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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Our most nuanced theories of the relationship between culture and crime come from ethnographic studies of single neighborhoods, places with names like Cornerville, The Addams Area, Germantown, and Winston Street. One of the most resilient findings across such studies is the seemingly paradoxical co-existence of law-abiding and deviant cultural systems. Indeed, a variety of ethnographic accounts since Whyte's (1943) *Street Corner Society* demonstrate how residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods navigate mainstream (read middle-class) *and* deviant cultural systems as they go about their everyday routines. Most residents of socially disadvantaged neighborhoods believe in the substance of the law and express little tolerance for violence and crime (Sampson and Bartusch 1998), yet many still engage in violations of the law despite these beliefs.

How, then, does one explain this coexistence of law abiding beliefs and law violating behaviors? For the most part, neighborhood research over the past twenty years has made few attempts to answer this question—or even to ask it—largely because of the failure to incorporate contemporary notions of culture in explanations for behavior. This neglect of cultural explanations is puzzling because a concern with culture was once core to theorizing in urban sociology. In particular, classic social disorganization theory considered cultural transmission an essential mechanism in the persistence of delinquency in disorganized neighborhoods (Park 1925; Shaw and McKay 1942). While in recent years research on neighborhood effects has done much to advance our understanding of the social-interactional and structural mechanisms of social behaviors (e.g., collective efficacy and concentrated poverty), only a handful of studies, mainly

ethnographies, consider the role of culture in explanations for crime, or in the study of neighborhood effects more broadly. This study aims to address this research shortfall by injecting a cultural dimension found within the ethnographic tradition into the quantitative study of neighborhood effects. We argue that above and beyond social structural conditions such as poverty and structural disadvantage, neighborhood levels of violence can be explained by the presence of a specific cultural frame—*legal cynicism*.

Legal cynicism refers to a cultural orientation in which the law and the agents of its enforcement, such as the police and courts, are viewed as *illegitimate, unresponsive, and ill-equipped* to ensure public safety. Legal cynicism resolves the aforementioned paradox—while individuals may *believe* in the substance of the law, antagonism toward and mistrust of the agents of the law may propel some individuals toward violence simply because they feel they cannot rely upon the police to help them resolve grievances. Under such conditions, violence can serve as an additional form of problem solving behavior in one’s cultural repertoire (Hannerz 1969; Black 1983), augmenting but not necessarily replacing other types of problem solving behaviors such as calling the police.

Drawing upon a unique assemblage of data on the socio-demographic, social- interactional, and cultural characteristics for every neighborhood in Chicago, this study seeks to answer the following questions about the effects of neighborhoods on lethal violence: Is neighborhood violence the product of a subculture that values such behavior? Or, is violence explained by legal cynicism, such that violence may be common in cynical neighborhoods even if few residents value and tolerate acts of violence? And, if so, does legal cynicism explain the persistence of violence in some Chicago neighborhoods over time, even as structural conditions such as concentrated poverty

improved? If legal cynicism is positively predictive of violence, does it make all types of violence more likely or just certain forms?

CONCEPTUAL MODEL (SEE FIGURE 1)

We contend that negative interactions with the police and other institutions of the law as well as neighborhood structural conditions such as concentrated poverty lead to legal cynicism. These conditions structure how individuals perceive the functioning and relevance of the law. Through communication and interaction, experiences with the law and neighborhood conditions coalesce so residents form a shared perception of how the police will operate in a given context. In turn, legal cynicism fosters violence by constraining the available strategies to resolve disputes and ensure personal safety. The perceived inadequacy or illegitimacy of formal institutions of social control means that individuals may no longer regard the use of formal control institutions as an option to mediate their grievances. In other words, calling the police will not solve their problems or remedy disputes and victimizations (Carr et al. 2007). In the face of such a constraint, the use of violence as a form of “self-help” or social control may become a situational response to legal cynicism (Black 1983; see also Anderson 1999; Jacobs and Wright 2006). When the law is unavailable—or when the law is *perceived* to be unavailable—individuals may choose to disperse social control by their own means, thus increasing the probability of violence.

In the present study, we focus on a single type of violent act—murder. While the act of murder is, at its core, a dyadic event, our focus is on determining whether differentials in homicide across neighborhoods are associated with neighborhood

differences in aggregate levels of legal cynicism. While it is an important question to consider whether a cynical individual is more likely to kill, our goal is to examine the ecology of homicide. Because of differences in structural conditions, the behavior of the law, and the consequent cultural transmission across neighborhoods, we have every reason to assume that legal cynicism does vary across neighborhoods. Given this reality, we seek to determine if legal cynicism explains why some neighborhoods have drastically more homicides than others.

METHODS AND DATA

Data utilized in this study come from three sources: the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN), the Chicago Police Department, and the U.S. Census. The PHDCN is an interdisciplinary project that focuses on understanding the causes of juvenile delinquency, adult crime, and violence, among other outcomes. Indicators of neighborhood cultural and social mechanisms come from the 1994-1995 PHDCN Community Survey.

Legal Cynicism is our key independent variable. We conceptualize legal cynicism as a frame through which individuals interpret the functioning and usefulness of the law and its agents. To measure legal cynicism we combine three items from the PHDCN Community Survey. Respondents of the survey were asked the extent to which they agree to the following: 1) Laws are made to be broken, 2) The police are not doing a good job in preventing crime in this neighborhood, and 3) The police are not able to maintain order on the streets and sidewalks in the neighborhood. Details of our scaling strategy are presented below. Additional correlates of violence used in our analyses

include tolerance of deviance, collective efficacy, concentrated poverty, residential stability, immigrant concentration, and the proportion of youth in the neighborhood.

To assess the consequences of legal cynicism for neighborhood violence, we utilize four different measures of homicide as our dependent variables: the average yearly homicide rate for 1996 to 1998, the residual change in homicide from 1991-1993 to 2000-2002, the residual change in gang homicides, and the residual change in non-gang homicides.

ANALYTIC STRATEGY AND HYPOTHESES

Analyses follow four paths. In the first set of analyses, we test the hypothesis that legal cynicism is a cultural adaptation to neighborhood structural conditions (Hypothesis 1).

At the first level of our hierarchical statistical model, we estimate each individual's mean response to the three legal cynicism questions as a function of individual-level characteristics. At the second level of the model, we model the neighborhood mean of legal cynicism as a function of neighborhood-level covariates.

