The historically enduring gap in death penalty support: Re-examining the role of context in the recent history of the black-white divide

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Abstract

This paper evaluates four racial-ecological theories regarding the historically enduring racial divide in public opinion regarding death penalty support. Using geo-coded data from the 20th century, this research examines the relative representation of African Americans, the level of black-white economic inequality, and the extent of racial residential segregation on race-specific odds of supporting the death penalty. The research finds support for aspects of racial social context accounting for a portion of the black-white gap in death penalty support at the time. We find differential effects, by race, of representation and segregation as mediators of public opinion regarding the death penalty.

Key words: racial-ecological theories, public opinion, death penalty support, geo-coded data

Introduction

Research attention to the black-white cleavage in public opinion has largely emphasized issues that overtly and explicitly deal with racial attitudes: such as opinions about the cause of social disparities by race, as well as opinions about appropriate societal and government response to ameliorate conditions for blacks. Kinder and Sanders (1996) characterize the racial divide on public opinion as "extraordinary" (p. 28) and a number of scholars who have examined this issue agree (e.g. Davis, 2005; Kinder and Winter 2001; Smith and Seltzer, 2000). They assert that black-white differences in public opinion matters dealing with race are unmatched by any other type of cleavage based on a social status characteristic (e.g. class, gender, etc.). Explanations often invoke two contrasting ideological systems (Unnever, 2008)—either alone or in combination—to account for the differences

in public opinion survey response patterns: "an African American racial belief system" (Allen, et al., 1989; Smith and Seltzer, 2000) and a white racist ideology (Feagin and O'Brien, 2003; Feagin, 2000). Kinder and Sanders (1996) aver:

> ... black and white Americans have taken possession of distinct paradigms. In the extreme, blacks and whites look upon the social and political world in fundamentally different and mutually unintelligible ways (p. 288).

The dual paradigm hypothesis implies a set of ecological expectations regarding the racial social context in which race serves to cleave public opinion. For example, one may presume that an African American racial belief system is likely to be of greater influence on opinions and attitudes among blacks who live in localities where blacks are large in number and highly concentrated. Similarly, white racist ideology has been shown to be more likely in places where black 'threat' is likely operant as indicated by the proportion black in the locality (see for example, Taylor, 2000; Taylor, 1998).

Within this line of thinking, scholars have focused on the black-white cleavage in public opinion about the death penalty—an issue in which race is neither explicitly embedded in the polling questions, nor which respondents themselves are required to internally recognize the question as being racial in content (either consciously or otherwise). Nevertheless, researchers use the dual paradigm hypothesis when analyzing the racial cleavage in death penalty support using empirical data. Some have emphasized a unique African American perspective (Anderson, 1990, 1994; also see Cochran and Chamlin, 2006; Unnever and Cullen, 2007a for a good review past literature on this subject); others have concluded that a white racist ideology accounts for much of the difference (Borg, 1997; Soss, et al., 2003; Unnever, et al., 2008; Unnever and Cullen, 2007b). Buckler et al. (2008) have also suggested that race specific ideologies account for the racial gap in support for the death penalty, but suggest that at the core, race differences in individualism, symbolic patriotism and authoritarianism are salient factors.

This analysis re-examines the black/white racial cleavage in death penalty support found in public opinion surveys and focuses on the question of how black/white racial social-ecological context differentially affects white and black reported attitudes toward capital punishment. We consider three dimensions of racial social context—the representation of blacks within the population, the economic disparities between blacks and whites, and the level of segregation between blacks and whites—as factors that may moderate the extent of the cleavage between blacks and whites in their attitudes toward the death penalty.

We find, consistent with extensions of Blalock's (1967) social threat hypothesis, that the greater the proportion black within an area, the greater the white support for the death penalty. This finding has already been established in the research literature on the racial cleavage in death penalty support (Baumer et al., 2003; Jacobs and Carmicheal, 2002; Soss et al., 2003; Taylor, 1998; Taylor, 2000). We also find, consistent with extensions of Lenski's (1954) status inconsistencies hypothesis and with Patterson's (1997) paradox of integration thesis, that blacks in more integrated areas are more likely to be opposed to the death penalty than are blacks in more segregated areas. We find that variation in racial economic equality is unrelated to the cleavage in attitudes regarding death penalty support despite expectations from extensions of Allport's (1958) social contact theory of a relationship. Finally, our finding of the negative effect of segregation on the cleavage between black

and white death penalty attitudes combined with the weak effect that percent black has on death penalty support among blacks is strong evidence against the black sub-cultural identity theory of attitude formation (see Cochran and Chamlin, 2006; also Kinder and Sanders, 1996).

Theory

If one embraces the dual paradigm hypothesis as a legitimate account for the racial cleavage in death penalty support, the next question that emerges is under what conditions is a white person more disposed toward adopting a white racist paradigmatic worldview, and under what conditions is a black person more disposed toward adopting an African American worldview? Several theoretical frameworks exist to provide ecological expectations for the answers to this question. These frameworks include: the social threat hypothesis (Blalock, 1967), the contact theory of prejudice (Allport, 1958), the theory of social influence in attitude formation (Friedkin, 1998; Marsden and Friedkin, 1993), and a theory of status inconsistencies (Lenski, 1957) coupled with the observation of the paradox of integration (Patterson 1997).

Social Threat Hypothesis

Blalock (1967) focused attention on discrimination against minority groups as a function of their proportionate representation in the population. Blalock hypothesized a positive relationship between the percentage of the population who are members of a subordinate group and the discrimination of the dominant group. He suggests that "as the power-threat increases [as a function of the increased relative size of the subordinate population] ... we are apt to find a disproportionately heavy emphasis on mobilizing resources through organizational and ideological techniques" (p. 160). Thus, white racist ideologies are hypothesized to be a function of the proportionate representation of blacks within the community.

With respect to support for the death penalty — the dual paradigm hypothesis coupled with the power-threat theory of discrimination suggests the expectation that the greater the proportion of blacks in a locality the greater the support among whites for the death penalty.

Contact Theory of Prejudice

The contact theory of prejudice (Allport, 1958) suggests "positive effects of intergroup contact . . . in situations marked by four key conditions: equal groups status within the situation; common goals; intergroup cooperation; and the support of authorities, law or custom" (Pettigrew, 1998, p. 66). When these conditions hold, the theory suggests that racist ideologies are likely to be minimized.

With respect to support for the death penalty — the dual paradigm hypothesis coupled with the contact theory of prejudice suggests the greater the degree of inequality between blacks and whites within a locality the greater the support among whites for the death penalty.

Theory of Social Influence

The theory of social influence suggests that actors situated in affective communication networks adjust and modify their ideologies and attitudes to "reflect those of their significant others, whose

attitudes reflect those of their significant others, and so forth" (Friedkin, 1998, p. 4). Simulation studies, predicated on the theory of social influence have shown that in the presence of network homophily that ideological polarization is likely (Kitts, 2005; Macy et al., 2003). Empirically, it has been shown that in the U.S. "homophily in race and ethnicity creates the strongest divides in our personal environments" (McPherson, et al., 2001, p. 415). However, certainly not all individuals are located in similarly racially homophilous networks. The more racially integrated interpersonal networks are the less that attitudes should be polarized by race.

