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Neighborhoods and Violent Crime

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Neighborhoods and violent crime

Abstract:

Violence—while a broader societal issue—requires the co-occurrence of two or more people in a specific place at a specific time. As such, a large body of literature has examined the spatial patterns of violence. Much of this work focuses on understanding why some neighborhoods have more violence than others. This chapter reviews the current body of literature that examines violence in neighborhoods, including work focused on how neighborhood socio-demographic characteristics, social capital, housing change, and the built environment are related to various forms of neighborhood violence both cross-sectionally and longitudinally.

Bio

John R. Hipp is a Professor in the departments of Criminology, Law and Society, and Sociology, at the University of California Irvine. His research interests focus on how neighborhoods change over time, how that change both affects and is affected by neighborhood crime, and the role networks and institutions play in that change. He approaches these questions using quantitative methods as well as social network analysis. He has published substantive work in such journals as *American Sociological Review*, *Criminology*, *Social Forces*, *Social Problems*, *Mobilization*, *City & Community*, *Urban Studies* and *Journal of Urban Affairs*. He has published methodological work in such journals as *Sociological Methodology*, *Psychological Methods*, and *Structural Equation Modeling*.

Cheyenne Hodgen is a Ph.D. student in the department of Criminology, Law and Society, at the University of California, Irvine. Her research interests include spatio-temporal patterns of crime, the relationship between crime and place, and the relationship between the built environment, crime, and fear of crime.

Introduction

While violence is an important societal issue, it plays out at the local spatial scale. That is, violence requires the co-occurrence of two or more people in a specific space (at a specific time); for that reason, a large body of literature has studied violence at various geographic levels. Most commonly, studies have focused on the neighborhood—however defined—when assessing why some neighborhoods experience more violence than others. More recent research has focused on even smaller spatial scales, exploring why some street blocks have more violence than others. Regardless of the geographic focus, this literature has spawned a large body of research, and provided us insights into the features of geographic areas that tend to experience more violence than others.

When considering violence, as well as crime more generally, it is useful to use the routine activity theory framework in which a violent event requires the spatial and temporal co-occurrence of a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of capable guardians (Cohen and Felson 1979). Indeed, the broad neighborhoods and violence literature—even when not directly invoking routine activity theory—oftentimes focuses either on why some environments foster more offenders or why some environments seem to have more capable guardians. These guardians are often informal, and take the form of neighbors who have the potential to provide oversight, or informal social control, which can discourage violent events that might otherwise occur.

In addition to the obvious negative impact that violence has on victims, it can also have negative consequences more generally for neighborhoods. As one example, a study using residents nested in neighborhoods over a 25 year period found consistent evidence that when

Neighborhoods and violent crime

residents assess the amount of crime in their neighborhood, they are most directly impacted by the level of violence, and not the amount of property crime (Hipp 2013). In fact, the level of property crime had virtually no impact on residents' assessments when accounting for the level of violence. Furthermore, violent crimes, such as robberies and aggravated assaults, had the strongest impact on these perceptions. Why does this matter? It matters because residents' perceptions of crime have impacts on neighborhoods: they can change residents' behavior in the neighborhood, which can also impact their fellow residents, and may even influence residents to leave the neighborhood. We will return to these ideas later in the chapter.

In the following sections we first consider which socio-demographic measures have been associated with violent crime in neighborhoods, as well as in longitudinal settings. Following that we consider the importance of housing change in neighborhoods, as well as social capital and cohesion. After considering the role of the built environment, we discuss inter-group violence, and then how the spatial scale impacts where violence occurs. We then conclude.

Neighborhood socio-demographic measures and violence

A particularly prominent theory for explaining why some neighborhoods experience more violence than others is social disorganization theory (Shaw and McKay 1942). In this perspective, it is the socio-demographic characteristics of neighborhoods that impact the social disorganization of a neighborhood and the potential level of informal social control. In the terms of routine activity theory, higher levels of informal social control enhance the potential for guardianship, which can potentially intervene and reduce violent events. It can also impact youth in the neighborhood, and potentially turn them away from becoming offenders. Through either mechanism, there is an expectation of an impact on the level of violence in the neighborhood.

Neighborhoods and violent crime

Given the expectations of social disorganization theory, a large number of studies have assessed whether various socio-demographic features of neighborhoods—such as poverty, the racial/ethnic composition, residential instability, or immigration levels—are related to levels of violence. These expectations were also articulated by Sampson and Wilson (1995), who argued that the ecological concentration and social isolation of the truly disadvantaged leads to the social disorganization and increased violence experienced within economically and racially disadvantaged neighborhoods.