In the second set of analyses we assess the repercussions of cynical cultural frames as well as tolerant attitudes toward deviance by modeling neighborhood rates of homicide from 1996 to 1998 as a function of legal cynicism, attitudes, and other relevant neighborhood covariates. Per our argument that violence proliferates in certain areas even when such courses of action are not valued, we hypothesize (Hypothesis 2A) that neighborhood-wide attitudes toward deviance and violence are unrelated to neighborhood rates of homicide. In contrast, we hypothesize (Hypothesis 2B) that legal cynicism is positively associated with neighborhood rates of homicide.

In the third set of analyses, we seek to determine if the influence of neighborhood culture, in the form of legal cynicism, explains the persistence of violence in certain neighborhoods over time. We hypothesize that legal cynicism is significantly and positively associated with the unexpected (residual) change in homicide during the 1990s, net of structural changes to Chicago neighborhoods (Hypothesis 3). For this analysis, we utilize rates of homicide from the early 1990s (1991 to 1993) and the early 2000s (2000 to 2002) to model the residual change in homicide.

Fourth, in order to determine if legal cynicism makes all types of violence more likely or just those forms we may regard as self-help (Black 1983) or retaliation (Kubrin and Weitzer 2003), we employ spatial regression models to examine whether the neighborhood covariates and predictors of gang-related and non-gang homicide are the same. We hypothesize that legal cynicism has a general effect on neighborhood violence, and thus is positively associated with both gang and non-gang homicide (Hypothesis 4).

Neighborhoods are interdependent ecological units, such that the conditions in one neighborhood are influenced by the conditions of spatially proximate neighborhoods. Theoretically, accounting for spatial dependence is crucial for understanding the causes and nature of homicide in a focal neighborhood. Empirically, ignoring spatial dependence may lead to biased parameter estimates and erroneous conclusions about statistical significance (Anselin 1988; Messner et al. 1999; Baller et al. 2001). We utilize a Lagrange Multiplier test to assess spatial autocorrelation with homicide, and to assess the exact form of spatial dependence (Anselin and Florax 1995; Anselin et al. 1996). We find evidence of spatial autocorrelation with respect to homicide, and that a spatial lag

model is most appropriate for modeling our homicide measures. Thus, we test hypotheses 2A, 2B, 3, and 4 using spatial lag regression models with the program GeoDa.

RESULTS

We find the following with respect to the neighborhood structural and cultural correlates of violence:

- Tolerant attitudes toward deviance and violence have little effect on neighborhood rates of violence.
- Concentrated poverty and the proportion of youth in the neighborhood are positively related to homicide.
- Legal cynicism mediates the association between the proportion of youth and homicide, suggesting that homicide clusters in youthful neighborhoods because youth are more cynical than adults.
- Legal cynicism has both a near-term and enduring influence on violence, net of neighborhood structural characteristics and social processes such as collective efficacy. Legal cynicism partially explains why rates of homicide remained stable in some Chicago neighborhoods, including those undergoing gentrification, during the 1990s when homicide declined dramatically city-wide.
- We find a strong, negative association between legal cynicism and collective efficacy (-0.69). Additionally, collective efficacy mediates the association between legal cynicism and both gang and non-gang homicide. Cynicism toward the law likely deters individuals from engaging in collective actions designed to control neighborhood violence.

CONCLUSIONS

The study of neighborhood effects has become a cottage industry over the past two decades, and much has been learned about the neighborhood-level social-interactional mechanisms which influence violence and other social outcomes (Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley 2002). Outside of a few noteworthy examples, however, quantitative studies of neighborhood effects have paid relatively little attention to cultural mechanisms in comparison to the usual suspects such as economic disadvantage and social capital. While structural and social-interactional factors are crucial for understanding neighborhood violence, cultural mechanisms are vital for understanding why neighborhood conditions such as disadvantage are associated with violence (i.e., because of adaptation) and for understanding why violence and other neighborhood-based outcomes may persist even as neighborhoods change structurally.

In regards to our empirical objectives, the findings presented in this paper reveal: a) individual-level perceptions of legal cynicism vary as a function of neighborhood conditions such as concentrated poverty and residential stability (Hypothesis 1), b) that homicide is unrelated to resident attitudes towards deviance and violence (Hypothesis 2A), c) that neighborhood rates of homicide are positively associated with legal cynicism net of structural and social factors (Hypothesis 2B), d) that legal cynicism explains the unexpected (residual) change in homicide in Chicago from the early-1990s to early-2000s (Hypothesis 3), and e) that legal cynicism has a general effect on multiple types of homicide (Hypothesis 4), which is mediated by collective efficacy. We assert that when the law is perceived to be unavailable—e.g., when calling the police is not a viable option

to remedy one's problems—individuals may instead resolve their grievances by their own means, which may include violence (Black 1983). In this sense, cultural frames have a constraining influence; cynicism constrains choice if individuals presume that the law is unavailable or unresponsive to their needs, thus pushing individuals to engage in their own brand of social control.

The findings of this project have several implications for policy and programs aimed at reducing neighborhood-level rates of crime and violence. The most important implication of this research is that improving structural and economic conditions of impoverished neighborhoods or increasing deterrence-based policing efforts alone may not be sufficient for reducing crime. Rather, our findings suggest that perceptions of the law—in this instance, legal cynicism—play a central role in maintaining high levels of crime even when social structural conditions might improve. As the case of the Bronzeville neighborhood illustrates (Figure 3), crime rates in some gentrifying African American neighborhoods remained at high levels in spite of improving economic conditions precisely because of the persistence of legal cynicism. In other words, cultural frames such as legal cynicism have a lasting impact on neighborhood levels of crime net of structural factors. This finding suggests that crime reduction efforts should explicitly incorporate approaches that decrease cynicism of the law.

What, then, can be done to reduce cynicism of the law? Without abandoning human capital, poverty-related, and deterrence-based solutions, we suggest that perhaps the most promising solutions rest in programmatic and policing efforts that focus on increasing the overall *legitimacy* of the criminal justice system and its agencies. By this we mean policing efforts should stress processes rather than outcomes and moral

engagement as opposed to purely deterrence-oriented thinking (see Meares 2009). Even deterrence-based policing efforts would do well to consider how simple interactions between police and citizens shape larger perceptions of fairness and trust in the legal systems. A focus on legitimacy does not mean that deterrence based strategies are not important, but simply that any criminal justice strategy—but especially deterrence strategies that are likely to have severe effects on legal cynicism—should consider the ways in which it might minimize cynicism of the law.

