnic crime in the region (Hipp, Tita and Boggess 2009). This new form of ethnic violence is not simply the result of thugs violently representing the grievances of their ethnic group as a whole. Rather, the private conflicts and organizational structures of gang

members themselves have been crucial in driving the mobilization of low-intensity ethnic violence. Specifically, a group of Latino prisoners, engaged in protracted conflicts with African American gang members, use the institutions of street gangs to direct violence against their African American adversaries. However, problems identifying gang adversaries, efforts to prevent those adversaries from gaining footholds in valuable territories, and spirals of retaliatory ethnic violence by both Latino and African American gang members have resulted in the mobilization of indiscriminate forms of ethnic violence against residents who are not directly involved in gang conflicts.

This analysis builds upon seminal work on the micro-foundations of group-based violence. However, the paper contributes to existing work on organized violence in two key ways. First, as discussed above, Kalyvas (2003; 2006) shows the ways civil war violence is related to private interpersonal disputes rather than group-based animosities. In other words, in the context of civil war, violence that appears from a distance to be based on group identities is often selective, private, and personal. In contrast, in the absence of large-scale violent conflict along group-based cleavages, this paper shows how local and personal conflicts can be important drivers of participation in indiscriminate and impersonal forms of ethnic violence.

Second, although Fearon and Laitin (1996) reference the potential for intra-ethnic policing institutions to help mobilize ethnic violence, they do not address when or why we might see this occur. This paper suggests that pre-existing violent organizations have comparative advantages in both in-group policing and ethnic violence, and that the private conflicts of the actors who control these institutions can help to understand when and why they are used to promote ethnic conflict and violence. Specifically, when actors in violent organizations are engaged in protracted and zero-sum conflicts with members of an out-group, they may use institutions within violent organizations to mobilize ethnic violence.

Although the paper focuses primarily on the role of private conflicts and institutions within violent organizations, I do not claim that these are the only processes that may drive the mobilization of low-intensity ethnic violence. Recent work points to the ways

in which institutionally-driven ethnic identities help political elites mobilize participation in ethnic violence (Lieberman and Singh 2012; 2017). Others show how social networks provide resources for aggrieved members of ethnic groups to mobilize ethnic violence, even in the absence of political elites (Scacco 2008). Additionally, recent studies of contentious politics suggest that in some cases, moral identities or grievances themselves may drive mass participation in risky group-based actions (Pearlman 2016; Simmons 2016). Instead of treating these as rival explanations, I view ethnic violence as a heterogeneous phenomenon that can be driven by a range of variables and processes (Brubaker and Laitin 1998; Horowitz 2001). In proposing a new set of processes explaining the mobilization of low-intensity ethnic violence, the hope is to focus scholarly attention on the ways in which private conflicts and institutions in local violent organizations may drive participation in indiscriminate ethnic violence.

## 2 Intergroup Conflict and Ethnic Violence

Ethnic violence is “violence perpetrated across ethnic lines... in which the putative ethnic difference is coded—by perpetrators, targets, influential third parties, or analysts—as having been integral rather than incidental to violence” (Brubaker and Laitin 1998, p. 428). Low-intensity ethnic violence is non-militarized and rarely reaches the levels of lethality of civil wars (Balcells, Daniels and Escribà-Folch 2016). However, low-intensity ethnic violence is distinct from general interethnic crime or violence in that the victims are chosen, at least in part, on ethnic criteria (Fearon 2006). Such violence has enduring impacts on the social and economic makeup of regions (Tolnay and Beck 1992) and structures of local political competition (Dancygier 2010).

Social scientific literature on low-intensity ethnic violence typically focuses on the ways in which structural factors impact relations between ethnic groups, which in turn impact the likelihood that individuals engage in low-intensity ethnic violence (Dancygier and Green

2010). For example, economic competition theories posit that ethnic violence is most likely to occur when ethnic groups compete for scarce economic resources (Barth 1969; Bonacich 1972; Soule 1992; Olzak 1992; Olzak, Shanahan and McEneaney 1996). The argument here is that group-based competition for jobs, wages, housing, or schools activates ethnic identities and leads individuals to engage in violence in order to promote group interests (Soule and Dyke 1999). Similarly, power-threat theories argue that when members of an out-group threaten the political, cultural, or territorial power of an ethnic group, members of the threatened group are more likely to engage in ethnic violence (Blalock 1967; Tolnay and Beck 1995; Green, Strolovitch and Wong 1998; Dancygier 2010; Kopstein and Wittenberg 2011; Balcells, Daniels and Escribà-Folch 2016).

Studies employing group-level theories consistently find empirical links between factors that heighten conflict between members of ethnic groups and levels of low-intensity ethnic violence. The causal chain used to explain those findings typically has three steps. First, structural factors lead to conflict between ethnic groups to secure collective resources. Here, economic, political, or demographic variables lead ethnic groups to attempt to deny out-group members access to material or symbolic resources that local in-group members can otherwise draw upon. Second, these group-based battles heighten in-group solidarity and out-group animosity. Third, these group-based biases and grievances help ethnic groups solve free-rider problems and mobilize members to engage in violence that promotes group interests.

Scholarly literature provides evidence supporting the first two steps in this causal chain. Competition for resources is often structured along ethnic lines (Bates 1983), and general scarcity heightens the intensity of ethnic identification (Chen 2010). Additionally, individuals are more likely to view out-groups as competitors and hold greater out-group animosity when they think their ethnic group is disadvantaged (Bobo and Hutchings 1996; Gay 2006). Furthermore, in competitive settings, individuals are generally more likely to cooperate with in-group members and punish members of an out-group (Chen and Li 2009). Thus, it is

plausible that various structural factors impact group-level conflict, and that intergroup conflict impacts in-group solidarity and out-group grievances.

The third step in this causal chain is less clear. Group-based theories provide less insight on why or how ethnic *conflict* results in ethnic *violence*. As Brubaker and Laitin (1998) argue, rather than simply being a measure of high levels of intergroup tensions, ethnic violence is a qualitatively unique form of conflict. For this reason, “the shift from nonviolent to violent modes of conflict. . . requires particular theoretical attention” (Brubaker and Laitin 1998, p. 426). Additionally, even low-intensity ethnic violence like hate crimes often require coordination and organization to persist (Green, Glaser and Rich 1998). However, levels of intergroup conflict or grievances provide few insights into the sources of such organization.

Thus, despite empirical links between factors that heighten aggregate ethnic conflict and low-intensity ethnic violence, we know less about who organizes and mobilizes violence in such contexts, or how they compel broader participation in ethnic violence. In the next section, I argue that understanding the processes driving the mobilization of low-intensity ethnic violence requires scholars to focus not only on group-level conflicts or tensions, but also private conflicts and local violent organizations.

