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DEFENDED NEIGHBORHOODS AND ORGANIZED
CRIME: DOES ORGANIZED CRIME LOWER STREET
CRIME?

by

HOLLIANNE ELIZABETH MARSHALL
B.A. City University of New York, 2008

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Sociology
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ABSTRACT

The literature suggests that neighborhoods with organized criminal networks would have lower crime rates than other neighborhoods or communities, because of the social control their organization exerts on residents and visitors. The strictly organized Italian-American Mafia seems to have characteristics that would translate throughout the neighborhood: People will not participate in overt illegal behaviors because they do not know who is watching, and the fear of what the Mafia might do keeps residents and visitors to the neighborhood relatively well-behaved. Using crime statistics from the NYPD and census data for neighborhood characteristics, four linear regressions were calculated. The results indicate that low socioeconomic status is the main factor explaining neighborhood crime rate variations in New York City. The percent of the population under 18 and density were also listed as influential factors for some variables. The percent of foreign-born Italians was noted as significant in the correlation models, though it is not yet clear what this might truly indicate. The proxy variable for Mafia presence was not significant, and this can either be due to inaccuracies of the measurement of the variable or a true decrease in the influence of Mafia presence after the string of RICO arrests in the 1980s and 1990s. The results imply that Mafia presence does not influence neighborhood social control, but they do reinforce social disorganization theory. The foundation of this theory is neighborhood stability; the more unstable a neighborhood is, the more susceptible the neighborhood is to crime and dysfunction. Factors like low socioeconomic status and density influence neighborhood

stability. Future research should attempt to have more accurate representations of Mafia presence and neighborhood characteristics.

This thesis is dedicated to all of those people who
complained about my choice to live outside of the trendy
Brooklyn neighborhoods. Those extra fifteen minutes on the
train seem even more worth it now.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the Johnson commission (1964): “Organized crime is a society that seeks to operate outside the control of the American people and their government. It involves thousands of criminals, working within structures as complex as those of any large corporation, subject to laws more rigidly enforced than those of legitimate governments” (Jacobs, Panarella and Worthington, 1994, p.194). These organizations can be considered anything from the grandiose Mafia families to the teen street, drug-dealing gangs (Orvis and Rush, 2000). Organized crime comes in many forms, but for the purpose of this paper, the focus will be on the Mafia, specifically Italian and Italian-American groups also known as La Cosa Nostra.

Shaw and McKay (1969), Suttles (1972), Hunter (1985), Sampson (1985) and Bursik and Grasmick (2001), among others, provide the framework for the argument that, despite the massive illicit dealings of the Italian-American Mafia, the residential neighborhoods in which they live and work remain relatively free of delinquency and street crime, more so than other similar urban neighborhoods. The underlying premise is straight-forward, everybody prefers to live in a safe neighborhood. This study will examine the characteristics of the defended neighborhood and how they are uniquely applied to New York City neighborhoods, particularly the Italian-American neighborhood of Bensonhurst in Brooklyn. The expectation is that Bensonhurst and other neighborhoods with a strong Mafia presence have significantly lower street crime

than the rest of New York City due to the influence and informal social control exerted by organized crime.

CHAPTER 1: THE DEFENDED NEIGHBORHOOD

Suttles (1972) coined the term *defended neighborhood* to describe communities where members collectively eradicate selected delinquency and crime from their community. “The residential group which seals itself off through the efforts of delinquent gangs, by restrictive covenants, by sharp boundaries, or by a forbidding reputation—what I will call the defended neighborhood—was for a time a major category in sociological analysis” (Suttles, 1972, p. 21). These communities are able to exert formal and informal social controls on community residents, on outsiders to the neighborhood, or on both. The literature makes clear that four elements are necessary to become a successful defended neighborhood: fear, reputation, organization (disorganization), and social control. The following sections will present an overview of these elements of defended neighborhoods.

Fear and Reputation

Personal views of a neighborhood vary; for some it might be the two block radius from their home, for others it might be the whole area between their job and their home, and for others their “neighborhood” is simply the street on which they live. However, there are typically general areas defined by the public and adopted by residents that are considered “neighborhoods.” In several larger cities, including New York City and Chicago, these neighborhoods have official status and have been widely used by planning agencies and other municipal offices, in some cases for over a century.