While our results provide valuable information about the importance of considering both cultural and social mechanisms when examining neighborhood violence, study limitations provide ample opportunities for future research. First, while we assessed whether the influence of legal cynicism explains the persistence of homicide, we did not assess whether neighborhood legal cynicism itself persists as neighborhood structural conditions are changing. In our view, legal cynicism is not static, and it may persist for some time—i.e., a cultural lag—even if the factors that led to its promotion somehow vanish. Examining the stability and change of legal cynicism is an important avenue of future research.

Second, future research should examine whether legal cynicism makes all types of violence more likely, or just those specific forms of homicide that are particularly indicative of self-help or retaliation. While we validated our core conceptual model (Figure 1) by disaggregating homicide by gang and non-gang homicide, further validation using other types of homicide as well as other forms of violence (e.g., assault) would be useful.

Third, because legal cynicism is so consequential to the frequency of crime and violence as well as collective efforts among neighborhood residents to control crime (see, e.g., Kirk and Matsuda 2011), it is vital for future research to further consider how to minimize or reverse cynical views of the criminal justice system.

Fourth, we argue that legal cynicism, a neighborhood cultural frame, is predictive of violence because it constrains the available strategies an individual has to resolve disputes and ensure personal safety. In this sense, individuals have agency, and choose among available strategies of action to handle their problems. Because of data constraints, we have examined neighborhood-level relationships in this study. Future research should examine the individual-level components of our model—i.e., how individuals perceive their available options for handling a problem and make behavioral decisions based upon those options.

INTRODUCTION

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Our most nuanced theories of the relationship between culture and crime come from ethnographic studies of single neighborhoods, places with names like Cornerville, The Addams Area, Germantown, and Winston Street. One of the most resilient findings across such studies is the seemingly paradoxical co-existence of law-abiding and deviant cultural systems. Indeed, a variety of ethnographic accounts since Whyte's (1943) *Street Corner Society* demonstrate how residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods navigate mainstream (read middle-class) *and* deviant cultural systems as they go about their everyday routines. Most residents of socially disadvantaged neighborhoods believe in the substance of the law and express little tolerance for violence and crime (Sampson and Bartusch 1998), yet many still engage in violations of the law despite these beliefs.

How, then, does one explain this coexistence of law abiding beliefs and law violating behaviors? For the most part, neighborhood research over the past twenty years has made few attempts to answer this question—or even to ask it—largely because of the failure to incorporate contemporary notions of culture in explanations for behavior. This neglect of cultural explanations is puzzling because a concern with culture was once core to theorizing in urban sociology. In particular, classic social disorganization theory considered cultural transmission an essential mechanism in the persistence of delinquency in disorganized neighborhoods (Park 1925; Shaw and McKay 1942). While in recent years research on neighborhood effects has done much to advance our understanding of the social-interactional and structural mechanisms of social behaviors (e.g., collective efficacy and concentrated poverty), only a handful of studies, mainly

ethnographies, consider the role of culture in explanations for crime, or in the study of neighborhood effects more broadly. This study aims to address this research shortfall by injecting a cultural dimension found within the ethnographic tradition into the quantitative study of neighborhood effects. We argue that above and beyond social structural conditions such as poverty and structural disadvantage, neighborhood levels of violence can be explained by the presence of a specific cultural frame—*legal cynicism*.

Legal cynicism refers to a cultural orientation in which the law and the agents of its enforcement, such as the police and courts, are viewed as *illegitimate, unresponsive, and ill-equipped* to ensure public safety. Legal cynicism resolves the aforementioned paradox—while individuals may *believe* in the substance of the law, antagonism toward and mistrust of the agents of the law may propel some individuals toward violence simply because they feel they cannot rely upon the police to help them resolve grievances. Under such conditions, violence can serve as an additional form of problem solving behavior in one’s cultural repertoire (Hannerz 1969; Black 1983), augmenting but not necessarily replacing other types of problem solving behaviors such as calling the police.

The conception of legal cynicism has received important theoretical attention in recent years (Sampson and Bartusch 1998). By and large, prior theorizing has utilized a definition of culture as norms and values (albeit situationally based). For instance, Sampson and Bartusch (1998, p. 782) conceive of (and empirically measure) legal cynicism in a normative manner—i.e., as a component of anomie, “a state of normlessness in which the rules of the dominant society (and hence the legal system) are no longer binding in a community.” Yet our study theoretically and empirically departs from prior work in three important ways. First and foremost, we seek to integrate theory

and research from cultural and urban sociology (e.g., Small 2002, 2004; Harding 2007) by conceiving of legal cynicism as a cultural frame. That is, legal cynicism is a lens through which individuals observe, perceive, and interpret situations (Lamont and Small 2008). This distinction between norms and frames may be subtle, but has important implications for our understanding of the sources of social behavior such as interpersonal violence. As Lamont and Small (2008, p. 81) note: “[T]he norms-and-values perspective posited a cause-and-effect relationship between values and behavior, whereas the frame perspective tends to posit . . . a constraint-and-possibility relationship. Frames do not cause behavior so much as make it possible or likely.” Thus, we contend that violence results because people’s perception of their context leads them to believe that they have few options to handle a conflict or to protect themselves besides violence. Empirically, we measure legal cynicism using indicators of resident perceptions of the legal system and the police, in contrast to earlier work which measured legal cynicism using indicators of social norms (Sampson and Bartusch 1998).

Second, while we contend, as do Sampson and Bartusch, that legal cynicism originates as an *adaptation* to neighborhood structural conditions such as concentrated poverty, we also argue that legal cynicism is *cultural* precisely because individual perceptions of the law are augmented and solidified through communication and social interaction among neighborhood residents. In this way, residents arrive at a shared, though not necessarily identical, meaning of the law and its viability (Hannerz 1969). Once such cultural understandings emerge, cynicism exerts an influence on neighborhood rates of violence independent of the structural circumstances that originally produced

such cynicism. Thus, culture plays a more important role in neighborhood violence than prior quantitative research may suggest.

Finally, whereas prior theoretical and empirical work addresses the sources of legal cynicism, our focus is directed toward the *consequences* of cynicism for neighborhood violence. While we do consider how legal cynicism emerges, the main empirical focus of this report is on how legal cynicism influences levels of neighborhood violence. And while some prior work has examined how views of the law influence *individual's* compliance and disobedience to the law (e.g., Tyler 1990), our interest is in exploring the social and cultural characteristics of neighborhoods which explain differential rates of violence across space.¹ By examining the relationship between legal cynicism and neighborhood violence, this study adds a dimension to a small yet resurging interest in identifying the cultural mechanisms at root of the neighborhood effects on behavior (e.g., Small 2004; Sampson and Bean 2006; Harding 2007; 2009).