There is a large body of research that has focused on the question of whether neighborhoods with higher levels of economic disadvantage have more violence. As one example, a study of Columbus, Ohio neighborhoods found a positive relationship between neighborhood poverty and violence (Krivo and Peterson 1996). Oftentimes, neighborhood disadvantage has a long legacy. For example, Powell & Porter (2022) looked at how redlining activity decades in the past still leads to higher levels of disadvantage in neighborhoods today. This redlining was a function of government policies, and their study focused on tracts in Chicago. They not only found that concentrated disadvantage levels were significantly higher in redlined tracts, but that concentrated disadvantage has a mediating effect in the relationship between redlining and the homicide rate.

One challenge to neighborhood-based studies is that the levels of disadvantage in neighborhoods predominantly occupied by African Americans are considerably different than those in neighborhoods predominantly occupied by Whites (Peterson and Krivo 2010). In fact, there is little overlap in the distributions of poverty levels of these neighborhoods, such that poverty levels in predominantly White neighborhoods never reach the levels commonly experienced in predominantly African American neighborhoods. This would not be a problem if

Neighborhoods and violent crime

there is a linear relationship between economic disadvantage and violence, but if it is indeed a nonlinear relationship then this will lead to different sized effects in the neighborhoods of these two groups.

A study of New York neighborhoods concluded that the higher levels of violence experienced by African Americans in their neighborhoods were due to the greater levels of economic disadvantage (McNulty 1999). In a follow-up study in Atlanta neighborhoods, McNulty (2001) focused on this problem of “restricted distributions” in which the poverty levels of Black and White neighborhoods are so different. He found a similar relationship between lower levels of disadvantage and violence in both Black and White neighborhoods, but the relationship was weaker in higher disadvantage Black neighborhoods. This finding highlights the possible nonlinearity between neighborhood disadvantage and violence.

There is theoretical interest in the potential nonlinear relationship between economic disadvantage and violence. Whereas some have posited an increasing positive relationship (Wilson 1987), others have posited a slowing positive relationship (Hannon 2002). As a result, a small body of research has explored this nonlinearity. One paper that extensively explored the possible nonlinear relationship between neighborhood poverty levels and violence used neighborhood data from 25 cities (Hipp and Yates 2011). This study showed robust evidence that in fact a slowing positive relationship captured this relationship across this large number of cities.

Whereas studies have often focused on economic disadvantage, as measured by income levels or the level of poverty, Crutchfield (1989) instead argued that it is the degree of underemployment that matters. In his study of Seattle neighborhoods, he measured underemployment based on the number of workers in the secondary labor market and those who

Neighborhoods and violent crime

are working less than full-time. In his formulation, it is the weak bonds to the workforce that increases the number of potential offenders in a neighborhood.

A common limitation of studies is using neighborhoods in a single city to test the relationship between neighborhood socio-demographic features and violent crime levels. To move beyond this limitation, an important contribution was the National Neighborhood Crime Study (NNCS) by Ruth Peterson and Laurie Krivo (2010). By collecting neighborhood crime data for 91 cities, they were able to better able to test this relationship. Nonetheless, their results reinforced the single-city results: neighborhoods with more economic disadvantage experience more violence. However, beyond that, one study using the NNCS showed that this level of violence is even greater in cities with greater levels of racial segregation *between* neighborhoods (Krivo, Peterson and Kuhl 2009). Further research using the NNCS data concluded that there were somewhat similar relationships between disadvantage and violence across Black and White neighborhoods, although some differences were nonetheless noted (Hernandez, Velez and Lyons 2018).

Following up on Crutchfield's ideas, Dollar and colleagues (2019) separated the effect of joblessness on crime from that of poverty. They argued that "unlike poverty, joblessness is theorized to produce social marginalization from "mainstream" or dominant society" (p. 345). Using data from the NNCS they found that poverty and joblessness were both positively associated with fatal and nonfatal violent crime, but that joblessness has a stronger impact on violence more generally. They also looked at three neighborhood categories based on the level of poverty and found that joblessness was positively associated with homicides at all poverty levels.

Only rarely have researchers considered the etiology of different types of violence. Further, very few studies have considered whether differing motivations for homicide might

Neighborhoods and violent crime

impact spatial patterns. One exception is Kubrin's (2003) study of St. Louis neighborhoods in which she distinguished between different types of homicides based on motivations. Her results showed that economic disadvantage was broadly associated with all five different types of homicides she identified, whereas residential instability was more narrowly associated with only felony homicides. Focusing explicitly on retaliatory homicides in St. Louis neighborhoods, Kubrin and Weitzer (2003) found that cultural retaliatory homicides were more common in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. The explanation given was the poorer policing in such neighborhoods, which led to residents more often resolving problems informally through violence.

In an attempt to avoid the potential limitations of police-generated data, Baumer (2002) used victimization data. Even so, he found the same consistent result that residents in disadvantaged neighborhoods experienced more violent victimizations. Similarly, Lauritsen and White (2001) disaggregated by race and gender and found that violence was most likely to be experienced in the 10 percent most highly disadvantaged neighborhoods. One study of victimization data in 57 neighborhoods across three cities found a positive relationship between poverty and violence, but no relationship for inequality (Patterson 1991). However, a meta-analysis looking at studies focusing on how poverty and income inequality are related to violent crime in neighborhoods found consistent positive evidence for both poverty and inequality (Hsieh and Pugh 1993).