### **3 Private Conflicts, Local Organizations, and Mobilizing Ethnic Violence**

To better understand the mechanisms driving the mobilization of low-intensity ethnic violence, I build upon two influential theoretical frameworks from studies on the micro-foundations violence. First, Kalyvas (2003; 2006) shows how actors may use political or ethnic cleavages to settle private scores in civil wars. Specifically, local actors may use broader conflicts to violently target their adversaries in private disputes. Second, Fearon and Laitin (1996) show how intra-ethnic policing institutions can facilitate interethnic cooperation, while acknowledging that in-group policing may also be used to mobilize participation



ethnic violence. The general logic here is intuitive: just as in-group policing might be used to deter opportunistic predatory behavior against members of an out-group, it might also be used to punish non-participation in ethnic violence.

These existing theoretical frameworks, when considered independently, cannot account for why or how actors mobilize low-intensity ethnic violence. For Kalyvas (2003; 2006), interactions between local actors and supra-local actors are key to explaining group-based violence. However, low-intensity ethnic violence often persists outside of civil wars, in contexts lacking supra-local actors who violently compete for political power. Additionally, although Fearon and Laitin (1996) call on future scholars to examine the ways in which intra-ethnic policing may help mobilize ethnic violence, they do not study this question directly. Some scholars have applied their logic to explain the mobilization of high-intensity ethnic violence like mass genocide (Bhavnani and Backer 2000; Bhavnani 2006). However, the mechanisms driving mass-based ethnic violence and genocide are likely to be different from those driving low-intensity forms of ethnic violence. However, I argue that examining the role of pre-existing violent organizations helps to uncover key mechanisms through which private conflicts and in-group policing drive the mobilization of low-intensity ethnic violence.

Pre-existing violent organizations are crucial to mobilizing ethnic violence for two reasons. First, although in-group policing can help sustain both interethnic cooperation and ethnic violence (Fearon and Laitin 1996), certain members of ethnic groups typically have comparative advantages in policing the behavior of co-ethnics. Specifically, because punishment often requires the use or threat of coercion, actors with experiences or predispositions favoring violence are particularly capable of in-group policing. For example, in the context of endemic distrust in 19th Century Sicily, former feudal security guards used their skills in violence to police behavior and facilitate collectively-beneficial trade (Gambetta 1993). Similar dynamics were also present in post-Soviet Russia, where military veterans and athletes often provided informal policing services (Varese 2001). In a similar way, within ethnic groups, specialists in violence can provide credible threats of sanctions. Second, pre-existing vio-

lent organizations are also particularly well-suited for violence against out-group members. Anthropological studies show that the participants in ethnic violence are often members of pre-existing violent organizations (Laitin 1995). For this reason, relative to the general population, violent organizations are made up of actors who can more readily be mobilized for violence.

Violent organizations are thus, A) particularly capable of policing in-group behavior, and B) populated by actors who are particularly prone to engaging in ethnic violence. I argue that private conflicts drive actors in such organizations to mobilize selective violence against out-group adversaries. Additionally, mobilizing selective violence also leads to indiscriminate forms of ethnic violence against members of that out-group more broadly.

When members of a local violent organization are engaged in private conflicts with members of an out-group, mobilizing selective violence against those adversaries helps to secure private goods. However, there are also potential costs to doing so. First, mobilizing selective violence against out-group adversaries inhibits mutually-beneficial intergroup cooperation (Fearon and Laitin 1996). Second, in cases in which the state retains coercive capacity, violence often results in state punishment (Arriola 2013). However, when actors engage in protracted and zero-sum conflicts with members of an out-group, the leverage they gain from selective violence is more likely to outweigh these costs. Thus, *as members of violent organizations increasingly engage in zero-sum conflicts with out-group adversaries, they attempt to mobilize selective violence against those adversaries.*

Two types of institutions within violent organizations help mobilize selective violence against adversaries. First, although localized violent organizations typically do not have rigid ideological mandates, they often use organizational identities to enhance group cohesion and effectiveness (Gambetta 1993; Kalyvas 2015). Framing those identities around ethnic cleavages helps motivate group members to engage in violence against out-group adversaries. Second, in-group policing allows actors to attach tangible incentives for participating in violence against out-group adversaries. On the whole then, *institutions within*

*violent organizations help mobilize selective violence against out-group adversaries.*

Private conflicts thus help drive efforts to mobilize selective violence against out-group adversaries, and institutions within violent organizations help promote participation in such violence. In turn, three mechanisms lead actors to mobilize indiscriminate forms of ethnic violence against out-group members who are not direct adversaries.

First, despite directly engaging in private conflicts with only certain members of an out-group, members of violent organizations often have difficulties identifying those adversaries. Just as civil war insurgents often meld into the civilian population (Kalyvas 2006), it may be difficult to distinguish private adversaries from non-adversaries. Because individuals typically maintain weaker social and informational networks outside of their own ethnic groups, this is particularly likely when adversaries are members of out-groups (Fearon and Laitin 1996). In such contexts, members of violent organizations may select victims based on rough group profiles such as ethnicity (Kalyvas 2006). Such violence is indiscriminate, in that perpetrators make little effort to determine whether the victim is an actual adversary. However, the lines between selective violence and indiscriminate ethnic violence blur as violent actors use additional informational to make further inferences on whether a given member of an out-group is a private adversary (Belge 2016). On the whole, however, we can expect that, *difficulties identifying private adversaries drive the mobilization of indiscriminate ethnic violence.*

Second, even without identification problems, actors may intentionally use indiscriminate ethnic violence in efforts to gain leverage over out-group adversaries. Just as civil war combatants intentionally displace civilians to weaken their opponents (Azam and Hoeffler 2002; Lyall 2009), local violent actors may use indiscriminate violence to displace out-group members who they believe might provide resources to current or future adversaries. Thus, *efforts to deny adversaries access to resources drives the mobilization of indiscriminate ethnic violence.*

Third, both selective and indiscriminate ethnic violence may in turn lead to spirals of

retribution. Here, members of violent organizations attack both direct adversaries and innocent members of those adversary’s ethnic group in response to attacks on members of their own group. In other words, members of violent organizations may hold both particular perpetrators of violence as well as all members of the perpetrator’s ethnic group liable for previous attacks (Fearon and Laitin 1996). In turn, these retributive attacks result in tit-for-tat cycles of both selective violence and indiscriminate ethnic violence. Thus, *spirals of group-based retribution drive the mobilization of indiscriminate ethnic violence*.