Suttles (1972) writes, “The Neighborhood,’ ...has a more fixed referent and usually possesses a name and some sort of reputation known to persons other than the residents” (p.37). This public reputation of a neighborhood is often its most important asset, and it is the responsibility of neighborhood residents to define and maintain this reputation. If neighborhood residents desire safe streets, it is they who have to do the work and make the effort to keep their streets safe. This ranges from physically stopping the crime to gaining influence with the police department and other local officials to help in crime reduction and prevention. Whatever the means of the neighborhood, residents being involved is the key to a successful defense.

For residents to become actively involved in securing their neighborhood, there first has to be an element of fear. This could stem from inside or outside the neighborhood; but there has to be a feeling of imminent danger or “urban unease” on some level for people to take up the cause of their neighborhood (Boggs, 1971; Taylor and Hale, 1986; Skogan and Maxfield, 1981; Liska and Baccaglioni, 1990). Conversely, as citizens come together to defend their community, they must create a reputation of fear for the rest of the city; find a successful way to advertise their defenses, letting others know that if they mess with the neighborhood, there will be negative consequences (Suttles, 1972).¹ This can be done through the social networks they create through the organization of the neighborhood.

¹ Most larger cities have one or more neighborhoods with a reputation for applying negative sanctions to street crime, for example, Little Italy and Hampden in Baltimore, The Hill in St. Louis and Bensonhurst in New York City.

Organization

Shaw and McKay (1969) created the theory of social disorganization as a way to explain why some neighborhoods experienced different levels of street crime and deterioration. Social disorganization theory explains that the more organized the residents are in neighborhoods, the more social control the neighborhood experiences and therefore the lower the level of delinquency or street crime in the neighborhood (Shaw and McKay, 1969; Suttles, 1972; Kornhauser, 1979; DeSena 1994). In other words, the denser the social networks in a given community, the better it can fight against overt and excessive street crime, delinquency, and neighborhood deterioration (Krohn 1986; DeSena 1994). There is the longstanding argument that socioeconomic status affects the level of community stability (Whyte 1941; Shaw and McKay 1969; Kornhauser, 1979; Sampson and Groves, 1989). However, Whyte (1941), Suttles(1972) and Kornhauser (1979) discuss the fact that those with low socioeconomic status and high rates of delinquency do not necessarily suffer from lack of organization. Whyte (1941) discusses the “Millers” and their highly organized order of operations, despite their low socioeconomic status (655). He notes specifically the hierarchy of the “Millers” and how the leaders could very easily get the members of their group to follow what they wanted to do. The chain of command makes accomplishing tasks easier and more organized (Whyte 1941). The neighborhoods that succeed in maintaining relatively “safe” streets, regardless of socioeconomic status, have been described by many as *defended neighborhoods*.

Social Control (or Networks)

Personal control is among families and friends; those who are closest to each other have a stronger effect on monitoring and maintaining desired behavior (Hunter, 1985; Bursik and Grasmick, 2001). “Within such groups, social control is usually achieved through the allocation or threatened withdrawal of sentiment, social support, and mutual esteem (p.233).” (Bursik and Grasmick 2001:16). Hirschi (1969), Kornhauser (1978) and Crutchfield et al (1982) describe family composition as an important factor in organizing and stabilizing a community. Sampson (1985) writes, “It is suggested that areas with pronounced family disorganization are less able to provide an effective network of social controls. In contrast, communities with a strong familial base are likely to be areas where families know each other and provide mutual support” (p. 11). Family composition appears to be a key factor in the defended neighborhood.

Parochial control refers to the control that comes from schools, churches and other more formal institutions that expect certain behaviors from participants. Bursik and Grasmick (2001).clarified that “...the parochial order refers to relationships among neighbors who do not have the same sentimental attachment” (2001:17). Finally *public* control comes from the police department and other government agencies. “The second, and perhaps most important, external resource concerning the control of crime concerns the relationships that exist between the neighborhood and the police department of the city in which it is located” (Bursik and Grasmick 2001 P. 17). A defended neighborhood is at its strongest if all three of these aspects of control are maintained. Neighborhoods that have strong family composition, solid public schools and a decent amount of local tax money

to support their police department have a stronger defense against delinquency and street crime than those neighborhoods with none or only one of the three P's of social control discussed by Hunter (1985). "Hence, the greater density of networks among persons in a community, the greater the constraint on deviant behavior within the purview of the social network" (Krohn 1986, p. 84). The more connected a neighborhood is through social networks, the more social control that neighborhood will have. The more influence a community has in all areas, *Personal*, *Parochial* and *Public* control, the greater the chances are of successful defense against street crime and delinquency.

