

**THE CONDITIONAL EFFECTS OF RACE AND POLITICS ON SOCIAL CONTROL:
BLACK VIOLENT CRIME ARRESTS IN LARGE CITIES, 1970-1990***

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*Data collection was supported, in part, by a National Science Foundation Grant (#SES-0002291), and the Center for Criminology and Socio-Legal Studies at the University of Iowa and by an Indiana University- Purdue University at Fort Wayne summer research grant.

This is the author's manuscript of the article published in final edited form as:
Stucky, T. D. (2011). The Conditional Effects of Race and Politics on Social Control: Black
Violent Crime Arrests in Large Cities, 1970 to 1990. *Journal of Research in Crime and
Delinquency*, 0022427810393020. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022427810393020>

THE CONDITIONAL EFFECTS OF RACE AND POLITICS ON SOCIAL CONTROL: BLACK VIOLENT CRIME ARRESTS IN LARGE CITIES, 1970-1990

Numerous studies of the determinants of formal social control of Blacks focus on racial threat arguments, which contain implicit or explicit political elements. Using insights from research on politics and social control more generally, this paper argues that the relationship between variation in the racial composition of a city and social control of minorities will be conditional on characteristics of the local political system. Hypotheses are tested using pooled cross-sectional time-series data on 100 large U.S. cities in 1970, 1980 and 1990. Contrary to expectations, Black violent crime arrest rates are curvilinearly negatively associated with larger percentages of Black residents. As predicted, the relationship between the percentage of Black residents and Black violent crime arrest rates is conditional on city political system characteristics (elected mayors, district council elections, partisan ballots), the race of the mayor, and the percentage of city council members who are Black.

Keywords: Racial Threat, Politics, Social Control

Introduction

It is widely known that African Americans are overrepresented among arrestees in the United States (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2003). One common explanation is some form of ‘racial threat’ argument, often grounded in Blalock’s (1967) work. Blalock (1967) argued that racial and ethnic minorities will be considered a threat to the majority group when there is perceived to be political or economic competition.¹ As a result, the racial majority group responds to this perceived threat by pressuring the government to increase social control activities such as arrest and imprisonment against the minority group to maintain power.

Racial threat arguments are typically based on conflict theories of the state, which view the government as organized to maintain the interests of the racial (and economic) majority. Yet, since these racial threat arguments were developed, some political sociologists have argued for an alternative view of the state, wherein state policies are not simply a reflection of elite interests (e.g. Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol 1984; Hicks and Misra, 1993) (for a discussion see Stucky 2005: 33-37). Consistent with this view, Stucky, Heimer, and Lang (2007) argue that all states must maintain public order, but in democratic societies, because elected officials shape public policy, electoral politics are critically important in shaping how the state attempts to maintain social control.

Using this alternative conception of the state, this paper develops hypotheses about the conditional nature of the relationship between the racial composition of an area and formal social control of minorities. Given the local nature of most formal social control activities, I focus on city politics. Specifically, I argue that the effect of variation in the racial composition of a city on formal social control of Blacks will depend on the structure of city government and minority representation on city councils and in the mayor’s office. These arguments are tested using pooled cross-sectional time-series data on Black violent crime arrest rates for 100 of the largest U.S. cities in 1970, 1980,

¹ Blalock’s arguments actually focused on private discrimination rather than state action.

and 1990. Results suggest the need for greater attention to the role of politics in studies of the relationship between racial composition and formal social control of minorities.

Racial Threat and Social Control against Blacks

Studies of the nexus between racial composition and social control of minorities, especially Blacks, have occupied considerable attention in criminological research (see for example Liska 1987, 1992).² Such studies have focused on how variation in racial composition influences: prison populations (e.g. Greenberg and West 2001); police strength (e.g. Cureton 2001; Jackson 1986, 1989; Jackson and Carroll 1981; Jacobs 1979, 1997; Kane 2003; Kent and Jacobs 2004, 2005; Sever 2001, 2003; Stucky 2005; Stults and Baumer 2007), deadly force by police (Jacobs and O'Brien 1998), police misconduct (Kane 2002), and arrests (Brown and Warner 1990; Liska and Chamlin 1984; Liska, Chamlin, and Reed 1985; Ousey and Lee 2008; Stolzenberg, D'Alessio, and Eitle 2004), as well as informal social control such as lynchings (Corzine, Huff-Corzine, Creech 1988; Creech, Corzine, and Huff-Corzine 1989; Olzak 1990). Much of this research relies on racial threat arguments (see Blalock 1967; Blauner 1972; Horowitz 1985), which posit that formal social control efforts are an attempt by the racial majority to maintain its dominance in the face of (real or perceived) threat or competition from racial minority groups (see D'Alessio and Stolzenberg 2003; D'Alessio, Stolzenberg, and Eitle 2002; Eitle, D'Alessio and Stolzenberg 2002).

