

Neighborhood Change & Formal Social Control

Enforcing Racial Social Control through Calls to the Police in Stable & Changing Neighborhoods

Lindsey Beach
UW Sociology
beachl@uw.edu

Charles Lanfear
UW Sociology
clanfear@uw.edu

Tim Thomas
UW Sociology
t77@uw.edu



CENTER FOR STUDIES IN
DEMOGRAPHY & ECOLOGY

Abstract

Crime and crime control are, for the most part, localized problems. Neighborhoods provide a stage for both criminal behavior and diversion to play out, with local residents and police sharing the responsibility of maintaining order through informal and formal social control. Demographic research shows that neighborhood context and change affect the ability of residents to share common goals for their area, hold strong and weak network ties with their neighbors, and unite to prevent crime. In addition, victimization research indicates that neighborhood context is a factor in determining which crimes are reported to the police and when formal social control is activated to resolve disputes. We merge demographic & criminological theories to understand how formal social control is enacted in Seattle neighborhoods of varying socio-demographic compositions, those undergoing seismic residential change, & those that have remained relatively stable.

Introduction

Criminological theories of social disorganization suggest that neighborhood transition has an impact on patterns of, and responses to, criminal behavior. Shifts in race and class composition may sever or harm social ties, leading to decreased collective efficacy and weakening the ability of a neighborhood to regulate deviance through informal social control. Seattle is currently experiencing accelerated shifts in neighborhood socio-demographics from rapid in-migration of high-income earners and decreasing housing affordability. These shifts led to the gentrification of traditionally non-white neighborhoods due to the affordability of the housing and proximity to business districts.

Guest, Kubrin and Cover[1] find that, in Seattle, high levels of neighborhood racial heterogeneity negatively predicts the degree to which whites view neighborly relationships as calm, trusting, and helpful. This distrust and skepticism may decrease the likelihood of white residents to informally address problems and increase their likelihood of bringing problems to a formal institution, such as the police. Furthermore, if this distrust and skepticism falls along racial lines, whites may be more likely to resolve problems informally with white neighbors while utilizing outlets of formal social control to address problems with black residents.

Seattle, like many cities, has a long history of racial residential segregation and exclusionary housing ordinances. Systematic examination of Seattle housing covenants by the Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project finds that there were 414 neighborhoods with racial covenants, confining black Seattleites to neighborhoods southeast of downtown. The ramifications of this legacy continue to this day; most black Seattle residents still live in these same areas. In addition, racial disproportionality in arrests has been a growing concern in the city. From 2008 to 2012 46% of the 230,000 arrests in Seattle involved a black suspect, while 45% involved a white suspect. In contrast to Seattle's racial composition these findings are startling. Black Seattleites comprise only 7.9% of the city's total population. During this 5 year period, the SPD reports arresting a number of unique black individuals equal to approximately 38% of the city's total black population, as compared to arresting the equivalent of only 8% of the city's white population.

Data

Neighborhood Trajectories

The first stage of this project is to define neighborhood change trajectories within Seattle's Census tracts, allowing us to categorize spatial locations of change and stability. We use the Geolytics Neighborhood Change Database (NCDB) to categorize change trajectories (1980-2010) of racial and socio-demographic in tracts inside, and bordering, Seattle's current metropolitan boundary. Neighborhood racial change is measured as the percent non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic black, and other over the four decades. The disadvantage measure for each neighborhood is a scaled index of Sharkey's definition of concentrated disadvantage: proportion of welfare recipients, poverty, unemployment, female-headed households, and density of children under the age of 18.

Crime Data

Crime data come from 2008-2012 geocoded police reports from the Seattle Police Department. These data describe 448,000 incident reports and 230,000 arrest reports of 57,000 unique individuals. Demographic information for each suspect, arrestee, and complainant involved in the incident include gender, race/ethnicity, and the zip code of their residence. We examine two crime categories: a) all crimes, and b) crimes most likely to be experienced between strangers. These categories will help unpack possible racial differences how different neighborhoods exert social control towards certain residents.

Methods

Latent Class Mixture Modeling

We use a multivariate latent class mixed-effect model (MLCMM) to reduce and categorize disadvantage and racial change trajectories from 1980-2010 for 146 Seattle tracts. MLCMM finds the most common trajectories that fit the data, reducing many trajectories to discretely defined neighborhood change types. The best fit model is a three category MLCMM (figure 1): neighborhoods with 1) increasing black populations & moderate disadvantage, 2) stable white populations & low disadvantage, and 3) declining black populations & declining disadvantage (i.e. gentrifying).

