

Exploring Graffiti Removal Requests and Murals in Response to Neighborhood Change

Manali Desai | 12/8/2019 | SI 535

“Different motivations drive different types of graffiti, and graffiti cannot be understood or controlled without an understanding of the motivations behind its creation.” -Gomez, 1993

Graffiti as a broad category has many types, from tagging to graffiti art murals(definitions below), with different motivations behind them. Whether sanctioned or not, there is a spectrum where graffiti is seen as urban decay and for others as urban renewal. The city of Chicago has a 311 graffiti removal service request form where citizens can request the removal of “graffiti” as they perceive it, which can mistakenly include sanctioned works like murals.

In recent years Chicago has been cracking down on graffiti removal, however this has led to incidents of the city painting over valuable/sanctioned graffiti art murals, due to misconceptions of graffiti by both the city and residents. The city recently created the Mural Registry to prevent further incidents and protect murals (Zhao, 2019). However, there are many restrictions placed on who can register(must be an organization or mural owner) making it's growth slow and inadequate, with many murals left out vulnerable to tagging and vandalism.

By exploring the relationship graffiti removal requests have to the urban landscape and its relationship to murals/graffiti art, the city can better understand the impact graffiti has on neighborhoods and gain insight into the motivations and relationships between them. This would ideally lead to better protection of murals, and improvement in the graffiti removal system by obtaining more granular data on the types and motivations behind graffiti requested for removal.

QUESTIONS

- Where is graffiti commonly located?
- Is change in graffiti removal requests correlated to indicators of gentrification (college graduates, white population)?
- What neighborhoods have the most graffiti requests?
- When and where were most registered murals created?
- What relationships can be found between murals, graffiti requests and factors of neighborhood change(white and college grad population)?

METHODS

- To account for variation in the total number of Graffiti Removal Requests per year (Fig 1), the percentage of requests each neighborhood accounted for each year was used for calculations.
- To calculate the change over time, the absolute difference between values for 2 time periods was taken.
- Carto was used for mapping data to neighborhoods
 - 6 buckets and Jenks method was used for bucketing ranges
- Pandas Seaborn, Tableau, and Chicago Data Portal were used for calculations and plots

DEFINITIONS

- GRAFFITI - Umbrella term for styles of public writings/drawings used for communication/expression, usually illegal.
- GRAFFITI ART - Style of graffiti with the intention and characteristics of art pieces. Can be sanctioned or not. (Gomez, 1993)
 - TAGGING/GANG GRAFFITI - Scrawlings and tags used to mark territory and vandalism (Gomez, 1993).
- MURAL - Publicly visible sanctioned wall art. Often in graffiti art style.

Total Graffiti Removal Requests: 962,748 *Between 2011-2018

Fig 1: Graffiti Removal Requests per Year

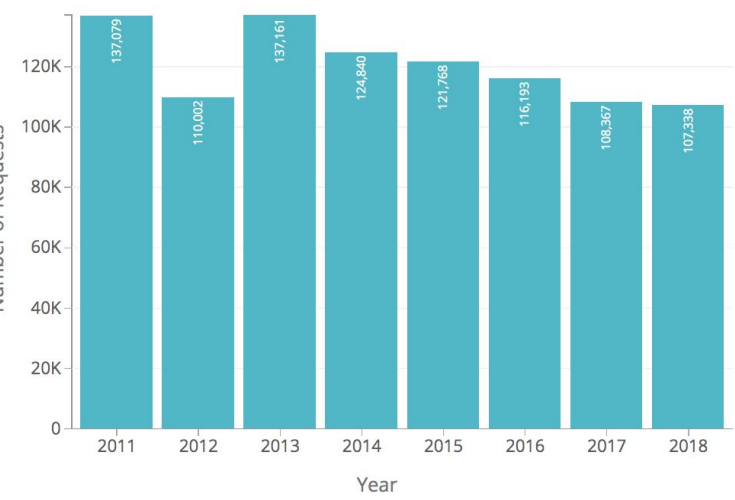
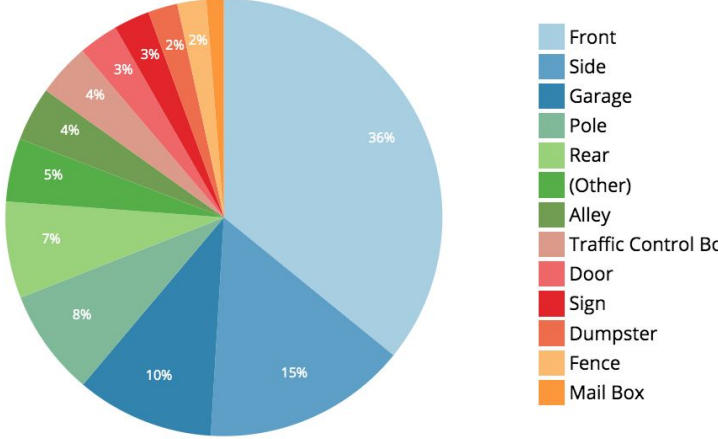