Drawing upon a unique assemblage of data on the socio-demographic, social-interactive, and cultural characteristics for every neighborhood in Chicago, this study seeks to answer the following questions about the effects of neighborhoods on lethal violence: Is neighborhood violence the product of a subculture that values such behavior? Or, is violence explained by legal cynicism, such that violence may be common in cynical neighborhoods even if few residents value and tolerate acts of violence? And, if

¹ As Sampson (2008) notes, much recent attention in the “neighborhood effects” literature has been directed towards explaining how neighborhood conditions influence individual outcomes like criminal behavior, educational attainment, employment, birth-weight, and so on. Yet there is a long tradition in sociology dating back to the Chicago school and before of examining how neighborhood characteristics influence *rates* of behavior. With the latter analytic approach, one could investigate how a neighborhood-based intervention, such as the implementation of a community-policing initiative, influences neighborhood crime rates. This type of approach to examining neighborhood effects contrasts initiatives such as the Moving to Opportunity housing mobility program which intervened in the lives of impoverished families (see Kirk and Laub 2010 for a discussion).

so, does legal cynicism explain the persistence of violence in some Chicago neighborhoods over time, even as structural conditions such as concentrated poverty improved? If legal cynicism is positively predictive of violence, does it make all types of violence more likely or just certain forms? Our findings reveal that tolerant attitudes toward deviance and violence have little bearing on neighborhood rates of violence. Legal cynicism, however, has both a near-term and enduring influence on violence, net of neighborhood structural characteristics and social processes such as collective efficacy. Neighborhood culture is a powerful determinant of neighborhood violence, and partially accounts for why rates of violence remained stable (and even increased) in some Chicago neighborhoods during the 1990s despite declines in poverty and drastic declines in violence city-wide. Our findings—of total, gang, and non-gang homicides—also indicate that cynicism of the law has a general effect on violence, and that collective efficacy substantially mediates the association between legal cynicism and homicide. Legal cynicism undermines the collective efficacy that is so vital to the social control of neighborhood violence.

The report proceeds as follows. We begin by describing our conception of cultural frames, and then focus attention on the sources and consequences of legal cynicism. After that, we address four empirical objectives. First, we examine the correlates of legal cynicism (Objective 1). Second, we examine the cross-sectional relation between neighborhood violence and legal cynicism as well as the relation between neighborhood violence and tolerant attitudes toward violence and deviant behavior (Objective 2). Third, through a dynamic investigation of neighborhood change, we seek to determine if legal cynicism predicts the change in neighborhood violence over

time, net of changes to the structural conditions of a given neighborhood (Objective 3).

Fourth, in order to determine if legal cynicism makes all types of violence more likely or just certain forms, we compare whether the neighborhood predictors of gang versus non-gang homicide are the same (Objective 4).

LITERATURE REVIEW

From Culture in Values to Cultural Frames

While little recent theorizing has been directed towards the culture-crime nexus, cultural explanations of crime do have a long tradition in sociology. One prominent cultural explanation, generally thought of as the “culture of deviance” model, explains differential levels of violence as the byproduct of a unique lower-class subculture whose main tenets diverge from or come into conflict with the values of mainstream society (Sellin 1938; Cohen 1955; Miller 1958; Lewis 1966; Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967). This approach conceives of culture as something deep inside individuals and social groups—a bundle of norms, beliefs, attitudes, and values that provide a worldview and, more importantly as far as crime is concerned, a motive for action (e.g., Parsons 1951). From this perspective, deviance is *conformity*, albeit conformity to a set of values that diverge from mainstream society (Sellin 1938).

A softer version of the culture of deviance argument is found in Shaw and McKay’s (1942) classic social disorganization model, although the cultural mechanism affecting behavior is still values.² For Shaw and McKay (1942), the persistence of delinquency in the same neighborhoods despite population turnover and ethnic succession results from both structural conditions (i.e., economic status, population

² See Kornhauser (1978) for a thorough and critical review of the social control and cultural deviance components of Shaw and McKay’s disorganization model.

heterogeneity, and residential mobility) and a process of *cultural transmission* whereby the character of a community is passed on to subsequent neighborhood inhabitants. Shaw and McKay's argument follows directly from Robert Park (1925, p. 5) who argued, "[I]n the course of time every section and quarter of the city takes on something of the character and qualities of its inhabitants. Each separate part of the city is inevitably stained with the peculiar sentiments of its population." As the character of a community persists and is transmitted, so too does the level of delinquency persist. In particular, youth in high delinquency neighborhoods are more likely to encounter differential systems of values, such as those touted by youth gangs, which thrive because weakened social institutions cannot fend them off.

Of course there are very good reasons why the recent resurgence of neighborhood effects studies has generally neglected the role of culture despite the theoretical groundwork laid by Shaw and McKay and earlier work in urban sociology. In particular, exploring a cultural explanation for inner-city problems could be misconstrued as favoring a "culture of poverty" interpretation of behavior. Relatedly, empirical research has largely disproved the existence of a unique lower-class culture (Kornhauser 1978). Members of *all* classes, including those living in impoverished neighborhood conditions, share uniform opinions of crime and subscribe to so-called "middle-class" values (Short and Strodtbeck 1965; Liebow 1967; Suttles 1968; Hannerz 1969).³ Even if residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods become socially isolated as a result of middle-class flight (Wilson 1987), it does not mean that they become culturally isolated and embedded in an

³ Evidence of mainstream values among the poor is not limited to beliefs about crime. For examples of the widespread adoption of mainstream values related to work, education, parenting, and family formation, see, Newman 1999; Young 2004; Carter 2005; and Edin and Kefalas 2005.

oppositional culture (Harding 2007).⁴ In fact, research reveals that residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods are no more likely to tolerate violence than residents of advantaged neighborhoods (Sampson and Bartusch 1998, p. 796).

Why, then, do crime and violence proliferate in certain areas when such courses of action are not valued? We suggest that the answer to this question lies in a revised conceptualization of culture which views culture not as *values*, but as a *repertoire of tools* which ultimately serve as a guide for action (Hannerz 1969; Swidler 1986). The core arguments of Hannerz's (1969) magnum opus, *Soulside*, reflect a fundamental shift in the sociological notion of culture away from the view of culture as a system of values. For Hannerz, ghetto dwellers are not necessarily engaging in behaviors they value, rather they must often suspend their core values in order to engage in behaviors necessary when faced with a given situation and context. Through adaptation, ghetto dwellers develop a *repertoire* of modes of action, which include both mainstream and ghetto-specific forms of behavior. Similar to Hannerz, Kornhauser (1978) argues that it is not the content of values that vary across neighborhoods, rather the *strength* of values. Accordingly, mainstream cultural values may be weak or lack relevance in certain contexts (in Kornhauser's terminology), yet other cultural tools in one's repertoire (e.g., frames) may provide a more robust guide for action.