Thus, it may be assumed that in localities in which blacks and whites are highly segregated, the racial cleavage in death penalty support will be the greatest — with blacks having the strongest tendencies in such localities to be in opposition to the death penalty and whites having the strongest tendencies to be in favor of the death penalty. Further, if blacks in localities with high black representation within the population have greater opportunities to have racially homophilous networks then a higher proportion black should also lead to a stronger African American racial belief system and a corresponding higher propensity for blacks to oppose the death penalty. Similarly, in localities with a large black population, whites have a greater opportunity to be in racially mixed networks (Blau, 1994). Thus, controlling for racial economic and racial segregation (two factors that should influence the likelihood of interracial network ties), the greater the proportion blacks in a population the greater the likelihood of racially mixed networks and the lower the polarization of ideology and attitudes. Therefore, following the theory of social influence, white support for the death penalty should be reduced in localities with many blacks.

Paradox of Integration and Status Inconsistencies Theory

Against the expectation that residential segregation increases the extent of homophily in affective networks is the 'paradox of integration' perspective presented by Patterson (1997). Patterson cites studies from Gallup polls that find that inter-racial close friendship ties are unrelated to residential segregation patterns. The Paradox of Integration perspective, however, does not merely lead to the expectation that segregation will be unrelated to racial ideological polarization — and therefore unrelated to attitudes toward the death penalty. Rather Patterson argues that integration has led to heightened perceptions of racial inequalities (even in the case where conditions are improving). Therefore, integration may be associated with stronger chances for blacks to adopt a strong version of an African American racial belief system. In this case, the greater the level of integration, the stronger the chances that blacks will be opposed to the death penalty and the greater the cleavage between blacks and whites in death penalty attitudes.

This perspective is somewhat related to Lenski's (1954) status inconsistencies thesis. Lenski argues that those who are consistently marginalized, along the many ways in which one can possess status, will be more likely to adopt the hegemonic ideology of the system than individuals who vary in the extent of their marginalization. No group can be seen as consistently marginalized than the hypersegregated blacks in the inner-cities that Wilson (1987) famously refers to as "The Truly Disadvantaged." The amelioration of residential segregation creates a status inconsistency that heightens the chances of adoption of an ideology of defiance and opposition. In this case, the more integrated the locality the stronger the chances that blacks will be opposed to the death penalty and the greater the cleavage between blacks and whites in death penalty attitudes.

Considering Deterrence and Brutalization Theory

Deterrence theory argues that the death penalty should serve as both a specific and general deterrent against future offending through the assumption that offenders are capable of making a rational choice about preserving their life and liberty by calculating the costs and benefits (e.g. pain or pleasure) associated with being sentenced to death for engaging in violent homicide. Deterrence theory assumes that offenders should fear being executed and that this should then decrease the homicide rate.

However, research on Brutalization theory, conducted by Thomson (1999), presents counter-intuitive results that are in direct contrast to the assumptions of the deterrence hypothesis for the death penalty for reducing violent homicide. Brutalization theory argues that potential offenders become emboldened by the government's use of the death penalty because it represents a diminished level of respect for the sanctity of life, even if it is the execution of violent offenders, by the authorities that are responsible for administering justice. Brutalization theory assumes that offenders' view the governments use of the death penalty as an example to be modelled and implemented in routine violent criminal activity.

Using pre- and post- homicide arrest data, Thomson (1999) found evidence to support the Brutalization hypothesis of the death penalty when examining the effects of a single publicized execution on the homicide rate in California. Consistent with the deterrence hypothesis, Thompson (1999) found that at the one-month follow-up, there was a slight decrease in the violent crime and homicide rate following an execution. However, consistent with the Brutalization hypothesis, at the 7-month follow-up, the residual deterrence effect is assumed to have diminished and the violent crime and homicide rate began to increase. Therefore, Thompson's (1999) findings establish that there is perhaps a temporary deterrence effect associated with the death penalty, but the brutalization effect is much more pronounced in the long-term as the violent crime and homicide rates regress to the mean. Similarly, Bowers and Pierce (1980) examined New York state data and found that one month after an execution, the homicide rate increases by an average of two additional homicide, even when controlling for seasonality and warfare.

If homogeneity in support for the death penalty exists in the absence of the effects of race or class variables, then we must assume that there is perhaps a brutalization effect occurring that is indiscriminate at shaping public opinion and attitudes towards the death penalty that moves beyond observable socio-demographic factors. In 1764, Cesare Beccaria noted that governments should not set a "savage example" for the population by perpetrating homicide through the use of the death penalty in its punishment of offenders, because it promotes hypocrisy and promotes the will of the mob and simultaneously diminishes the restraint that government is designed to uphold when administering justice.

Bowers and Pierce (1980) state: "The lesson of the execution, then, may be to devalue life by the example of human sacrifice. Executions demonstrate that it is correct and appropriate to kill those who have gravely offended us." This quote highlights the assumption that governmental practices are being observed by the governed and serve to shape public opinion and attitudes towards the most punitive punishment available, death.

Cleavages in Black/White Death Penalty Opinion

The case of public opinion toward the death penalty provides an excellent opportunity to study how social context operates to explain black/white differences. Race is one of the strongest predictors of support of capital punishment (Bohm, 1991; Cochran and Chamlin, 2006; Unnever and Cullen, 2007b) and the racial cleavage on this issue has been shown to persist over long periods of time (Borg, 1997; Anderson, 1990, 1994). Davis (2005) shows that the black-white difference in death penalty support is greater than any other black-white difference in a public opinion issue that is not explicitly and overtly about race. Since death penalty support is, at best, an issue in which race is a "covert" or "implicit" issue rather than "overt" and "explicit" (see Kinder and Sanders, 1996; page 29) explanations that rely on perceptions of the advancement of individual interests are less satisfying. Scholars must consider how group level differences emerge in attitude formation when group members are not merely expressing the aggregation of individual material interest.

The accounts that have emerged from recent studies of the racial cleavage in death penalty support have emphasized two factors of particularly strong salience in contributing to the fact that support for the death penalty is much higher among whites than among blacks. The first factor is white symbolic racism and the second factor is a black sub-cultural worldview that is inclusive of resistance to injustice of the American criminal justice system.

For example, Cochran and Chamlin (2006) draw on the past literature invoking the differential "worldview" thesis. They test eleven distinct explanations of the race effect on death penalty attitudes by statistically controlling for a number of individual level attributes that theory suggests may attenuate the effect of race. However, they find, using General Social Survey (GSS) data, the effect of race persists no matter what individual level control they add to their model. They interpret their findings as suggestive that "life experiences, life chances and world views of Blacks Whites and Hispanics in the United States are both different and profound" (p. 97). Following the ideas best attributed to Anderson (1990, 1994) and Borg (1997), Cochran and Chamlin (2006) conceptualize potentially salient subcultural differences between blacks and whites with ecological reference: "One representing a white, rural, and southern subculture of putitiveness/retribution and the other a northern, urban, Black underclass subculture of opposition/defiance" (p. 87).