To recap, I highlight the role of private conflicts and local violent organizations in mobilizing low-intensity ethnic violence. Violent organizations have comparative advantages in both in-group policing and ethnic violence. Actors can use the institutions of such organizations to mobilize participation in selective violence against out-group adversaries. In doing so, information problems, efforts to deny adversaries resources, and retributive spirals result in broader forms of indiscriminate ethnic violence. This means that ethnic violence that is not aimed at direct adversaries can nonetheless have origins in the local and private conflicts of members of local violent organizations. In the rest of the paper, I build upon this framework to examine the processes driving ethnic violence between African Americans and Latinos in Southern California.

## 4 Methods and Data

Existing work demonstrates consistent empirical correlations between factors associated with intergroup conflict and levels of low-intensity ethnic violence. The goal in the following analysis is to explore the processes driving the mobilization of low-intensity ethnic violence in contexts in which members of ethnic groups are in conflict.

To do so, I employ process tracing methods. Process tracing identifies causal process observations (CPOs). CPOs are “insights or pieces of data that provide information about context, process, or mechanism, and that contributes distinctive leverage in causal inference”

(Mahoney 2010). The method pays particular attention to the sequences linking independent, dependent, and intervening variables within a case (Collier 2011). Specifically, identifying three types of CPO helps to identify the causal processes of interest. Independent variable CPOs confirm the presence of the independent variable in the case. Mechanism CPOs give information on the intervening events posited in the theory. Auxiliary CPOs are occurrences that should be present if the theory works in the posited fashion (Mahoney 2010).

In the language of CPOs, the key independent variable in this study is conflict between members of ethnic groups. Group-based theories consider those conflicts in terms of aggregate ethnic groups. The theory presented in the previous section considers private conflicts between individuals, and specifically individuals in violent organizations. For group-level theories, the mechanism linking group-level conflict with the mobilization of ethnic violence is heightened in-group solidarity and out-group grievances, which facilitate group action toward a collective goal. In contrast, in the theory presented in the previous section, there are two steps in the causal chain linking private conflicts to the mobilization of ethnic violence. The first is the mobilization of selective forms of violence against out-group adversaries. The second step is comprised of three mechanisms that link this selective violence to indiscriminate ethnic violence: identification problems, denying access to resources, and retribution.

I analyze these processes using evidence from legal documents, media and secondary sources, and interviews in Southern California, focusing specifically on dynamics between African Americans and Latinos. The historical trajectory of the key variables of interest make this an ideal case for studying the mechanisms linking interethnic conflict and low-intensity ethnic violence. The structure of group-based conflicts in the region developed slowly over the course of decades. In contrast, the onset of a new structure of private conflicts and institutions in violent organizations was relatively sudden, and resulted from factors unrelated to the broader developments of group-level conflicts. Specifically, the creation of a new set of institutions by prisoners in California in the early 1990s resulted in the emergence of a new set of protracted private conflicts in the streets. Additionally, actors engaged in these

conflicts had access to the institutions of violent street gangs. This feature of the case allows me to closely investigate how both the group-based and private-based mechanisms posited above help to drive low-intensity ethnic violence. To do so, the analysis examines conflict and violence in the region as a whole, while also providing more in-depth examinations of the ground-level mobilization of ethnic violence in a variety of areas throughout the region.

This case-based analysis also has limitations. Because the relevant private conflicts and structures of violent organizations are specific to California, the analysis does not produce variables that can be readily inserted into large- $n$  cross-sectional analysis. Additionally, although the analysis provides within-case comparative leverage in terms of changes over time in both the region as a whole and particular areas within the region, it does not provide out-of-sample evidence of the mechanisms. This means that it is possible that the analysis picks up idiosyncratic mechanisms driving ethnic violence in the case. However, both interethnic conflict and small-scale violent organizations (gangs, mafias, local militias, etc.) are prevalent in a variety of areas. Closely examining the links between private conflicts, violent organizations, and low-intensity violence in Southern California thus points scholars of ethnic violence in useful directions for understanding the ways in which an unexplored set of mechanisms may help explain the mobilization of low-intensity ethnic violence.

## **5 Tracing the Mobilization of Ethnic Violence between Latinos and Blacks in Southern California**

In what follows, I trace the processes driving the mobilization of low-intensity black-brown ethnic violence in Southern California. Each section starts by outlining the causal-process observations that are presented in that section, and highlighting how these observations map onto the relevant causal chains outlined in Section 2 and Section 3.

## 5.1 Background: Black-Brown Conflict, Intergroup Grievances, and Ethnic Violence in Southern California

*Outlining Causal-Process Observations:* This section shows that key demographic and economic factors that group-based theories posit to drive ethnic violence grew in intensity throughout the second half of the 20th Century in Southern California. It shows how the first step in the causal chain posited by group-based theories—aggregate conflict over collective economic, political, and identity-based goods—has been ubiquitous in black-Latino relations in the region. It shows some evidence of the next step in the causal chain, in which these group-level conflicts impact in-group solidarity and out-group animosity. However, despite group-based conflicts and in-group biases, there is little evidence that these causal mechanisms resulted in mobilization of sustained ethnic violence.

From its settlement in 1781, Los Angeles has been home to a diverse community, housing substantial populations from multiple ethnic groups. During the World War II era, Latino and African American populations in the area were largely segregated into underdeveloped areas through the use of restrictive real estate covenants (Jones-Correa 2000-2001; Camarillo 2007). However, the easing of these restrictions in the 1950s, coupled with demographic and macro-economic shifts in subsequent decades, heightened the potential for conflict between members of the two groups. Beginning in the late-1970s, the decline of the region's manufacturing sector resulted in increased economic stress in both African American and Latino working class communities (Straus 2009; Pastor 2014). Additionally, while the groups were roughly the same size in the 1960s, the growth of the Latino population in subsequent decades greatly outpaced that of the African American population (Kun and Pulido 2014). By the 1980s, this meant that especially in historically black areas, economically distressed blacks and Latinos were increasingly living in shared neighborhoods (Camarillo 2007).

These demographic and macro-economic shifts led to several forms of group-based conflict. Scholars argue that as early as the 1960s, employers in metal and food industries preferred newly-arriving Latinos laborers relative to their black counterparts (Sides 2003).

In later decades, these hiring trends led African Americans to increasingly view expanding Latino populations as detrimental to job prospects in the African American community (Pastor 2014). Likewise, as Latino populations became increasingly prevalent in historically-black neighborhoods, African American communities were often hesitant to hire Latinos in historically-black institutions. As Latinos pushed for access such jobs, the groups were increasingly in conflict over these scarce local resources (Camarillo 2007).

