Immigration, Collective Efficacy, and Neighborhood Participation: Exploring the Limits of Social Control in Seattle and Brisbane


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The study of neighborhood crime continues to be important for the field of criminology. Collective efficacy as a neighborhood process has modernized traditional social disorganization theory by confirming that the willingness of residents to intervene in neighborhood problems is a mediating factor between structural disorganization and neighborhood violent crime rates. Though the effect of collective efficacy on violent crime and victimization is well supported in the criminological literature (Sampson et al, 1999), there are two specific theoretical considerations that would enhance the social disorganization literature in its ability to explain neighborhood violence and neighborhood processes in general. First, though collective efficacy has clear benefits on neighborhood crime, it is unclear what additional benefits collective efficacy may have for neighborhoods. In particular, do high levels of collective efficacy facilitate more collective problem solving among neighbors? Second, social disorganization theory has traditionally linked neighborhoods with high immigrant populations with higher crime rates (Shaw and McKay, 1942). However, current empirical work on immigration and crime suggests that neighborhoods with more immigrants are actually less likely to experience high levels of violence (Reid et al, 2005). The following dissertation explores whether neighborhood and individual perceptions of collective efficacy promote collective problem solving in the form of block watch organization and neighborhood watch. In addition, I seek to explore whether foreign born and native born residents are influenced by the similar factors in collective problem solving. These questions are explored in a comparative context in Seattle, Washington and Brisbane, Australia where differences in immigrant history provide an interesting comparison for neighborhood effects. Analyses show that while collective efficacy as a neighborhood property does help explain collective problem solving in Brisbane neighborhoods, perceptions of collective efficacy among individuals does promote block watch participation and collective problem solving in both cities. In addition, analyses indicate that native born and foreign born residents join in collective problem solving for different reasons, however, the presence of social ties is important for both groups. Directions for future research and policy are also discussed.