Logistic Regression

We use logistic regression to estimate two elements of police contact: a) the risk of a suspect or arrestee being black (versus white), and b) the risk of a police contact resulting in an arrest. As covariates we include neighborhood composition, LCMCMM neighborhood categories, and characteristics of the involved individuals.

Results

Seattle Three-Category MLCMM

The MLCMM model accounts for three response variables - disadvantage, proportion black, and proportion other - on discrete longitudinal outcomes for each Census decade. The map of Seattle in the upper right (figure 1) shows the tract location of these three neighborhood categories. Within these neighborhoods, we then plot the average levels of disadvantage and the proportion black by year within these tracts, providing a definition for our neighborhood trajectory types.

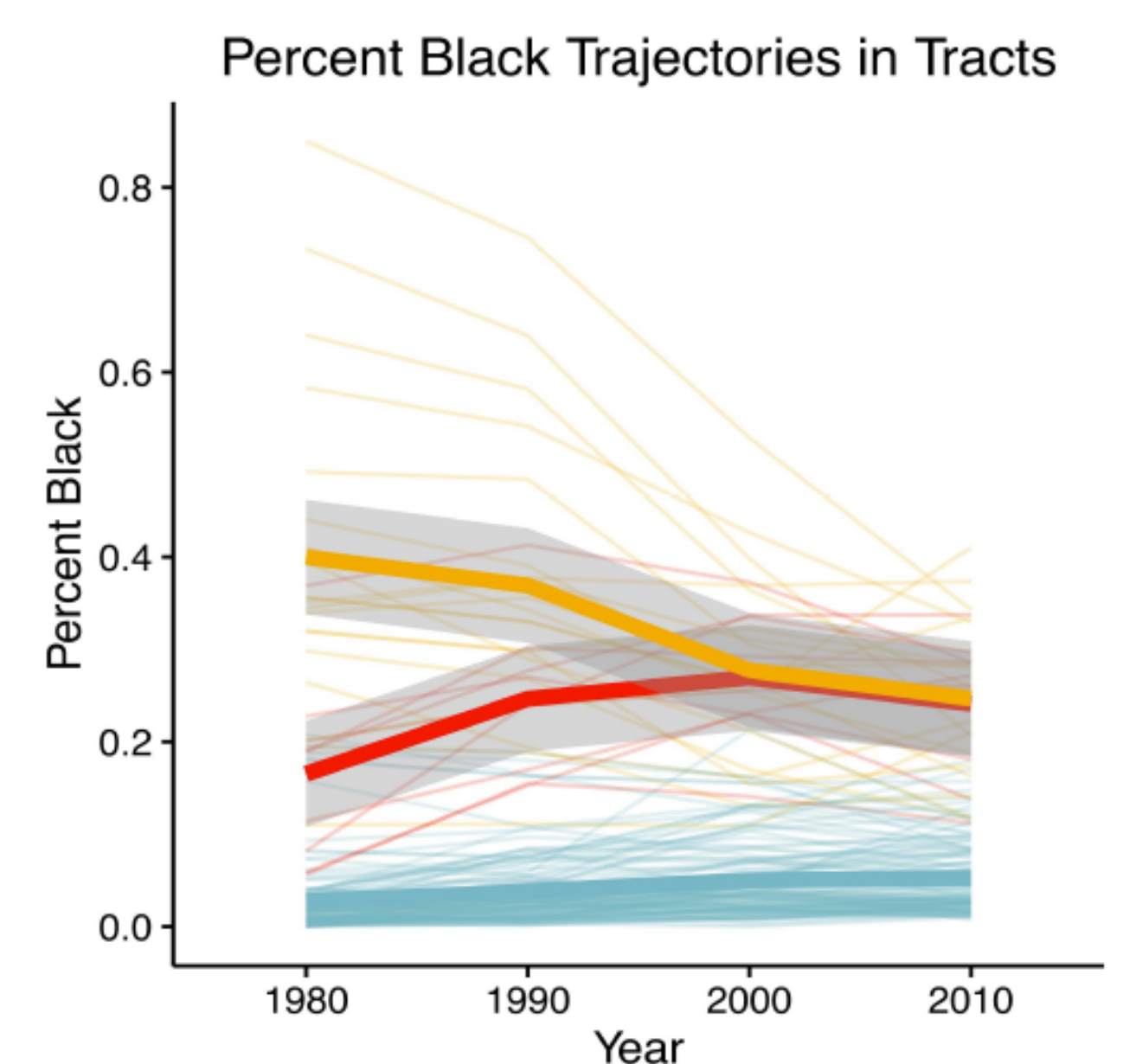
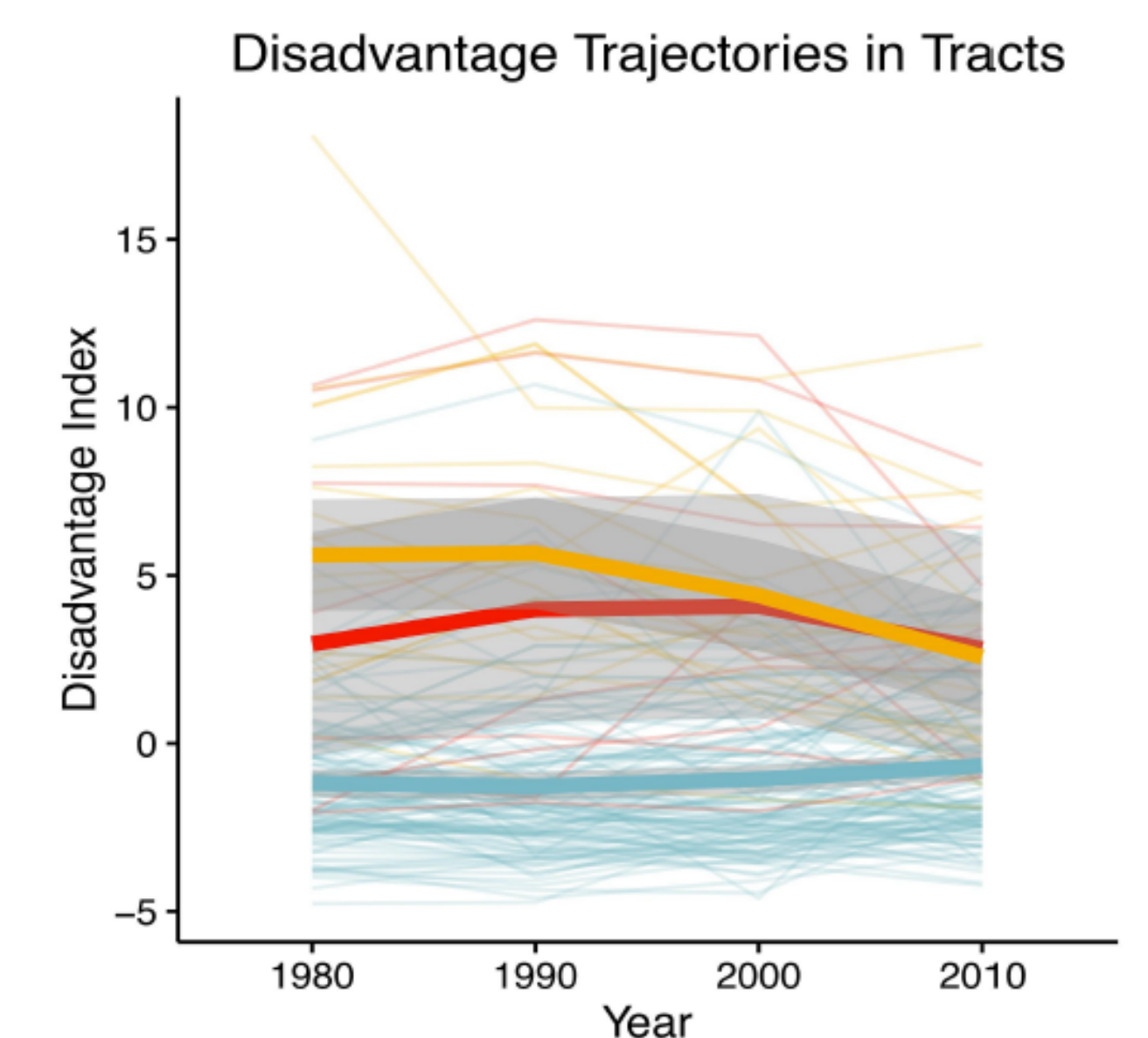
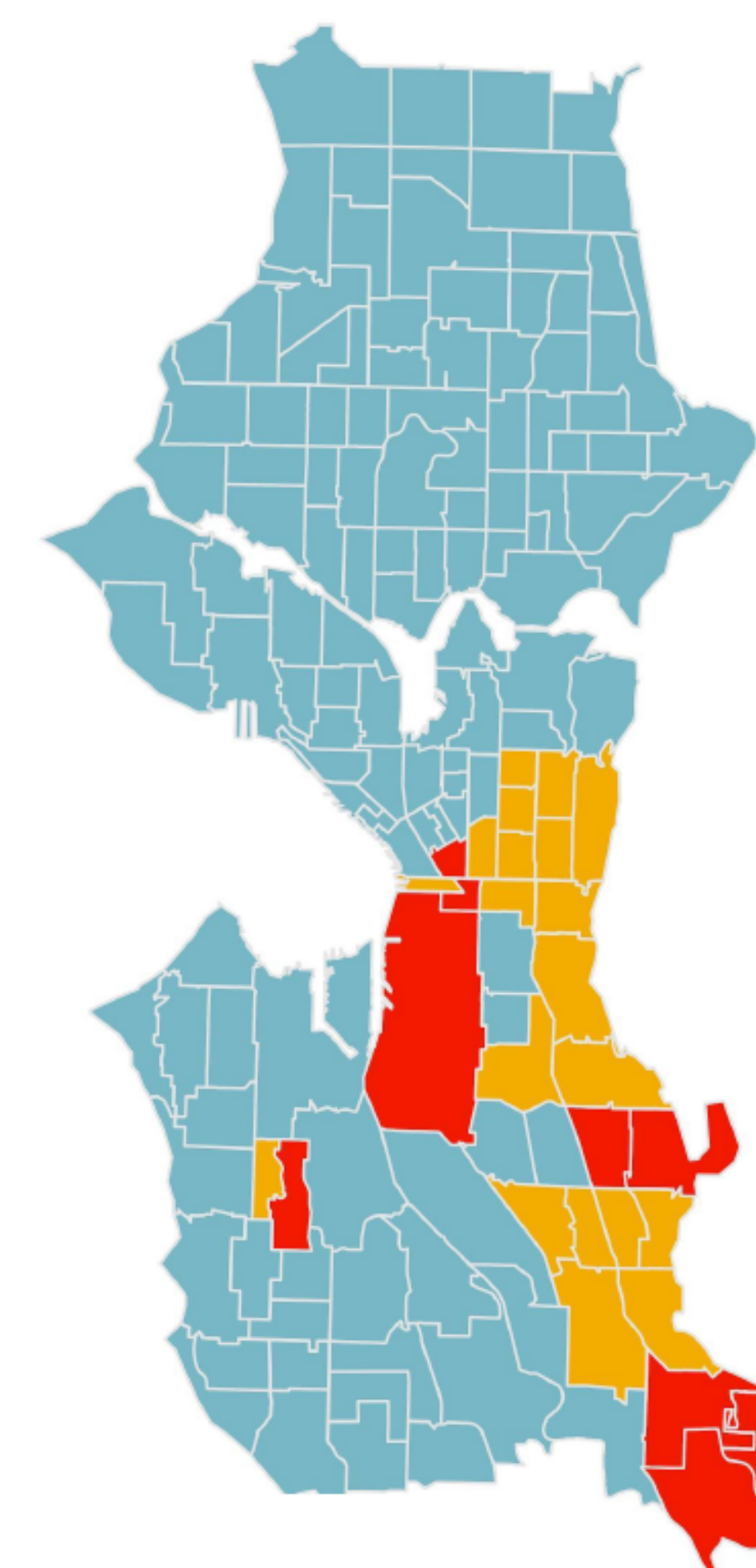


