

ENVIRONMENT OF RISK AND DETERMINANTS OF RACIAL ATTITUDES TOWARD GUN REGULATION: A TEST OF THE SOCIAL REALITY THESIS*

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ABSTRACT

Despite the years of heated debate surrounding the issue of gun regulation, little is known about the attitudes of or the determinants of attitudes of blacks and whites toward this policy issue. The questions addressed here are whether the social realities of whites and blacks are so different that they produce disparate attitudes toward gun regulation and also produce different determinants of such attitudes. Data collected through a mail questionnaire from black and white residents of high and low homicide risk neighborhoods in Detroit are used to test the hypotheses. Results indicate that, for the most part, blacks and whites hold different positions on the issue of gun regulation and evidence different determinants of attitudes.

INTRODUCTION

The incidence of criminal violence – murder, robbery, and assault – has increased substantially in the last several decades. The increased use of firearms in the commission of many of these crimes leads some to suggest the need for more stringent firearms regulation. Many contend that gun regulation represents the single most important means of reducing criminal violence in the United States [1–5]. But this view is not held by other Americans who view gun control as an intrusion into rights granted by the Constitution [6, 7].

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Opposition to gun regulation, regardless of its perceived value by advocates, boils down to suggestions that the criminal element in this country is behaving in a manner that threatens supposed constitutionally mandated rights. Some perceive the problem as criminals preying upon other criminals, an action that does not warrant attempts to regulate firearms. Other opponents perceive the problem to be criminals victimizing law-abiding citizens, thus regulation would restrict the ability of citizens to protect themselves. Research indicates that at least one half of all American households are armed. Yet, in spite of the crime scare, most firearms are reportedly owned for sport and recreation, rather than for self-defense [8].

A common issue for both proponents and opponents of gun regulation is violent crime, the former from the perspective of crime reduction, the latter from the view of crime protection. One point, however, should be emphasized. That segment of the population most susceptible to violent criminal victimization is blacks. Blacks are disproportionately the victims of criminal violence, particularly homicide and robbery. Thus, if there is a relationship between criminal victimization and gun regulation attitudes, objectively they should be the ones most concerned with the issue.

Despite the heated debate surrounding this issue, surprisingly little is known about the attitudes of or the determinants that shape individuals' positions on the issue of gun regulation [9, 10]. Should we expect whites and blacks to have similar and/or different positions on this policy issue? Why do individuals, both black and white, support or oppose gun regulation? Surely, the answer goes beyond whether an individual is a member of a "gun lobby" organization (oppose) or a "gun controller" organization (support).

This research examines the question of whether the environment in which white and black Americans live is so different that they are likely to take different positions on the issue of gun regulation. Also, it is possible that the differences in the environments of these two groups may cause the determinants of gun regulation attitude to be different. There is good reason to believe that the determinants of black attitudes toward this issue may be different from the determinants of white attitudes. (Reasons are discussed below.) Research of this nature is significant, for if the determinants of attitude toward gun regulation are identified, social scientists, as well as policymakers, will be in a position to understand the concerns of a diverse citizenry with varied experiences on an issue that often is only associated with the "gun lobby." Also, it may add to our understanding of the factors that contribute to formulation of racial attitudes towards public policies.

SOCIAL REALITY THESIS

Research concerned with black and white political attitudes have utilized numerous theories, such as social deprivation and political education, in order to explain apparent racial differences on various political concepts and issues. Each

of these theories has evidence supporting its feasibility as an explanation for attitude differences.

Another highly plausible explanation, suggested by Abramson [11], is the political reality explanation. This explanation argues that many of the attitudes of black Americans reflect an accurate response to the realities of black political life in the United States. Furthermore, there are suggestions that the political reality of blacks is fundamentally different from that of whites. Sears and McConahay noted that the extremely negative attitude black children exhibited toward the police was not the result of a lack of respect for authority, but was essentially related to black perceptions of the role the police play in the black community [12].

There is a possibility that the explanation for some attitude differences may extend beyond the perceived political reality of Abramson's concept to include objective social and environmental realities that may differ for blacks and whites. When positions on specific policy issues are examined, the objective reality of one's environment, in conjunction with the perceived reality, may be the bases upon which positions are formulated. Therefore, for our purposes, we will expand the political reality concept to include both realities and call this concept the *social reality thesis*.

When the subject of violence is examined, the differences in black and white social realities are very evident. In fact, blacks are eight times more likely than whites to be victims of homicide [13]. In addition to the greater potential of being victims of homicide, blacks are two and one-half times more likely to be victims of rape. For robbery, the black victimization rate is three times the white rate, and the black rate for aggravated assault is one and one-half times the white rate [14].