Longitudinal neighborhood socio-demographic measures and violence

Whereas studies have shown much evidence that neighborhoods with certain socio-demographic characteristics have more violence, it is also the case that violence can impact the characteristics of a neighborhood by inducing residential mobility. For example, Dugan (1999)

Neighborhoods and violent crime

showed that those who have been victimized by property crime are more likely to leave the neighborhood in the near future. Similarly, Xie and McDowall (2008) found that property victimization of proximate neighbors induced residential mobility, whereas nearby violent victimization had no such effect. While these studies found no relationship for violent crime, one possibility is the relative rarity of violence which limits statistical power.

Because violent incidents may occur too rarely to pick up their effect on residential mobility when studied separately, several studies have adopted an ecological strategy for more statistical power, and have found much more robust evidence. For example, a study using aggregated neighborhood data across 13 cities found a robust positive relationship between neighborhood violent crime rates and the level of residential instability and vacancies ten years later (Hipp 2010a). Similarly, a study of neighborhoods in Los Angeles found evidence that violent crime led to greater residential instability in subsequent years (Boggess and Hipp 2010). Further research of Los Angeles neighborhoods found that the effect of violence on residential instability is even stronger in neighborhoods with higher levels of racial/ethnic heterogeneity, which could be due to the reduced neighbor networks in such neighborhoods as well as greater fear of violence (Hipp, Tita and Boggess 2009). Similarly, Morenoff and Sampson (1997) found that higher levels of homicides in Chicago neighborhoods led to greater population decline over the subsequent decades; furthermore, larger increases in homicides in nearby neighborhoods exacerbated this effect.

There is also evidence that violence can impact the racial/ethnic composition of neighborhoods. One study using the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) found that greater victimization of the respondent or their proximate neighbors increased the probability that a white household will leave a housing unit and be replaced by a Black household (Xie and

Neighborhoods and violent crime

McDowall 2010). A similar study using the American Housing Survey showed that residents' perceptions of crime likewise led to greater likelihood of moving out by white residents, lesser likelihood of moving out by Black residents, and greater likelihood of moving *in* by Latino residents (Hipp 2010b). This same pattern was also found at the micro-neighborhood level, suggesting an ecological effect beyond an individual perceptual effect. Likewise, a study of crime data in neighborhoods over a large number of cities over time found that white residents were more likely to exit high violent crime neighborhoods than were Black residents, and also less likely to move into high violence neighborhoods (Hipp 2011). Both Blacks and Latinos were more likely to enter high violence neighborhoods, and this was particularly the case for Latinos if violent crime rates were increasing. In Chicago, one study found that more homicides in nearby neighborhoods also led to an increase in the black population in the neighborhood, and a decrease in the white population (Morenoff and Sampson 1997). Of course, there is little reason to expect that such racial/ethnic mobility patterns reflect household preferences, but rather that they reflect constraints in the housing market for specific groups.

In addition to impacting the racial/ethnic composition of neighborhoods, violent crime can also impact home values. A study of Los Angeles neighborhoods found that higher levels of violent crime resulted in lower property values the following year (Hipp, Tita and Greenbaum 2009). Another study of Los Angeles neighborhoods found that violent crime in neighborhoods resulted in lower sale prices (Tita, Petras and Greenbaum 2006).

Neighborhood housing change and violence

There is also a body of evidence exploring how changes in various characteristics of housing in a neighborhood can impact changes in violent crime levels. A number of these studies resulted from the housing crisis of the late 2000s that led to a large foreclosure crisis.

Neighborhoods and violent crime

These studies raised the question of the possible mechanisms for why foreclosures might be related to increasing violence, and one posited mechanism was the role of vacancies. Indeed, vacancies are a longer-term challenge for neighborhoods beyond the immediacy of the foreclosure crisis. This raises a general issue of how housing-related processes might impact violence, such as gentrification, demolitions, or even evictions, and we discuss these in this section.

One of the first studies of the relationship between foreclosures and violence was a cross-sectional study by Immergluck and Smith (2006). In their study of tracts in Chicago, they found a positive relationship between foreclosure rates and violent crime rates. A subsequent longitudinal study using monthly data of neighborhoods in Glendale, Arizona was able to explore the temporal aspect of the foreclosures and violence relationship (Katz, Wallace and Hedberg 2013). The researchers found a very short-term increase in violent crime that typically only lasted 3 months.