Socioeconomics

There are no consistent socioeconomic characteristics of a defended neighborhood. Shaw and McKay ([1942]1969) focused on the socioeconomic aspect of social organization as did Suttles (1972) and Kornhauser (1979), but in the latter works it becomes clear that SES may not be a very good predictor of how well a neighborhood is defended. Those that have more money can afford more *Public* control and probably more *Parochial* control, but neighborhoods with any level of SES can achieve familial or *Personal* control. There are accounts of lower-class neighborhoods being defended by women and street gangs, but this is rare among those who are less economically endowed (Shaw and McKay [1942] 1969; Suttles 1972; Patillo 1998). In either case, a part of creating neighborhood safety involves citizens organized in some type of social network willing to actively work toward eradicating the presence of street crime in their neighborhood (Suttles 1972; Kornhauser 1979; Krohn 1986; McIlwain 1999).

“In a very real sense, many of our slum communities in large cities come to approximate warrior societies because they must perform so much of their own policing and other functions which are ostensibly the responsibility of public institutions” (Suttles, 1972, p.191). Those of lower SES are many times more tightly networked than those who have more of an economic advantage, and they will personally fight for the neighborhood; taking up where the government leaves off. “Thus in these defended communities, a significant amount of delinquency did not represent internal social disorganization but *organized* responses to perceived external threats”(Heitgard and Bursik, 1987, p. 785). Moreover, if a slum neighborhood has a reputation for violence or other street crime, it lowers the likelihood that outsiders will enter their territory; delinquency in one’s own neighborhood can be a deterrent.

Neighborhoods with a higher SES may be able to afford the outside *Public* and *Parochial* control but they might not have strong *Personal* networks. “The segmental character of urban life leaves only some people free some of the time to invest their energy and interests into the defended neighborhood” (Suttles, 1972, p. 37). Most often the best defended neighborhoods are middle to upper class because they can better afford to have the political and social connections to enforce rules about street behavior.

Women of wealthier families can stay home and keep a look out in the neighborhood (Desena 1994). DeSena (1994) discusses the neighborhood of Greenpoint in Brooklyn, New York. The women of this neighborhood keep very close tabs on all of the social action and closely monitor who they allow into the neighborhood by tightly controlling

the rental and sale of property. They have established a tight social network and use this network to aid in protecting the neighborhood (DeSena, 1994).

Basically, high socioeconomic status can help, but it is not the only indicator of a defended neighborhood. The literature has pointed to several different indicators of the defended neighborhood, but what if all of those indicators were present at the same time?

For a neighborhood to have the best defense it must have the elements of fear, reputation, social organization, and social control. At least some neighborhoods with a heavy presence of the Italian-American Mafia seem to possess all of these characteristics.

CHAPTER 2: LA COSA NOSTRA: THE FIVE FAMILIES OF NEW YORK CITY'S ITALIAN-AMERICAN MAFIA

La Cosa Nostra or “this thing of ours” is the slang term for those involved in Sicilian crime families known more widely as “the Mafia.”(Maas, 1999;Orvis and Rush, 2000; DeStefano, 2007). Beginning in the 19th century in Sicily as a way to protect citizens from unstable and unfair government, the U.S. American Mafia is a collection of Italian immigrants who opted for bootlegging and other black market dealings rather than the janitorial and unpleasant jobs typically held by immigrants (Maas, 1999; DeStefano, 2007). These bootlegging organizations have strong roots in family and are intricately organized (Ianni and Reuss-Ianni, 1972; Block and Chambliss, 1981;). Traditionally, there is a strict code by which all members of the organization must live or they must undergo, usually severe, punishment—the code is referred to as *Omerta*, meaning honor. Living by the *Omerta* means that you never talk about the organization or sell out the organization by giving away information (Maas, 1999; DeStefano, 2007). For the most part the *Omerta* works; it was not until the 1980s that people began to work as informants for the FBI, breaking the sacred code of honor (Jacobs et al., 1994).

