



The Urban Ecology of Bias Crime: A Study of Disorganized and Defended Neighborhoods

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Summary

This study examines the neighborhood characteristics that affect bias crime and compares bias crime to non-biased criminal activities using data collected from the City of Sacramento Crime Report Database and California Criminal Justice Statistics Center. Using these datasets, along with demographic characteristics from the U.S. Census, the author tests social disorganization and defended neighborhoods as arguments for why bias crime occurs.

Methods

The bias crime report data, collected from the City of Sacramento Crime Report Database, contained 245 total incidents that occurred from 1995 to 2002. Data on reported robbery, assault, and vandalism were also collected. The unit of analysis for the social disorganization and defended neighborhoods arguments was U.S. Census tracts. The author examined 103 units (some of Sacramento's 114 tracts were merged with their nearest neighbor to account for those with zero residents). Using address data contained in the bias crime reports, the author geospatially mapped each count to visually access count locations. U.S. Census data (1990-2000) were used to access the percent white and the percent change in nonwhite population. The data were analyzed using a negative binomial model.

Results

The results of the negative binomial model found that effects of social disorganization – measured by concentrated disadvantage and percent new residents – were quite large. A two-unit change in concentrated disadvantage is associated with a doubling of bias crime, and a 20-percentage point change in the percent of new residents increased expected bias crime counts by 38 percent. This study also found that homogeneously white neighborhoods experiencing a large nonwhite influx have a much greater expected number of bias crimes.

Implications

This study indicates that bias crimes are reflective of broader social processes of intergroup conflict. Although bias crimes are consistent with other criminal activities in that they are positively correlated with factors of social disorganization, this crime type is also impacted by demographic dynamics. The author recommends that future research be done on cultural processes that generate neighborhood defenses in white communities with nonwhite immigration.