The above victimization rates are not only applicable to blacks residing in low-socioeconomic status areas because, regardless of socioeconomic level, blacks for a variety of reasons tend to live in spatially segregated neighborhoods. Also, there is less spatial segmentation by class in the black community than is true in the white community, leading to greater heterogeneity in social class mix within individual black communities [13]. There is a higher probability that lower income persons will be victims of criminal behavior than will persons in other income groups. Consequently, black concentration in common residential areas increases the probability that blacks, regardless of socioeconomic status, will be more susceptible to criminal victimization than will whites [15, 16]. The lower intensity of spatial economic stratification also results in fear of victimization being more apparent in urban black residential communities than is true in urban white communities.

A question then that needs to be addressed is the following: how important are the objective and perceived social realities of white and black persons likely to influence attitudes related to a proposal aimed at reducing interpersonal violence? Since blacks and whites live in different environments of risk (different social realities), it is plausible to expect that:

1. blacks and whites have different attitudes toward gun regulation;
2. different environments of risk result in different determinants of gun regulation attitude; or
3. both.

RESEARCH SETTING AND DATA

Detroit, Michigan was selected as the research setting for this investigation. Between 1965 and 1975 the city experienced more than a 300 per cent increase in the frequency of homicide, and, by the latter year, approximately one-half of the homicides could be attributed to instrumental action.¹ Most homicide victims in Detroit, regardless of victim-offender relationships, are black [17].

Data were gathered from black and white residents of neighborhoods defined as high and low homicide risk neighborhoods. Homicide was selected as the defining criterion over other crime measures, such as robbery and aggravated assault, for several reasons. First, homicide is the most serious of all violent crimes, and second, has the most devastating and permanent consequences, not only for the victim but family and neighborhood residents as well. Finally, and most important, homicide statistics are the most accurate, and least biased, of the crime statistics. Others are affected by victim reporting, police charging procedures and police reporting practices to the FBI.

Homicide Frequency as a Surrogate of Risk

The issue of how risk is to be evaluated is a complex one. One can approach risk of victimization from the perspective of place of occurrence of the homicide or place of offender residence or place of victim residence. Each has advantages and disadvantages, and ideally any definition of high risk homicide environments should incorporate all three. In light of data incompleteness on the first two elements, however, place of victim residence seems the most appropriate. Place of victim residence is the measure utilized to record all death rates, by cause of death, within urban areas.

Another problem encountered in defining annual risk at the neighborhood level is lack of data. Annual risk, unfortunately, can only be accurately determined at the time of the decennial census. Frequency data on the number of homicides committed, however, are available annually. Therefore, at the neighborhood level, the absence of risk data necessitates the substitution of frequency data for the probability of death. An attempt has been made to devise a frequency level congruent with a critical level of risk.

¹ Instrumental violence is defined as violence designed to enable one to secure a goal (i.e., money, other material goods, and so forth), as opposed to expressive violence, which results from a situationally motivated outburst of anger.

In 1970 the risk of homicide victimization in the nation's large black communities was around 50 per 100,000 [18, p. 197]. In Detroit, the census tracts, or neighborhoods for our purposes, average between 4,000 to 5,000 persons; thus, three homicide victims per tract, based on fifty homicides per 100,000, would exceed the mean level of risk. Three homicides per tract, based on victim residence, has been chosen as the level separating high and low risk homicide neighborhoods within Detroit's black community.

In the same year, 1970, the risk of homicide victimization in the nation's larger white communities was around 5 per 100,000 [18]. Thus, .25 homicide victims per tract, based on five homicides per 100,000, would exceed the mean level of risk. For purposes of clarity and simplicity, the figure was rounded to one, but the rounding was kept in mind when levels of risk were defined. Therefore, one homicide per tract, based on victim residence, has been chosen as the level separating high and low risk homicide neighborhoods within Detroit's white community.

Sample

Utilizing homicide data from the Detroit Department of Public Health, the cumulative number of resident homicides was totalled for each census tract in the city for the period 1970 through 1975. This cumulative period was chosen over a single year as a means of stabilizing the measure. The use of a single year may over- or underestimate the homicide risk of a neighborhood. The census tracts were then divided into high homicide risk black, low homicide risk black, high homicide risk white, and low homicide risk white neighborhoods.

A high homicide risk black neighborhood was defined as a majority black neighborhood having a cumulative resident homicide victimization of twenty or more for the period 1970 to 1975. Twenty-five high risk black neighborhoods were identified with cumulative resident homicides ranging from twenty to forty. A low homicide risk black neighborhood was defined as a majority black neighborhood having a cumulative resident homicide victimization of at least ten but less than fifteen for the period.² Thirty-seven tracts were identified.

For whites, a high homicide risk neighborhood was defined as a majority white neighborhood having a cumulative resident homicide victimization rate of five or more. Fifteen tracts were identified, all but one ranging from six to ten resident homicides. One tract had a total of seventeen resident homicides. A low homicide risk white neighborhood was defined as a majority white neighborhood having a cumulative resident homicide victimization rate of less than five homicides. Forty-eight of these tracts were identified.