The *La Cosa Nostra* grew fast in the United States during prohibition; there was plenty of opportunity to make a lot of money with little risk, but most of their dealings are far from upstanding(Ianni and Reuss-Ianni, 1972;Block, 1980; Block and Chambliss 1981). The Mafia grows strong roots in society through extortion and bribery and for

some time even the FBI denied its existence for fear of retaliation. Until the 1980s there was no massive crack down on Mafia operations (Jacobs et al, 1994). Many believe that the Mafia is no longer operating or that it never was in the first place; but if you read the news it becomes obvious that that is not true, there are several recent articles that discuss the many current operations of the Italian-American Mafia (AP 2007). Further, the Mafia always has replacements ready when other members die or go to jail. The organization is set up to keep renewing itself no matter what happens (Ianni and Reuss-Ianni, 1972; Maas, 1999). The Italian-American Mafia has a strong organization and network that enables them to withstand the many law enforcement and social challenges, below we will see how these characteristics spill over into the neighborhoods in which they live.

Characteristics of the Defended Mafia Neighborhood

Italian-American Mafia neighborhoods possess all of the characteristics suggested for a defended neighborhood: fear, reputation, organization, and social control.²

The Fear

Fear is essentially the driving force for neighborhood organization and social control (networks) and the *La Cosa Nostra* represents fear (Boggs, 1971; Skogan and Maxfield, 1981; Taylor and Hale, 1986; Liska and Baccaglioni, 1990). It is common knowledge that you will be killed if you do the wrong thing inside a neighborhood controlled by the Mafia, this fear of immediate and permanent punishment deters residents and outside street criminals from acting out. Suttles (1972), discusses Chicago's Mafia, better known

² It is important to note that not all cities have a branch of La Cosa Nostra. There is a general consensus that the strongest Mafia families are found in New York City and Chicago.

as the “Outfit,” and explains that “the Italian boys, as well as the Mexican, Puerto Rican, and black ones, tended to behave rather gingerly when in the presence of their Italian male elders. Rumor had it that many of the Italian males had ready access to professional ‘skullers’ and could carry out heavy handed retaliation against anyone who challenged their authority or dignity” (Suttles, 1972, p.202). This is one of many examples where the social network of the Mafia has stabilized its reputation for violence, rumors can have a profound effect on the behavior of people in particular neighborhoods, although they may not be completely based in reality.

The Reputation

The Italian-American Mafia has a notorious reputation for retaliating against those who cross them by making them “disappear.” The Mafia have many personal and political connections that it is easy for them to quietly end a person’s life. This idea is reinforced by films like the *Godfather*, *Goodfellas*, *Casino* and even *Dick Tracy*. Without even coming in contact with the Mafia, the general public already has a preconceived idea about the Mafia based on media representation. This perception is mildly accurate because the Mafia really is tightly organized and networked (Ianni and Reuss-Ianni ,1972; McIllwain, 1999; DeStefano, 2007).

The network density of the Mafia is so strong that it extends far beyond adjacent neighborhoods; all five New York City Boroughs are aware of the Mafia presence in Bensonhurst and other sections of the city (Ianni and Reuss-Ianni ,1972; McIllwain, 1999; DeStefano, 2007). The Mafia not only put their roots in their neighborhoods, but they tend to take over government business and local industry; garbage trucks,

construction, the garment district, and the waterfront in Manhattan. As the Mafia get deeply involved with a city both financially and physically, more and more people become an indirect part of “this thing of ours” (Block, 1980; Maas, 1999). “People who understood power and ‘the way things were’ recognized the Mafia as a force in politics vice and legitimate business including shipping, trucking, garbage disposal and the garment district” (Jacobs et al, 1994). Members of the organization get elected to government offices and take jobs in the police department to make things like bribery, extortion and other crimes a bit easier, but it also allows for protection from the government and the police department, which aids in the reduction of street crime (DeStefano, 2007). The Mafia is rarely questioned or opposed by local law enforcement; they achieve this usually through bribery (Jacobs et al, 1994). “Remarkably, until well into the 1960s the FBI, under the leadership of J. Edgar Hoover, disputed the very existence of an American Mafia” (Jacobs et al, 1994, p. 45). Finally the element of fear that the Mafia carries elevates the neighborhood to an even higher defended status. Not only do people in the neighborhood behave, people outside the neighborhood behave according to the regulations set forth by the organization. “People fear the violence, because it often spills over and hurts innocent bystanders. But at the same time, people give the mob credit for occasionally mediating in community disputes and for enforcing a certain set of rules on the street” (Dillon, 1992, p. 35). In neighborhoods defended by street gangs, outsiders can see what they are up against, but in Mafia neighborhoods everything is behind closed doors. The tall tales and the true stories that float around

about the Mafia keep up this reputation even if they come or go in a neighborhood (Suttles, 1972).