Unnever and Cullen (2007a) further focus on whether individual level attributes have similar effects on death penalty support for both whites and blacks. Their finding, also using the GSS, that blacks and whites of otherwise similar social position do not converge in their acceptance of the death penalty lead them to more forcefully assert the differential worldview hypothesis. They conclude that "African Americans and Whites have widely different collective biographies that uniquely influence their opinions of the death penalty. Specifically, we propose that a key factor in sustaining the cleavage in capital punishment attitudes is the historical legacy of racial oppression that prompts African Americans in diverse social and cultural locations to be wary of the state's use of lethal punishment" (p. 126). Unnever and Cullen suggest that blacks possess a unique 'cognitive landscape' which frames perceptions of the criminal justice practices differently than whites and further suggest that the finding of racial cleavages among blacks and whites occupying otherwise similar social positions is consistent with the 'two nations' thesis regarding race in America.

In a separate analysis, Unnever and Cullen (2007b) find using the 2000 National Election Study that the effect of race on death penalty support is somewhat attenuated when controls are added indexing propensity to attribute the low economic status of blacks to individualistic rather than social causes. They conclude that whites are divided in their support for the death penalty and that white racism is the salient factor driving this division: "nonracist whites are less likely to support capital punishment than racist whites." (p. 1293). Further, they acknowledge that even after controlling for white racism most of the effect of race on death penalty support remains, leading them to affirm their previous finding "these results suggest that African Americans have unique experiences that contribute to their lower support of the state's use of capital punishment."

Unnever and Cullen's (2007b) interpretation of white racism being at the root of the racial cleavage in death penalty support is consistent with the perspective advanced by Soss et al. (2003). Soss, et al. do not explicitly attempt to account for a racial cleavage in death penalty—as they focus exclusively white variation. They do, however, take racial social context—at the geographic level—into account in the statistical modeling of the variation of opinion. The measure of white racism in this study is indexed on a thermometer score indicating 'warm' versus 'cold' feelings towards blacks combined with "difference scores indicating the gap between respondents' ratings of white and black people on three traits: hardworking-lazy, intelligent-unintelligent, and violent-peaceful." They find that their white racism score is highly predictive of support for the death penalty among whites, especially in areas with a high concentration of blacks. They conclude: "White American's preference for the death penalty cannot be adequately understood apart from their racial component. Racial prejudice is, in the aggregate, a significant part of what white death penalty support means." (p. 416).

Racial Social Context and Racial Cleavage in Public Opinion

We are not the first to look at social context in terms of racial issues in general or death penalty specifically. Others have addressed the question of racial cleavage in attitudes as a function of ecological context, but they have tended to focus on the social threat hypothesis (Blalock, 1967). Also, studies have yet to look at differential effects of context by race, either looking at one race only (Hagan et al., 2005; Soss, et al., 2003 Taylor, 1998; Taylor, 2000) or at population as a whole undifferentiated by race (Baumer et al., 2003; Jacobs and Carmicheal 2002). Most of this literature does not deal with hypotheses emerging from social contact theory (Allport, 1958), theory of social influence (Friedkin, 1998) status inconsistencies (Lenski, 1954) and the paradox of integration (Patterson, 1997).

Taylor (1998; 2000) examines whites only and looks at how racial composition affects attitudes regarding issues that overtly and explicitly deal with race and prejudice. She examines GSS data from 1990 and 1994 and creates four locality-level contextual predictors; proportion black, black/white economic status, white economic status and South vs. non-south (Taylor, 2000). She finds that traditional prejudice rises as the proportion of blacks to the overall population rise. On the other hand, Taylor does not find that contextual level inequalities exist among blacks and whites are related to white opinions on racial matters (Taylor, 2000).

Soss et al. (2003) use social context to explain variation among whites in their attitudes toward the death penalty specifically. They build into their empirical models measures of county-level income, county-level education, the county-level murder rate, and the percent black in the county.[1] Their theoretical emphasis is related to the social threat hypothesis, and they find support for it. The larger the percentage of blacks in a county the greater the support for the death penalty among whites. Also, of note, they find that the higher the murder rate in the county, the higher the white support for the death penalty. They interpret this finding in terms of perceptions of social disorder and fear of victimization.

Baumer et al. (2003) look at contextual level factors influence on death penalty support among General Social Survey respondents. They find that homicide rates, conservative climate and percent black each have an independent and additive effect on death penalty support even when individual level characteristics are controlled. Their research clearly points to the importance of social context. However, they note that their analysis estimates an overall — and not a race specific — effect of social context and that future research needs to take into account potential interactions between race and context (p. 869).

Jacobs and Carmichael (2002) examine support for the death penalty, but instead of examining variation in opinion among individuals, they focus on variation in enacted law among states. They focus on the threat hypothesis (Blalock, 1967). They find support for two aspects of the minority threat hypothesis—both minority population sizes and economic inequality have independent and additive effects in increasing likelihood of death sentencing availability. They also find that death penalty laws vary alongside the conservative ideological commitments of the population as measured by voting patterns of both constituents and representatives.

Hagan et al. (2005) provide an instructive exception to the focus on the threat hypotheses and present an ecological study on attitude formation that looks at the effects of segregation. The authors examine black youths in Chicago public schools to see their perception of the fairness of the criminal justice system. They find that blacks in integrated schools perceive more unfairness in the criminal justice system than blacks in segregated schools do. They interpret these findings in terms of the paradox of integration presented by Patterson (1997). This study by Hagan et al. differs from the current analysis in the dependent variable (perceptions of the fairness of the criminal justice system in general versus perceptions of the appropriateness of the death penalty), in the sample (adolescents, single race, within Chicago versus adults, two races and national in scope), and on the range of variation in a focal contextual variable (units ranging from 50 percent to 100 percent black versus units ranging from zero to fifty percent black).

Messner et al. (2006) examine ecological context as a predictor of death penalty support independently for whites and blacks. They ask whether a history of lynching–or a tradition of vigilante justice—has an independent effect on the likelihood of death penalty support that is moderated

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1 Helms (2009), Jacobs & Carmichael (2004) and Keen & Jacobs (2009) show that the relationship between public opinion of criminal justice outcomes and the percent black in the community is not linear and instead requires a threshold approach to account for the curvilinear relationships. Our own exploration into these processes found that the baseline (uncontrolled) curvilinear relationship did explain more variation (via goodness of fit statistic comparisons) however the controlled model produced non-significantly different results in relation to predictive capabilities of the linear and binary form of the % percent black predictor at the macro level. Given the interpretability of the % black indicator in linear form, we retained those results for inclusion in this examination. The discrepancy with prior results could result in the nested nature of the modeling procedure in which GSS respondents are examined in the context of their geographically assigned PUMAs (see Methods section for more information).

by race. Moreover, they ask whether a history of lynching moderates the effects of government distrust on death penalty support and whether this moderating effect is different by race. They find that among whites, those who live in places with a greater history of lynching are more likely to be in favor of the death penalty, but that history of lynching does not moderate the effect of distrust of the government on death penalty support. Among blacks the history with lynching does not influence the likelihood of death penalty support nor does it moderate the effect of distrust of government.