² Census tracts with a black cumulative resident homicide victimization of less than ten for the six year period were excluded because the risk of victimization would approximate that of whites rather than the race specified risk for blacks. There were thirteen of these tracts.

Twenty per cent of the tracts in each risk category were drawn using a simple random sampling procedure resulting in the selection of five high risk black and three high risk white neighborhoods and eight low risk black and nine low risk white neighborhoods. For each of the sample census tracts, an alphabetical listing of the streets and the range of addresses of those streets were compiled. All individuals in those tracts with a separate residential phone listing at addresses listed in a current address listing directory from Michigan Bell Telephone were counted. The number of listings in each tract was totalled and the assigned number of questionnaires for that area was distributed in proportion to the census tract population. Selection of individual respondents in each tract was done through the generation of random numbers no larger than the number of listings in that tract. The random numbers when ordered corresponded to a residential listing in the tract. This sampling frame is far from the desirable random sample. The preferable alternative would have been to sample households, proportional to census household count for each tract, and to list the population of households from the *Detroit City Directory*. Unfortunately, Detroit's directory has not been updated since 1973-1974. Since many of the sample tracts are characterized by unusually high mobility rates, many of the persons whose names were identified with household addresses in 1973 were expected to no longer live there. Thus, the questionnaire would have had to have been addressed to resident, occupant, or head of household, any of which were expected to reduce the response rate significantly. In this instance, the more representative or random sample was sacrificed in hopes of attaining a more adequate response rate.

Two waves of the questionnaire were mailed during the summer of 1980. The responses were weighted to correct for problems such as unequal selection probabilities, differences in response rates and so forth, yielding weighted totals of black high risk (N = 808), white high risk (N = 275), black low risk (N = 729), and white low risk (N = 1080) [19, pp. 424-432]. Approximately 500 respondents each were drawn from the black high and low risk tracts, and 300 respondents each were selected from the white high and low risk tracts, for a total of 1600 respondents. The unweighted totals and response rates were the following: black high risk – N = 101, 20.2 per cent response rate; white high risk – N = 55, 18.3 per cent response rate; black low risk – N = 81, 16.2 per cent response rate; and white low risk – N = 108, 36 per cent response rate. The weights for each area are the following: black high risk (weight = 8); white high risk (weight = 5); black low risk (weight = 9); and white low risk (weight = 10). The complete weighting procedure is available from the author upon request.

The response rates were lower than initially anticipated, which raises a question about the representativeness of the sample. Response rates for mail questionnaires are most often significantly lower than those for personal interviews. Social scientists, however, should not pass up analysis of available survey data on the ground that they may not be the best data. This argument is especially appropriate when the subject has received limited study and when

the research is exploratory in nature. The characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 1. The sample is subject to bias from several sources. First, there is exclusion of those individuals without telephone service. This would be especially prevalent in those tracts with large numbers of rooming houses or hotels. Second, there is exclusion of those individuals with unlisted numbers, estimated to be 35 per cent metropolitan-wide. No estimate for the City of Detroit was available of the number of persons who had unlisted numbers, however, 35 per cent is expected to be too high. Third, there is an under-sampling of household adults who are not listed separately at an address, which is an especially pervasive bias against females' in male-headed households. Finally, there is oversampling of older adults who for various reasons were more inclined to return questionnaires than were young individuals. In order to address the proposed research questions, analysis will be conducted in terms of black residents only of black high risk neighborhoods; white residents only of white high risk neighborhoods; both black and white residents of black low-risk neighborhoods; and white high risk neighborhoods.

ENVIRONMENT OF RISK

Drawing on the literature that examined ecological factors related to urban violent crimes and on the literature concerned with social and environmental factors related to the fear of crime, as well as the limited research on gun regulation attitudes, the environment of risk (social reality) may be conceptualized as consisting of particular demographic, social, and environmental

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

	<i>High Risk</i>		<i>Low Risk</i>	
	<i>Black</i>	<i>White</i>	<i>Black</i>	<i>White</i>
Male	49.5%	69.1%	56.8%	71.7%
Female	50.5%	30.9%	43.2%	28.3%
Race				
Black	82.0%	5.7%	61.2%	6.7%
White	14.0%	83.0%	33.7%	93.3%
Native American	4.0%	—	3.7%	—
Mexican American	—	11.3%	—	—
Other	—	—	1.2%	—
Mean Age	54.1	51.11	64.35	48.62
Mean Education	11.3	11.6	12.2	13.9
Mean Income	\$7,839.00	\$9,922.00	\$9,065.00	\$12,157.00

factors. Among these factors are the following: level of fear, gun ownership, purpose of ownership, gender, having been a victim of violent activity, home burglary, perceived level of police protection, income, education, age, perception that regulation decreases crime, and years of residence in the neighborhood [9, 20-23].