A longitudinal study of Cleveland neighborhoods distinguished between the effects of foreclosures and vacancies (Boessen and Chamberlain 2017). Using quarterly data from 2006 to 2011, they found that vacancies impacted violence in the neighborhood itself, whereas the impact of foreclosures only occurred through a broader spatial effect on nearby neighborhoods. Yet another study distinguished between foreclosures and vacancies in Pittsburgh neighborhoods (Cui and Walsh 2015). Using a difference-in-difference study design, they found no effect for the initial foreclosure itself, but a quite strong increase in violence once the vacancy occurred; additionally, violence increased further the longer the unit remained vacant.

Whereas the foreclosure literature focuses on declining economic situations in neighborhoods, the gentrification literature focuses on the opposite end of the economic

Neighborhoods and violent crime

spectrum and studies neighborhoods experiencing increasing economic fortunes. A study of 55 New York city sub-boroughs over three time points found that those experiencing more gentrification saw greater decreases in violence levels (Barton 2016). Given the spatial pattern of gentrification, research in Los Angeles showed that neighborhoods closer to the “frontier” of where gentrification is occurring experienced more violence, which may be due to the reactions of residents being pushed out of such neighborhoods (Boggess and Hipp 2016).

One measure of gentrification is the presence of building demolitions, and one study looked at this in Philadelphia using longitudinal data of block groups (Wo and Kim 2021). The authors found that a greater increase in private demolitions—arguably a proxy for gentrification—was associated with lower violent crime levels. In contrast, city demolitions did not show such a crime reducing effect, which the authors interpreted as being evidence that city demolitions are indicators of neighborhood decline and death, in contrast to private demolitions, which are a sign of neighborhood revitalization.

In addition to studying the effect of gentrification on violence, a body of research has examined whether external investment in neighborhoods can impact violent crime rates. One research strategy employs residential loans as a proxy for external investment, and Saporu and colleagues (2011) found that the most disadvantaged neighborhoods, and those with more Black or Latino residents, benefited the most from greater levels of residential loans, leading to lower violent crime rates. Similarly, a study of census tracts in Seattle accounted for possible simultaneity between violence and residential loans with longitudinal data over 27 years, and also found that increases in residential loans resulted in greater decreases in violence (Velez, Lyons and Boursaw 2017). Interestingly, they did not find evidence of the opposite effect, as greater levels of violence did not reduce residential loans in subsequent years.

Neighborhoods and violent crime

While these studies look at forms of external investment, an alternative approach examines mortgage denials in a neighborhood. Kirk (2020) adopted such an approach, and studied how mortgage denial rates in Boston census tracts were related to violent crime levels. She found evidence that mortgage denials are disproportionately concentrated in disadvantaged African American neighborhoods and that, furthermore, mortgage denials are positively associated with violent crime rates. As an interesting twist, she found no relationship between concentrated disadvantage and neighborhood violent crime after accounting for mortgage denial rates.

Yet another housing process that is likely important for violent crime levels are forced evictions. It is only in recent years that this has become a focus of studies, and this research typically conceives of evictions as a form of forced mobility (Semenza et al. 2022). In this sense, evictions contribute to neighborhood residential instability beyond more traditional measures given that evictions are not voluntary but instead are enacted by force. The consequence is that residents have little to no time to prepare for exiting, resulting in the residents becoming “hypermobile” given that they are forced to move quickly and often frequently. This, in turn, disrupts the organization and stability of the neighborhood. Stansfield and Semenza (2023) extend this and look at housing affordability and eviction filings in four U.S. cities. They find that both unaffordability and evictions were significant predictors of gun violence in majority Black neighborhoods, but not in majority white neighborhoods. Furthermore, they connect these patterns to historical neighborhood issues, such as redlining and segregation, issues to which we will return later in the chapter.

While these evictions are to some degree a function of landlord behavior, and therefore one might presume that changing landlord behavior would therefore change the violence levels

Neighborhoods and violent crime

in these neighborhoods, a complication is that the level of violence may impact landlord behavior, as discussed by Gomory & Demond (2023). They argued that violent crime can lower the rents possible in buildings, and this can affect the behavior of landlords regarding what type of renters they might accept. Utilizing place managers theory, they argue that landlords can impact crime because they choose who lives there, how they maintain the space, etc. Using census tracts in Milwaukee, they found evidence that neighborhood violent crime may lead landlords to adopt specific management practices in response, highlighting a possible reciprocal relationship in which landlord management is shaped by crime but can also potentially shape crime in the neighborhood.

Neighborhood social capital and violence

One reason various scholars posit the potential importance of sociodemographic measures for neighborhood violence is the expectation that this will impact a neighborhood's informal social control capability. This can entail various mechanisms, such as impacting the level of social capital in a neighborhood, the level of cohesion among residents, or the degree of collective efficacy among residents. We will explore these ideas in this section.