The Organization

The Mafia organized their families and their businesses under strict rules and codes and because of their social networking skills, these rules and codes often spill over into their neighborhoods. The strict code of rules applies to their families and organization but also in the neighborhood they choose to live or work in (Ianni and Reuss-Ianni, 1972; Block, 1980). Criminologist James Jacobs from NYU also believes that the Mafia and other organized criminal activities can make a neighborhood safer (DeStefano 2007). DeStefano held an interview with James Jacobs in New York City in May, 2002. During the interview Jacobs said “Mafiosi were a force for stability in neighborhoods...They wanted to live in safe neighborhoods, and because they had a reputation for violence and a willingness to use violence, the neighborhoods in which they had presence were safe” (DeStefano, 2007, p.60). The vast organization and social network that the Mafia constructed is responsible for social control through its reputation, both real and rumored, for retaliation.

The Social Control

Another important detail of the defended Mafia neighborhoods is the emphasis on family values. Previously noted, family composition can be a significant predictor of social disorganization, and is most likely a significant factor in the organization of the Mafia and their neighborhoods (Sampson 1985; Sampson and Groves, 1989; McIllwain,

1999). The Mafia home life builds this *Personal* control through emphasis on respect and trust. Because heritage is one of the most important elements of *La Cosa Nostra* (you cannot be considered for full membership if you are not Italian), more people involved in the organization carry the same family and religious values (Ianni and Reuss-Ianni, 1972; Maas, 1999; DeStefano, 2007). This makes it easier for the family values to cross over into the neighborhood; it is not solely fear that drives the organization; strong family values aid in creating a successfully defended neighborhood.

The neighborhoods that are home to the Mafia make trade offs with residents so that their illegal business behind closed doors will not be of concern; providing safety for residents is one of the benefits of looking the other way in the presence of their illegal enterprise. The social network of the Mafia extends far beyond their tiny neighborhood. “Network density refers to the extent to which all actors in a social network are connected by direct relations. When network density is high, the ability to control delinquency is increased because the behavior of participants in such a network is potentially subject to the reactions of all network members” (Sampson and Groves, 1989, p.779). Mcillwain (1999) discusses social networking as a new framework for understanding organized crime; the criminal organizations are successful on the large scale because they are so tightly networked. James Jacobs explains “So, the Mafia was functional. That’s why it lasted so long, why it was so powerful, because it served needs.”(DeStefano, 2007, p.61).

CHAPTER 3: THE BENSONHURST NEIGHBORHOOD

The focus on the New York City neighborhood of Bensonhurst and the influence of the Mafia presence in the neighborhood stems from approximately four years of personal residence in the area. While I was looking for an apartment in Brooklyn, people told me to pay attention to the cars parked on the street because this was considered an indicator of neighborhood safety. On my street in Bensonhurst, people parked their Jaguars without a second thought, the neighbors left their front doors unlocked, and police cars were practically nonexistent. These things struck me as odd; it just did not seem possible that, in New York City, a place that quickly trains you to keep tabs on all personal belongings, people do not garage their Jaguars or lock their doors and there are not police cars every two or three blocks. After spending enough time in Bensonhurst, deli owners, old women on their front porch, men at the Laundromat started to talk, and I began to realize that the Mafia also had a strong presence in the neighborhood. Joe, the corner deli guy, told me that all of the deli ATM cash machines were owned by the Mafia and that they would not allow him to have one in his deli. I may never know if what Joe said was actually true, but I do know that this was not the first or last time I heard mention of the Mafia in that neighborhood. During my stay in Bensonhurst, I always attributed my safety to the presence of the Mafia.

The elements to a successful defended neighborhood are fear, reputation organization, social control or networks (including elements of the three P's). The neighborhoods of the Italian-American Mafia or *La Cosa Nostra* meet, and often excel, at all four elements and therefore maintain the safest neighborhoods. Bensonhurst is a good example of a Mafia neighborhood with the type of defense described in this paper.