Collectively, four points emerge from this set of literature relevant to our study. First, racial social context does matter in understanding variation in public opinion regarding race generally, and the death penalty and criminal justice in particular. Second, the literature provides substantial precedent supporting the threat hypothesis as an explanation for variation in attitudes among whites. Third, while racial social context is an important ecological factor in explaining variation in death penalty support, so too is the murder rate. Fourth, while studies have identified ways in which social context explains variation in attitudes, only one study has been structured to explain racial cleavages — or racial polarization — in attitudes based on ecological context and that study has focused on the tradition of vigilante justice.

Data and Methods

In order to test how social context accounts for racial cleavages in death penalty support we use data from the twelve panels of the General Social Survey (GSS) between 1985 and 1998. We limit ourselves to this set of years because we rely on matching GSS respondents' primary sampling units to 1990 or 2000 census year data to derive measures for our key contextual variables. Our dependent variable is the response to the question "do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?" Figure 1 presents a time trend separately for whites and blacks of the percent who respond in favor of the death penalty. Whites are substantially more likely to be in favor of the death penalty, and the race effect is persistent across years.
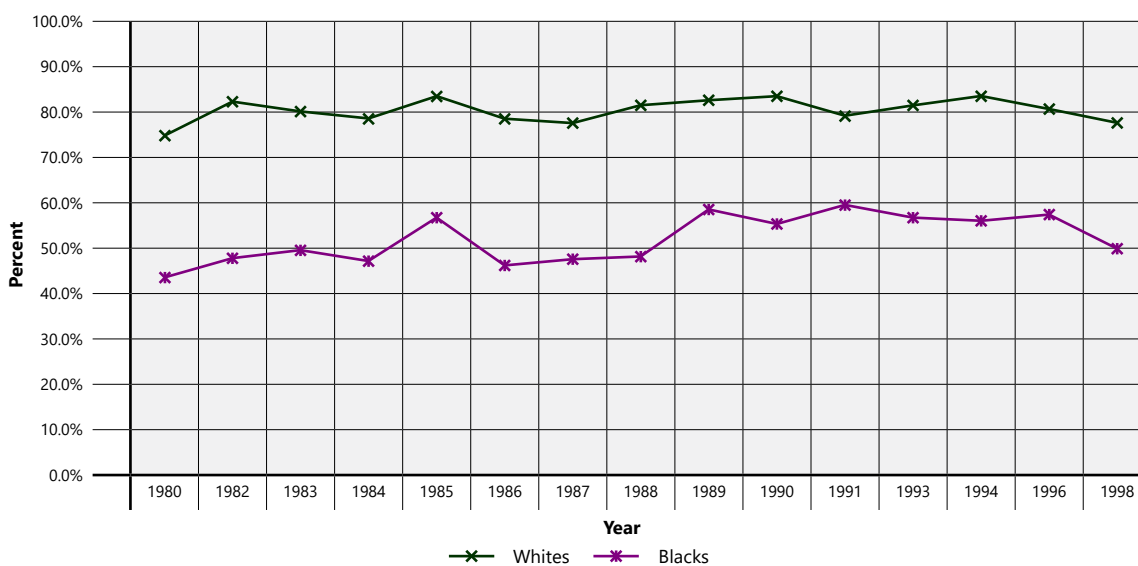

Figure 1 Percent Who Favor Death Penalty for Murder by Race, GSS 1980 — 1998

We employ nine individual level variables as exogenous controls: gender, age, education, occupational prestige, household income, urbanity, southernness, protestant fundamentalism, and personal religiosity. Occupational prestige and income are calculated in terms of within year z-scores in order to control for change over time in income and occupational structure. Support for the death penalty, female gender, residence in an urban core, residence in the South, identification as a fundamentalist Christian, and identification as strongly religious are all dichotomous variables.[2] Age and education are measured in terms of years. These nine individual level control variables were employed in previous analyses of death penalty support (Bohm, 1991; Cochran and Chamlin, 2006). Cochran and Chamlin (2006) discuss both the theoretical justification for inclusion of these variables and the measurement of these variables, and since we merely consider them as controls, we will not repeat this discussion here. Ultimately, Cochran and Chamlin (2006) found that controls for these variables only modestly attenuated the race effect on attitudes toward capital punishment.

Our focus is on the differential effect, by race, of three contextual level variables: the percent of blacks in the population, the level of economic inequality between blacks and whites, and the level of residential separation between blacks and whites. We obtain these measures by linking individual GSS respondents to their primary sampling units (PSUs) from which the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) selected the respondents. A PSU corresponds to a county or county cluster, and for urban locations corresponds to a metropolitan area. The 1990 and 2000 decennial census of housing and population served as the source for our PSU level data. Percent black refers to the number of blacks in the PSU divided by the total population of the PSU. Economic inequality between whites and blacks was measured as the ratio of odds that a randomly selected black in the PSU would be in poverty divided by the odds that a randomly selected white in the PSU would be in poverty. Finally, segregation was measured in terms of a dissimilarity index based on distributions of individuals by race at census tract levels within the PSU. The index can be interpreted as a measure of the percent of the black and white population that would have to spatial relocate in order for there to be a spatially random residential distribution. For each of the three measures, GSS respondents between 1985 and 1994 were linked with 1990 decennial census data, and GSS respondents between 1995 and 1998 were linked with 2000 decennial census data.

Our analysis also employs one non-racial social context variable: the homicide rate for the PSU. We derived homicide rates using Uniform Crime Report data. We captured rates only for census years and linked these census years to individual level data in a similar fashion as with the other PSU level data. Finally, we collect as a variable the year of response for each of the subjects in our study.

Methods

We test our hypotheses regarding the race specific effects of racial social context in a hierarchical logistic regression model using restricted maximum likelihood estimation. We begin by dividing our sample in two — a set of respondents identified in the GSS as 'white,' and a set of respondents

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2   It is important to note that Wozniak and Lewis (2010) found the GSS's measure of Fundamentalist Christian to lack construct validity and to be a poor predictor of support for death penalty. Furthermore, the indicator was shown to obscure important variation across race. The current research examined such model implications in ancillary fashion and found no significant differences across racial variations in relation to death penalty support with the variable in the model or without. Given the relationship between "Fundamentalism" and support for the death penalty we leave the measure in our models as a control with this note to serve as important information with which our model results should be interpreted.

identified in the GSS as 'black.' For each sample, we apply a two-level random intercept model formalized in Equation 1 through Equation 3 (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002).

$$\eta_{i,j} = \log\left(\frac{\varphi_{i,j}}{1 - \varphi_{i,j}}\right) \text{ (1)}$$

$$\eta_{i,j} - \beta_{0j} - \sum_{k=1}^{k} (\beta_k * x_{k,i,j}) + r_{i,j} \text{ (2)}$$

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \sum_{m=1}^{i} (\gamma_{0m} * x_m) + u_{0j} \text{ (3)}$$

Equation 1 specifies the form of the dependent variable in the model. $\varphi_{i,j}$ represents the probability that respondent "i" in primary sampling unit "j" would support the death penalty in the case of murder. Thus, according to Equation 1, $\eta_{i,j}$ is the log odds of supporting the death penalty. Equation 2 indicates that these log odds will be dependent on a set of individual-level exogenous covariates and an intercept β_{0j} that varies across primary sampling units. The individual level covariates are enumerated in the data section of this paper and include: gender, age, education, occupational prestige, household income, urbanity, southernness, protestant fundamentalism, personal religiosity, and survey year. Equation 3 posits that the intercept in Equation 2, β_{0j} will be estimated to vary according to four primary sampling unit level variables. These, level two variables include the percent black, the ratio of black to white likelihood of poverty, the residential dissimilarity index, and the murder rate. Thus, in Equation 3, γ_{01} captures the effect on the likelihood of supporting the death penalty of the percent black in the primary sampling unit; γ_{02} captures the effect of black-white status inequality no the likelihood of support for the death penalty; γ_{03} captures the effect of residential segregation on the likelihood of support for the death penalty; γ_{03} captures the effect of the murder rate on the likelihood of support for the death penalty.