Fear

Given the greater potential for victimization, the level of fear should be higher among residents of black high and low risk neighborhoods than among residents of the other two areas. Our data indicate this to be partially true. Approximately one-half of the black residents of black high and low risk areas, 53.7 and 50 per cent respectively, are either somewhat afraid or very afraid, as are 62.9 per cent of the white residents of black low risk neighborhoods. There appears to be a difference, however, in the level of fear between white high and low risk areas. Approximately 54.6 per cent of the residents of high risk environs exhibited some type of fear compared to only 36.1 per cent of the residents of low risk neighborhoods ($X^2 = 29.86, p < .05$). Stinchcombe, et al. found that fear was positively associated with attitude toward gun regulation; individuals who are fearful are more inclined to favor gun regulation than those who are not afraid [9]. Therefore, it is plausible to expect that fear will have more of a positive impact on the supportive attitudes of residents of black high and low risk and white high risk neighborhoods than it will on the attitudes of residents of white low risk areas.

Gun Ownership and Purpose of Ownership

Given the higher victimization rates, should one expect to find a higher level of gun ownership among blacks than among whites? Feagin found that blacks were less likely to report a gun in the home than were whites, and that whites were more likely to be armed than were blacks [24]. Lizotte and Bordua found that defensive gun ownership is associated with factors such as fear of crime, age (older), sex (male), race (black), residence in an environment of high crime and violent experiences, whereas sport gun ownership is associated with factors such as financial status, sex, early socialization to gun use and reading sports magazines [23, 25]. Stinchcombe, et al. found that gun ownership is negatively associated with gun regulation: people who own guns are more inclined to oppose gun regulation than people who do not own firearms.

Our data indicate that the percentage of residents owning firearms was relatively identical across areas with one exception. Among blacks residing in high and low risk neighborhoods, 35.8 and 44.9 per cent own guns respectively, however, only 22 per cent of whites living in black low risk neighborhoods owned guns. Within white high and low risk areas 39.5 and 36.5 per cent of whites owned firearms respectively. Some striking differences emerge, however, when purpose of ownership is examined.

Among black gun owners, 74.1 per cent in high risk and 66.7 per cent in low risk areas, owned them for protection, whereas, only 37.5 and 29 per cent of white gun owners in white high and low risk areas respectively owned firearms for protection. The majority of gun owners of both areas owned firearms for sport and recreation. Interestingly, 60 per cent of white gun owners living in black low risk neighborhoods also owned guns for sport and recreation rather than for protection.³ There is also a statistically significant relationship between black and white residential environments and owning a gun for protection ($X^2 = 93.06, p < .05$).

The foregoing pattern suggests several possible impacts on attitude toward gun regulation. First, blacks who own guns for defensive purposes may favor regulating firearm availability, as they perceive a positive association between gun availability and violent victimization rates. On the other hand, whites in high and low risk neighborhoods who own guns principally for sport may oppose regulation because it is viewed as curtailing the easy availability of guns for recreation.

Having Been a Victim of Violent Activity

Given the greater potential for victimization, residents of black high and low risk areas should have a higher level of victimization than residents of white high and low risk areas. Our data indicate that 48.1 and 45.8 per cent of black residents of the former areas had been victims of some form of violent activity one or more times: beaten up, mugged, threatened with a gun, or shot at. Additionally, 42.3 per cent of white residents of the latter neighborhoods had been victims.

A different pattern of victimization appears in white high and low risk areas. Approximately 32.6 per cent of residents of high risk and 38.9 per cent of residents of low risk areas had been victims of some form of violent activity. In view of this differential pattern of victimization, it may be plausible to expect that having been a victim of violent activity will have a greater impact on the favorable gun regulation attitudes of blacks who reside in high and low risk areas, and possibly of whites in black low risk areas, than it will have on attitudes of whites residing in high and low risk neighborhoods.

Home Burglary

The literature indicates that blacks are more likely to have their homes burglarized than are whites [15, p. 34]. Thus, on the attitude of gun regulation, the same argument made for having been a victim of violent activity applies to the impact of having one's home burglarized. Our data show that 63.3 and 51 per cent of blacks in high and low risk areas respectively had had their homes

³ The remaining percentages were for persons in each area who owned firearms for occupational or collection/hobby purposes.

illegally entered one or more times, as had 57.7 per cent of whites in black low risk areas. Whereas, 40.9 and 38.8 per cent of the whites in high and low risk neighborhoods had had their homes broken into one or more times ($X^2 = 19.71$, $p < .05$). Thus, this variable may have more impact on the favorable attitudes of residents of black high and low risk neighborhoods than on residents of white high and low risk areas.