Additionally, group-based conflict over educational resources was also prominent. In economically-strained public schools, African American administrators were often hesitant to fund ESL programs or hire bilingual teachers, fearing that doing so would deprive African American students of already scarce resources. In response, Latino groups organized to push for educational reform, leading to conflicts between Latino activists and black school administrators over how educational resources would be shared between the two groups (Straus 2009).

In many cases, demographic shifts also resulted in perceptions of political threat and group-based conflict over local political resources. During the 1970s and 1980s, African American populations in historically-black areas often gained control of local municipal councils, committees, and boards from white minority populations (Camarillo 2007; Pastor 2014). In many cases, they were not eager to cede newly-won political power to the growing Latino populations that demanded representation and a share of political resources. In Compton, for example, a journalist commented in 1990 that “blacks control every public and quasi-public institution in Compton—the schools, City Hall, the Compton Chamber of Commerce, and the Democratic party machine—and show no sign they intend to share their power.” (Camarillo 2007, p. 19). Additionally Latinos winning local political offices in some cases resulted in efforts to use that power to amplify the resource share of their ethnic group. For example, after the first Latino mayor elected in Lynwood fired several black employees and contractors, black residents to claimed that, “a lot of them [Latinos] want to shut us out completely” (Camarillo 2007, p. 19).



As group-based theories of ethnic violence posit, demographic and macro-economic changes in Southern California thus resulted in various forms of contentious group-level conflict between Latinos and African Americans in the region. The next step of this causal chain is that such conflicts increase in-group biases by heightening in-group solidarity and out-group grievances. While limited, there is also some evidence of this step in the causal chain. Broadly, Camarillo (2007) argues that both blacks and Latinos in the area expressed anxiety over the ways in which demographic shifts upset their respective group's status quo. Likewise, studies using survey data collected in Los Angeles during the early 1990s show that blacks who shared environments with economically advantaged Latinos were more likely to harbor negative stereotypes about Latinos and view their economic and political interests as incompatible (Gay 2006).

Despite the presence of group-based conflicts, and the potential for such conflicts to result in heightened in-group biases, there is little evidence that these processes resulted in the sustained mobilization of ethnic violence. The closest evidence in favor of this step of the causal chain is the large-scale riots that occurred in Los Angeles over a six-day period in 1992. Bergesen and Herman (1998) argue that much of the violence during the event can be traced to African American resentment stemming from recent influxes of Latino immigrant populations. They show that neighborhood levels of riot fatalities were correlated with local ethnic transitions. Similarly, others find that areas with higher amounts of unemployment and ethnic diversity were also likely to experience higher levels of riot violence (DiPasquale and Glaeser 1998). However, despite fear in both black and Latino communities of a recurrence of ethnic riots (Marks, Barreto and Woods 2004), the events of 1992 did not result in the more sustained "institutionalized riot system" found in places like India (Brass 1997).

Outside of the relatively isolated events in 1992, there is little evidence of sustained forms of black-Latino ethnic violence stemming from the group-based conflicts. Prior to the early-1990s, the majority of recorded incidents of ethnic violence in the region were tied to white

youth groups that were not party to black-Latino conflicts over schools, jobs, or politics.<sup>3</sup> Even among members of street gangs, who might be considered natural violent defenders of group-based claims, both interethnic crime and explicit ethnic violence were rare. In Pacoima, for example, where demographic shifts during the 1980s had lead predominately-black housing projects to become predominately-Latino, black and Latino gangs peacefully parsed out territory and drug markets, and personal disputes between members rarely devolved into ethnic violence (Rotella 1991). Even in South Los Angeles, where demographic shifts often heightened inter-group conflicts, Latino and black gangs peacefully coexisted with few violent flare-ups. (Tobar 1992). This does not mean that gang members did not violently prey on members of out-groups. For example, in 1991, in supposed retaliation for cooperating with police drug investigations, members of an African American gang in Watts set fire to the apartment of a Latino family, killing five people (Katz 1991). At times, predatory behavior against out-group members even verged on ethnic violence. For example, in some neighborhoods, African American gang members would disproportionately rob Latino immigrants (Lopez 1993*a*). However, police sources claimed that such targeting was motivated primarily by opportunity, with both blacks and Latinos targeting immigrants who often carried cash and were unlikely to seek legal recourse (Katz 1993).

However, beginning in the early 1990s, there have been increasing reports of gang members engaging in attacks based on ethnicity. In 1992 and 1993, cases of gang-perpetrated ethnic hate crimes against non-gang members became common in cities like Azusa (Torres 1992) and neighborhoods like Hawaiian Gardens (Adams 1993). Over the following decades, such incidents spread to other areas of the region. By 2015, conservative estimates count gang members as perpetrators in over half of the 750 federally-recorded Latino-on-black hate crimes in Los Angeles County during the previous eight years.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Data on ethnic violence prior to the early 1990s is limited, but reporting on ethnic violence during earlier periods turns up few incidents of ethnic violence or hate crimes between African Americans and Latinos. Likewise, interviews with workers in the Los Angeles County Committee on Human Relations and other community groups indicate a general dearth of black-Latino incidents of ethnic violence prior to the 1990s.

<sup>4</sup>This was the most common suspect-victim dyad in the area. These data come from the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations. An incident is coded a racial hate crime if law enforcement officials

The causal chain posited by group-based theories has difficulties accounting this new mobilization of ethnic violence in the region. Despite numerous forms of broader intergroup conflict, the Latinos and African Americans who are most likely to be aggrieved by group-level conflicts over jobs, schools, and political appointments have largely abstained from ethnic violence. One potential explanation for the gang dimension of this mobilization is that gangs simply do the violent bidding of their ethnic groups. While the remaining sections cannot entirely rule out this alternative mechanism, the close analysis of the local dynamics of ethnic violence in the area point to clear links between the mobilization of ethnic violence and the private conflicts of gang members themselves.

Before moving on, it is important to put the gang mobilization of ethnic violence into context. Some criminologists, responding to media reports of a full-blown “race war” in the region, note that rates of general intra-ethnic crime dwarf rates of interethnic crime in Southern California (Hipp, Tita and Boggess 2009). These efforts to push back against overly-alarmist accounts of ethnic violence are admirable. However, it is also a mistake to entirely discount the importance of more overt and indiscriminate forms of ethnic violence in the region. Ethnic violence is qualitatively different from more general forms of intra-ethnic and interethnic crime. Although the following sections show how ethnic violence can become entangled in private criminal disputes, the explicit use of ethnicity to target victims warrants particular scholarly attention.

## 5.2 Prisons, Ethnicity, and Private Conflicts in the Streets

*Outlining Causal-Process Observations:* This section begins to explore the alternative mechanisms driving ethnic violence outlined in Section 3. The first step in this causal chain is private conflicts, and specifically the private conflicts of members of violent organizations.