We use Equations 1 though 3 to formalize our hypotheses.

Based on the social threat hypothesis, we hypothesize:

— H1: for the white sample, the coefficient estimating the effect of the percent black on the odds of supporting the death penalty '$\gamma_{01,\,white}$' will be positive and significant.

Based on the contact theory of prejudice, we hypothesize:

— H2: for the white sample, the coefficient estimating the effect of black-white economic inequality on the odds of supporting the death penalty '$\gamma_{02,\,white}$' will be positive and significant.

Based on the theory of social influence, we hypothesize:

— H3: for the black sample, the coefficient estimating the effect of the percent black on the odds of supporting the death penalty '$\gamma_{01,\,black}$' will be negative and significant

— H4: for the black sample, the coefficient estimating the effect of segregation on the odds of supporting the death penalty '$\gamma_{03,\,black}$' will be negative and significant.

— **H5:** for the white sample, the coefficient estimating the effect of segregation on the odds of supporting the death penalty '$\gamma_{03,\,white}$' will be positive and significant.

Based on the paradox of integration thesis and the theory of status inconsistencies, we hypothesize:

— **H6:** for the black sample, the coefficient estimating the effect of segregation on the odds of supporting the death penalty '$\gamma_{03,\,black}$' will be positive and significant (Note that hypothesis **H6** and hypothesis **H4** are in direct opposition to one another).

After formally testing hypotheses **H1** through **H6** through an estimation of Equations 1 through 3, we pool our two samples to examine how the racial gap in death penalty support is affected by racial social context. We thus specify a two-level random slope model where the effect of race on the likelihood of death penalty support is specified as dependent on our social context level variables. The level-one equation for this model requires one addition to Equation 2 and is formalized as Equation 4 (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002).

$$\eta_{i,j} = \beta_{0j} + \sum_{k=1}^{k} \left(\beta_k * x_{k,i,j} \right) + \left(\beta_{k+1,j} * x_{k+1,i,j} \right) r_{i,j} \quad (4)$$

The one addition is the introduction of a k+1 individual level covariate: race (or more specifically a dichotomous variable coded 1 if the respondent is white and zero if the respondent is black). Thus, $\beta_{k+1,j}$ indicates the increase in the log-odds that white respondent will support the death penalty relative to the log-odds that a black respondent will support the death penalty.

However, we conceive $\beta_{k+1,j}$ as a random variable dependent on racial social context. Thus, our random slope model incorporates Equation 5 (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002):

$$\beta_{k+1} = \gamma_{k+1,0} + \sum_{m=1}^{4} \left(\gamma_{k+1,m} * x_m \right) + u_{k+1,j} \quad (5)$$

The specification of Equation 5 is very similar to that of Equation 3 for the random intercept term. Thus, we interpret the coefficients specified in Equation 5 similar to our interpretation of the coefficients from Equation 3: $\gamma_{k+1,1}$ captures the influence of the percent black in the primary sampling unit on the racial gap in the likelihood of supporting the death penalty; $\gamma_{k+1,2}$ captures the influence of black-white economic inequality in the primary sampling unit on the racial gap in the likelihood of supporting the death penalty; $\gamma_{k+1,3}$ captures the influence of residential segregation in the primary sampling unit on the racial gap in the likelihood of supporting the death penalty; $\gamma_{k+1,4}$ captures the influence of the murder rate in the primary sampling unit on the racial gap in the likelihood of supporting the death penalty.

We simultaneously estimate Equations 1, 4, 3 and 5 as our random slope model. This estimation allows us test hypotheses about the racial gap in death penalty support derived from our theories.

Based on the social threat hypothesis, we hypothesize:

— **H7:** The greater the percent black, the greater the black-white gap in support for the death penalty. '$\gamma_{k+1,1,\,pooled}$' will be positive and significant.

Based on the social contact theory of prejudice, we hypothesize:

— H8: The greater the amount of black-white economic inequality the greater the black-white gap in support for the death penalty. '$\gamma_{k+1,2,pooled}$' will be positive and significant.

Based on the theory of social influences, we hypothesize:

— H9: The greater the percent black, the greater the black-white gap in support for the death penalty. '$\gamma_{k+1,1,pooled}$' will be positive and significant.

— H10: The greater the amount of racial segregation the greater the black-white gap in support for the death penalty. '$\gamma_{k+1,3,pooled}$' will be positive and significant.

Based on the paradox of integration and theory of status inconsistencies, we hypothesize:

— H11: The greater the amount of racial segregation the less the black-white gap in support for the death penalty. '$\gamma_{k+1,3,pooled}$' will be negative and significant.

Note that hypotheses **H10** and **H11** are in direct opposition to one another. Also, note that hypotheses **H7** and **H9** are identical.

Ethical Considerations

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) designates this study as exempt from review because this study uses secondary data that is publicly available from the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR). All identifying information of research participants in this study is unavailable or deidentified in the publicly available datasets.

Findings

Table 1 presents means and standard deviations for the variables we use in our analysis for both whites and for blacks. In our sample from the GSS, 81% of whites were in favor of the death penalty for murder, compared with 54 % of blacks. Both blacks and whites tended to live in regions that were dominantly non-black — on average, whites lived in regions that were just over 12 percent black, whereas blacks were sampled from regions that were, on average, just over 20 percent black. Both blacks and whites were sampled from regions where blacks had a much higher likelihood of being in poverty (in the white and black sample, black poverty is about 4.8 times more likely than white poverty). Both blacks and whites lived in regions that were highly segregated by race, with the segregation index being higher for the black sub-sample than the white (0.71 compared to 0.61). Finally, the average black respondent lived in an area with a higher murder rate than the average white respondent.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics: Means and Standard Deviations By Race