Gender (Sex)

In 1975, 35.3 per cent of black families nationally were female-headed compared to 10.5 per cent of white female-headed families [26, p. 37], indicating that many black females are responsible for their own, as well as for their families' protection. Research indicates that female-headed households are more vulnerable to criminal victimization than are other types of households [27]. It is therefore possible that the perceived need for self-protection may make many black females more sensitive to the issue of gun regulation. In fact, Lizotte and Bordua suggest that many black females may purchase firearms in response to threat from violent crime [8]. Thus, we may anticipate that gender (sex), as a determinant of attitudes, will have more impact on the attitudes of black females residing in high and low risk neighborhoods than on the attitudes of white females living in high and low risk areas. Black females may be more inclined to favor gun regulation than are white females, black males, or white males.

Perceived Level of Police Protection

Research indicates that blacks perceive the police as providing only limited protection to the black community, whereas whites have a more positive perception [24, 28, 29]. Our data also indicate that there are differences in the perceived level of police protection between blacks and whites. But, the differences appear to be associated with area of residence rather than strictly race. For instance, blacks and whites in high risk neighborhoods appear to be undecided as to whether the police protect their communities. On the other hand, blacks and whites residing in black low risk neighborhoods and whites in low risk neighborhoods tend to believe the police are inclined to protect their communities. Although blacks and whites in low risk neighborhoods are inclined to view the level of police protection positively, whites in low risk neighborhoods hold even more strongly positive perceptions.

Theoretically, it is possible that the perceived level of police protection may have an impact on attitudes toward gun regulation. Whites and blacks living in high risk neighborhoods may be more inclined to favor gun regulation as a means of increasing their safety in light of what they perceive as inadequate police protection. On the other hand, whites and blacks who reside in low risk neighborhoods may be more inclined to oppose regulation because they feel their environments are adequately protected by the police.

Socioeconomic Status

Neighborhoods that are characteristic of a high incidence of criminal victimization are often characterized as environments that include a high proportion of low socioeconomic status individuals [30]. Our data indicate that the income and education levels of residents of black high and low risk areas are lower than those of their white counterparts, and those differences are statistically significant ($X^2 = 98.48$, $p < .05$ for income; $X^2 = 81.24$, $p < .05$ for education).

More than one-half of black high risk residents earned less than \$10,000 annually, as did more than one-third of black low risk residents. White high risk areas, however, appear to possess socioeconomic characteristics that show greater similarity to black low risk areas. Within the former, slightly more than one-third of the families, 35.2 per cent, earned less than \$10,000, however, only 15.7 per cent of white low risk area residents earned less than this amount.

The mean years of education for black high risk and low risk area residents are 11.3 and 12.2 years respectively, whereas, the means for white high and low risk residents are 11.6 and 13.9 years respectively. Consequently, these differences in socioeconomic status may result in a differential association with the gun regulation issue. Specifically, higher income and more educated whites, who reside in minimal criminal victimization environments, may oppose gun regulation on constitutional grounds since they are not faced with the objective reality of violent crime. But, lower income and less educated blacks, who reside in low and high risk neighborhoods, and whose absolute level of victimization is considerably higher than that of the former, may favor gun regulation as a means of making their environments safer.

Age

Although the absolute incidence of crime against the elderly is lower than the incidence for younger age categories, research suggests that fear of crime has become generalized throughout the aged population [31]. Consequently, the perception of risk of victimization is more exaggerated among the elderly than among the other residents. Thus, it is possible that older residents of all four areas should be more inclined to favor gun regulation than should younger residents.

Years of Residence in Neighborhood

High criminal victimization areas are often characterized as older neighborhoods with a highly mobile population, whereas low risk areas are usually newer with more stable, yet relatively recent, populations. Our data indicate that at least three-fourths of the residents of black and white high risk and black low risk areas have lived in their neighborhood more than ten years. But, fewer than one-half of the residents of white low risk areas have lived in their neighborhood for the same amount of time.

It could be hypothesized that the longer individuals reside in a high risk neighborhood, the more likely they are to favor some form of gun regulation. Thus, residents of black and white high risk neighborhoods, as well as residents of black low risk areas, may be more inclined to favor gun regulation than do residents of white low risk areas because the former have lived in their neighborhoods longer. Residents of black low risk areas are included with those of high risk areas because the victimization level is greater than that of residents of white low risk neighborhoods.

Perception that Regulation Decreases Crime

Many associate the easy availability of firearms with the increased crime and victimization rate. If individuals perceive an association, they may be more inclined to favor gun regulation if they feel it will decrease crime, whereas, individuals who do not perceive an association will be more inclined to oppose regulation. We anticipate that this indicator will have an impact on the supportive attitudes of residents of all four areas.

ANALYSIS

Each of the twelve indicators presented as demographic, social, and environmental elements existing in the environment of risk has been discussed. Also, the anticipated contribution of each to an explanation of the determinants of attitudes toward gun regulation has been hypothesized. The environment of risk explanation (social reality) can now be tested using appropriate indicators from the survey data.