Several studies have utilized the idea of third places (Oldenburg 1999) to posit that these can impact neighborhood cohesion, which can then have consequences for neighborhood violence. The idea of third places moves beyond first places (the home) and second places (the workplace), to focus on local gathering places (third places). These local gathering places include various sites, such as bars, coffee shops, small grocery stores, etc. One study focused on the micro level of street segments, but found no evidence that street segments with coffee shops had lower violent crime levels (Boehme 2022). A likely possible explanation is that the social cohesion spawned in third places does not operate at such a small geographic scale, highlighting

Neighborhoods and violent crime

the need to consider the spatial scale at which processes operate (Hipp and Williams 2020, Hipp 2023). Consistent with this idea, a study of tracts in Columbus, Ohio found that disadvantaged neighborhoods with more recreation centers have reduced violence, suggesting that these might operate as third places (Peterson, Krivo and Harris 2000).

A large body of research building on the social disorganization tradition has focused on how the social network of relationships among residents might foster greater cohesion, and an enhanced ability to provide informal social control and guardianship. For example, one study explored how neighborhood social cohesion can spawn more informal social control activity and lead to reduced violent victimization (Rhineberger-Dunn and Carlson 2011). One challenge for scholars considering neighborhood social networks is that the presumption that they always are beneficial for neighborhoods may not be the case. Chris Browning and colleagues (Browning, Feinberg and Dietz 2004) posited that social networks can also be beneficial for potential offenders—or what they termed the negotiated coexistence model. Using Chicago neighborhood data, they found that the negative relationship between collective efficacy and violence at a point in time was reduced if the neighborhood also had greater social network connectivity among residents.

Sampson and colleagues (Sampson, Raudenbush and Earls 1997) utilized Albert Bandura's idea of collective efficacy and proposed that some neighborhoods have a greater collective efficacy that helps them better engage in informal social control actions. In this view, it is a combination of trust and cohesion among residents, along with a sense that others in the neighborhood will engage in activity to improve the neighborhood, that increases the willingness of residents to engage in such activity themselves. The theory posits that this can then reduce violence in the neighborhood. In their study, they focused on Chicago neighborhoods and found

Neighborhoods and violent crime

that indeed those with higher levels of collective efficacy had lower levels of three different measures of violence: 1) perceived violence; 2) violent victimization; 3) homicide events.

Numerous other studies have subsequently explored the cross-sectional relationship between neighborhood collective efficacy and violence. As one example, a study of Chicago neighborhoods found that those with greater levels of collective efficacy had lower levels of violence, even after accounting for the level of disorder in these neighborhoods (Sampson and Raudenbush 1999). Many other recent studies also posit collective efficacy or social cohesion as mechanisms through which whatever they are studying impacts violence: for example, Semenza et al. (2022) focus on how evictions impact violence through their impact on collective efficacy.

Nonetheless, the possibility arises that collective efficacy may not only impact levels of neighborhood violence, but there may be a reciprocal effect in which violence reduces levels of collective efficacy. Indeed, Sampson (2006) suggested such a possibility in early work.

Nonetheless, far fewer studies have explored this possibility empirically. One study of neighborhoods in Mesa, Arizona used an instrumental variable strategy, and found that whereas neighborhood cohesion was related to reduced violence, collective efficacy had no such effect when included in the same model (Armstrong, Katz and Schnebly 2015). This same study found that greater violence did indeed reduce neighborhood cohesion. A longitudinal study of neighborhoods in Brisbane, Australia found that while neighborhood violence impacted the sociodemographic characteristics of the neighborhoods over time, and reduced neighborhood collective efficacy, there was no evidence that this informal social control capability reduced neighborhood violence over time (Wickes and Hipp 2018). Another study using the same data estimated three different models, making different temporal assumptions about how collective efficacy and crime are related, and found robust effects in which there was no evidence that

Neighborhoods and violent crime

collective efficacy reduced violence over time (Hipp and Wickes 2017). However, this study did find strong evidence of reciprocal relationships between violence and disadvantage, and disadvantage and collective efficacy, implying that one route between collective efficacy and violence may occur through a neighborhood's level of disadvantage. Garcia and colleagues' (Garcia, Taylor and Lawton 2007) cross-sectional study of Philadelphia also found evidence that violent crime reduces trust and cohesion among neighbors.

Neighborhood built environment and violence

Beyond the social composition of neighborhoods, another body of research has studied how the built environment might impact where violence occurs. There are various mechanisms through which the built environment might impact the behavior of persons, and therefore impact levels of violence.

One example is how the built environment can foster a vibrant environment, which can affect the number of people in a location. As highlighted by Browning and Jackson (2013), this can affect the level of violence by increasing the number of potential offenders and targets in a location, but also by increasing the number of capable guardians simply through the presence of a large number of people (which can discourage crime incidents). Their study of Chicago street blocks found a nonlinear relationship between the presence of people on the street and violence: at lower levels, there are increasing levels of violence, but beyond a threshold an increasing number of people results in falling levels of violence. This latter finding is evidence of the potential importance of guardians, simply due to the presence of persons in the environment.