	Whites		Blacks	
	Mean	St. Dev.	Mean	St. Dev.
Favor Death Penalty for Murder (1 = Yes)	0.81	0.38	0.54	0.49
Sex (1 = female)	0.55	0.49	0.62	0.48
Age	45.99	17.53	43.02	16.74
Education (0 — 20 yrs of education)	13.08	2.96	12.01	3.12
Occupational Prestige (z-score)	0.06	0.98	-0.34	0.95
Household income (z-score)	0.08	0.95	-0.45	1.09
Urban (1 = resides in urban core)	0.13	0.33	0.38	0.48
South (1 = Southern)	0.33	0.47	0.49	0.50
Fundamentalist (1 = Fund. Protestant)	0.28	0.44	0.62	0.48
Religiosity (1 = Strong Religious Identification)	0.36	0.48	0.49	0.49
Percent Black	12.12	9.83	20.40	11.04
Black to White Poverty Ratio	4.78	2.07	4.75	1.32
Residential Dissimilarity Index	0.61	0.14	0.71	0.13
Murder Rate	7.99	6.46	11.65	6.55
N	13884		2145	

Table 2 presents the findings from our restricted maximum likelihood estimations of our models and provides us sufficient information to evaluate hypothesis *H1* through *H11*. Before estimating these models, we transformed both the percent black and the racial dissimilarity index to a zero-to-ten scale (so that a one-point increase in each of these two variables corresponds to approximately a one-standard deviation change).

Table 2 Odds Ratios for Hierarchical Logistic Regression Model of Likelihood of Supporting the Death Penalty in the Case of Murder (st. errors in parentheses). White, Black and Pooled Samples

Variable		White		Black		Pooled	
Level 1 Component							
White (0,1)	γ_{k+1}					3.457***	(0.075)
Female (0,1)	γ_1	0.622***	(0.046)	0.830*	(0.156)	0.668***	(0.040)
Age (Yrs.)	γ_2	1.001	(0.001)	0.996	(0.003)	0.999	(0.001)
Education (Yrs.)	γ_3	0.922***	(0.009)	0.927*	(0.093)	0.931***	(0.009)
Occupational Prestige (z-score)	γ_4	0.987	(0.027)	1.005	(0.051)	0.996	(0.024)
Household income (z-score)	γ_5	1.241***	(0.026)	1.105**	(0.053)	1.199***	(0.023)
Urban (0,1)	γ_6	0.752***	(0.069)	1.085	(0.096)	0.783***	(0.059)
South (0,1)	γ_7	1.171*	(0.078)	0.811*	(0.156)	1.013	(0.083)
Fundamentalist (0,1)	γ_8	1.486***	(0.057)	0.968	(0.093)	1.279***	(0.048)
Religiosity (0,1)	γ_9	0.740***	(0.047)	0.897	(0.092)	0.772***	(0.042)
Year	γ_{10}	1.001	(0.005)	1.020*	(0.116)	1.017	(0.006)
Year Squared	γ_{11}	0.919**	(0.131)	0.902**	(0.121)	0.915**	(0.129)
Level 2 Random Intercept Component							
Percent Black	γ_{01}	1.010***	(0.005)	1.001	(0.005)	1.001	(0.006)
Black to White Poverty Ratio	γ_{02}	1.004	(0.014)	0.969	(0.043)	1.007	(0.049)
Residential Dissimilarity Index	γ_{03}	0.662*	(0.026)	1.976*	(0.035)	1.037	(0.055)

Murder Rate	γ_{04}	1.009*	*(0.006)*	1.005	*(0.006)*	1.010*	*(0.008)*
Level 2 Random Slope (White) Component							
Percent Black	$\gamma_{k+1,1}$					1.019*	*(0.006)*
Black to White Poverty Ratio	$\gamma_{k+1,2}$					1.055	*(0.049)*
Residential Dissimilarity Index	$\gamma_{k+1,3}$					0.233**	*(0.522)*
Murder Rate	$\gamma_{k+1,4}$					1.008	*(0.009)*
Chi-Square Model Fit		461.127	***	163.231	***	454.846	***
Sigma — Random Intercept (γ_{00})		0.381		0.209		0.336	
N		**13884**		**2145**		**16029**	

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

We focus our discussion of Table 2 on the evaluation of our hypotheses and the role of contextual variables in explaining variation in death penalty support. Overall, we have ten unique hypotheses (since one of the eleven is redundant); four receive support; six are rejected. Before beginning it is important to note that in the pooled sample, the effect of race is a robust finding with an odds ratio of 3.457. This indicates that whites have over three times a higher likelihood of supporting the death penalty once all variables in the pooled model are taken into account.

Both hypotheses derived from social threat (**H1** and **H7**) are supported. **H1** states among whites the greater the percentage of blacks in their region the stronger their support for the death penalty. The odds ratio is significant and estimated as 1.010 indicating that a ten percent increase in the number of blacks in a region, is associated with a one percent increase in the odds of supporting the death penalty for whites. **H7** states the greater the percent black in an area the greater the black-white gap in death penalty support. The corresponding odds ratio $\gamma_{k+1,1,pooled}$ is significant and estimated as 1.019 indicating that a ten percent rise in black population increases the black-white gap in the odds of supporting the death penalty by two percent.

Both hypotheses from the paradox of integration perspective (**H6** that $\gamma_{03,black} > 0$ and **H11** that $\gamma_{k+1,3,pooled} < 0$) are supported. **H6** states among blacks, the greater the amount of segregation, the greater the support for the death penalty. The corresponding odds ratio for $\gamma_{03,black}$ is significant and estimated as 1.976 indicating that among blacks a ten percent increase in the racial dissimilarity index increases the odds of supporting the death penalty by almost two times. **H11** states that the greater the amount of racial segregation the less the black-white gap in support for the death penalty. The corresponding odds ratio for $\gamma_{k+1,3,pooled}$ is significant and estimated as 0.233 indicating that a ten percent increase in the racial dissimilarity index is associated with a twenty three percent decrease in the black-white gap in the odds of supporting the death penalty.

Both hypotheses derived from the contact theory of prejudice (**H2** that $\gamma_{02,white} > 0$ and **H8** that $\gamma_{k+1,2pooled} > 0$) are rejected. **H2** states that among whites, the greater the black-white economic inequality, the greater the support for the death penalty. However, the coefficient $\gamma_{02,white}$ is not significant at the a = 0.05 level. **H8** states that the greater the economic inequality the greater the black-white gap in death penalty support. However, the coefficient $\gamma_{k+1,2pooled}$ also is not significant at the a = 0.05 level.

Four of the five hypotheses derived from the theory of social influence (H3 that $\gamma_{01,\,black} < 0$, **H4** that $\gamma_{03,\,black} < 0$, **H5** that $\gamma_{03,\,white} > 0$ and **H10** that $\gamma_{k+1,\,3\,pooled} > 0$) are rejected. **H3** states among blacks, the greater the percent black, the lower the support for the death penalty. However, for blacks the estimated effect of percent black on support for the death penalty $\gamma_{01,\,black}$ is not significant at the a = 0.05 level. **H5** states among whites, the greater the amount of racial segregation, the greater the support for the death penalty. The estimated coefficient for this relationship, $\gamma_{03,\,white}$ is not significant at the a = 0.05 level. **H4** states among blacks, the greater the amount of racial segregation, the lower the support for the death penalty. **H10** states the greater the amount of racial segregation the greater the black-white gap in support for the death penalty. The coefficients for the hypotheses **H4** and **H10** ($\gamma_{03,\,black}$ and $\gamma_{k+1,\,3\,pooled}$ respectively) are both significant in the opposite direction than hypothesized. The directions of effects for these relationships are, instead, explained by the paradox of integration perspective. Only one of the five hypotheses that fit the theory of social influence (**H9** that $\gamma_{k+1,\,1\,pooled} > 0$) receives support. However, this hypothesis also emerges from the social threat perspective and is redundant with hypothesis **H7**. The theory of social influence does not explain any observed relationships that cannot be explained from other frameworks.