The dependent variable — attitude toward some form of gun regulation — is represented by an index consisting of five items. Cronbach's Alpha, or the degree of reliability of the unidimensional scale, for the index α is .80. The first, second, and third indicators of environment of risk — fear, gun ownership, and purpose of ownership — are represented by single items. The fourth indicator — having been a victim of some form of violent activity — is represented by a computed index consisting of three items ($\alpha = .62$). (See Table 2.)

The fifth and sixth indicators — home burglary and gender (sex) — are represented by single items. The seventh indicator — perceived level of police protection — is represented by a computed index ($\alpha = .72$). The eighth through the twelfth indicators — income, education, age, years of residence in neighborhood, and perception that regulation decreases crime — are all represented by single items.

Multiple regression analysis for attitude toward gun regulation and the twelve elements of environment of risk was conducted separately for each area. This was done in order to identify differences between areas. There was no multicollinearity detected between the twelve predictors in the data. To test for interaction effects, the regression analysis with the inclusion of multiplicative

Table 2. Dependent and Independent Variables and Item-Total Correlations

Gun Regulation (Dep) –

- (1) The government should control the availability of firearms: handguns, shotguns, and rifles (.73).
- (2) Rifles and shotguns should not be regulated (.52).
- (3) A person should be required to obtain a police permit before he or she could purchase a gun (.51).
- (4) All sales of guns should be from government-owned stores (.64).
- (5) All firearms should be confiscated except for those of the police (.56).

Fear – Are you afraid to walk alone at night in your neighborhood? (Very afraid = 5; somewhat afraid = 4; undecided = 3; reasonably unafraid = 2; and not afraid at all = 1.)

Gun Ownership – Do you happen to have any guns or revolvers in your home or garage? (Yes = 1; no = 0.)

Purpose of Gun Ownership – Own gun for protection = 1; own gun for sport/recreation = 0.

Victim of Violent Activity –

- (1) Has anyone ever taken or tried to take something from you by using force: such as a stickup or threat? How many times would you guess this has happened to you (.42)?
- (2) Has anyone ever beaten you up, attacked you, or hit you with something such as a rock or bottle? How many times would you guess this has happened to you (.36)?
- (3) Have you ever been threatened by a gun or shot at? How many times would you guess this has happened to you (.50)?

Home Burglary – Has anyone ever broken into or entered your home illegally? (No = 0; once = 1; twice = 2; three times = 3; and four or more times = 4.)

Gender (Sex) – Male = 0; female = 1.

Police Protection –

- (1) The police are really concerned with protecting people like me from experiences with crime (.56).
- (2) The police are not concerned with preventing crime in my neighborhood (.56).

Income – Actual figure.

Education – Actual number of years in school.

Age – Actual figure.

Years of Residence in Neighborhood – Actual number of years.

Perception that Regulation Decreases Crime – If firearms were regulated, violent crimes would decrease. (Strongly agree = 5; agree = 4; undecided = 3; disagree = 2; strongly disagree = 1.)

terms was conducted a second time.⁴ Results indicated that, with one exception, the interaction effects made no significant difference in R^2 . The results of the regression analysis with interaction terms indicated that the interactions of fear and age (R^2 change .035), fear and perceived level of police protection (R^2 change .176), and fear and having been victim of violent activity (R^2 change .036) increased the R^2 to .885 for whites residing in black low risk neighborhoods. These interactions are theoretically understandable and tend to support the conclusion that whites over perceive the risk of the neighborhood; thus, fear

⁴ All analyses were also conducted on the unweighted data to provide a check of the weighted regression results; both were identical.

has more of a significant interaction with these indicators for whites than for blacks in the same neighborhood.

FINDINGS

Analysis indicates that blacks in high risk areas have a more favorable attitude toward some form of gun regulation than do whites of high risk areas, 52.7 per cent and 34.9 per cent respectively. Conversely, a greater proportion of whites in high risk areas oppose regulation, 46.5 per cent, than do blacks in similar risk areas, 37.8 per cent. The remaining 9.5 per cent of blacks and 18.6 per cent of whites, are undecided on the issue. There also appears to be a difference in the attitudes of blacks and whites in low risk areas. Blacks, once again, appear to favor regulation in a greater proportion than whites, 40.4 and 34.7 per cent respectively; however, the difference is not as great as in the former area. The greatest difference is in opposition to regulation, 52.6 per cent of white low risk residents oppose regulation compared to 34 per cent of blacks. At least one-fourth, 25.6 per cent of the black respondents are undecided about regulation compared to 12.7 per cent of whites. Interestingly, whites residing in neighborhoods defined as black low risk are not as undecided on the issue as their black neighbors appear to be. They favor regulation in approximately the same proportion as blacks, 40 per cent, however, slightly more than a majority, 52 per cent, are opposed to regulation while only 8 per cent are undecided.