A related approach is studies focusing on the degree of walkability in an area, under the presumption that this will lead to more people in the ambient population. One study measured walkability in the environment of census block groups in Los Angeles, and found that greater

Neighborhoods and violent crime

walkability was associated with high violent crime levels (Lee & Contreras 2021). Furthermore, they found this effect was strongest in more disadvantaged neighborhoods, implying that economically disadvantaged neighborhoods that are walkable are more prone to violence.

Business districts can also impact violence through similar mechanisms. The increased presence of potential offenders, targets, and guardians can lead to a curvilinear relationship between the number of businesses and violence, and a study in Columbus, Ohio neighborhoods found evidence of this (Browning et al. 2010). Similar to Browning and Jackson's (2013) study, discussed above, the implication is that this increased ambient population impacts the possibility of violence. A further challenge is that violent crime can impact the placement and survival of businesses (Hipp et al. 2019), and thus whereas the presence of businesses at a point in time may provide more opportunities for violence, the *change* in the number of businesses might have different consequences. For example, one longitudinal study of census tracts in Washington, D.C. found that growth in economic activity was associated with declining violent crime in the same year (Stacy, Ho and Pendall 2016). The idea that the change in measures might have different consequences in a longitudinal setting than they do in cross-sectional studies was explored more extensively by Hipp and Luo (2022).

Another well studied area is how the presence of specific businesses can impact local violence. A number of studies have explored the relationship between alcohol establishments and violence and found robust evidence. For example, a study in Detroit found that census tracts with more alcohol outlets have higher violent crime rates (Gyimah-Brempong 2001). Similarly, Nielsen and Martinez (2003) found that the presence of alcohol establishments were associated with higher violent crime rates in Miami census tracts. Groff (2014) explored alcohol establishments on a more micro geographic scale, and found a sharp distance decay effect in

Neighborhoods and violent crime

which violence was more likely to occur on the street segment containing a drinking facility, but then decreased moving to adjacent blocks. In a study of New York City census block groups, Haley and colleagues (2023) looked at the link between redlining, the presence of off-premise and on-premise alcohol outlets, and violent crime. They found that the density of alcohol outlets was higher in block groups that had been redlined in the past, that these neighborhoods had more violence, and that the association between off premise and violent crime was higher in redlined block groups.

A more complicated potential relationship is between parks and violence. In short, there is little reason to expect parks to have a uniform impact on violence, either positive or negative. Instead, it is more likely that the amount of violence in or around parks will depend on various features of the park, or the surrounding area. That is, while parks have the ability to be gathering places that can increase neighborhood cohesion and social networks, they also can be hang-outs for potential offenders. Thus, determining which will be the case for any particular park has been an area of recent research.

One study in Philadelphia measured various features of parks in an effort to untangle the complicated relationship between parks and violence (Groff and McCord 2011). In their study, while they found that, on average, there was more crime around parks, this depended on the particular features of the park. Similarly, a study of parks across several cities found that social characteristics of the neighborhood surrounding the park were important for the parks and violence relationship (Boessen and Hipp 2018). A park in a neighborhood with more persons aged 16 to 29 tended to experience more violence in and nearby, consistent with the idea that they may serve as a hangout for potential offenders. On the other hand, this same study found that parks in high disadvantage neighborhoods reduced the otherwise positive relationship

Neighborhoods and violent crime between disadvantage and violence, which would be consistent with their role as a positive gathering place.

A broader range of studies have focused on how multiple features of the built environment can impact where violence occurs. One exhaustive study of small geographic units in Indianapolis, Indiana measured 30 land use categories, and found mixed evidence in which some features were associated with more violence, whereas others were associated with less violence (Stucky and Ottensmann 2009). This same study also found evidence that economic disadvantage operates as a moderator of some of these relationships between land use characteristics and violence, and these possible moderating effects have been an ongoing part of subsequent research. Another study attempted to link the insights of social disorganization theory with the ideas of crime opportunity theories by measuring land use features in Seattle census tracts (Wilcox et al. 2004), and found that various built environment features impact violence either directly, or indirectly through possible mediating social environment features. Research in Brisbane, Australia explicitly focused on the degree of mixing of land use in a block group, and found that it is this mixing in nearby areas that is associated with greater neighborhood violence (Zahnw 2018). This effect was on top of the effect of specific businesses, such as alcohol establishments.

Snowden (2019) looked at how a number of land use features were related to violent crime levels in Milwaukee block groups. This research found that land use features such as off-premise alcohol outlets, gas stations and laundromats are all positively associated with violent crime rates, but that the density of colleges and universities, and parks and playgrounds are negatively associated with violent crime levels. Li & Kim (2022) focused on how subway stations in New York City might provide opportunities for violence. Using ¼ mile egohoods, the

Neighborhoods and violent crime

study was also able to account for the surrounding retail land use, and concluded that the presence of more stations in an area was associated with more violence. However, the results for ridership were mixed, resulting in more robberies, but fewer aggravated assaults. Again, the potential presence of guardians may be at work in these results.