Although common in social control research, such racial threat arguments often contain significant ambiguity (Liska 1987; Parker, et al. 2005). For instance, Blalock (1967) argued that variation in the minority population will only be associated with higher levels of social control against that group up to a certain threshold, beyond which the size of the minority groups will make them likely to be a political force (for a discussion see D'Alessio et al. 2002; Eitle et al. 2002). Such

² Although Blacks are not the only minority group in the United States, their history and current overrepresentation in the criminal justice system justify looking at social control against this group specifically, particularly for the period under study—1970 to 1990.

an argument suggests a *curvilinear* relationship between the size of the minority population and social control. Yet, many studies include only a *linear* percent black variable (e.g. Cureton 2001; Jacobs 1979; Jacobs and Carmichael 2002; Parker et al. 2005). Others include a squared term or the natural log transformation (Kent and Jacobs 2005; Ousey and Lee 2008; Sever 2001, 2003; Stucky 2005). Some studies even find a negative effect of percent black on social control, positing ‘benign neglect’, such that larger minority populations are not perceived to be a threat to majority interests because of substantial racial segregation in many cities (Liska and Chamlin 1984; see also Ousey and Lee 2008; Parker et al. 2005), and the fact that most crime is *intra-racial*. Thus, because the white majority sees crime as someone else’s problem, formal social control against minorities is less frequent where the minority population is larger.

Another source of ambiguity in this research is the source of the threat. Eitle et al. (2002) note three distinct forms of racial threat—economic, political, and the threat of Black on white crime. Some focus on the perceived threat to majority interests due to economic competition from minority groups (e.g. Beck and Tolnay 1990; Bonacich 1972; Olzak 1990, 1992).³ Others focus on economic inequality (e.g. Jacobs 1979). Still others suggest that absolute minority disadvantage is more important than inequality (Parker et al. 2005). A second source of threat is interracial crime. From this view, whites perceive a greater likelihood of criminal victimization when minority populations are larger, particularly young Black males, who are seen as especially threatening (see Spitzer 1975).

Finally, some focus on political competition (e.g. Cureton 2001; Kent and Jacobs 2005). As noted, Blalock’s work asserted that greater social control of minorities is only expected up to a certain threshold, beyond which the minority group can become a political force. Thus, the state must be cognizant of the (potential) political clout of racial minorities once they reach a certain

³ See also Parker (2008) who integrates race and economic competition in her excellent explanation of uneven crime decline across cities. Unfortunately this explanation though mentioning political threat did not include any political measures possibly because crime rather than formal social control was the focus of the book.

percentage of the voting population and social control against minorities is expected to be lower (see D'Alessio et al. 2002; Eitle et al. 2002). Until recently, however, few studies have included *any* measures of politics and those that do usually include single indicators of minority representation. For example, Jacobs and colleagues (Jacobs and Carmichael 2002; Jacobs and Wood 1999; Ousey and Lee 2008) included categorical variables for the presence of a Black mayor, arguing that a Black mayor will be associated with increased Black political efficacy, thus reducing the need for formal social control of minorities. Yet, such research has produced conflicting results. Jacobs and Carmichael (2002) found that violence against police is less likely in cities with African-American mayors and Jacobs and Wood (1999) found that Blacks killed Whites less frequently in cities with African-American mayors (see also Jacobs and O'Brien 1998). Yet, other studies show no effects (e.g. D'Alessio et al. 2002; Eitle et al. 2002; Ousey and Lee 2008; Parker et al. 2005; Shihadeh and Flynn 1996). Despite the inclusion of political indicators in some recent racial threat research, I argue these studies have not fully considered the implications of politics for social control.

As noted, the racial threat literature is based on conflict perspectives. Because, from this perspective, the state is organized to represent the interests of the racial (and economic) majority, the government is expected to respond to pressure from the racial majority to address the threat posed by minority populations with greater formal social control against minorities. Thus, public policies for crime control reflect the desires of the powerful—in this case the racial majority. Yet, as noted, some more recent conceptions of the state reflected in the work of Evans et al. (1984) and Hicks and Misra (1993) among others (for a discussion see Stucky 2005: 33-37) suggest that in democratic societies, governments are not simply organized to represent the interests of the powerful. From this perspective, political system characteristics, the independent interests of elected officials, and the

interests of various groups in society combine to produce public policies.⁴ Applying this perspective to formal social control generally, Stucky et al. (2007) argue that in determining corrections expenditures elected state officials consider both the maintenance of social order and electoral politics. Few would contest the point that a central concern of governments is maintaining order. Thus, threats (real or perceived) to public order are expected to produce state action. Yet, in democratic states, elected leaders hold power only by maintaining enough political support to get re-elected. Therefore, public policies, including formal social control are inextricably linked to electoral politics. I argue that focusing on electoral politics can provide fresh insights on the formal social control of minorities.

In prior racial threat research, the implicit assumption has been that on average governments will respond similarly to pressure by the racial majority for increased social control of minorities. From the conflict view, the state is a tool of the racial majority. Yet, some argue that state policies are not simply a reflection of elite interests. If state actors have their own interests apart from elites, the exploration of politics can inform social control and racial threat. Because most formal social control activities are local, I now turn to local politics research.