Figure 1: MLCMM of Seattle Neighborhood Disadvantage and Racial Composition

Logistic Regression of Police Contacts

Figure 2 depicts relative risk estimates of a suspect or arrestee being black, as opposed to white, and relative risks of a given police contact resulting in arrest, as opposed to an informal resolution.

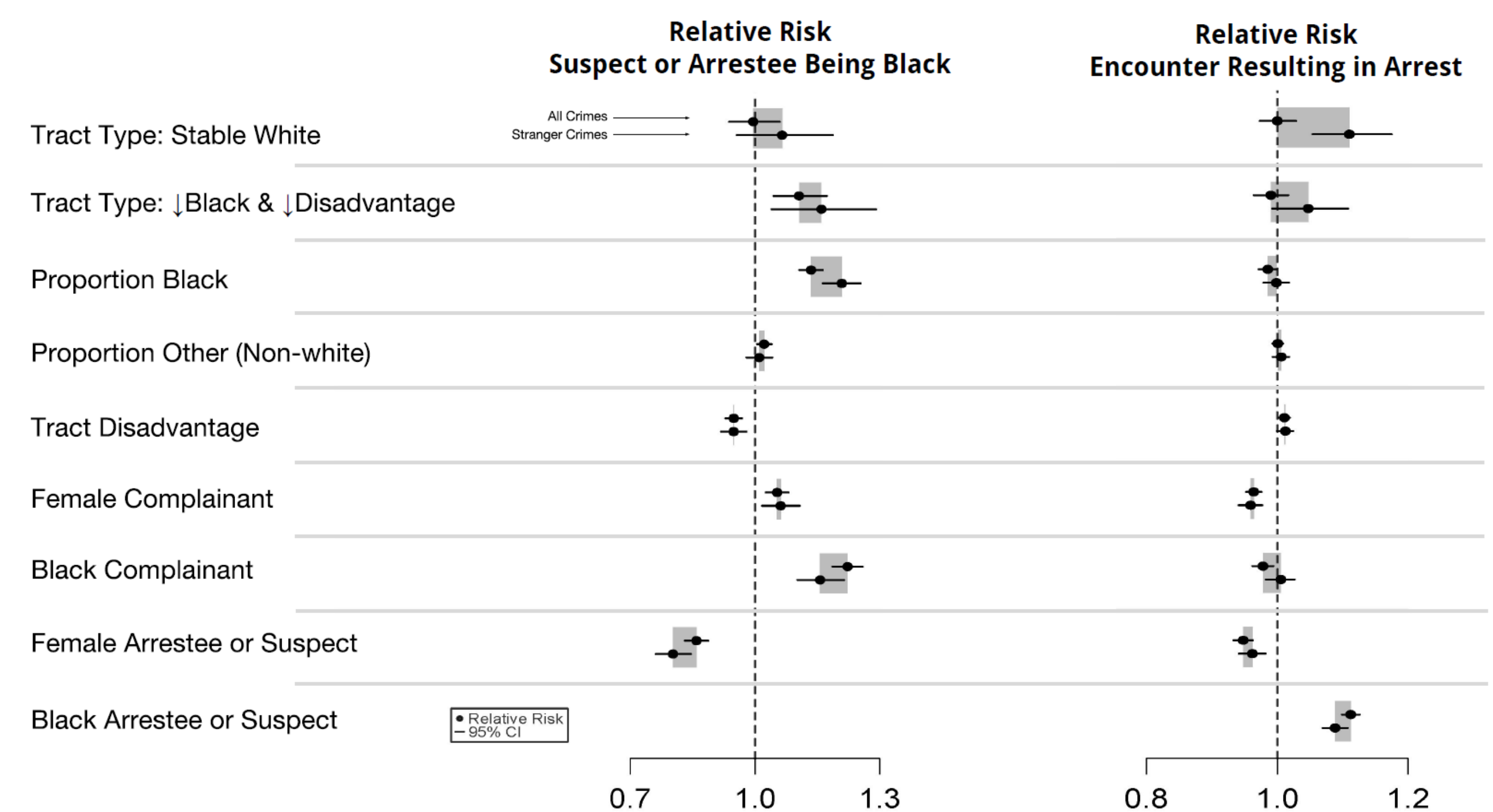


Figure 2: Relative Risks from Logistic Regression

Hypotheses and Findings

Current Composition

As formal social control is mainly a function of racial composition & disadvantage, neighborhood change will have no impact on police contacts.

- Composition impacts the likelihood of a suspect or arrestee being black but not of an event resulting in arrest.
- Neighborhood trajectories appear to account for variation above and beyond composition.

Stable Neighborhoods

Stable neighborhoods with continually low disadvantage & no racial change will exert social control against strangers.

- Stable white neighborhood trajectories are not associated with variation in proportions of black police contacts.
- Stable white neighborhoods may increase the probability of arrest for crimes between strangers.

Changing Neighborhoods

Neighborhoods with a decreasing black population & declining disadvantage will see increased formal social control.

- Neighborhoods with declining disadvantage and black populations see elevated risks of black contacts with police.
- Changing neighborhoods do not appear to have higher likelihoods of arrest than other neighborhoods.

Summary

Changing neighborhoods experience racialized formal social control in ways unexplained by current demographic composition. Within stable neighborhoods, crimes between strangers with a black suspect are more likely to lead to an arrest. Gentrifying neighborhoods see a higher risk of complaints against black individuals but not higher likelihoods of arrest.

References

[1] A.M. Guest, C.E. Kubrin, and J.K. Cover. Heterogeneity and Harmony: Neighbouring relationships among whites in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods in Seattle. *Urban Studies*, 45(3):501-526, 2008.