

CLAS Open Seminars - Lent Term 2026

SG1 Ground Floor, Alison Richard Building, 7 West Road, CB3 9DP

Monday 02 March - 5:15pm

Book Presentation: [Inside Criminalized Governance. How and Why Gangs Rule the streets of Rio de Janeiro](#)

Author: [Nicholas Barnes](#) (University of St Andrews)

Commentator: [Graham Denyer Willis](#) (University of Cambridge)

Description: For over four decades, drug trafficking gangs have monopolized violence and engaged in various forms of governance across hundreds of informal neighborhoods known as favelas in Rio de Janeiro. Drawing on three years of ethnographic fieldwork, over 200 interviews with gang members and residents, 400 archival documents, and 20,000 anonymous hotline denunciations of gang members, this book provides a comprehensive examination of the causes and consequences of these governance arrangements. The book documents the variation in gang-resident relationships – from responsive relations in which gangs provide a reliable form of order and stimulate the local economy, to coercive and unresponsive relations in which gangs offers residents few benefits – then identifies the factors that account for this variation. The result is an unprecedented ethnographic study that provides readers a unique, in-depth insight into the evolution of Rio de Janeiro's drug trafficking gangs from their emergence in the 1970s to the present day.



Nicholas Barnes is a visiting scholar at Columbia University's Institute of Latin American Studies (ILAS) and a Senior Lecturer in the School of International Relations at the University of St. Andrews. He is the current recipient of several awards and research grants, including a Harry Frank Guggenheim Fellowship, a Leverhulme Trust Research Fellowship, and a Royal Society of Edinburgh Personal Research Fellowship. After receiving his PhD in Political Science at the University of Wisconsin–Madison in 2017, he was a Postdoctoral Fellow at Brown University's Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs (2017-19).

His recently published book, *Inside Criminalized Governance: How and Why Gangs Rule the Streets of Rio de Janeiro* (Cambridge University Press), is based on three years of ethnographic fieldwork in Rio de Janeiro's favelas. His research has also been published in *Comparative Political Studies*, *Perspectives on Politics*, *Current Sociology*, *Latin American Research Review*, *Civil Wars*, and the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice*.

CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS

INSIDE CRIMINALIZED GOVERNANCE

How and Why Gangs Rule
the Streets of Rio de Janeiro

NICHOLAS BARNES