Local Politics: The Legacy of Reform

To combat the corrupt political machines that dominated American cities, late 19th Century reformers introduced several changes, including: changing from an elected mayor to an appointed “professional” city manager, moving from district-based to city-wide city council elections, and non-partisan elections (see Banfield and Wilson 1963; Bridges and Kronick 1999; Knoke 1982). Although ostensibly to reduce corruption, reforms were also designed to limit the political influence of minority and poor groups (Bridges and Kronick 1999; Hofstadter 1955). In the South, reforms

⁴ See for example Amenta 1998; Amenta and Halfmann 2000 for applications of this approach to social welfare policies.

were so tied to deleterious effects on Black political representation that court cases challenged their constitutionality (see Bullock and MacManus 1993). In the late 20th century (often due to legal pressure from minority groups), many cities returned to ‘unreformed’ or what Stucky (2003) refers to as ‘traditional’ political systems (i.e. elected mayors, district-based council elections, and partisan ballots).

Research has shown that modern variation in local political systems based on these reforms can have a number of political and social consequences for Blacks. For example, cities with at-large elections tend to have fewer Black council members (see Bullock and MacManus 1993; Sass and Mehay 1995; Sass and Pittman 2000; Welch 1990). Welch and Bledsoe (1988) also found that district-elected council members place a higher priority on the needs of their own districts, whereas at-large council members focus more on the entire city. Thus, if Black representatives are more likely to be elected in district-based elections and district councilors focus more heavily on the needs of their own constituents (which typically have more Black residents), one might expect more benefits to accrue to Black residents/ neighborhoods in district cities. Redistributive spending also tends to be higher in district cities (Wong 1988), because such systems represent the preferences of geographically concentrated groups better than at-large cities (Langbein, Crewson, and Brasher 1996). Bledsoe (1986) also found that Blacks have a stronger belief that they have a say in local government in district cities. Thus, district political systems appear to increase Black representation in local government, political efficacy of Black residents, and the responsiveness of city council members to geographically concentrated groups, which is especially beneficial for Black neighborhoods due to clustering of Black residents in certain neighborhoods.

Research also suggests that partisan systems moderately favor representation of poor and minority groups on city councils because political parties provide an organizational resource that the poor and minorities can use to mobilize voters (Welch and Bledsoe 1988). Voter turnout—especially

among poor and minority voters—is also lower on average in non-partisan cities (Alford and Lee 1968; Karnig and Walter 1977, 1983). Partisan governments are also more responsive to citizen concerns, especially disadvantaged groups (Hansen 1975; Shumaker and Getter 1983). Thus, if party competition increases voter turnout and responsiveness, one would expect that Blacks would have more influence in partisan than non-partisan cities.

City form of government has also been posited to influence the susceptibility of city government to public pressure. For instance, Wilson and Boland (1978) found that police are more aggressive in city manager cities, which they claim results from the relatively greater insulation of city managers from public pressure by voters. Similarly, Kent and Jacobs (2005) found that city managers cities had fewer police per capita on average, which they attribute to the greater susceptibility of elected mayors to public pressure to do something about crime.

In sum, variation in the nature of city governments appears to condition the ability of minority groups to gain representation of their interests in the city. In the next section, these insights are applied to racial threat arguments to develop a more sophisticated view of the conditional relationship between local politics, racial composition, and social control of minorities.

Conditional Effects of Race and Politics on Social Control against Blacks

Recall that racial threat arguments, drawing on conflict theories, suggest that the size of the minority population is expected to be related to social control against minorities. Yet, Blalock argue that higher levels of social control should be expected *up to the point* at which racial minority groups become large enough to become a political force. This argument implicitly recognizes the possibility of political power by minority groups. The research discussed above suggests that not all city governments will be equally susceptible to political pressure, especially by minority groups. Some city political systems—those with elected mayors, partisan elections, and district-based city council representation—appear to be more open to political representation of minority group interests than

others. Recall that the alternative view of the state described above suggests that two basic considerations of democratic governments are social order and electoral politics. Thus, elected officials can be expected to respond to (real or perceived) threats to the social order but must also consider how these actions affect their chances of reelection. Below I discuss two avenues by which political variation can be expected to condition the relationship between racial composition and social control of minorities.

Recall that racial threat studies typically posit that the percentage of a city's residents who are Black will be directly (or curvilinearly) related to formal social control activities directed against Blacks. Thus, studies typically include a measure of the percent Black (though sometimes squared or logged). Yet, specified in this way, such a model assumes that governments will on average respond similarly to variation in the size of Black populations. I argue that this is an oversimplified view of the racial composition → minority social control relationship. The research on city politics discussed above suggests that some governments appear to be more susceptible to Black political pressure than others. Thus, one can expect that governments in traditional cities (elected mayors, partisan elections, district councils) will be more likely to be concerned with the swing vote that minority groups can represent to maintain their jobs. Therefore, the impact of variation in the racial composition of a city on social control directed at minority groups cannot be viewed separately from this political context. Consistent with this, Stucky (2005) found that the effect of city racial composition on the number of police per capita depended on whether the city political system was traditional or reformed. Thus, I hypothesize that the effect of variation in the percentage of city residents who are Black on formal social control of Blacks will be conditional on whether the city is traditional or reformed (hypothesis 1).