Table 3 shows the results of the regression analysis for all four areas, specifically the standardized regression coefficients (beta weights) between attitude toward gun regulation and the twelve indicators of environment of risk. The beta weights for blacks in high risk areas indicate that one indicator — the perception that regulation decreases crime (.55) — is, as expected, strongly and positively associated with attitude toward gun regulation. The more an individual perceives a relationship between gun regulation and decreasing crime rates the greater the support for gun regulation.

Gun ownership (-.31) and sex (gender) (.27) are moderately to weakly associated. As anticipated, blacks who own guns are more inclined to oppose regulation than are those who do not own guns. Likewise, black females in high risk areas are more inclined to favor regulation than are black males. Income (.16), age (-.10), education (-.18), having been a victim of violent activity (-.07), and owning a gun for protection (.16) have small but significant effects on attitude. Also, contrary to our expectations, the effects of the remaining indicators are extremely small.

The beta weights for whites residing in high risk neighborhoods demonstrate that one variable — the perception that regulation decreases crime (.53) — is also strongly and positively associated with attitude. Gun ownership (-.28) and having been a victim of violent activity (-.24) are weakly but significantly associated. The direction of association for the former is the same as for blacks in the preceding area. The association for the latter is an inverse one: an

Table 3. Standardized Regression Coefficients for Environment of Risk and Gun Regulation Attitude for Black and White High and Low Risk Areas

	<i>Black High Risk (Blacks Only)</i>	<i>White High Risk (Whites Only)</i>	<i>Black Low Risk Blacks</i>	<i>White Low Risk (White Only)</i>
Income	.16 ^a	.02	.002	.37 ^a
Victim of Violent Activity	-.17	-.24 ^a	-.02	.003
Police Protection	.04	.06	.15 ^a	-.10
Regulation Decreases Crime	.55 ^a	.53 ^a	.42 ^a	.46 ^a
Gun Ownership	-.31 ^a	-.28 ^a	-.51 ^a	-.45 ^a
Own Gun for Protection	.16 ^a	.07	.31 ^a	-.01
Years of Residence	-.05	-.03	.06	.41 ^a
Fear	-.04	.04	.07	.30 ^a
Home Burglary	-.03	-.08	.12 ^a	-.03
Age	-.10 ^a	.10	-.26 ^a	-.30 ^a
Sex	.27 ^a	.16 ^a	.06	-.10
Education	-.13 ^a	.11 ^a	.02	-.45 ^a
Adjusted	(N = 456) R ² = .449	(N = 195) R ² = .698	(N = 387) R ² = .474	(N = 189) R ² = .627
				(N = 850) R ² = .561

^a F value significant at p less than .001.

individual who has been a victim of some form of violent activity is more inclined to oppose gun regulation than is an individual who has not been victimized. The effects of the remaining indicators are minimal.

The beta weights for blacks in low risk neighborhoods demonstrate that three indicators – gun ownership (-.51), perception that regulation decreases crime (.42), and owning a gun for protection (.31) – are strongly to moderately associated with attitude. The interesting finding is that owning a gun for protection is positively associated with attitude. Although gun ownership in general is inversely associated with attitude, it appears that blacks who own guns for protection are more inclined to support regulation than are blacks in the same neighborhood who own guns for sport.

Contrary to our expectations, age (-.26) is inversely and weakly associated with attitude. As black residents of these neighborhoods get older, support for gun regulation declines. Perceived level of police protection (.15) and home burglary (.12) have small but significant effects. The effects of the other indicators are extremely small.

Of particular interest are the results for whites living in black low risk neighborhoods. Seven indicators – perception that regulation decreases crime (.46), gun ownership (-.45), age (-.30), years of residence (.41), education (-.45), income (.37), and fear (.30) – have moderate associations with attitude. The direction of association and interpretation for the first three are the same as for the preceding areas. The other three have not had this magnitude of association in other areas. Apparently, the longer a white individual resides in a majority black neighborhood, support for gun regulation increases. Upper income whites are more inclined to support regulation than are lower income whites in the area. Paradoxically, however, the obverse relationship is apparent for the education indicator: higher educated whites are more inclined to support regulation. Additionally, the more fearful these individuals, the more inclined to support gun regulation. The effects of the remaining indicators are extremely small.

The results for whites in white low risk neighborhoods demonstrate that only one indicator – perception that regulation decreases crime (.50) – has any substantial association with gun regulation. Perceived level of police protection (.14), gun ownership (-.10), years of residence (-.12), and sex (.14) have small but significant effects. Moreover, the effects of the remaining indicators are minimal.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

The evidence indicates that, for the most part, blacks and whites have different attitudes toward gun regulation. Moreover, whites who live in black low risk neighborhoods appear to have attitudes similar to those of whites in the other neighborhoods rather than to those of their black neighbors. Additionally, the determinants of those attitudes are similar for blacks and whites in similar

risk neighborhoods, different for blacks and whites in different neighborhoods, and different for blacks and whites residing in the same neighborhoods. Consequently, we can accept the hypotheses, with some very important qualifiers and distinctions, that:

1. environment of risk causes blacks and whites to have different attitudes toward the issue of gun regulation; and
2. differential environments of risk result in different determinants of black and white attitudes toward gun regulation.