*Beginning in the early 1990s, Latino prisoners who would come to control street gang insti-*  

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determined that the victim was targeted because of her perceived membership in a racial or ethnic group, rather than a rival gang. The coding scheme for the gang component is very restrictive, with incidents coded as gang-related if the perpetrator(s) explicitly said (or wrote, in the case of vandalism) his gang affiliation during the actual incident.

*tutions in Southern California were increasingly engaged in protracted and zero-sum private conflicts with black gang members over the right to extort from local illicit markets. These conflicts provided incentives for mobilizing selective violence targeting these adversaries.*

In the post World War II period, ethnicity began playing a prominent role in the development of organizations and violence in California jails and prisons. During the 1940s and 1950s, the prison population in the state grew larger and more diverse. In the absence of effective state protection, prisoners banded together to form mutual protective groups. These groups typically formed along pre-existing social ties. Given high levels of residential segregation in California at the time, this meant that protective groups were typically ethnically homogenous. However, prior to the late 1950s, these groups remained relatively informal. This began to change in 1957. At the time, Mexican American prisoners were frequently out-numbered by their black and white counterparts. In this context, in the Deuel Correction Facility, a group of Mexican American prisoners from Los Angeles created the Mexican Mafia, or *la Eme*. The group recruited the most dangerous Latino inmates from Southern California, regardless of their social ties outside of prison. In forcing members of the organization, or *emeros*, to set aside their conflicts from the street and follow organizational rules, the group institutionalized its power. As the prisoners were relocated in attempts to break their power in the facility, the organization spread throughout the entire state. In response, inmates who did not fall under the organization's protective umbrella created similar organizations. In subsequent decades, violence in California jails and prisons came to fall sharply along ethnic lines (Skarbek 2014).

Despite the key role that ethnicity played in organizing violence behind bars, from the 1960s through the 1980s, these conflicts rarely spilled into the streets. However, this began to change in the early-1990s as a result of another institutional innovation in the Mexican Mafia. Specifically, a new generation of *emeros* began using their authority to extort illicit market activity conducted by Latinos in the streets (Blatchford 2008). Latino gang members from Southern California anticipate incarceration, and know that they will fall under the authority

*la Eme* in jails and prisons. *Emeros* thus use the threat of violence to compel these gang members to pay them a portion of their illicit profits. However, because African Americans from the area fall under different protective organizations in prisons, *emerros* are unable to extort their market activity (Skarbek 2011). The implementation of this extortion system has been uneven. As an organization, *la Eme* is decentralized, meaning that individual *emerros* have the authority to extort markets in individual parcels of territory in Southern California. This means that while a substantial number of *emerros* began extorting illicit markets from their respective neighborhoods in the early 1990s, in other neighborhoods individual *emerros* implemented or altered these systems over the course of the following two decades. However, by the early 2010s, the vast majority of Latino street gangs were paying extortion taxes to an *emero*.<sup>5</sup>

The implementation of this “taxation” system in a given neighborhood often results in the emergence of a new set of protracted and zero-sum private conflicts with between *emerros* and African American gang members. Extortion has quickly become *emero*’s chief source of income. However, because extortion by more than one actor discourages production (Olson 1993), the consumption of extortion in a given market is essentially limited to one individual or firm.<sup>6</sup> *La Eme*’s power behind bars largely protects *emerros* from co-ethnic competitors, who know that attempting to extort in a given *emero*’s territory will result in violent repercussions for themselves and their associates behind bars.<sup>7</sup> However, *emerros* can neither extort African American gang members directly nor extort market transactions which African American gang members already extort. This means that a given *emero*’s ability to profit from a given territory often hinges upon gaining leverage over current and

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<sup>5</sup>Author interview with gang intervention worker, August 2012

<sup>6</sup>In other words, conflicts over extortion are inherently private, rather than over club goods from which the entire ethnic group can draw.

<sup>7</sup>This becomes slightly muddled in cases of conflict between multiple *emerros*. For example, at various times in El Monte (*United States v. Gutierrez et al* 2014), Pico-Union (*United States v. Pantoja et al* 2007), Florence-Firestone (*United States v. Vasquez et al* 2007), Azusa (*United States v. Rios et al* 2011), and Orange County (*United States v. Ojeda et al* 2011) multiple *emerros* clashed over rights to extort, leading to conflict between street gangs supporting different *emerros*. Such problems are exacerbated by conflicts and rivalries between *emerros* housed in federal prisons and those housed in state prisons (Author interview with gang intervention worker, September 2013).

future African American adversaries.

These protracted conflicts with African Americans gang members over the right to extort help ensure that for *emeros*, the benefits of selective violence aimed at their African American adversaries in many cases outweigh the benefits of cooperation. There are certainly costs to mobilizing selective violence. Mainly, the state often responds to gang conflict and disorder with interventions and injunctions against local criminal actors and illicit markets, which can greatly diminish short-term profits. However, *emeros* are typically already serving long prison sentences, and their primary (and at times, only) source of income is extortion. In this context, to the extent that mobilizing selective violence against out-group adversaries provides leverage in their private conflicts, *emeros* have incentives to mobilize such violence.

### **5.3 In-group Policing, Organizational Identity, and Mobilizing Selective Violence against Out-group Adversaries**

*Outlining Causal-Process Observations:* The next step in the causal chain outlined in Section 3 is the mobilization of selective violence against out-group adversaries. This section first briefly presents auxiliary outcomes to highlight the ability of *emeros* to police members of street gangs. It then shows how these actors have used the organizational identities and institutions of street gangs to mobilize violence targeting their African American adversaries.

The same institutions that allow *emeros* to extort local illicit market activity also allow them to police behavior within violent gang organizations. *Emeros* supply in-group policing of gang members in order to ensure that members do not engage in behavior that is detrimental to their ability to extort. For example, in the same period that they were setting up extortion systems, *emeros* coordinated dozens of meetings throughout Southern California, some of which were attended by hundreds and even thousands of gang members. In these meetings, *emeros* and their representatives presented gang members with new rules governing their behavior. One of the most famous examples was an edict prohibiting drive-by shootings. The purpose of this rule was to minimize harm to innocent bystanders, which

increases police attention and harms the drug markets that the *emeros* extort. As a police memo from 1993 noted, “due to drive-by shooting, the street gangs have caused too much attention and the Eme wants less publicity.” After handing down the edict, levels of violence in many areas of the city dropped considerably (Lopez 1993*b*).