New measurement of the built environment

Recent methodological innovations have allowed scholars to measure the built environment in novel ways. Most notably, the images provided by Google Streetview (GSV) have provided scholars a new way to measure the built environment. Whereas a limitation of earlier research using GSV was the labor-intensive need to code each image, resulting in a focus on relatively small geographic study areas, the advent of machine learning techniques has allowed scholars to automate the process of coding these images. The result is relatively large-scale studies recently focusing on how the built environment might impact violence.

As one example of a study using GSV images and machine learning techniques, He and colleagues (He, Páez and Liu 2017) used GSV images to measure physical disorder in an effort to test broken windows theory. They found a positive relationship between physical disorder and violence. A study in Santa Ana, California used GSV images to capture eleven different features in the environment of street segments (Hipp et al. 2022b). The researchers found that features capturing more persons in the environment, auto-oriented measures such as vehicles and pavement, and a measure of terrain were all associated with more violence. However, vegetation showed an inverted-U relationship with violence, and the presence of walls was negatively related to violence. A similar study of street segments demonstrated how this technique using machine learning to classify GSV images can be utilized on the very large scale study area of Los Angeles, the second largest city in the U.S. (Hipp et al. 2022a). This study found that the

Neighborhoods and violent crime
presence of more buildings had a particularly strong positive relationship with violence in low disadvantage neighborhoods. And whereas walls—which do not allow visibility—were strongly associated with reduced violence in high disadvantage neighborhoods, fences—which allow visibility and therefore likely serve a more symbolic purpose—were only beneficial in low disadvantage neighborhoods.

Intergroup violence

While up to this point we have described neighborhood violence more generally, we can also distinguish between violence committed by specific racial/ethnic groups, or violence occurring *within* racial/ethnic groups and that occurring *across* racial/ethnic groups.

One challenge for studies exploring this question of inter-group and intra-group violence is the proper denominator to use. Whereas researchers have sometimes used the total population when constructing the rate of intergroup violence, or the population of the offending group or the victim group, all of these strategies are incorrect and create considerable bias, as demonstrated by Hipp and colleagues (Hipp, Tita and Boggess 2011). Instead, what is necessary is to account for the possible number of interactions between the members of the two groups. Although this is a straightforward statistical solution, it has rarely been done in this literature.

One study that did appropriately account for the random possibility of interaction in assessing intergroup violent crime rates explored this question in South Los Angeles neighborhoods (Hipp, Tita and Boggess 2009). Consistent with social disorganization theory, racial/ethnic transition in nearby neighborhoods resulted in more intergroup violence between Latinos and African Americans, as well as more intragroup violence among Latinos. In addition, the highest levels of intragroup violence occurred in neighborhoods with more racial/ethnic heterogeneity. Consistent with consolidated inequality theory, there was more intergroup

Neighborhoods and violent crime

violence committed by the disadvantaged group when there was more intergroup inequality.

Nonetheless, more studies are needed that appropriately capture intergroup violence rates.

Geographic and spatial scale of violence

Although we have been discussing violence in neighborhoods, the spatial patterns of residents—both as potential offenders or as targets—give rise to the need to consider spatial effects. This has led to recent research focused on smaller geographic units and simultaneously nearby small units. It has also given rise to neighborhood-based research that also accounts for adjacent neighborhoods, or even the broader city context.

A growing research tradition focuses on violence at the very small spatial scale of street blocks, or even down to specific parcels. As one example, Ratcliffe (2012) using data for Philadelphia demonstrated how violence occurs very close to bars, but then shows a sharp distance decay effect as one moves away from the bar. His strategy used a series of buffers around each bar to measure this distance decay effect, and determine the distance at which the decay entirely faded away. A study of Boston drilled below street segments down to parcels in exploring the question of “problem properties” that consistently have higher levels of crime and disorder, as reported to the police and the consequences for violence (O’Brien and Winship 2017).

Racial borders in the spatial environment are another potential source for fostering violence (Legewie 2018). That is, locations across the spatial landscape at which there are sharp breaks in the racial or economic residential composition may spark conflict and violence, and Legewie’s study of census blocks in Chicago demonstrated this pattern based on sharp racial breaks in the landscape.