Prior social control research has mainly focused on the effects of representation of Blacks within the government such as a Black mayor (e.g. Jacobs and Carmichael 2002; Jacobs and O'Brien

1998; Parker et al. 2005) or Black city council representation (Shihadeh and Flynn 1996). Jacobs and Carmichael (2002) suggest that Black mayors may reduce Black violence (and arrests) by reducing feelings of injustice and increases feelings of political efficacy. Yet, greater Black political efficacy may be associated with Blacks taking a larger role in local politics and having more power to exert pressure on the government to reduce social control activities directed at minorities. Studies have also shown that Black city council representation and the presence of a Black mayor are associated with the creation of civilian police review boards (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984; Salzstein 1989) and greater Black police employment (Dye and Renick 1981; Kerr and Mladenka 1994; Salzstein 1989). If Black mayors or Black city council representation lead to greater empowerment in Black communities, it is plausible that the racial majority will be less able to press for greater control of minorities and formal social control directed at minorities will be lower. It is also reasonable to examine whether the effect of variation in the percentage of city residents who are Black on social control of Blacks is conditioned by physical representation in the local government. Because prior research has focused on the race of the mayor (hypothesis 2), and Black representation on city councils (hypothesis 3), I test for these additional interaction effects in the current study.

Table 1. Hypothesized Relationships between Racial Composition, Local Politics, and Formal Social Control of Blacks.

- Hypothesis 1. The relationship between the percentage of city residents who are Black and formal social control against Blacks will be conditional on whether the city political system is reformed or traditional.
- Hypothesis 2. The relationship between the percentage of city residents who are Black and formal social control against Blacks will be conditional on whether the city has a Black mayor.
- Hypothesis 3. The relationship between the percentage of city residents who are Black and formal social control against Blacks will be conditional on the degree of Black representation on the city council.
-

In sum, prior studies of “racial threat”, typically based on conflict perspectives, have suggested that variation in the racial composition of an area will be associated with variation in formal social control against Blacks. Although this argument contains implicit political elements,

some prior studies have included only limited political measures with mixed results. The view of the state adopted here suggests that the desire to maintain social order *and electoral politics* jointly influence formal social control activities directed at Blacks. Because some local governments are more likely to permit physical representation of Blacks and are more susceptible to Black political pressure, variation in political systems is expected to have important consequences for social control activities directed against Blacks, and condition the relationship between variation in black populations and social control of Blacks.

Data and Methods

Pooled cross-sectional time-series regression techniques are used to test these hypotheses with data on 100 of the largest U.S. cities in 1970, 1980, and 1990 (more on the statistical model below). Demographic and crime data come from the *Urban Underclass Database* (UUD) (Kasarda 1993), which contains variables on the economic and social conditions and arrest data from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting program for large cities with major underclass populations. This dataset contains more than 80% of cities in the United States with significant urban underclass populations and includes cities with a wide range of population sizes from just over 100,000 to the largest cities in the United States (Kasarda 1993). Data on local political systems were gathered from *The Municipal Yearbook* (various years) and from International County/ City Management Association *Form of Government* surveys in 1981 and 1991 (Urban Data Service 1982, 1992).

Dependent Variable

As noted, previous studies have considered a variety of measures of social control. Arrests were chosen here because they are one of the most visible and widely-studied aspects of formal social control. In addition, much of the research focuses on violence (e.g. Jacobs and Carmichael

2002; Jacobs and O'Brien 1998; Jacobs and Wood 1999; Parker et al. 2005).⁵ Therefore, the current study focuses on Black violent crime arrests. To reduce year-to-year fluctuations, a three-year average of arrests for Black violent crimes (murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault) was computed, and the rate per 100,000 Black city residents was calculated. The natural log of this variable was computed to reduce skewness. I also include the rate of overall reported violent crimes per 100,000 city residents because higher arrest rates of Blacks might simply be the result of higher violent crime rates overall (logged to reduce skewness).

Independent Variables

One key element in evaluating the arguments discussed above is the percentage of a city's residents who are Black. Because some racial threat arguments suggest a non-linear relationship (e.g. Jackson 1986, 1989), a squared term is also included. To test for the possibility that "social dynamite" groups pose a separate threat (Spitzer 1975), the percentage of the city's Black residents who are male ages 15 to 24 is also included.

To capture the effects of the political system characteristics discussed above, consistent with Stucky (2003, 2005), a *traditional government index* (TGI) was created, where 1 is added to the index when the form of government is mayor-council, at least some city council members are elected to represent geographical districts, or partisan labels appear on local election ballots (range = 0-3). Information on the race of elected officials came from the *National Roster of Black Elected Officials* (Joint Center for Political Studies 1970, 1980, 1990). A categorical variable called *Black mayor* is coded 1 if the city's mayor was African- American in a given year and 0 otherwise. To capture Black city council representation, *Black city council percent* is the percentage of city council members who are Black.

⁵ Although other offenses such as drug arrests, where police discretion is greater, might be interesting to examine, arrest information is not available across cities for the time period under study. In addition, major changes in drug enforcement efforts occurred during the time period studied.