Fear and Reputation

The Mafia in Bensonhurst are so tightly networked that it translates into the neighborhood network. Everyone begins to share the *Omerta*; the rules of the Mafia become the neighborhood rules and the vow of silence becomes the vow of the neighborhood (Ianni and Reuss-Ianni, 1972; Block, 1980). “Perhaps the most subtle structural feature of the defended neighborhood is its shared knowledge or what might be called its underlife”(Suttles,1972, p. 36). Lori Geli, a 28 year old mother and resident among the Brooklyn mob neighborhoods says "We don't like dead bodies, with holes in their heads, turning up in front of our homes, but in a way the Mafia keeps the neighborhood safe. There aren't half as many burglaries here as in other places. So their presence is kind of good because they give a kind of fear to other people" (Dillon, 1992, p.35). There is an exchange of respect and trust in Bensonhurst. “Trust is used here in this third sense, as a social relationship in which principals—for whatever reason or state of mind—invest resources, authority, or responsibility in another to act on their behalf for some uncertain future return...”(Shapiro, 1987, p. 653).

Organization and Social Control

Bensonhurst is the kind of neighborhood where kids sled in the streets in the winter and play in the water from the fire hydrants in the summer. “In Bensonhurst everyone knows everyone else on every block. Its mainly blue-collar residents are insular, closemouthed and suspicious of outsiders. Strangers are remarked on at once. As a result, the rate of common street crimes—rapes, robberies, felony assaults—is low compared to other parts of the city, according to police statistics. Murder is a third less than the citywide average” (Maas, 1999, p.2). The values and ideals upheld by *La Cosa Nostra* in Bensonhurst have persisted over time and have penetrated the community. “Cultural theory suggests that once beliefs, values, ideas and ideologies become norms in a macro unit, they can persist over time and generations through the normal process of socialization. To some extent, beliefs and fear of crime may also be part of the socialization process” (Liska and Baccaglioni, 1990, p. 361).

Residents of Bensonhurst are fully aware of the Mafia presence in their neighborhood and the majority of those living there do not mind (Bohlen, 1989; Dillon, 1992). For them it is extra security; the same kind of security that the Mafia was initiated for back in Sicily; protection for those who cannot protect themselves. Despite the vast underworld of criminal activity, Bensonhurst was and is one of the safest neighborhoods in all of New York City. The infamous “Five Families” of the American Italian Mafia call Bensonhurst in south Brooklyn home. The Gambino, Columbo, Bonnano, Genovese, and Luchese families operate throughout New York City, but are densely located in South Brooklyn (Bohlen, 1989; Dillon, 1992; De Stefano, 2007). Occupying about two

square miles, the neighborhood of Bensonhurst is a relatively quiet suburban area. (Bohlen, 1989). Howard Feur, district manager of the community board for Bensonhurst says “It is not uncommon for people to have lived here all their lives, for their parents to have lived here before them. These are people who are happy in their community...The biggest problem’ is the subways, they don’t run on time” (Bohlen, 1989, p.A1). There is the occasional elevated train that passes but mostly the noise and city chaos are off in the distance. Almost entirely two family homes, the majority of front yards are adorned with wrought iron gates and various religious statues (Bohlen, 1989; DeStefano 2007). This neighborhood is extremely family oriented and knowing the neighbors is a must in this area (Ianni and Reuss-Ianni, 1972; Maas, 1999; DeStefano, 2007).

The sense of family and community in Bensonhurst has persisted over time, and has been described as unchanged since the 1950s. This could explain the ability of the neighborhood to have such dense social networks and strong social control. The neighborhood has had decades to develop and maintain its reputation of quiet streets but underground fear. Bensonhurst has strong organization and social networks; the strong reputation for violence creates fear and deters delinquency and street crime. Bensonhurst is one of the most effectively defended neighborhoods, because it is not missing any of the necessary elements needed for a successfully defended neighborhood.

In order to conduct a more quantitative test of the hypothesis that Mafia neighborhoods in New York City have lower levels of street crime than others with similar socioeconomic characteristics, the next section of the paper analyzes assault,

homicide and robbery rates for the New York City community districts circa 2000. As will be discussed below, there is a difficulty in undertaking this type of analysis because there is a lack of a reliable measure for Mafia presence or influence at any level. Because the Mafia has been increasingly disrupted by informants during the past two decades, their presence can begin to be approximated by using arrest records. However, even this method is not an accurate measure of Mafia presence because it only assesses those members who get caught, not all Mafia members. There are no membership lists or end of the year financial records for New York City Mafia families, and this makes it difficult to precisely measure Mafia presence.