Relative to these large-scale and coordinated efforts at in-group policing, decentralized and ad hoc in-group policing is more common. This typically entails individual *emeros* using intermediaries to send written or verbal rules or directives to the gangs in the under their influence. For example, in the Ramona Gardens housing projects, after not being able to conduct a drug transaction due to a heightened police presence in 2012, a representative of an *emero* disciplined young members of the Big Hazard gang for engaging in behavior that “draws heat [i.e. attracts police attention]” (*United States v. Jackson et al* 2014). In the MacAurthur Park area in 2007, upon learning that a member of 18th Street gang had mistakenly killed a child with a stray bullet, an *emero* ordered that members of the gang execute the offender or face punishment as an entire group (*United States v. Pantoja et al* 2007). While these particular forms of in-group policing are auxiliary to the mobilization of ethnic violence, they demonstrate the ways in which *emeros* are capable of policing the behavior in violence street gang organizations.

In their efforts to gain leverage in their private conflicts, *emeros* also use institutions in street gangs to mobilize selective violence against the African American adversaries who inhibit their extortion incomes. For example, officials argue that many of the *emeros*’ efforts at promoting peace between Latino street gangs in the 1990s were motivated by a desire to “strengthen racial alliances” vis-a-vis adversaries (Lopez 1993*b*). Such efforts are even more explicit when examining patterns within particular neighborhoods. For example, an *emero* in Florence-Firestone wrote a letter in 2007 ordering members of Florencia 13 gang to help each other enter drug markets and to “help each other when they engaged in battles with rival African-American street gangs,” (*United States v. Vasquez et al* 2007). Likewise, a letter confiscated from a Latino gang member in 1993 advised, “It’s about making money

these days, not shooting up your own Raza [race]. If you guys wanna shoot somebody go shoot those niggers from Westside 357 or Ghost Town [African American gangs]. You don't need to blast up your own kind no more. That shit is dead," (Blatchford 2008, p. 151). These efforts have in many cases shifted gang conflicts within particular spheres of influence to fall along ethnic lines. For example, in Mar Vista, where Latino and black gangs had for years peacefully divvied up drug turf, gang conflict along ethnic lines erupted after the release of several *emeros* and members of the Black Guerrilla Family prison gang to the area. Anti-gang officers in the area concluded that in general, "the Mexican Mafia was trying to organize the gangs to dominate narcotics trafficking..." (Katz 1993).

To successfully mobilize selective violence against out-group adversaries, *emeros* first attempt to promote ethnic identities within the organizational cultures of street gangs. For example, in their large-scale meetings in the early 1990s, *emeros* often appealed to cultural unity, "La Raza," and respect for "brothers in blood" (Wilgoren 1992; Rodriguez, Rodriguez and Rodriguez 1993). As retired LAPD sergeant argued, "[*emeros*] can play the race card to motivate their soldiers on the street..." (Lowrey 2012). In some cases, such appeals may be enough to mobilize participation in selective violence against out-group adversaries. For example, in Boyle Heights in the early 1990s, seven Latino gangs had peacefully coexisted with the one black gang in the local housing projects for years. However, the charge to rid the projects of the black gang was led by a youthful gang that had once been closely allied with the black gang. Police note that this move occurred after the Latino gang had been derided for "betraying their culture," with one gang member claiming that "it offended us because a lot of people said we acted black and dressed black... we had to show that we were true Chicanos" (Katz 1993). These cultural appeals might be particularly effective with young gang members who are potentially easier to indoctrinate.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, it is perhaps unsurprising that these efforts at "ethnic entrepreneurship" start young. For example, in a police-recorded telephone conversation, an incarcerated member of the Avenues gang used

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<sup>8</sup>For a similar argument in the context of civil war, see Beber and Blattman (2013).



part of his phone time to teach a young child to say, “fuck a nigger” (*United States v. Real et al* 2008). As a former gang member claims, “like the family teaches you to pray before a meal, [the *emeros*] are teaching us to be racial.” (Quinones 2014).

For other members, however, identity-based appeals alone are unlikely to be sufficient to mobilize selective violence against *emeros*’ African American adversaries. In many cases, gang members have historically been rivals with in-group gangs while peacefully coexisting with out-group gangs. As a member of Florencia 13 exclaimed, the local *emero* “didn’t understand how it worked...I hate 38th Street [a Latino gang]. I didn’t have no problem with the guys from East Coast [an African American gang] because I grew up with them. It’s kind of hard to say, ‘Now I’m going to...kill this black guy just because he’s black.’ But that’s how they wanted it.” (Quinones 2007*a*). A gang member from the San Fernando Valley echoes this sentiment, claiming “there were a lot of blacks we grew up with. Once that green light [to attack black gang members] came out , it was like, forget that we grew up playing with Big Wheels together...I would tell [the local *emero*], ‘We got cousins that are Crips—half black, half Mexicans.’ ” (Quinones 2014).

To overcome these obstacles, *emeros* use in-group policing institutions to punish cooperation with their black adversaries and reward participating in selective violence. For example, in 1990, upon learning that the Tiny Dukes, a predominately Latino gang in Riverside, had been working with the 1200 Blocc Crips, an African American gang, in a feud with mutual cross-town rivals, an *emero* placed an order for other gangs to attack members of Tiny Dukes, resulting in numerous members being beaten and stabbed. To remove order, the Tiny Dukes were forced to rid their area of the Crips, leading gang conflict in the area to fall along ethnic lines for much of the next two decades (Ogul 1994; Quinones 2014). Likewise, even an *emero* who had gained considerable power in the organization was marked for death in 2010 when his past associations with an African American gang came to light (*United States v. Ojeda et al* 2011). In addition to punishments, *emeros* also present rank-and-file members with material rewards for selective violence. As Levitt and Venkatesh (2000) demonstrate,

while work in illicit markets can be lucrative, this is typically only the case as one moves up the chain of command. In this sense, engaging in violence targeting adversaries is often framed as a way of “putting in work” to moving up the hierarchy of the organization, and thus increase income.<sup>9</sup>

This means that even if rank-and-file gang members do not buy into identity-based appeals, in-group policing often compels them to engage in selective violence against out-group adversaries. In fact, it is clear that many gang members follow directives to selectively target out-group adversaries while not necessarily internalizing ethnic-based ideologies. For example, even during the height of black-Latino gang violence in Florence-Firestone in the early 2000s, Florencia 13 gang members continued distributing drugs to an African American dealer, with the understanding that the dealer would sell the drugs outside of their territory (*United States v. Vasquez et al* 2008). Additionally, even in the context of extreme ethnic divisions in California prisons, gang members have been known to secretly communicate their good will toward African Americans with whom they have personal relationships. “They can’t communicate openly,” a gang intervention worker claims, “so maybe they’ll walk into the other’s site line and drop a cigarette or a candy bar that they can pick up later, just to show that they’re still alright.”<sup>10</sup>

## 5.4 Mobilizing Indiscriminate Ethnic Violence I: Identification Problems

*Outlining Causal-Process Observations:* The causal chain outlined in Section 3 highlights three mechanisms through which mobilizing selective violence against out-group adversaries results in the mobilization of indiscriminate low-intensity ethnic violence. This section illustrates the first mechanism, in which members of violent organizations have difficulties identifying direct adversaries from out-group gangs.