Swidler's (1986) theory of culture as a "tool kit" has further guided the intellectual shift away from "culture in values." As Swidler (1986, p. 273) notes, "[T]he

⁴ Liebow (1967, pp. 220-222) offers an illuminating discussion on this point. What has often been regarded as a culturally distinctive pattern of "serial monogamy" among women in ghetto neighborhoods (i.e., a succession of mates during procreative years) may instead be viewed as women and men striving to achieve a "durable, permanent union" in the mold of mainstream ideals, but often unable to do so because of the influence of structural challenges. The mainstream ideal of marriage is still upheld in disadvantaged areas, yet factors like weak labor markets contribute to its repeated demise in practice (see also Edin and Kefalas 2005).

reigning model used to understand culture's effects on action is fundamentally misleading. It assumes that culture shapes action by supplying ultimate ends or values toward which action is directed, thus making values the central causal element of culture." As an alternative to this traditional view of culture, Swidler (1986, p. 273) suggests "[C]ulture influences action not by providing the ultimate values toward which action is oriented, but by shaping a repertoire or 'tool kit' of habits, skills, and styles from which people construct 'strategies of action.'" In other words, culture has causal significance not because it spells out the desired ends of action, rather because culture shapes choices for action. In particular, culture provides a repertoire of evaluation schema, scripts, and frames people use to understand their social context and to choose courses of action.

In this study we similarly conceive of culture as a tool kit for action, and focus on one particular element of the tool kit which has bearing on action, namely *cultural frames*. The notion of cultural frames can be traced to the work of Erving Goffman (1974). For Goffman, cultural frames provide meaning to situations and contexts; in other words, individuals' perceptions of the world are filtered through a particular frame. Thus, the objective world may be different than the world an individual subjectively perceives and cultural frames serve to simplify the complexity of the objective world by highlighting certain elements of reality while excluding others (Lamont and Small 2008). In turn, cultural frames provide a guide to action in a given situation. Quite simply, how people act depends on how they cognitively perceive of themselves and the world in which they live.

2 demonstrates that this particular type of value has little relevance for explaining neighborhood violence.

We add the legal cynicism measure to Model 3, and find, as expected, that the addition of this measure partially mediates the effect of concentrated poverty on homicide. One reason why homicide tends to cluster in neighborhoods characterized by concentrated poverty is because such neighborhoods have more cynical views of the law than advantaged neighborhoods. Similarly, legal cynicism mediates the association between the proportion of youth and homicide, suggesting that homicide clusters in youthful neighborhoods because youth are more cynical than adults. Most important for testing our conceptual model, Model 3 reveals a positive, significant association between legal cynicism and homicide. This finding supports Hypothesis 2B. *Neighborhoods where the law and the police are seen as illegitimate and unresponsive have significantly higher homicide rates than in neighborhoods where the law is viewed more favorably.*

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

While between neighborhood differences in mean levels of legal cynicism are associated with differences in homicide, it is important to consider the nature of the underlying distribution. It might be the case that there are a few extremely cynical individuals in a neighborhood, thus pulling the mean of the distribution to the right.¹⁹ For instance, moderate mean levels of legal cynicism in two different neighborhoods could be produced by two very different distributions of survey responses. One neighborhood could have uniformly moderate levels of cynicism while the second neighborhood is composed mostly of residents with positive views of the law but with a

¹⁹ We do find a significant, positive correlation between the mean level of cynicism in a neighborhood and the variability in cynical views in the neighborhood, yet the correlation is modest in size (0.223; $p < .001$).

micro-grouping with extremely cynical views. These two different distributions could have different consequences for homicide. It could be the case that the neighborhood with uniform views has little violence while the neighborhood with dispersed views has numerous homicides because of the actions of a few cynical individuals. In this scenario, the within neighborhood heterogeneity of legal cynicism may be a significant predictor of homicide, in addition to or instead of the mean level of cynicism.

In order to provide an accurate depiction of the relationship between legal cynicism and homicide, in Model 4 we include both a measure of central tendency of legal cynicism (as in the previous models) as well as a measure of dispersion.²⁰ Results reveal that the mean level of cynicism in a neighborhood is associated with homicide, but not the within neighborhood variability in cynical views. Thus, what separates violent from non-violent neighborhoods is not that violent neighborhoods have a heterogeneity in cynical views about the law, rather that violent neighborhoods have more cynicism, on average, than non-violent neighborhoods.

Given the strong association between collective efficacy and neighborhood rates of violence demonstrated in prior research (Sampson et al. 1997; Morenoff et al. 2001; Papachristos and Kirk 2006), we next seek to determine if results concerning legal cynicism hold once accounting for the influence of collective efficacy on homicide. Consistent with prior research, the results from Model 5 reveal a negative association between collective efficacy and homicide. The relation between legal cynicism and homicide is attenuated once controlling for collective efficacy, though the association is still statistically significant. As we posited earlier, negative cultural frames toward the

²⁰ Our measure of dispersion is estimated from the same three-level regression model used to produce the scale for the mean level of legal cynicism. Post-estimation we compute the residual standard deviation in legal cynicism for each neighborhood (see Raudenbush and Bryk 2002, pp. 219-222).

law deter neighborhood residents from collectively working to control crime.

Accordingly, legal cynicism operates both directly and indirectly through collective efficacy to affect the likelihood of neighborhood violence.

To account for the possible confounding effects of prior homicide, Model 6 includes a control for the average yearly homicide rate from 1991 to 1993. It could be the case that residents in neighborhoods with high prior levels of violence become quite cynical. As we saw in Table 1, prior homicide is positively related to legal cynicism (0.488; $p < .001$). In Model 6 of Table 3 we find that prior homicide is a significant predictor of the rate from 1996 to 1998, yet the association between legal cynicism and homicide remains virtually the same when controlling for prior homicide. In sum, we find that the mean level of legal cynicism is positively associated with neighborhood rates of homicide, and this relationship holds when accounting for neighborhood structural conditions, social-interactive mechanisms, and the confounding effects of prior violence. Values, in this case related to a tolerance of violence and deviance, have little bearing on neighborhood violence.