Fig 2: Where the Graffiti is located



Removal requests are on a general decline

Majority of graffiti from requests are located on the front, side and garages of buildings

Fig 3: Graffiti Removal Requests

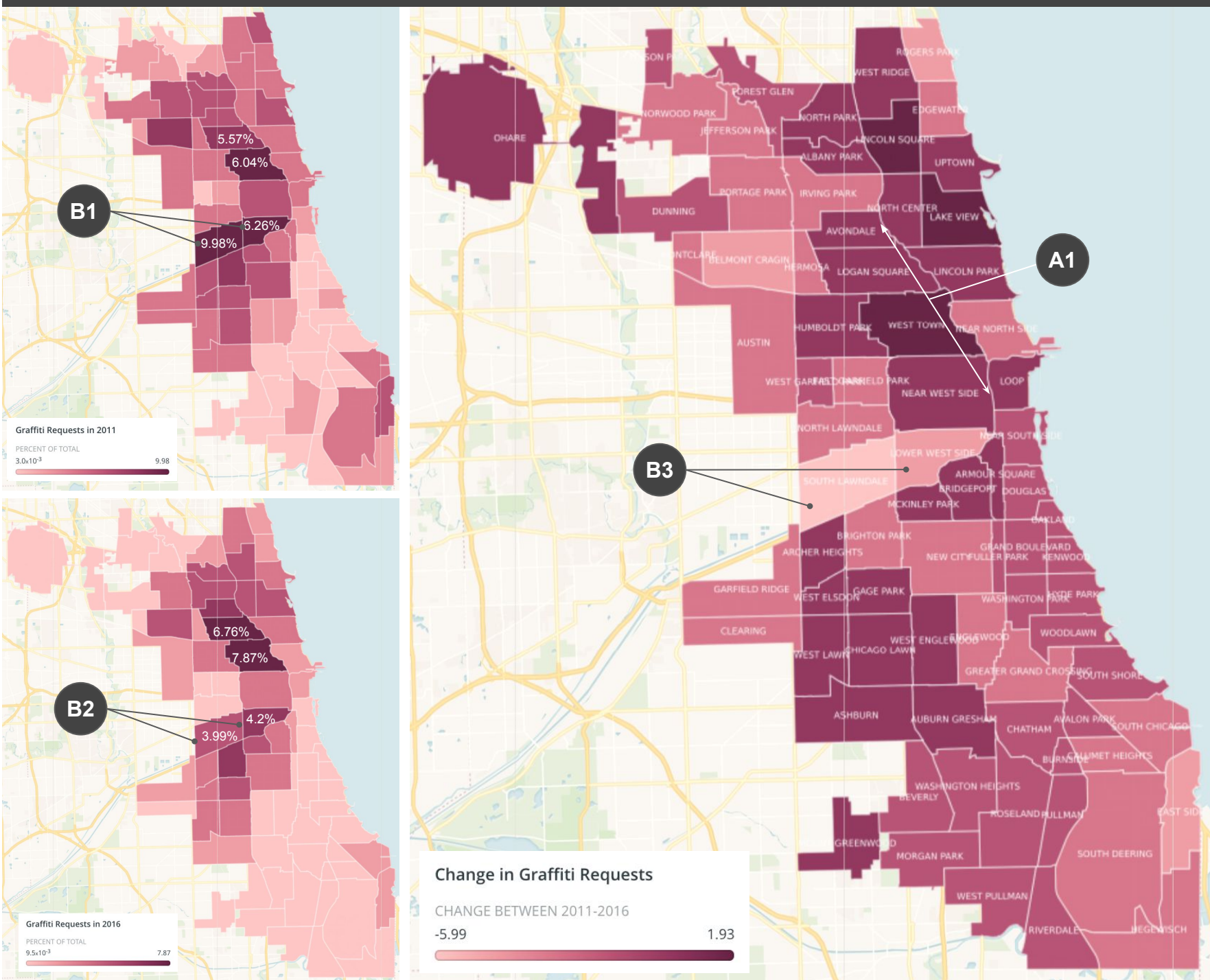