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<sup>9</sup>Author interview with gang intervention worker, August 2012

<sup>10</sup>Interview with author, June 2013

In their efforts to gain leverage in private conflicts over the right to extort illicit markets, the previous section shows how *emeros* use institutions in street gangs to mobilize selective violence against African American adversaries. Doing so leads both indirectly and directly to the mobilization of indiscriminate forms of ethnic violence, in which gang members select non-gang “civilian” victims based on their ethnicity. The first mechanism through which this occurs is tied to information and identification problems.

While gang members may signal their gang affiliation with clothing, tattoos, or other forms of identification, it is often difficult to readily distinguish between gang members and non-gang members. This ambiguity is heightened by the fact that gangs have increasingly discouraged members from wearing stereotypical gang clothing or tattoos, in order to avoid police identification.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, as certain gang-inspired styles and mannerisms gain popularity in broader groups, gang members increasingly blend into the broader population. In this sense, even when attempting to selectively direct violence at gang adversaries, gang members often face what Kalyvas (2006) refers to as “identification problems,” in which it is difficult to distinguish between gang adversaries and non-gang members. This is particularly likely when those adversaries are members of out-groups, with whom gang members often do not share robust social networks.

In cases in which adversaries are members of out-groups, ethnicity can be used as an informational shortcut. Doing so increases the likelihood that indiscriminate ethnic violence occurs as a result of collateral damage. In this sense, many cases of ethnic violence result from mistakenly identifying non-gang members as gang members. For example, in the midst of interethnic gang conflict in Venice in the early 1990s, several African American and Latino civilians were killed when gang members mistook them for adversaries (Umemoto 2006). While prisoners may have initially stoked the violence in order to gain leverage in private conflicts (Katz 1993), these conflicts indirectly result in out-group members becoming victims of violence on the basis of their ethnicity.

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<sup>11</sup>Author interview with gang intervention worker, August 2012

The lines between selective violence against adversaries and ethnic violence against civilians blur even further when gang members attempt to use additional sources of information to identify adversaries. For example, in Arlington Heights in 2008, a member of the 18th Street gang crossed paths with an African American high school student carrying a red Spider-man backpack and wearing a red belt. The local branch of 18th Street had been in conflict with a local branch of the Bloods, an African American gang, for much of the previous decade. Although the student was not a gang member, the 18th Street member inferred that he was a rival. The gang member then asked the student what gang he was from before promptly shooting him (Kim 2012). During the well-publicized trial that followed, members of the community and media vigorously debated the role that ethnicity played in the killing. Some argued that the victim was selected based on his ethnicity. Others argued that the gang member associated the student's red accessories with the rival gang. In such cases, identification problems and efforts to incorporate additional information result in ambiguous forms of ethnic violence. Here, while gangs do not target non-gang residents completely randomly, their use of additional selection criteria may have little to do with actual "guilt."<sup>12</sup>

Thus, through this first mechanism, mobilizing gang conflict along ethnic lines indirectly leads to the mobilization of indiscriminate ethnic violence against civilians due to problems in identifying adversaries.

## **5.5 Mobilizing Indiscriminate Ethnic Violence II: Denying Adversaries Access**

*Outlining Causal-Process Observations:* This section illustrates the second mechanism driving the mobilization of indiscriminate forms of low-intensity ethnic violence. Members of violent organizations attempt to deny their adversaries resources by using using indiscriminate ethnic violence in efforts to displace out-group members who might serve as footholds in valuable areas.

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<sup>12</sup>For a similar argument in the case of counter-insurgent violence, see Belge (2016)

In some cases, *emeros* use gang organizations to intentionally mobilize deliberate and indiscriminate forms of ethnic violence against non-gang civilians. In El Monte and South El Monte, for example, the *eme*-directed El Monte Flores gang allegedly committed hate crimes, “in an effort to rid these cities of all African Americans” (*United States v. Gutierrez et al* 2014). Similarly, in Highland Park, a gang member testified in court that after receiving orders from an *emero* to rid the neighborhood of the black “infestation” in 1998, factions of the Avenues gang would compete to see who could drive the most blacks out of the neighborhood (Spano 2006). In Azusa, a former gang member testified that after the release of several associates of *emeros* from prison, gang members would go “hunting” for African American residents to attack (Quinones 2008*a*). In Harbor Gateway, a police sergeant claimed that “there was no doubt that there were directives from the Mexican Mafia” to engage in ethnic attacks on civilians, and a gang member claimed that participating in arsons of African American homes gave the gang credibility in the eyes of the *emeros* (Quinones 2007*b*). In Escondido, a gang detective testified that hate crimes spiked after an *emero* issued an order focusing on, “getting the blacks out of Escondido” (Lowrey 2012). In such cases, there are no attempts to distinguish between black adversaries in gangs and black civilians.

Instead of being a form of collateral damage, in these cases gang members strategically use indiscriminate ethnic violence in attempts to displace out-group civilians. The logic is that the presence of black civilians in certain areas might provide adversaries with access to valuable territories. For example, one former gang member from Azusa claimed that, “we’re brainwashed [by *emeros*] to think that if we let a black family in, then their [gang] cousins are going to come from Compton,” (Quinones and Winton 2011). Likewise, the most common theory for a string of firebombings of African American homes in the Ramona Gardens neighborhood in the 1990s was that, “one of the many ‘sets’ within the Big Hazard gang feared that African-American residents would attract competing gang members from outside the project, leading the homeboys into a demeaning fight over their own turf,” (Becklund 1992). When African Americans began moving back into the neighborhood in the late-2000s,

even a former gang member who at the time served as a gang intervention worker admitted that, “I was a little worried that they would come in and take over...” (Becerra 2013).

Such violence need not target every out-group member in a given area: as a gang intervention worker in Los Angeles claimed, “a little violence can create a lot of fear in the community.”<sup>13</sup> Toward this end, overt attacks are often supplemented with intimidating vandalism meant to instill fear in members of out-groups. For example, the Big Hazard gang in Ramona Gardens tags buildings with “Varrío BHR no blacks.”<sup>14</sup> In Compton, the Compton 155 gangs adds “NK” (“nigger killer”) to the end of their name in graffiti (DOJ 2013). Similarly, a retired LAPD sergeant claims that in Pomona, the Pomona 12 gang dubbed an entire faction of the organization the “Nigger Killers” (Valdemar 2008). By instilling such fear in local environments, *emeros* believe they can help ensure that adversaries cannot gain footholds in valuable territories.