Previous research has included measures of disadvantage but suggests they are highly correlated (e.g. Parker and McCall 1999; Parker et al. 2005). To reduce multicollinearity issues, an index called *Black disadvantage* was created. Principal components analyses produced a single factor including: intra-racial income inequality as measured by a gini index, the percent of Blacks not employed, the percent of Blacks living below the poverty line, and the percent of Black households that are female headed with children. Factor loadings ranged from .74 to .84. Factor scores for each city-year were generated based on these variables. Because research has also focused on racial inequality (e.g. Peterson and Krivo 1999), an index was created to tap *Black-White (BW) inequality*, which includes the ratio of Black to White median income, Black to White median years of education and Black- White unemployment ratio. Factor loadings ranged from .72 to .92.⁶

Some studies also have included measures of segregation (e.g. Logan and Messner 1987; Parker et al. 2005; Peterson and Krivo 1993; Shihadeh and Maume 1997). Such studies have often used the dissimilarity index, which captures the degree to which Blacks and Whites are not evenly distributed across areas of a city. A second measure, the *exposure* index, captures the degree to which individual blacks and whites can expect to physically interact with one another because they share common residential areas (Massey and Denton 1988). Although related, the dissimilarity index depends on the relative size of the two groups, whereas the exposure index does not (Massey and Denton 1988).⁷ Finally, because cities with larger police forces may have more Black arrests on average, the number of police per capita is also included.⁸

⁶ Inclusion of these indices in analogous OLS regression equations, substantially reduced maximum VIFs (less than 4.5), suggesting that multicollinearity did not affect reported results.

⁷ Substantive conclusions were similar when the dissimilarity index was substituted.

⁸ Of course, this measure itself is often seen as an indicator of formal social control (e.g. Jackson 1986, 1989; Stucky 2005).

Statistical Model

The pooled cross-sectional time series (PCTS) approach employed here has become common in public policy research (Phillips and Greenberg 2008; Stimson 1994). One advantage of PCTS models is that they capture variation across cities during one time period and variation over time within cities, greatly increasing statistical power over longitudinal or cross-sectional models (see Berk, Hoffman, Maki, Rauma, and Wong 1979; Kent and Jacobs 2005:733). The current study is based on 254 data points (100 cities over 3 time points minus 46 city-years with missing data).⁹

The statistical model is specified as a general linear mixed model and fit using PROC MIXED in SAS. I employ empirically-adjusted standard errors, which makes inferences about fixed effect parameters relatively robust to misspecifications of the correlation structure (cf. Huber, 1967; White, 1980). To account for the time series nature of the data, I also include an auto-correlated (AR(1)) error structure. Random effects for both city and year (suppressed to save space in Table 2) are included in the models to avoid biased estimates due to unobserved heterogeneity unique to each city, as well as period effects for each year included in the analysis (see Phillips and Greenberg 2008).¹⁰ In addition, because even the large cities included in the current sample vary in size from approximately 117,000 to more than 7.3 million residents, a population weight is included in the analyses reported below. In effect, the residual dispersion can be greater for smaller cities than larger ones, constituting a departure from the homogeneity of variance assumption and creating the potential that an un-weighted analysis could produce misleading results.¹¹ Finally, predictor

⁹ To determine whether missing data affected the results, I ran a logistic regression with a categorical variable for whether the city had information on Black violent crime arrests or not with the independent variables reported in Table 2 as predictors. None was a significant predictor of having missing data on Black arrests. Thus, missing data did not likely influence reported results. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

¹⁰ A more conservative approach is to include fixed city and state effects to control for unobserved heterogeneity, but this substantially reduces degrees of freedom. Models including fixed effects dummies for city and year produced substantively similar results to those presented in Table 2.

¹¹ Weighting by population does preclude the inclusion of population as an independent variable, however.

variables were centered to reduce artificially induced multicollinearity that could result from inclusion of the interaction terms necessary to test the hypotheses discussed above (see Aiken and West 1991). Centering was accomplished by subtracting the overall (grand) variable mean from the individual city value.

Results

Table 1 presents means for key variables reported in Table 2 for each time period, broken down by city political system and percent black. For each period the left columns refer to cities that are below average on the TGS index (i.e. most reformed). The right column refer to cities with average or greater values on the TGS index (i.e. most traditional). The table also separates cities with below average Black populations from those with average or above percentages of Black residents. In each period Black violent crime arrest rates are similar or lower in cities that are more traditional (i.e. elected mayor, district councils, and partisan ballots), despite having larger populations overall and substantially higher overall reported violent crime rates. For the 1970 period, more ‘traditional’ cities had only slightly higher Black violent crime arrest rates (2,283 v. 2,166 in cities with low percent Black, and 1,403 v. 1,522 in cities with high percent Black) despite having much larger city populations and higher reported violent crime rates than ‘reformed’ cities. For 1980, traditional cities actually had *lower* black violent crime arrest rates (2,470 v. 2,710 and 1,913 v. 2,076) than reformed cities despite traditional cities being larger, having higher levels of Black disadvantage, substantially higher reported overall crime rates. A similar pattern exists for 1990. Though not predicted by previous specifications of racial threat arguments, these results are consistent with the arguments advanced above.