The determinants, with slight variations, appear to be similar for blacks and whites in high risk neighborhoods. The twelve indicators of the environment of risk concept, however, explain more of the variance in the attitudes of whites in high risk neighborhoods (adj. $R^2 = .698$) than they explain in the attitudes of blacks in high risk neighborhoods (adj. $R^2 = .449$). Additionally, whites tend to oppose regulation, whereas blacks tend to support regulation. Thus, it appears that high risk environments result in opposite responses from whites and blacks.

It is possible that whites in high risk neighborhoods could oppose regulation from the viewpoint of owning guns for self-protection. It is also possible that blacks in similar risk neighborhoods support regulation as a means of restricting weapons which could be used in criminal victimization. But, the finding that whites in these neighborhoods primarily own guns for sport may negate the former line of reasoning. Or, it is possible, that in spite of our definition of the white neighborhoods as high risk, the respondents may not perceive them as such. For instance, if the nature or type of homicide committed in their areas is expressively motivated (domestic or interpersonal conflict), rather than instrumentally motivated (robbery, assault and so forth), residents might not perceive a high level of individual risk of victimization. Hence, if this is the case, and conversely if most of the homicides committed in black high risk neighborhoods are instrumental, it would explain why the interaction of environment with attitude toward gun regulation is different for whites and blacks in high risk areas. Unfortunately, the nature or type of homicides committed in each neighborhood was not determined.

The determinants definitely appear to be different for blacks and whites residing in the same black low risk neighborhood. The different determinants also result in different positions—whites are more inclined to oppose regulation than their black counterparts. There may be several reasons for the differences. Many of the neighborhoods which are presently majority black low risk neighborhoods are or were transition neighborhoods formerly all or majority white, or border on black high risk neighborhoods. Thus, the change in the racial make-up of the area may result in blacks correctly perceiving the level of neighborhood risk, while the remaining white residents may over-perceive the level of risk. The moderate association of fear with attitude for the latter group may be indicative of this line of reasoning. Also, it is possible that many of the black residents may have formerly lived in high risk neighborhoods which also

would affect their perceptions of risk in the newer neighborhood. Consequently, within the same neighborhoods blacks and whites may perceive risk differently, resulting in different determinants and different views of gun regulation.

Once again, however, the twelve indicators explain more of the variance in the attitudes of whites (adj. $R^2 = .627$) than they explain for blacks in the same neighborhood (adj. $R^2 = .474$). Apparently, there are other factors interacting with blacks in both areas that are not tapped by the environment of risk indicators utilized in this work.

Whites residing in white low risk neighborhoods differ completely from the other groups. Only one indicator has any magnitude of association with gun regulation attitudes and, that factor accounts for most of the variance explained by the twelve indicators (adj. $R^2 = .561$).

These findings may have serious implications for our understanding of the perceptions and views of the gun regulation issue. It appears that among urban residents the determinants of attitude extend beyond the mere ownership of a firearm. Various experiential, behavioral, and environmental factors, as well as perceptions of those factors, interact to formulate one's position. This also suggests implications for gun regulation policy. Perhaps policymakers need to examine the pro and con views of urban citizens whose lives are directly intertwined with criminal victimization, rather than to examine the opinions of rural-based organized gun owners. For urban residents, the issue might not be registration of handguns, but total confiscation of firearms. It is possible that existent (or non-existent) policies on gun regulation may be sufficient for and approved by people whose victimization is negligible, live in rural communities, and own guns for sport. But, they might not be in the best interest of those whose victimization is high, live in urban communities, and own guns for protection.

CONCLUSION

These data from Detroit in no way provide conclusive evidence of the validity of the social reality explanation for accounting for black and white attitudes toward gun regulation. These findings, however, may generate questions for further research.

In this research, the evidence suggests that the concept of social reality appears to provide a relatively good explanation of 1) black and white positions on gun regulation and 2) the determinants of those attitudes. The objective and perceived social realities of these two groups differ to the extent that there are racially different positions on the issue and racially differential associations of the determinants of attitude.

What is needed in future research is a retesting of the social reality thesis, using a variety of policy issues and data from more than one city. This work concentrated on blacks and whites, but future projects should include an examination of Mexican-Americans as well. Their victimization rates, in some

instances, are less than those of blacks, but greater than those of whites. Also there is a strong possibility that their social reality is totally different from those of whites and blacks, thus producing still another position and other determinants of attitude toward gun regulation. Additional research would also provide an indication of what types of racial attitudes toward policy issues, i.e., capital punishment, crime prevention, and so forth, can be explained by social realities, and of what policy positions are better explained by other theories.

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