Fig 4: Non-hispanic White Population

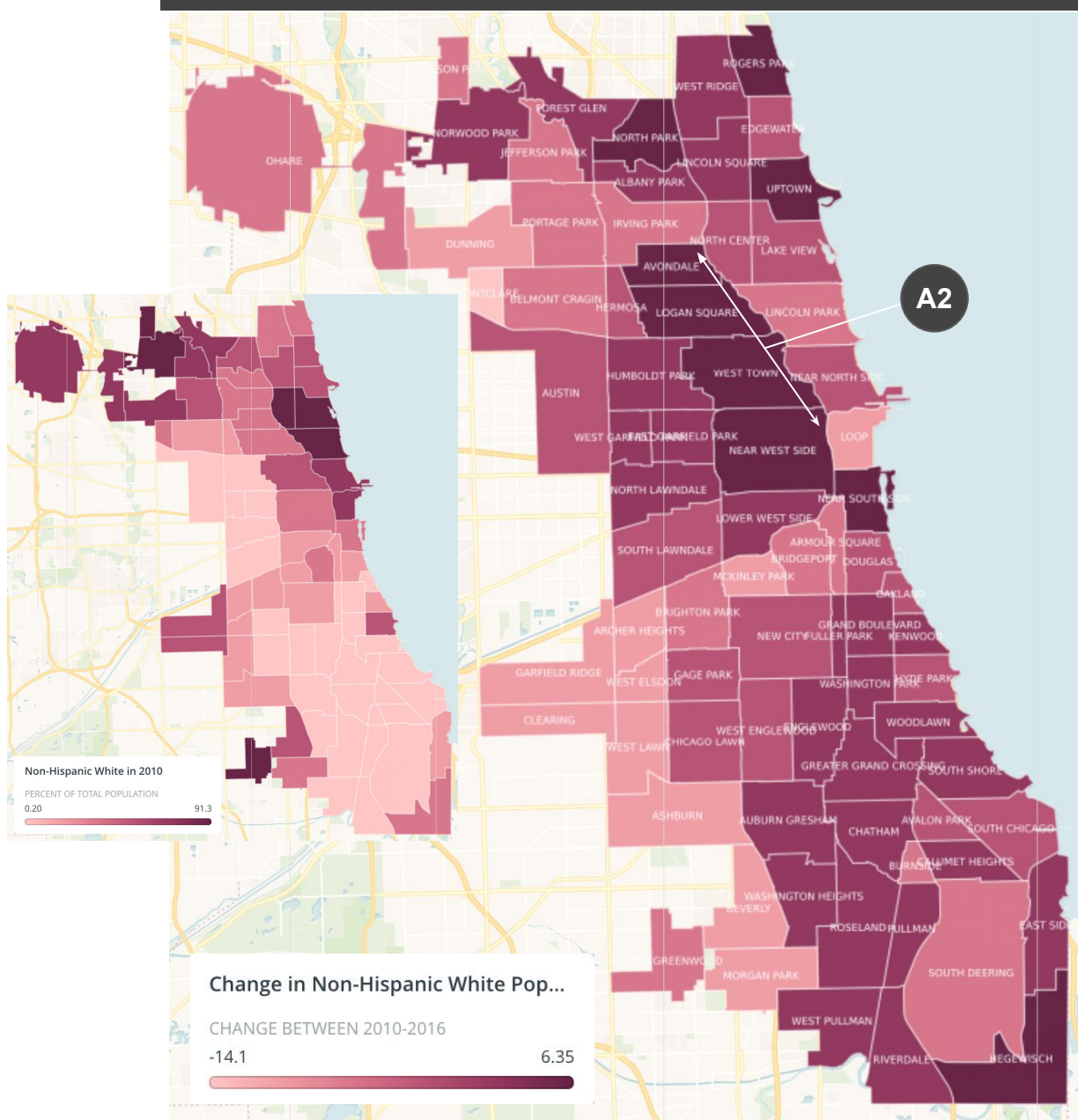
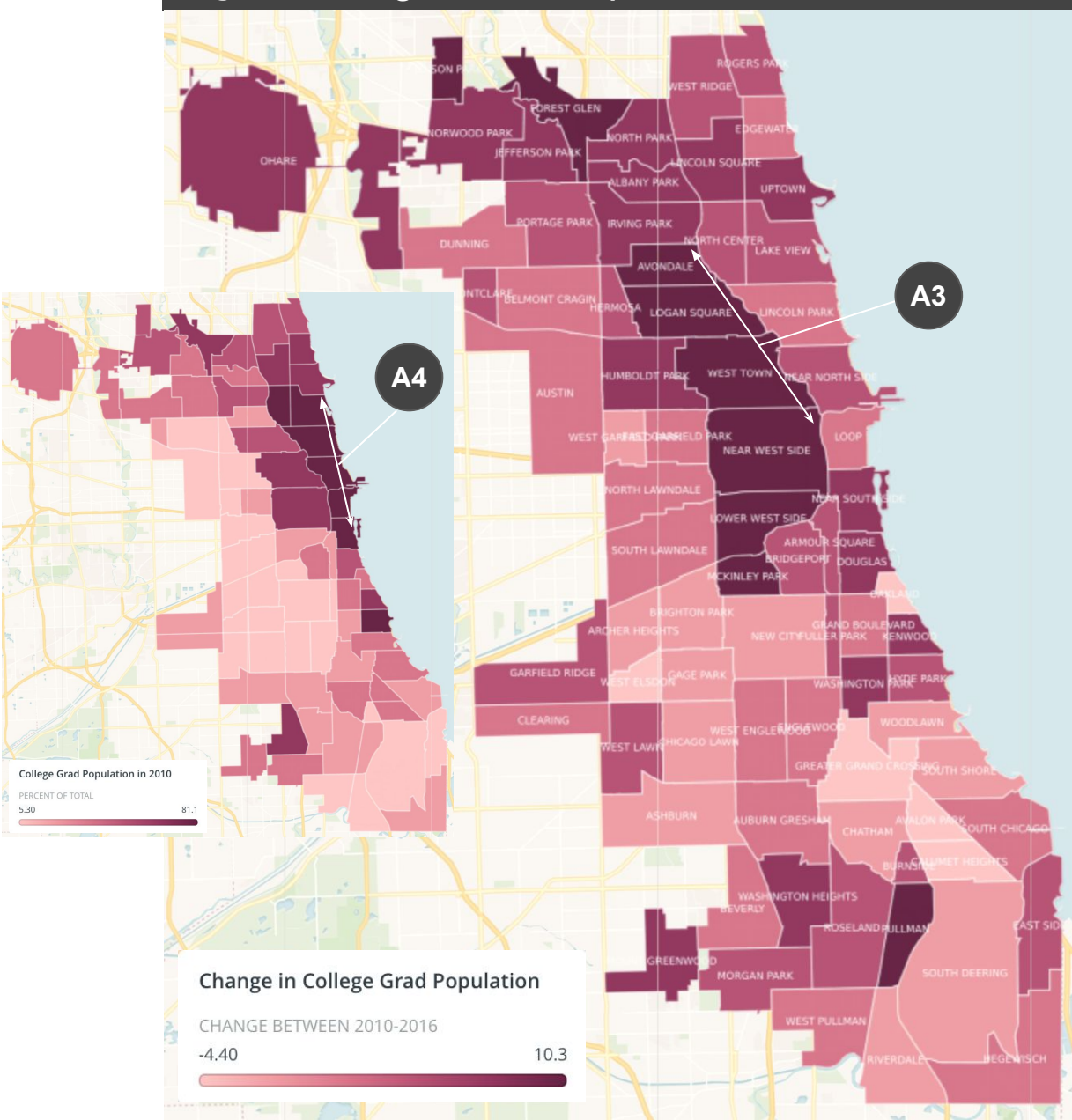