Table 1 about here

Table 2 presents results of the maximum likelihood (ML) estimation of models predicting the natural log of Black violent crime arrest rates to test the hypotheses discussed above. To test the overall significance of the independent variables in the model, the ML estimate for the full model reported in equation 1 of Table 2 was compared to a model including only an intercept (and the random variables). Under the null hypothesis that the independent variables explain no more variation than the city and year random effects, the likelihood ratio statistic L^2 ($-2 * \text{the difference between log likelihoods of the two models}$), is distributed approximately as a chi-square distribution with 11 degrees of freedom. In this case, $L^2 = 43.9$ ($p < .001$), which indicates that the fixed effects covariates provide a substantially better fit than a model including only heterogeneity across cities and over time. Although not shown in the tables to conserve space, city and year random effects, and the AR-1 error process are statistically significant in all models ($p < .05$).¹²

Model 1 of Table 2 is included for comparison with extant studies of social control such as Parker et al. (2005). Not surprisingly, violent crime arrest rates for Blacks are significantly positively related to overall reported violent crime ($p < .001$) in all models in Table 2.¹³ Model 1 shows that the percent of the city that is Black has a curvilinear relationship with Black violent crime arrest rates. The coefficient for percent Black is negatively associated with black violent crime arrests (consistent with Parker et al. 2005). However, the percent Black squared term is positive and significant, suggesting that the relationship between percent Black and violent crime arrests is indeed curvilinear. But, as we will see below, the picture is even more complex when the size of the Black population is considered in conjunction with the political context of a city.

¹² Though one might also consider city and time interactions with the fixed effects presented in table 2, examining how the conditional curvilinear effects described below would vary over time periods and across cities would become extremely cumbersome. In addition space considerations preclude a full examination of such effects. Future research will consider this issue.

¹³ Although this might seem counterintuitive given, the results of Table 1, the bivariate correlation between black violent crime arrests and reported crime is $+.163$ ($p < .01$).

Contrary to expectations, the B-W inequality index and the percentage of young Black males are non-significant, but the Black disadvantage index is highly significantly positively related ($p < .001$) to Black violent crime arrests in all models in Table 2, net of other factors in the model. The exposure index is significantly positively related to Black violent crime arrest rates ($p < .05$), which means that when interracial exposure is higher so are Black violent crime arrests. The number of police officers per capita is also positively associated with Black violent crime arrests ($p < .001$) in all models in Table 2. In terms of the main effects for political variables, the TGS index is significantly negatively ($p < .05$) related to Black violent crime arrest rates. Consistent with some other studies showing no direct effect of these variables (e.g. D'Alessio et al. 2002; Eitle et al. 2002; Ousey and Lee 2008; Parker et al. 2005; Shihadeh and Flynn 1996), neither the presence of a Black mayor nor the percentage of the city council that is Black is *directly* related to Black violent crime arrest rates. However, equations 2-4 suggest *conditional* effects of all three political variables.

Table 2 about here

Model 2 adds an interaction term between the percent Black variables and the TGS index. Consistent with hypothesis 1, the relationship between percent black and violent crime arrests continues to be curvilinear but as the significant interaction terms with the traditional government index (TGI) show (see % Black*TGI and % Black squared*TGI coefficients), this relationship is conditional on the city's political system characteristics. To get a sense of these effects, Figure 1 shows the predicted violent crime arrest rates per 100,000 Blacks in cities with varying levels of percent Black and in various political systems, net of all other factors.¹⁴ The lines show three different types of political systems—the most reformed cities, cities at the TGI sample average, and the most traditional cities. Although the lines appear close together, this is due to the scale of the

¹⁴ Because the variables are centered, variables at the mean become zero and drop out of the prediction equation. Thus, the figure predicts violent crime arrests when all other variables are at their means.

graph. For example, in a city with 5% African American population, Black violent crime arrest rates would be predicted to be 31.5% lower (3,219 v. 4,233) in highly traditional cities than the most reformed. In a 50% African American city, Black violent crime arrest rates would be 10.2% (791 v. 979) lower in the most traditional cities than the most reformed cities.¹⁵ Thus, consistent with hypothesis 1, the relationship between the racial composition of an area and social control of Blacks is conditional on the city political context.

Figure 1 about here

Equation three includes interaction terms to test hypothesis 2. The significant interaction terms for Black mayor* percent Black and percent Black squared indicate that the effect of variation in the Black population on violent crime arrest rates is conditioned by the presence of a Black mayor. Figure 2 illustrates the predicted Black violent crime arrests in cities with varying percentages of Black residents with and without a Black mayor. Figure 2 shows that when the percentage of a city's residents who are Black is less than 15% and greater than 50% violent crime arrests for Blacks are lower in cities with a Black mayor.

Figure 2 about here

Equation 4 includes interaction terms for the percent of the city council members who are Black and the percent Black and percent Black squared. Consistent with hypothesis 3, the interaction terms are significant. Figure 3 illustrates the predicted violent crime arrest rates for Blacks when the percentage of the city council that is Black is low, and one and two standard deviations above average in cities with varying percentages of residents who are Black. Here again, predicted violent crime arrest rates for Blacks are higher when there is low Black representation on the city council than when Blacks are better represented when the percentage of the residents who are Black is below

¹⁵ Although most cases in the sample (N=159/254), had less than 25% Black populations, 22 cities had more than 50% African Americans.

15 percent and above 55 percent. One possible explanation for the findings that Black arrest rates are higher in cities with Black mayors and Black city council proportions between roughly 15 and 50% Black is due to white backlash against the perceived threat posed by the very visible sign of Black progress denoted by a Black mayor or Black representation on a city council (see e.g. Beckett 1997; Beckett and Sasson 2000; Giles and Buckner 1993; Giles and Hertz 1994 for discussions). In any event, it appears that the effect of racial composition on social control of Blacks is conditioned by the political context.

