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A MULTILEVEL TEST OF RACIAL THREAT THEORY


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Abstract (Document Summary)

We develop a conceptual model articulating the mechanisms by which racial threat is theorized to affect social control, focusing specifically on the influence of the relative size of the black population on the likelihood that the police will arrest a black citizen suspected of a violent criminal offense. A multilevel analysis of 145,255 violent crimes reported to police in 182 cities during 2000 shows only qualified support for racial threat theory. Controlling for the amount of race-specific crime reported to police, our findings reveal that black citizens actually have a lower probability of arrest in cities with a relatively large black population. This finding tends to cast doubt on the validity of the racial threat hypothesis. No evidence buttresses the claim that economic competition between whites and blacks affects arrest probabilities. However, results show that in cities where racial segregation is more pronounced blacks have a reduced risk of being arrested relative to whites. Crimes involving black offenders and white victims
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