HYPOTHESIS 3

The 1990s were marked by an unprecedented decline in violence in major U.S. cities, yet declines were not uniform across city neighborhoods (see, e.g., Weisburd et al. 2004; Papachristos, Meares, and Fagan 2007; Braga, Papachristos, and Hureau 2010). To motivate our analysis of legal cynicism and the temporal changes in neighborhood violence, we chart the geographic distribution of homicide changes across Chicago. Figure 3 presents a map of homicide residuals representing the neighborhood change in

homicide from the early 1990s (1991-1993) to the early 2000s (2000-2002), where the residuals are grouped into quartiles. The 1st quartile represents neighborhoods where homicide declined the most during the 1990s, while the 4th quartile depicts neighborhoods where homicide stayed roughly the same or even increased over the course of the decade despite the fact that homicide declined drastically city-wide.

[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

The neighborhoods depicted in the map inset comprise the Grand Boulevard and Douglas community areas of Chicago. This area of Chicago is more commonly known as Bronzeville, and is at heart of the “Black Metropolis” so vividly described in the seminal work of Drake and Cayton (1945). The promise of prosperity, employment, and a better way of life brought substantial numbers of black residents from the South to this part of Chicago during the first part of the 20th century. Yet starting in the 1940s, Bronzeville began a long spiral of decline; segregation, institutional racism, the development of high density public housing, black middle-class flight, and the decline in manufacturing in the Midwest all contributed to the demise of this historic neighborhood (Hirsch 1983; Wilson 1987; Hyra 2008). Violence, drug use, and crushing poverty all became commonplace. Yet after decades of economic and physical decline, Bronzeville began gentrifying near the turn of the twenty-first century (Hyra 2008). This recent period has been marked by rising home values, and substantial increases in income and home ownership.²¹

²¹ In Douglas, the median home value grew from \$164,472 in 1990 (2000 dollars) to \$208,449 in 2000, while in Grand Boulevard home values rose from \$81,312 in 1990 (2000 dollars) to \$179,849 (Chicago Fact Book Consortium 1995; Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission 2002). From 1990 to 2000, the percentage of owner-occupied housing units increased from 5.5 to 12.5 percent in Douglas, and from 8.2 to 13.5 percent in Grand Boulevard. From 1990 to 2000, median family income increased from \$13,962 (2000 dollars) to \$25,720 in Douglas, and from \$10,126 (2000 dollars) to \$18,159 in Grand Boulevard.

Despite drastic changes in the 1990s and early 2000s to this historic area of Chicago, Bronzeville still had unexpectedly high homicide rates. In fact, in the four full subsections of Bronzeville depicted in the map inset, homicide increased from an average rate of 59.5 homicides per 100,000 residents in the early 1990s to a rate of 94.6 in the early 2000s. We argue that legal cynicism, at least in part, explains why such gentrifying neighborhoods had increases in homicide. These neighborhoods are characterized by the some of the highest levels of legal cynicism relative to anywhere in the city, which likely contributes to the persistence of high homicide rates even in the face of structural and compositional change. We now turn to tests of this argument in Table 4.

Table 4 presents models of the change in homicide from the early 1990s (1991 to 1993 yearly average rate) to the early 2000s (2000 to 2002). As noted previously, the residual change score is interpreted as the *unexpected* change in homicide, where residuals are positive when homicide dropped less than expected and residuals are negative when homicide declined more than expected.

[TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

In Table 4 we see that tolerance of deviance is unrelated to the change in homicide. As hypothesized, we find that legal cynicism is positively and significantly associated with the unexpected persistence in homicide in Chicago neighborhoods, even after accounting for neighborhood structural changes from 1990 to 2000. Legal cynicism, at least partly, accounts for why rates of homicide remained stable in some neighborhoods such as Bronzeville despite structural changes and a city-wide decline in homicide.

In Figure 4 we use the standardized coefficients from Table 4 to compare the effects of concentrated poverty, proportion youth, tolerance of deviance, collective efficacy, and legal cynicism on the persistence of homicide. Through this analysis, we seek to determine which among these correlates of homicide are crucial for understanding why homicide persists in some neighborhoods over time. The bars displayed in this chart represent the association between homicide in a focal neighborhood (in terms of standard deviations) and each respective measure in the focal neighborhood.²² Not surprisingly, the proportion of youths in a neighborhood in 1990 strongly predicts the persistence of homicide from the early 1990s to the early 2000s. Homicide statistics show that young adults (age 18-24) have the highest victimization and offending rates by a large margin (Fox and Zawitz 1999; 2004). Thus, if we assume that neighborhoods with high proportions of youths (under 18) in 1990 subsequently had high proportions of young adults (18-24) over the course of the ensuing decade, then such neighborhoods would be exposed to heightened risks of homicide victimization and offending because of the age distribution of the neighborhood population.

Most crucial for our core arguments, Figure 4 reveals quite vividly the importance of legal cynicism for explaining the persistence of neighborhood violence. Even more so than collective efficacy, legal cynicism explains why rates of homicide remained stable in some Chicago neighborhoods (e.g., Bronzeville) during the 1990s when homicide declined dramatically city-wide.

²² Recall that we model homicide as a spatial multiplier process (see equation 5). For ease of presentation, in Figure 4 we only present results of the relationship between homicide and each variable in a focal neighborhood, yet the spatial lag effect revealed in Table 4 indicates that homicide is also the product of these correlates in adjacent neighborhoods. To show the full cumulative effect of legal cynicism we would need to include the effects of cynicism in first-order neighborhoods as well as second-order, third-order, and so on.

[FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE]

HYPOTHESIS 4

To conclude our analysis, Table 5 presents models of the residual change in gang homicide and non-gang homicide from 1991-1993 to 2000-2002. Focusing first on the gang results, we see in Model 1 that legal cynicism is positively predictive of gang homicide, while tolerance of deviance is not. In Model 2 we find that the addition of collective efficacy substantially mediates the association between legal cynicism and the persistence of gang homicide. The coefficient weakens to non-significance, declining from 0.030 to 0.023. Cynicism toward the law likely deters individuals from engaging in collective actions designed to control neighborhood violence. For instance, neighborhood residents may find little reason to risk their lives to thwart the crimes of gang members if they perceive they will receive little help and support from the police (see Venkatesh 2008). Thus, results from our models of gang homicide underscore the importance of the *indirect* relationship of legal cynicism for neighborhood violence.

[TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE]

Results from estimation of non-gang homicide tell a similar story: we find a positive association between legal cynicism and the persistence of non-gang homicide (Model 1), which is mediated when adding collective efficacy to the model. In sum, legal cynicism appears to operate in two manners to affect neighborhood violence: first, it narrows individuals' strategies of action for resolving disputes because individuals perceive that they cannot rely upon the police for help; and second, legal cynicism makes

violence more likely because it undermines the collective capacity of a neighborhood to control violence.

CONCLUSIONS

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study of neighborhood effects has become a cottage industry over the past two decades, and much has been learned about the neighborhood-level social-interactional mechanisms which influence violence and other social outcomes (Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley 2002). Outside of a few noteworthy examples, however, quantitative studies of neighborhood effects have paid relatively little attention to cultural mechanisms in comparison to the usual suspects such as economic disadvantage and social capital. While structural and social-interactional factors are crucial for understanding neighborhood violence, cultural mechanisms are vital for understanding why neighborhood conditions such as disadvantage are associated with violence (i.e., because of adaptation) and for understanding why violence and other neighborhood-based outcomes may persist even as neighborhoods change structurally.

There are very good reasons why the recent resurgence of neighborhood effects studies has generally neglected the role of culture. In particular, for too long academia conceived of culture as values, despite an accumulating volume of ethnographic research that demonstrates that values become attenuated in the face of societal structural conditions, and play but a minimal role in guiding individual action. Thus, in order to explore the role of culture as a determinant of neighborhood violence, the theoretical challenge is to reorient discussions away from the “culture in values” framework and

toward a more nuanced understanding of cultural mechanisms. Accordingly, this study examines the consequences of one particular cultural mechanism—legal cynicism. Legal cynicism is a cultural frame which structures the way residents perceive the legitimacy of the law, and the utility of the law as a guide for behavior.

In regards to our empirical objectives, the findings presented in this report reveal: a) individual-level perceptions of legal cynicism vary as a function of neighborhood conditions such as concentrated poverty and residential stability (Hypothesis 1), b) that homicide is unrelated to resident attitudes towards deviance and violence (Hypothesis 2A), c) that neighborhood rates of homicide are positively associated with legal cynicism net of structural and social factors (Hypothesis 2B), d) that legal cynicism explains the unexpected (residual) change in homicide in Chicago from the early-1990s to early-2000s (Hypothesis 3), and e) that legal cynicism has a general effect on multiple types of homicide (Hypothesis 4), which is mediated by collective efficacy. We assert that when the law is perceived to be unavailable—e.g., when calling the police is not a viable option to remedy one’s problems—individuals may instead resolve their grievances by their own means, which may include violence (Black 1983). In this sense, cultural frames have a constraining influence; cynicism constrains choice if individuals presume that the law is unavailable or unresponsive to their needs, thus pushing individuals to engage in their own brand of social control.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The findings of this project have implications for policy and programs aimed at reducing neighborhood-level rates of crime and violence. The most important implication of this

research is that improving structural and economic conditions of impoverished neighborhoods or increasing deterrence-based policing efforts alone may not be sufficient for reducing crime. Rather, our findings suggest that perceptions of the law—in this instance, legal cynicism—play a central role in maintaining high levels of crime even when social structural conditions might improve. As the case of the Bronzeville neighborhood illustrates (Figure 3), crime rates in some gentrifying African American neighborhoods remained at high levels in spite of improving economic conditions precisely because of the persistence of legal cynicism. In other words, cultural frames such as legal cynicism have a lasting impact on neighborhood levels of crime net of structural factors.

This finding suggests that crime reduction efforts should explicitly incorporate approaches that decrease cynicism of the law—a complicated charge to be sure. As described in this report, legal cynicism emerges from complex interwoven histories and interactions between neighborhood residents and the criminal justice system. What is more, cynicism of the law in general and police specifically is not evenly distributed across geographic space or social strata. Indeed, much has been written about white and black disparities not only in levels of neighborhood crime and violence, but also contact with the criminal justice system (e.g., Mauer and Huling 1995), levels of incarceration (e.g., Western 2006), sentencing disparities (e.g., Tonry 1996), racial profiling and discrimination at all levels of the justice system (e.g., Fagan et al. 2010), and perceptions of ‘fairness’ of the criminal justice system (e.g., Tyler 1990). With very few exceptions, such research points to the fact that, as compared to whites and relative to their total representation in the population, young black men are more likely to be stopped by the

police, more likely to be arrested for particular types of crime, more likely to be incarcerated if they are arrested, and, when convicted (which also occurs at a higher rate), are more likely to receive longer prison sentences.

Given such racial discrepancies, it is of little surprise that legal cynicism is higher in African American neighborhoods, especially those with high levels of concentrated disadvantage. In these types of neighborhoods, young men are more likely to have contact with the criminal justice agencies, and, thus by simple statistical probability, they are also more likely to have a greater number of *negative* interactions with the police (e.g., inappropriate stops/arrests, (mis)uses of police discretion, and so on).

What, then, can be done to reduce cynicism of the law? Without abandoning human capital, poverty-related, and deterrence-based solutions, we suggest that perhaps the most promising solutions rest in programmatic and policing efforts that focus on increasing the overall *legitimacy* of the criminal justice system and its agencies. By this we mean policing efforts should stress processes rather than outcomes and moral engagement as opposed to purely deterrence-oriented thinking (see Meares 2009). Attention should be directed toward *how* policies and programs embody notions of fairness (both procedural and absolute) and, more importantly, how the “on the ground” various programmatic manifestations embody the “law.” Even deterrence-based policing efforts would do well to consider how simple interactions between police and citizens shape larger perceptions of fairness and trust in the legal systems.

At face value, this suggestion may sound counter-intuitive, but research on compliance suggests that even those people who are stopped (and potentially arrested) have more favorable opinions of the police if they *feel* as though they were treated with

dignity (e.g., Tyler 1990; Tyler and Fagan 2008; Meares 2009). All people—even those stopped by the police or suspected of a crime—want police to treat them with respect, use honorifics, and, most importantly, they want to know that the reasons they are stopped or suspected seem fair and reasonable. The key element is that agents of the criminal justice system should consider the manner in which legal activities are perceived by the community and those arrested as being “fair,” even if the outcome of the interaction (e.g., arrest) is not favorable for one party (the arrestee). In fact, *positive experiences* with the police are strongly associated with subsequent evaluation of the police, even if the outcome of a specific act is not desirable (Paternoster et al. 1997; Tyler and Fagan 2008). So, for instance, Paternoster and colleagues shows that offenders in domestic abuse situations are more likely to evaluate the final decision of the court/police as “fair” when they are treated with respect and have a clear conception that the procedures leading to their arrest/confinement were also fair. Likewise, a recent report by Papachristos and colleagues (2009) finds that even highly active gun offenders are less likely to commit a subsequent crime when they have favorable opinions and interactions with the police.