Figure 3 about here

Checks for Robustness

To determine the robustness of these findings, several additional analyses were conducted. First, although numerous additional interactions with political variables and percent Black variables were tested (e.g. black-white inequality index, Black disadvantage index, percentage of young Black males), none were significant. In addition, results were substantively similar when the unlogged version of the dependent variable was used. Models testing the ratio of black to white violent crime arrests or controlling for white violent crime arrest rates, rather than overall reported violent crime produced substantively similar conclusions on the hypotheses reported here.¹⁶ To determine whether the curvilinear negative percent Black effect was robust, an models excluding overall reported violent crime and other variables were examined. The effect was consistent across specifications. Finally, an analogous model using fixed city and year dummies produced similar results to the random effects models reported in Table 2.

¹⁶ Models including white violent crime arrests rates were less stable because of the high correlation between black and white arrest rates for violent crime.

Conclusions

Although most racial threat arguments rely on a conflict view of the state, some state theorists have suggested alternative perspectives on state policies since Blalock's work was produced. One alternative view suggests that public policies are not simply a reflection of elite interests (in this case the racial majority), but are also influenced by electoral politics. Because most formal social control is locally generated, hypotheses were derived from research on local politics. These hypotheses suggested that the effect of the percentage of a city's residents who are Black on formal social control against Blacks (measured by Black violent crime arrest rates) will be conditioned by aspects of the city's political system, the race of the mayor, and the racial composition of the city council. Although recent studies of social control of minorities have included political measures, these measures have not considered *conditional* influences of political system variation. Consistent with expectations, results showed that the effect of variation in percentages of a city's residents who are Black on arrests of Blacks for violent crimes is conditional on the local political context.

Existing racial threat arguments explicitly or implicitly suggest that politics are likely to play a role in determining state social control but until recently few studies have included political measures. Yet, the current study suggests that the effect of variation in a city's racial composition on social control such as arrests cannot be seen apart from the political context in which these factors operate. Local political systems create the environment in which government actors operate and electoral politics creates a lens through which government actors view all potential actions. Therefore, future studies of social control should explicitly consider how the local political context conditions the influence of social and economic factors on social control.

The current results suggest that failure to include measures of politics or inclusion of only direct political measures such as the race of the mayor or racial composition of the city council may

account for some of the mixed findings in prior racial threat studies. The current study showed that the relationship between Black arrest rates for violent crime was both curvilinear and conditional. To date, no studies that I am aware of have modeled this complexity.

This study also suggests the value of re-examining the view of the state that underlies the arguments we typically discuss with respect to social control. Formal social control—whether in the form of police employment or arrest activities—is inherently *state* action. Thus, it is critical to focus on the nature and characteristics of the state. Too often studies in the past have relied on conflict views of the state and assumed that the state actions are simply a reflection of the interests of economic or racially ascendant groups. At the time that conflict theories were adapted to the discussion of formal social control in the 1960s and early 1970s, assuming that Blacks had little or no legitimate access to the government may have been realistic. Clearly, the possibility of political influence by Blacks now exists, though apparently to varying degrees, and research shows that some city governments create more hospitable environments for influence on the government by Blacks. The current study suggests that this has implications for social control activities directed at Blacks. A substantial body of work—including research by Beckett (1997, 2000); Jacobs and colleagues (see above); Garland (1990, 2001), Stucky and colleagues (2003, 2005, 2007); and others—has documented the importance of politics for understanding various elements of formal social control. Given the consistently inconsistent findings of racial threat research on various elements of formal social control in prior research, perhaps it is time to reconsider the view of the state that underlies racial threat arguments and as a consequence racial threat theories as they apply to state actions. At a minimum, it appears that the add percent Black and stir approaches that are common in many studies is overly simplistic.

Perhaps just as important is to consider that the study showed an overall negative (albeit conditional) relationship between the percentage of the city's residents who are Black and Black

arrest rates for violent crimes. This was a robust finding. The bivariate correlation between Black violent crime arrests and reported the percent Black in a city was $-.246$ ($p < .001$) and appeared in Table 1, as well as multivariate analyses controlling for numerous factors including rates of violent crimes reported to police. Such a finding has appeared in other studies (e.g. Parker et al. 2005; Stolzenberg et al. 2004). One interpretation of this negative finding would be a sort of ‘benign neglect’, though some might argue that it is more ‘malign’ than benign. Yet, if whites do not care about Black violent crime because it is someone else’s problem, there would be no reason to expect that variation in Black violent crime arrest patterns would vary by the presence of a Black mayor or Black city council representation, as shown in Figures 2 and 3. Such findings challenge existing versions of racial threat arguments and suggest the need for further theorizing and research. One recent effort is Parker (2008) who examines direct measures of the local labor market and racial competition her attempt to develop an integrated explanation of unequal crime declines in recent years. Though focusing on crime, an integrative approach would serve as a useful blueprint for future theorizing on formal social control of minorities.