Table 3 summarizes the performance of the hypothesis's tests. Two theories provide expectations that fit with the observed relationships: the social threat hypothesis and the paradox of integration thesis.

Table 3 Summary of the Performance of Hypotheses

Framework	Num.	Formalized Expression	Support/Reject	Informalized Expression
Social Threat Hypothesis				
	H1	$\gamma_{03,\,white} > 0$	Support	Among whites, the greater the percent black, the greater the support for the death penalty
	H7, H9	$\gamma_{k+1,\,3\,pooled} > 0$	Support	The greater the percent black the greater the black-white gap in death penalty support
Contact Theory of Prejudice				
	H2	$\gamma_{02,\,white} > 0$	Reject	Among whites, the greater the black-white economic inequality, the greater the support for the death penalty
	H8	$\gamma_{k+1,\,2\,pooled} > 0$	Reject	The greater the economic inequality the greater the black-white gap in death penalty support
Theory of Social Influence				
	H3	$\gamma_{01,\,black} < 0$	Reject	Among blacks, the greater the percent black, the lower the support for the death penalty
	H4	$\gamma_{03,\,black} < 0$	Reject	Among blacks, the greater the amount of racial segregation, the lower the support for the death penalty
	H5	$\gamma_{03,\,white} > 0$	Reject	Among whites, the greater the amount of racial segregation, the greater the support for the death penalty
	H9, H7	$\gamma_{k+1,\,1\,pooled} > 0$	Support	The greater the percent black the greater the black-white gap in death penalty support
	H10	$\gamma_{k+1,\,3\,pooled} > 0$	Reject	The greater the amount of racial segregation the greater the black-white gap in support for the death penalty
Paradox of Integration				
	H6	$\gamma_{03,\,black} > 0$	Support	Among blacks, the greater the amount of segregation the greater the support for the death penalty.
	H11	$\gamma_{k+1,\,3\,pooled} < 0$	Support	The greater the amount of racial segregation the less the black-white gap in support for the death penalty

In addition to the coefficients that address hypotheses explicitly made in this paper, Table 2 also allows us to evaluate the effect of one other contextual level variable and how this may be related to

the racial gap in death penalty support. Previous research, limited to a white only sample, has found that the murder rate is positively associated with support for the death penalty (Soss, Langbein & Metelko 2003). We find, in this analysis, that this effect is limited to whites. Black support for the death penalty is not sensitive to the murder rate. Since the murder rate has a positive effect for support for the death penalty among whites and no effect among blacks, the higher the murder rate the greater the gap in black and white support for the death penalty.

Conclusion

A number of scholars have focused their attention on explaining black-white racial cleavages in public opinion in general and in death penalty support in particular. Among those studies, Cochran and Chamlin (2006) call for additional attention to the measurement of subculture; Baumer et al. (2003) suggest a need to look at race specific effects of social context.

Our study answers these calls and provides an analysis of the racial cleavage in death penalty support based on theoretically informed expectations regarding social context. We seek to modify the existing explanations of the racial cleavage in death penalty support. We take on the challenge to the existing explanations that through the end of the twentieth century, whites had obtained a good deal of consensus regarding support for the death penalty whereas blacks were evenly divided. Furthermore, we seek to develop an account that is consistent with variation in racial polarization across different ecological contexts. However, perhaps our most important finding does not differ from the results of many of the scholars cited throughout this research article: the enduring racial divide in death penalty support. Here we include indicators of ecological context that have yet to be included in research on this topic and we find that we are unable to explain away the enduring divide which is the racial gap in support of capital punishment.

As mentioned above, white symbolic racism and a black-subcultural worldview are important factors influencing attitudes towards the death penalty. Unnever and Cullen (2007a) conclude that African Americans and Whites collective biographies lead them to have divergent opinions of the death penalty. Specifically, they propose that a historical legacy of racial oppression prompts African Americans from diverse social and cultural spaces to be weary of lethal punishment by the state. Other scholars find that historical legacy of white supremacy, where whites believe the state is not oppressive towards them, and white racism, where white believe that blacks bear the burden of fear, leads whites to support the death penalty, especially when blacks are thought to pose a social threat (Soss et al., 2003; Taylor, 1998; Taylor, 2000). Our findings support these conclusions.

Our analysis of ecological factors, factors that could provide alternative reasons for death penalty support by whites or lack of support by blacks, prove to be consistent with other research on the racial divide in regard to the death penalty. Therefore, much like Unnever and Cullen (2007a) and Cochran and Chamlin (2006), this study illustrates that race, more than other factors, shapes attitudes towards the death penalty. Therefore, we draw preliminary conclusions that current ecological situations do not erase long standing historical legacies of oppression faced by African Americans nor engrained white racism.

We find strong support for the social threat hypothesis (Blalock, 1967). This finding is already well established (Baumer et al., 2003; Jacobs & Carmicheal, 2002; Soss et al., 2003; Taylor, 1998; Taylor, 2000) and is not surprising. With regards to the death penalty, whites are more likely to view the state's use of capital punishment to be favorable, especially when blacks are thought to pose a social threat. The fact that whites disproportionately support the death penalty when they live in the presence of blacks is consistent with the conclusion that white racism accounts for some of the racial cleavage in death penalty support.

We found no support for the social contact theory of prejudice (Allport, 1958; Pettigrew, 1998). Our measure of inequality by race was not related to race specific support for the death penalty. The failure to support this theory may have occurred because (1) black-white economic inequality may not vary enough across regions to meaningfully influence variation in racial discord; (2) our measure of black-white inequality — the ratio of the odds of being in poverty — may not be the best measure of the construct of status inequality as posited in the social contact theory of prejudice models; (3) county-clusters may not be the appropriate geographic unit in which individuals perceive group-level status inequality; or (4) the contact theory of prejudice has little to offer in explaining racial gaps in public opinion. Future research would be necessary to sort through the potential explanations of the failure of the social contact theory of prejudice to add to our understanding of the racial cleavage in death penalty support.

We find no support for hypotheses that emerge from a theory of social influence. If we attribute black and white cleavage in public opinion to the fact that blacks adhere to a race specific ideology, then it is quite curious that they are not more likely to adhere to such an ideology when they are more concentrated (through segregation) or otherwise have greater opportunity (Blau, 1994) for homophilous networks (through greater representation in the population). From the current empirical investigation, it is not clear if the hypotheses that emerge from the theory of social influence do not hold because homophilous network ties are unrelated to social context, because racial polarization in death penalty support is unrelated to polarization in homophilous network ties, or both. This question is a matter for future research.