## 5.6 Mobilizing Indiscriminate Ethnic Violence III: Retribution

*Outlining Causal-Process Observations:* This section illustrates the third mechanism driving the mobilization of indiscriminate forms of low-intensity ethnic violence. Both of selective and indiscriminate violence lead to cycles of retribution. In these spirals, both Latino and African American gang members employ indiscriminate violence against members of the other group in response to violence committed by gang members of that group.

In many cases, mobilizing both selective and indiscriminate forms of violence leads to retributive attacks. Often, the goal of retributive attacks is to target a member of the rival gang that committed the original offense. For example, a member of the East Side Riva gang in Riverside told a detective that in 2014 that he went, “hunting, looking for black people, because he had been chased by members of local black gangs.” Shortly thereafter, he shot and killed a 40-year-old man that he identified as a member of the rival black gang (Wesson, Hurt and Surowski 2015). In other cases, however, gang members seeking retribution against

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<sup>13</sup>Quoted from interview with author on October 15, 2012 in Los Angeles.

<sup>14</sup>Here, “Varrío BHR” is short hand for the name of the gang.

out-group adversaries have difficulties finding or identifying rivals. For example, in Harbor Gateway in 2006, days after the killing of a fellow gang member, two members of the 204th Street gang went in search of an African American man who had allegedly flashed a gun at them. Unable to find the culprit, they instead shot into a group of non-gang black youth, killing a 14-year-old girl (Quinones 2007*b*). In other cases, members make little effort to selectively seek retribution. For example, in Lancaster, two gang members were accused of attacking the first black person they saw after a relative was beaten by black gang members (Maeshiro 2007).

These efforts at retribution can lead to violent spirals of both selective violence and indiscriminate ethnic violence, in which the lines between private and group-based violence become further blurred. The case of retributive violence in the Duarte and Monrovia areas highlights this point. Over 70 shootings occurred in the small towns during a one-and-a-half year period between 2006 and 2008. Nearly all of the shootings were black-on-Latino or Latino-on-black. Most were attributed to members of the Du Roc Crips, an African American gang, and two Latino gangs with which it was feuding, Monrovia Nuevo Barrio and Duarte Eastsiders (Lee 2009). Politicians and police officers believe that the violence between the gangs escalated after the release of several inmates from prison, who encouraged younger gang members to get active in the conflicts (Quinones 2008*b*; Lee 2009). In the midst of conflict between gang members, a 24-year-old Latino civilian was killed by black gang members in December 2007. In retaliation, a month later, a Latino gang member shot and paralyzed a 16-year-old black student, who was the shooter's former classmate. While the student was not a gang member, his father and uncle had been members of the Du Roc Crips (Hennessy-Fiske 2012). A day later, a Latino gang member shot and killed a retired 64-year-old African American at close range. Again, while the man was not a gang member, his nephews were (Lee 2009). The next day, those nephews shot at but missed the father of the Latino gang member who would later be convicted of their uncle's murder. Later that month, at a gathering of gang members following the 64-year-old man's funeral,

a witness claimed that “what was on everybody’s mind was revenge” (Lee 2009). The two nephews then went out with another friend and eventually killed a 16-year-old Latina. The girl had no apparent gang connections (PSN 2010).

Through these processes, indiscriminate forms of ethnic violence, in which the victim is selected explicitly based on ethnic identity, often have their origins in efforts to mobilize selective forms of violence against out-group adversaries in private conflicts.

## 6 Conclusion

Social scientific findings consistently point to empirical links between factors that heighten interethnic conflict and low-intensity ethnic violence. When demographic, economic, or political factors put members of different ethnic groups into conflict, individuals are more likely to engage in ethnic attacks against out-group members. However, we know less about the processes underlying the mobilization of ethnic violence in such cases. Why do certain actors attempt to mobilize participation in ethnic violence? How do such actors compel others to participate?

To address these questions, this paper builds upon insights from seminal work on the micro-foundations of group-based violence. It traces the development of low-intensity ethnic violence in Southern California to build a novel theory on the processes linking interethnic conflict and low-intensity ethnic violence. The theory highlights the comparative advantages of pre-existing violent organizations in engaging in both in-group policing and ethnic violence. It then argues that private conflicts can give some members of violent organizations incentives to mobilize selective attacks on out-group adversaries. In turn, these efforts to settle private scores result in indiscriminate forms of ethnic violence due to problems identifying private adversaries, efforts to deny those adversaries resources, and spirals of retribution. In the case of Southern California, Latino prisoners have mobilized local street gangs to engage in selective violence against adversaries in African American gangs. Doing so has resulted



in the mobilization of indiscriminate ethnic violence against residents who are not directly involved in private gang conflicts.

This theory and analysis has implications for academic literature on ethnic violence. In addition to opening the black box of causal mechanisms linking interethnic conflict and low-intensity ethnic violence, the paper shows the ways in which, in the absence of broader group-based violence, private conflicts within local violent organization can lead to the mobilization of indiscriminate forms of group-based violence. Additionally, the paper highlights the ways in which intra-ethnic policing, in addition to promoting interethnic cooperation (Fearon and Laitin 1996), may help actors to mobilize low-intensity ethnic violence.

Additionally, the paper has implications for understanding contemporary ethnic violence outside the academe. Within the case of Southern California, debates surrounding the role of racial bias in gang violence have been particularly polarizing. In 2008, for example, the sheriff of Los Angeles County wrote an op-ed in the *Los Angeles Times* arguing that racial bias and hatred lay at the heart of recent patterns of gang violence (Baca 2008). In response, a chief in the Los Angeles Police Department wrote an op-ed arguing that race was not a factor in gang violence (Beck 2008). In a meeting in which a police chief presented this argument to concerned residents, a community member replied, “the first thing out of your mouth is that [these crimes] are not racially motivated. . . You need to expand your definition of what’s racially motivated” (Leovy, Smith and Rubin 2008). The analysis presented in this paper supports this conclusion: while private conflicts between gang members are at the root of violence, these private conflicts can also lead to the mobilization of indiscriminate forms of ethnic violence.

Outside of Southern California, academic and media analysts have highlighted the role of growing racial and ethnic grievances in driving recent political developments in the US and Europe (Tesler and Sides 2016; Beauchamp 2016). When and why might such group-based conflicts result in the mobilization of ethnic violence? The theory and analysis presented in this paper suggests one potential set of processes, in which private conflicts of existing

violent organizations and actors lead to the mobilization of low-intensity ethnic violence.

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