The current study does have some limitations. First, only fairly crude political measures were available. Future studies should attempt to directly tap into citizen empowerment and local government responsiveness, and how they condition the relationship between minority populations and formal social control. Another limitation is the inability to directly test racial threat arguments. As King and Wheelock (2007: 1256) note, “[e]xisting work largely operationalizes “threat” using aggregate level measures and relies heavily on inferences and assumptions about individual perceptions of minorities as threatening.” Yet, data is not available to test such arguments directly for many cities or over time. Therefore, conclusions regarding racial threat remain inferential. Another limitation of the current study is that an alternative explanation for the current pattern of results could be found in Wilson’s theory of police organization. It could be that cities have different

policing styles that lead to differential arrest rates, which Wilson (1968) argued were related to the local political culture. Although a possibility, Wilson's theory primarily suggested differences in police aggressiveness for minor offenses. Such police style variations are unlikely to manifest themselves in the serious offenses measured here. If this alternative interpretation were correct, future studies should account for style of policing variation (which he argued varied across local political systems).

This study was also limited to large U.S. cities from 1970 to 1990. Future studies should examine whether the same relationships hold for smaller cities and continue in more recent years. Studies should also consider if political system variation influences social control for other racial and ethnic minority groups such as Latinos similarly.

In sum, the current study suggests that social control of Blacks is related to variation in the size of their populations (albeit negatively) but the effect of such variation across cities on arrests of Blacks for violent crimes depends on the nature of the local political system and the presence of a Black mayor and Black city council representation. Such findings lend additional support to the notion that one must consider the *politics* of social control.

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Table 1. Variable Means by Traditional Government Index (Low v. High) and Year.

Year	1970	1970	1970	1970
Percent Black Representation	Low	Low	High	High
	Low	High	Low	High
Black VC Arrest Rate	2165.8	2282.9	1402.7	1522.3
Reported VC Rate	1721.5	4372.1	5110.3	9621.2
Population	331,252	577,511	403,272	933,512
Percent Black	9.1	14.99	34.1	38.8
Disadvantage	-0.44	-0.58	-0.49	-0.29
N	38	16	15	13
Year	1980	1980	1980	1980
Percent Black Representation	Low	Low	High	High
	Low	High	Low	High
Black VC Arrest Rate	2709.9	2469.6	2075.9	1912.5
Reported VC Rate	2709.9	5111.9	5766.8	12679.1
Population	316,255	461,651	378,181	843,013
Percent Black	9.1	9.9	34.7	40.8
Disadvantage	-0.33	0.14	0.19	0.64
N	35	15	18	26
Year	1990	1990	1990	1990
Percent Black Representation	Low	Low	High	High
	Low	High	Low	High
Black VC Arrest Rate	3398.7	3091.5	2551.6	2589.5
Reported VC Rate	4222.9	8918.3	8032.7	14120.1
Population	403,947	522,799	423,107	722,861
Percent Black	9.7	10.7	37.8	43.5
Disadvantage	-0.14	0.1	0.27	0.94
N	28	13	13	26

Table 2. Regression of Black Violent Crime Arrest Rates on Local Politics and Race of Elected Officials in 100 Largest U.S. Cities 1970, 1980, and 1990 (N=254).

	Equation 1	Equation 2	Equation 3	Equation 4
Intercept	7.6239***	7.6232***	7.6308***	7.6112***
	0.0422	0.0450	0.0428	0.0442
Overall Reported VC	0.2602***	0.2615***	0.2596***	0.2597***
	0.0416	0.0429	0.0419	0.0417
Percent Black	-0.0497***	-0.0517***	-0.0568***	-0.0554***
	0.0074	0.0062	0.0083	0.0081
Percent Black Squared	0.0003**	0.0004***	0.0004***	0.0004***
	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001
Percent Young Blacks	-0.0023	-0.0024	-0.0025	-0.0026
	0.0037	0.0036	0.0037	0.0035
Black White Inequality	-0.0208	-0.0315	-0.0248	-0.0263
	0.0312	0.0308	0.0309	0.0292
Black Disadvantage	0.1625***	0.1570***	0.1711***	0.1707***
	0.0283	0.0267	0.0295	0.0284
Officers Per Capita	0.1587***	0.1481***	0.1542***	0.1420***
	0.0368	0.0341	0.0369	0.0333
Exposure Index	0.0263*	0.0259*	0.0260*	0.0273**
	0.0104	0.0096	0.0104	0.0096
TGS Index	-0.0753*	-0.0753*	-0.0726*	-0.0683*
	0.0328	0.0335	0.0315	0.0321
Black City Council Percent	0.0006	0.0019	0.0014	0.0009
	0.0020	0.0021	0.0021	0.0022
Black Mayor	0.0070	0.0117	-0.0068	0.0303
	0.0660	0.0596	0.0831	0.0623
Percent Black*TGS Index		0.0083 [†]		
		0.0042		
Pct. Black Sq* TGS Index		-0.00014*		
		0.00006		
Pct. Black * Black Mayor			0.0189 [†]	
			0.0108	
Pct. Black Sq.*Black Mayor			-0.0003*	
			0.000014	
Pct. Black* Black CC Percent				0.0066*
				0.0003
Pct. Black Sq.* Black CC Percent				-0.0000096**
				0.0000003
-2 Log Likelihood	312.4	336.6	333.9	344.4

Note: City and year random effects suppressed; standard errors in parentheses, [†] p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001 (2-tailed tests).