Fig 5: College Grad Population



REFERENCES

- Gomez, M. (1993). The Writing on Our Walls: Finding Solutions Through Distinguishing Graffiti Art from Graffiti Vandalism. *University of Michigan Journal of Law Reform*. V 26.
- Zhao, Lu (2019) Chicago's mural registry growing in some neighborhoods bur art vs. graffiti debate leaves other behind. *Block Club Chicago*
- Glaeser, E. et al (2018) Measuring gentrification: using yelp data to quantify neighborhood change. *National Bureau Of Economic Research*.

DATA SOURCES

311 Graffiti Removal Requests (2011-2018) - Chicago Data Portal
Percent College Educated (2006-2010, 2012-2016) - American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates
Unemployment Rates (2006-2010, 2012-2016) - American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates
Non Hispanic White Population (2006-2010, 2012-2016) - American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates
Chicago Mural Registry - Chicago Data Portal

Neighborhoods with the most registered murals are South Lawndale, West Town and the Loop

Fig 7: Registered Murals by Installation Year

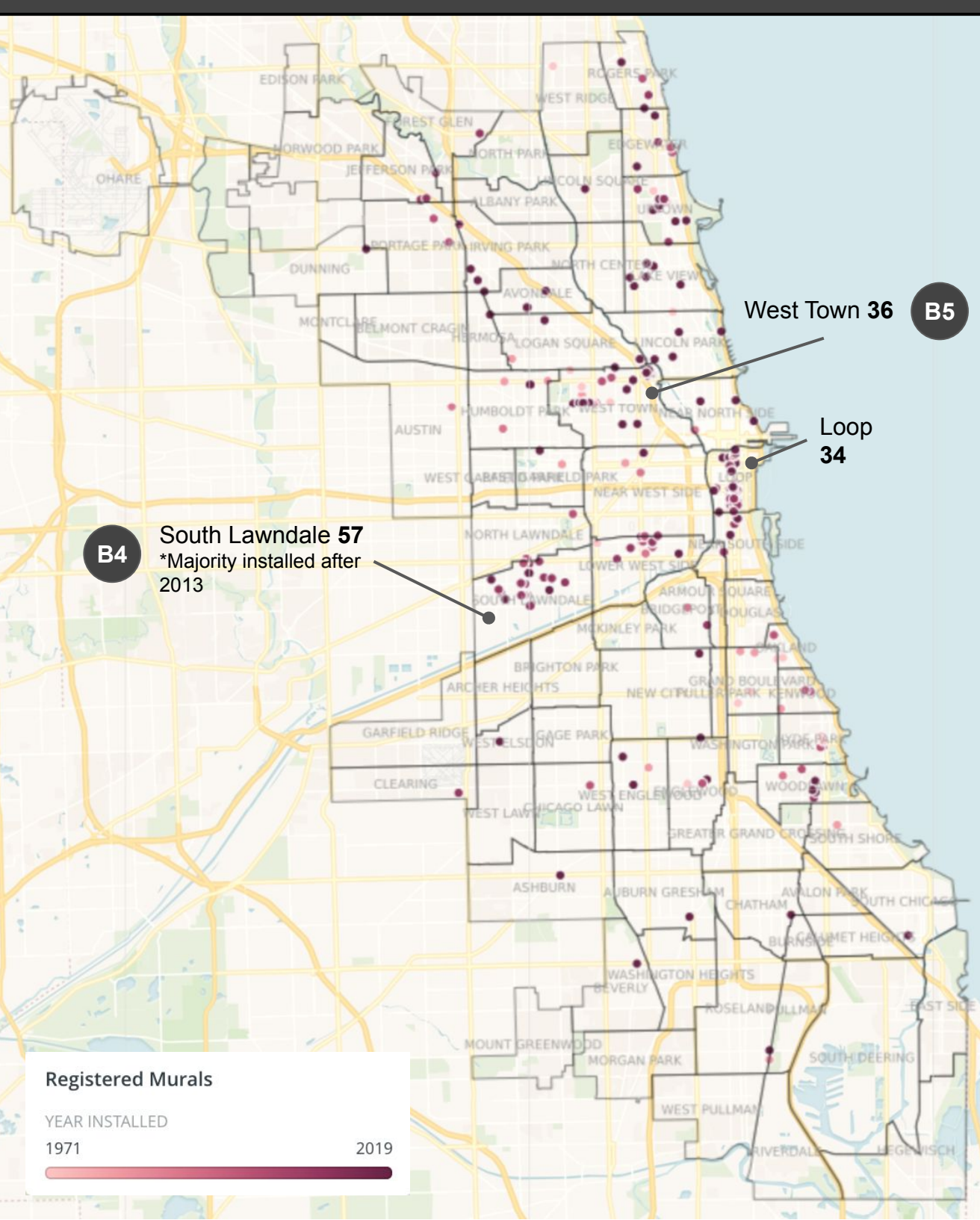


Fig 6: Correlation Coefficients

	% Change in Graffiti Requests
Change in College Grads	0.166
Change in Non Hispanic White Population	0.0833

DISCUSSION

- A The central cluster of north side areas with an increase in graffiti removal requests(A1) also have increases in college grads & white population (A2 & A3), which are indicators of gentrification. This is a shift directly west of areas already predominately white and educated(A4).** While the correlation coefficients didn't show any direct city wide correlation between requests and change factors(Fig6), this finding suggests there may be a correlation between an increase in graffiti requests and areas experiencing gentrification.
- B South Lawndale and Lower West Side went from having the highest removal requests in 2011(B1), following an installation of many murals(B4) they had the greatest reduction by 2016(B2 & B3).** It's unclear whether the creation of murals in South Lawndale significantly impacted this, as West Town with the 2nd greatest increase in requests despite having the 2nd most registered murals(B5). However from my experience, unlike West Town, South Lawndale and Lower West Side are primarily latinx areas threatened by gentrification (Lower West Side especially) but have strongly resisted and slowed it. They are still in the early stages, unlike many other northern areas that are further along. This suggests that in the beginning of gentrification graffiti requests may decrease, and as displacement continues requests increase. Both areas also have a strong graffiti art and mexican art heritage. By getting more information on the types of graffiti in these areas we can gain insight into the motivations behind these changes and if different types and locations of graffiti can reflect neighborhood discontentment to such changes.

It's unclear how accurately graffiti requests reflects graffiti in areas, and if changes in requests are really due to changes in demographics and 311 reporting culture in these areas. An empirical analysis on the motivations behind graffiti, resident views of it and the 311 system would useful in gaining insight into these motivations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