Deterrence is the penultimate principle behind criminal justice policy. A focus on legitimacy does not mean that deterrence based strategies are not important, but simply that any criminal justice strategy—but especially deterrence strategies that are likely to have severe effects on legal cynicism—should consider the ways in which it might minimize cynicism of the law. Chicago’s Project Safe Neighborhoods initiative provides an illuminating example of the potential efficacy of such legitimacy centered programs.

The Chicago Project Safe Neighborhoods program (hereafter PSN) is a gun violence reduction initiative that coordinated a multi-agency effort in the city’s highest

crime communities (Papachristos et al. 2007; Meares 2009).²³ Although Chicago’s PSN consisted of several related strategies—including deterrence based policing efforts, a re-entry strategy, and community outreach—all efforts were directed with explicit attention toward theories of legitimacy and fairness. PSN’s core program was a re-entry effort known as “Offender Notification Forums.” The Forums are hour-long meetings in which approximately 20 individuals recently released from prison meet with representatives from law enforcement, community agencies, and various service providers. These meetings stress the consequences offenders will face if they choose to pick up a gun again as well as the choices they have to make to ensure that they do not re-offend (Meares 2009). Law enforcement agents speak candidly about their efforts and penalties and stress that those individuals in the room are at the greatest risk of *both* victimization *and* offending. Service providers spotlight the different avenues and barriers to re-entry. And, the meeting concludes with testimonials and re-entry strategies from other offenders who have remained out of prison. Informal conversations among participants, law enforcement, and community members typically extend well past the official ending time meeting.

A quasi-experimental evaluation of the Chicago PSN program found strong evidence of a programmatic effect of the Forums on both neighborhood level rates of crime and individual recidivism (Papachristos et al. 2007). At the neighborhood level, the treatment effect was the “saturation” of the Forum among the high-risk offending

²³ Federally, the larger PSN initiative was a billion-dollar program that was implemented within each of the 93 federal court jurisdictions. While oversight within each jurisdiction was handled by the respective U. S. Attorney’s office, each jurisdiction was charged with (a) assessing its own “gun violence” problem and (b) crafting its own gun violence reduction strategy accordingly. The end result was, in effect, not a single compressive plan, but rather a patch-work of 93 separate strategies that were designed to meet the specific needs of local jurisdictions.

population and increases in programmatic saturation were associated with a 37 percent drop in average monthly homicide rates. At the individual level, Forum participants were nearly 28 percent less likely to go back to prison within three-years of release. Modest effects were also detected in more traditional deterrence based strategies (e.g., targeted policing efforts), but the largest programmatic effects were by far those of the legitimacy-based efforts.

While PSN included strong enforcement components and in no way dismissed the idea of deterrence, the intervention was not designed to “scare” the participants straight. Rather it was designed to promote the individual agency of offenders (Meares 2009). Individuals were treated as rational thinking adults who would understand the potential severity of sanctions, but who were also guided toward direct services and other outlets to help them adjust behavior accordingly. The role of legitimacy is central to PSN. PSN overtly acknowledges that issues of race, community safety, and mistrust of the criminal justice system must be addressed head-on—that solutions to the “crime problem” cannot simply be solved by the continued mass incarceration of young African Men.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While our results provide valuable information about the importance of considering both cultural and social mechanisms when examining neighborhood violence, study limitations provide ample opportunities for future research. For one, we assess whether legal cynicism explains the persistence of homicide in certain neighborhoods over time, and find the legal cynicism does explain the residual change in homicide. In our view, this finding gives credibility to the argument that culture is more

than a mere adaptation to structural circumstances—culture exerts an independent causal force on neighborhood rates of behavior. Yet, while we assessed whether the influence of legal cynicism explains the persistence of homicide, we did not assess whether neighborhood legal cynicism itself persists as neighborhood structural conditions are changing. In our view, legal cynicism is not static, but it may persist for some time—i.e., a cultural lag—even if the factors that led to its promotion somehow vanish. We intend to take up this issue of cultural lag in future research. Thus, our present findings provide an initial test of what arguably should be modeled as a dynamic relation between social-structural conditions, cultural mechanisms, and violence.

Second, future research should examine whether legal cynicism makes all types of violence more likely, or just those specific forms of homicide that are particularly indicative of self-help (Black 1983) or retaliation (Kubrin and Weitzer 2003). While we validated our core conceptual model (Figure 1) by disaggregating homicide by gang and non-gang homicide, further validation using other types of homicide as well as other forms of violence (e.g., assault) would be useful.

Third, because legal cynicism is so consequential to the frequency of crime and violence as well as collective efforts among neighborhood residents to control crime (see, e.g., Kirk and Matsuda 2011), it is vital for future research to further consider how to minimize or reverse cynical views of the criminal justice system. The aforementioned PSN has already made some headway in this regard, as has research on the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (Skogan 2006).

Fourth, we argue that legal cynicism, a neighborhood cultural frame, is predictive of violence because it constrains the available strategies an individual has to resolve

disputes and ensure personal safety. In this sense, individuals have agency, and choose among available strategies of action to handle their problems. Because of data constraints, we have examined neighborhood-level relationships in this study. Future research should examine the individual-level components of our model—i.e., how individuals perceive their available options for handling a problem and make behavioral decisions based upon those options.

Urban ethnographies have for decades revealed the seemingly paradoxical coexistence of law-abiding beliefs and law-violating behaviors in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Our findings suggest that cultural frames such as legal cynicism go a long way towards explaining this paradox. Legal cynicism emerges not as some monolithic set of values, but as an adaptation to neighborhood structural conditions and interactions between neighborhood residents and the law, especially the police. Once emerged, cynical perceptions of the law become solidified through social interaction, whereby neighborhood residents develop a shared meaning of the behavior of the law. In addition to supporting much of the findings of urban ethnography, our quantification of legal cynicism further allows us to compare and contrast the impact of such cultural frames and more traditional structural determinants of neighborhood violence. The strong effect of legal cynicism, net of structural conditions and neighborhood social processes, suggests that “neighborhood effects” research needs to consider both social-structural and cultural mechanisms in order to fully understand the bases of neighborhood rates of homicide. More traditional structural analyses of neighborhood behavior would do well to bring culture back into deeper theoretical and empirical consideration.

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FIGURES

TABLES