We do find strong support, consistent with Hagan et al. (2005) findings, for the positive relationship between segregation and black support for capital punishment. This finding is also consistent with Patterson's (1998) observations regarding the paradox of integration and with Lenski's (1954) theory of status inconsistencies. If black opposition to capital punishment is a function of a distinct African American paradigm, why should this paradigm be more salient when blacks are residentially integrated? Also, why should the relative size of the black population in the locality be unrelated to black opinion? The theory of status inconsistencies suggests that those who are at the lowest point in status hierarchies — across the many ways in which status can be evaluated — are much more likely to adopt hegemonic standards. When one is in an inconsistent position, such as upwardly mobile African Americans whose social worlds more thoroughly bridge into the mainstream of America but who also experience differential treatment and prejudice, one is more likely to develop ideologies in opposition to the hegemonic positions. Therefore, we find that segregation — into black enclaves and from consistent experience with white racism — positively influences support for the death penalty amongst blacks.

While comprehensive in many ways, this study has several limitations. Foremost, our study does not parse out links between racially-homogenous areas and neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage. Qualitative scholars find that attitudes and opinions about criminal justice are multilayered amongst black residents, especially in high crime zones (Clear, 2007; Miller, 2008). Future research should investigate high crime zones and low crime zones in high black areas to discern attitudes in based on amount of crime. Black attitudes might be shared not just because of homophily but due to opinions towards living in a high crime area, fear of crime, and desires for lower crime in the neighborhood. Third, we do not discern attitudes of "fairness" in response to the justice system. Devon Johnson (2008) demonstrates the white-black gap in attitudes towards punished based on perceptions of fairness. Our study does not investigate attitudes of fairness. Finally, this study focuses on attitudes towards the death penalty, which is the apex of division between whites and blacks and the criminal justice system. We recognize that black-white division may not be as pronounced or even non-existent with regard to other crimes (Jacoby and Cullen, 1999). This study does not discern overall attitudes towards the justice system.

Future Research and Theoretical Implications

The results presented in this study provide an empirical foundation for future research to investigate the social and demographic forces shaping societal perceptions and attitudes towards support for enabling state sanctioned death through legislation and policies, such as, the death penalty, physician assisted suicide, and targeted assassinations (Chintakrindi & Porter, 2016). Through analyzing attitudes towards the death penalty as an effective crime control policy and perceived deterrent, Tyler and Weber (1982) found that political and social beliefs were the strongest predictors of support for the death penalty. Political ideology and shared narratives regarding the mythological effectiveness of the death penalty were substantively more influential in shaping beliefs and attitudes than logical and rational considerations for understanding the empirical reality of whether punitive punishments are correlated with decreased crime rates.

The influence of political and social beliefs on the death penalty remains strong, even when controlling for perceptions on the effectiveness of the punishment. Therefore, ideology and socialization patterns were strong predictors of attitudes towards the death penalty, rather than an individuals' logical consideration of the effectiveness of the death penalty as a deterrent. Young (1992) reports that individuals who were Caucasian, male, and have conservative beliefs and are committed to religious practices were significantly more likely to support the death penalty. Findings from these studies strongly suggest that sociological factors tied to race, religiosity, and political orientation explain a significant percentage of the variation in support for the death penalty. However, these studies do not account for within group variations for support for the death penalty. Our current study reports results that have been overlooked in previous research by documenting findings that are both counter-intuitive and a challenge to the existing theoretical narrative that within group homogeneity on attitudes towards the death penalty are persistent and enduring.

Tyler and Weber (1982) make the assumption that liberalism, authoritarianism, and dogmatism are shaped early in the life of an individual and remain static throughout the life-course. Therefore, individual preferences and support for the death penalty may be the product of psychological,

sociological, and developmental factors that passively influence emotional and attitudinal support for retributive punishment schemes, rather than a rational choice or logical reasoning-based framework that forces individuals to actively assess and examine the quantitative effectiveness of deterrent options provided by the state to reduce violent crime. We believe the results from this study not only contribute to the collective body of academic research on the death penalty, but it is also an important instrument for highlighting the racial and class stratification dynamics underlying the socialization process that serves as a catalyst for policy change.

Also, we must consider the theoretical assumptions that are underlying the brutalization hypothesis. Primarily, that support for the death penalty may be directly impacted by publicized events of savagery and violence that are promoted and administered by the authorities who possess a monopoly on death. The use of state sanctioned death has both symbolic and pragmatic effects that impact public sentiments. The relationship between openly publicize instances of the use of the death penalty on public opinion should be examined more closely in order to understand what role the governmental punishment policies have for shaping public opinion and violent crime rates.

We believe our results should serve as a reminder to policy makers that support for the death penalty is not necessarily driven by rational choice, but rather by broader social and ecological contextual factors that are often latent and difficult to deconstruct in the absence of social scientific theories. Therefore, we provide a cautionary warning to policy makers to avoid being swept up in enabling populist sentiments towards the death penalty in order to satisfy their constituents. Instead policy makers should be focused more so on supporting research that analyzes empirical data on the effectiveness of punishment policies for achieving desired aims and objectives, such as, reducing the violent crime rate or increasing public safety.

This paper presents several contributions to understanding the group processes of attitude polarization. We draw attention to the surprising role of segregation in this process. Also of note, we identify challenges to the theory of social influence in accounting for attitude polarization. This theory has been advanced through simulations (Axelrod, 1997; Kitts, 2005; Macy et al., 2003) and has a compelling logic. However, in the case of death penalty research it did not generate any expectations that were empirically verified. Therefore, future research and theoretical refinement is needed and must be done to specify the proper application of this theory to the real world. Finally, we consider our inclusion of ecological context in the models of racial cleavage in death penalty research, rather than other aspects of the criminal justice system, to be an improvement over existing models insofar as we more thoroughly identify underlying processes of polarization.

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Ukorijenjena podjela oko podrške smrtnoj kazni: preispitivanje utjecaja konteksta u novijoj povijesti podjele između crnačkoj i bjelačkog stanovništva

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Sažetak

U ovom se radu ispituju četiri teorije u odnosu na rasu i ekološke sustave o ukorijenjenoj rasnoj podjeli kada je riječ o podršci smrtnoj kazni. Korištenjem geokodiranih podataka iz 20.-og stoljeća, ovaj rad ispituje odnos između relativne zastupljenosti Afroamerikanaca, razine ekonomske nejednakosti između crnačkog i bjelačkog stanovništva te stupnja stambene segregacije prema rasnoj pripadnosti i vjerojatnosti za podršku smrtnoj kazni u odnosu na rasu. Rad pokazuje da se razlika između crnačkog i bjelačkog stanovništva u pogledu podrške smrtnoj kazni u određenoj mjeri može pripisati podršci za načela rasnog socijalnog konteksta u promatranom razdoblju. Utvrdili smo da na razlike u oblikovanju javnog mnijenja o smrtnoj kazni utječu zastupljenost i segregacija u odnosu na rasnu pripadnost.

Ključne riječi: rasno-ekološke teorije, javno mnijenje, podržavanje smrtne kazne, geokodirani podaci