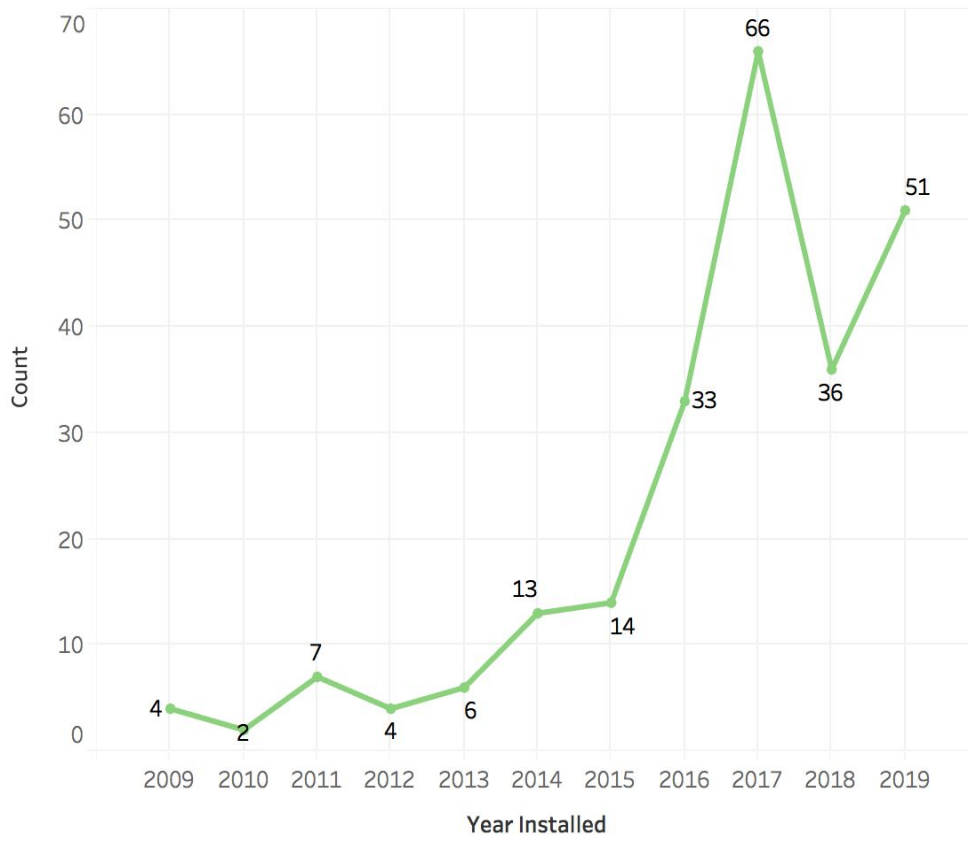
The city should consider including characteristic fields in the removal requests, such as tagging or if vandalizing a mural, to better examine the types of graffiti and their relationship to different areas. The city should also be more proactive in getting murals registered by reaching out to other institutions and orgs to register murals(Fig8). This would allow for deeper exploration on the relationships between murals, graffiti and neighborhoods.

Total Registered Murals: 294*

*Since April 2019 - There are hundreds more murals in Chicago that are unregistered. The total number of murals are unknown.

Fig 9: Registered Murals by Installation Year

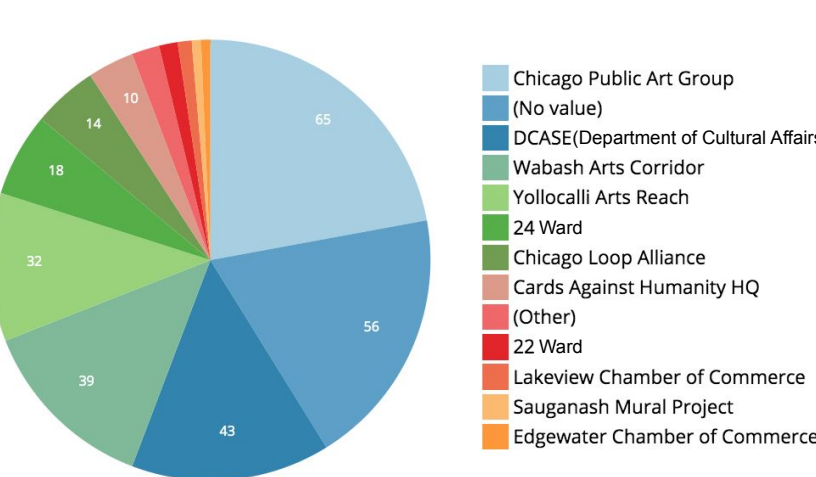
*excludes the few installed prior to 2009



Majority of registered murals were installed between 2016 to 2019

2017 had the most

Fig 8: Groups Registering Murals



Majority of murals are registered by public and nonprofit organizations.

Card Against Humanity being the only major exception - the city removed one of their murals thinking it was graffiti, which led to the creation of the registry.