Russian organized crime, typically referred to as the Russian Mafia, is another predominant crime group in the United States and New York City (Shelley, 1995; Finkenbauer and Waring, 1998). Russian organized crime is not considered to be as organized as the Italian-American Mafia because they do not have any typical order of operation and they have many small groups rather than one large group. However, the impact of their many organizations has harmed many on a global scale as well as locally in New York City (Shelley, 1995; Finckenhauer and Waring, 1998). Because Russian organized crime is well-known in the United States and New York City, it will be used as a measure of mafia presence in the final analysis. This will allow for a broader picture of the effects of organized crime that is not specifically Italian.

CHAPTER 4: DATA AND METHODS

The best way to study a neighborhood is through observation and interview/survey, as we have seen through the work of Park and Burgess (1925), Suttles (1972), DeSena (1994), Patillo (1998) and the like. However, there are three reasons why this project will not use the preferred method. First, there are time constraints. Second, due to the nature of the topic, there would probably be an overwhelming unwillingness to talk by residents. Lastly, the Mafia has been depicted so frequently in movies and television that there is a likelihood of exaggerated responses. Instead of interviewing New York City residents, this part of the thesis will analyze secondary data collected by government agencies.

Specifically, to take a closer look at the influence of Mafia presence on neighborhood levels of crime, I turned to two data sources: the United States Census Bureau and the New York City Police Department.

Independent Variables

Data from the Census Bureau were retrieved from the New York City Department of City Planning for the year 2000 for each New York City community district. The purpose of collecting these data is to show the neighborhood characteristics that are commonly associated with neighborhood public safety. The reason community districts were chosen rather than census tracts or neighborhoods are three fold. Because this study is preliminary, first the larger community districts will be analyzed and, if the results

warrant further investigation, a more detailed study of census tracts or neighborhoods will be conducted. Additionally, it is important to consider that census tracts are much smaller than neighborhoods and this may misrepresent communities, especially in an urban area as dense as New York City. Instead, community districts will be viewed as neighborhoods to achieve the same effects.

Each community district is approximately 1-2 square miles with populations between 50,000 and 200,000 (NYCDCP 2008). Each of the five boroughs are divided into multiple community districts: Brooklyn is divided into districts 1-18, Queens has districts 1-14, Manhattan separates into districts 1-12, the Bronx also has districts 1-12, and Staten Island has community districts 1-3. This totals 59 community districts.³

The neighborhood characteristics collected from these community districts and included in the data set are % Russian foreign-born, % Italian foreign-born, % on public assistance, population density, % female headed households with dependent children, population change from 1990-2000, median income, % owner occupied housing, % education of high school or higher, and % of those under 18. These variables were chosen because they are commonly discussed in criminology and sociology as influential on neighborhood public safety (Park and Burgess, 1925; Shaw and McKay, 1969; DeSena, 1994; Patillo, 1998; Bursik and Grasmik, 2001). They were available in the community district profiles compiled by the New York City Department of City Planning.

³ Community districts in New York City have been previously used in scholarly research (Golub, Johnson and Dunlap 2006).

The *Percent of households on public assistance* was chosen as a variable to measure socio-economic status. *Population Density* was chosen as a variable because crime rises with the number of people in an area; typically, the higher the density, the more crimes will occur. The *Percent of Female Headed Households with Dependent Children* was also chosen to be an indicator of low socio-economic status. *Population Change from 1990-2000* was chosen because social disorganization theory suggests higher mobility (moving in and out frequently) can lead to higher crime rates. *Median Income* was obviously chosen as an indicator of socio-economic status. The *Percent owner occupied housing* was chosen to indicate socio-economic status. *The Percent Education of high school or higher* was also chosen as an indicator of socio-economic status. The *Percent of population under 18* was selected as people under the age of 18 are more susceptible to becoming involved in criminal activity. The following variables were available in percentages from the Census Bureau: Russian foreign-born, Italian foreign-born, public assistance, owner occupied housing and high school or higher. The percent of female-headed households and the % of the population under 18 were calculated by the author. Percent of female-headed households was calculated by dividing the number of female headed households by the total number of households in the district. The percent of people under the age of 18 was calculated by dividing the number of under 18 by the total population of the district. Population density was also calculated by the author, and this was done by dividing the total population of the district by the total number of square miles in the district.