Neighborhoods and violent crime

At a broader spatial scale, research has suggested that a neighborhood can be impacted not only by its own sociodemographic features, but by those in nearby areas (Mears and Bhati 2006). For example, using NNCS data, Chamberlain and Hipp (2015) explored how varying levels of concentrated disadvantage in nearby areas can create inequality across neighborhoods and therefore impact violent crime rates. In this study, whereas relative deprivation provided an explanation for why differing levels of disadvantage between the focal and nearby tracts led to more property crime in the tract itself, there was a reinforcing effect for violent crime in which greater disadvantage in nearby areas further increased already higher violence in high disadvantage neighborhoods. Another study also using the NNCS found that higher levels of disadvantage in nearby neighborhoods resulted in higher violent crime rates in the focal neighborhood (Peterson and Krivo 2009). Stepping outside the U.S., a study of neighborhoods in South Africa found that although there was no relationship between inequality and violence within the neighborhood itself, the level of inequality in the surrounding neighborhoods was related to greater violence within the neighborhood itself (Demombynes and Özler 2005).

Part of the reason for these spatial effects is because offenders travel to crime. Although research has shown that offenders, on average, travel shorter distances to violent crime than they do to property crime (Rossmo 2000), they nonetheless will often travel across neighborhood boundaries when committing crimes. Furthermore, targets often are not at their own home when victimized, but have traveled to a location. Indeed, a study of homicides in Pittsburgh created a typology of five combinations depending on the travel patterns of the offender and victim, and showed that most homicides involved mobility by both, reinforcing the usefulness of routine activity theory (Tita and Griffiths 2005). A natural conclusion by the authors, informative for scholars considering the etiology of violence in neighborhoods, is that "...levels of lethal

Neighborhoods and violent crime

violence in a community are influenced more by the interaction among nonlocal participants than by the violent actions of local residents” (Tita and Griffiths 2005: 275).

At an even greater macro scale, there is evidence that the context of the city in which neighborhoods are situated can impact the pattern of violence across neighborhoods. Several studies have utilized the multi-city NNCS for exploring such research questions. For example, one study using the NNCS tested and found that the negative relationship between immigrant concentration and violence is even stronger in cities with more favorable political opportunities for immigrants (Lyons, Vélez and Santoro 2013). Ramey (2013) asked whether the relationship between immigrant concentration and violence is dependent on the history of immigration to the city—specifically, whether the city is a traditional immigrant destination city, or a more recent destination. The results suggested that recent immigrant populations may rely on more receptive contexts that occur only within the more traditional destinations for more beneficial violent crime outcomes. Another study using the NNCS data found that greater levels of police arrest activity in the city was actually associated with greater violent crime rates in more disadvantaged neighborhoods (Martin, Wright and Steiner 2016).

Research has also explored how commuting patterns by workers can impact the spatial scale of violence. For example, Boivin and Felson (2018) combined information from a transportation survey with data from the police on whether offenders of violent crimes were residents or visitors to the tract where the incident occurred. In their study, the routine activity patterns of persons through their mobility patterns were important for explaining where violence occurred, as tracts with more visitors tended to experience more violence.

Long-term neighborhood change and violence

Neighborhoods and violent crime

While nearly all research on neighborhoods and violence focuses either on a point in time, or else looks at longitudinal data over a few years, or, at most, a decade, there is some research looking at a much longer time period. One study explored the change in violent crime across neighborhoods in six cities over two decades during which crime was declining overall (Friedson and Sharkey 2015). The authors concluded that crime declined the most in neighborhoods that had the highest violent crime rates and disadvantage levels at the beginning of the time period. Another study focused on homicides in Chicago neighborhoods over a 20 year period during this crime decline (Papachristos, Brazil and Cheng 2018). Here the focus was on the gap in homicides between the highest and least disadvantaged neighborhoods, and there was evidence of a greater decline in homicides in the most advantaged neighborhoods. Thus, not only did the relative spatial pattern of homicides across neighborhoods remain the same, the gap actually grew over time. Sharkey and Marsteller (2022) took an even longer view of Chicago neighborhoods over 55 years, and concluded that despite rises and falls in city violence over this time period, the relatively higher rate of violence in more disadvantaged neighborhoods remained robust over the time period.

Boessen and colleagues (2021) also took a long view and studied neighborhood change in St. Louis over a 40 year period. Here, the focus was on the role of the education level of residents over this long time period, finding that neighborhoods with more college educated residents tended to experience less violent crime, and this was particularly the case in the most recent decades and in neighborhoods with more white residents. Notably, this more recent pattern contrasted with the older decades in which it was neighborhoods with more residents with a high school degree, and neighborhoods dominated by Black residents, that experienced larger drops in violent crime levels. The important implication is that the results of studies may

Neighborhoods and violent crime
not generalize to other temporal periods, raising an important generalizability question that needs
more consideration.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the spatial component of violence, and how there is robust evidence that it is more likely to concentrate in some neighborhoods rather than others. This body of research has provided us considerable insights. Nonetheless, there are two broad areas in need of further research. First, there is a need for further research exploring whether the relationships observed between key neighborhood measures and violence are robust across different city contexts. Data limitations have limited exploring this question up to now, but this state of affairs is changing. Second, there is a need for longitudinal research to explore the dynamics of these neighborhood processes. Such longitudinal models will need to account for change over both shorter- and longer-term time horizons.

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