Proxy Variables

Mafia presence is a difficult variable to measure; there is no list that keeps track of Mafia members and associates, nor are members willing to come forward and label their true means of employment on the Census, and there are no end-of-the-year financial reports to request from them. Initially, the method of measuring Mafia presence was to obtain the names and addresses of those Italian-Mafia members who were arrested under the RICO Act, pinpoint their addresses on a map, and use the results as a measure of Mafia presence. However, searching through court records became very expensive and time-consuming, with few results. The addresses of those Mafia members arrested under the RICO act were not easily accessible, so, the Mafia presence variable was constructed as a dummy variable as a way to approximately measure Mafia presence. The neighborhoods that are most popularly rumored to have dense Italian-American Mafia presence were used to gauge Mafia presence. Suttles (1972) studied neighborhoods that were rumored to have Mafia presence and this is where the idea stems from for this study. The following neighborhoods that are rumored to have Mafia presence in New York City were matched to their corresponding community districts: Howard Beach, Queens can be found in Queens community district 10, Todt Hill, Staten Island matches with Staten Island Community District 2; Princess Bay, Staten Island matches with Staten Island community district 3; Bensonhurst, Brooklyn is in Brooklyn community district 11; Dyker Heights, Brooklyn is in Brooklyn community district 10; Arthur Avenue, Bronx is found in the Bronx community district 6; Little Italy, Manhattan is in Manhattan community district 2 (Sorrentino and Krase 2000). These neighborhoods were all labeled

with a “1” and all other community districts were labeled as “0,” to achieve the proxy variable for Mafia presence.

A problem with this approach is that a neighborhood’s reputations for a strong Mafia presence may be based on old rumors and not represent its current status. Therefore, also serving as proxy variables are the *Percent Russian Foreign-born* and the *Percent Italian Foreign-born* as measures of organized crime presence. The *Percent Russian Foreign-born* was chosen to represent the growing populations of the Russian Mafia in Brooklyn and other parts of New York City. The *Percent Italian Foreign-born* was chosen to represent the Italian born immigrants in New York City and Brooklyn. The New York City Mafia families only allow Italians to join as full members, so potential recruits are most likely in areas with strong Italian reputations. Russian organized crime represents the second-largest ethnic-based organized crime group in New York City, so it is useful to include it as it can offer additional representation of social control through organized crime (Finckenauer and Waring 1998).

Dependent Variables

Next, the street crime in New York City will be assessed. For the purpose of this project street crime will be considered assaults, robberies and homicides as these seem to be the offenses that people most often turn to in deciding if a neighborhood is safe. It is recognized that some of these offenses, especially those involving intimate partners, occur in homes or other indoor locations (Bursik and Grasmik 2001).

Data from the New York City Police Department were retrieved for the years 1998 and 2001. The crime statistics chosen were assault, robbery, and homicide; these crimes were chosen because they form a template for violent and public crimes. According to social disorganization theory, a crime has to be somewhat public in order for citizens to have social control over said crime; robbery is most often a crime that occurs in public spaces. These numbers for each crime were averaged for the years 1998 and 2001, the aim is to account for year to year fluctuations in crime occurrences; this was accomplished by adding the two years together and dividing by two times the population from the year 2000. The crime rate was calculated by adding together the total number of assaults, robberies and homicides divided by the total population and multiplied by 100,000, this way the crime rate reflects units per 100,000. The crime statistics were available by precincts in the five boroughs: Manhattan is home to 22 precincts, Brooklyn divides into 23 precincts, Queens 16 precincts, the Bronx has 12 precincts and Staten Island has 3 precincts; making a total of 76 New York City precincts.

The issue of matching community districts and police precincts was easily solved because previous research had called for the same procedure, and in the interest of saving time it was easier to use the “ready-made” match devised by Golub, Johnson and Dunlap (2006). They matched the community districts with police precincts during the same time frame that we are assessing here. An illustration of the chart constructed by Golub et al. is visible in **Table 1**.

Methods

Once the data were collected, multivariate regression analyses were performed. Initially, there was multicollinearity between the economic variables ($VIF > 4.0$). These included: % female headed households, % owner occupied housing, median income, % education of high school or higher, and % of public assistance. Two of the variables (female headed households, public assistance) have positive relationships to crime and the other three variables (median income, high school education and home ownership) have negative relationships. To rectify this, all of the aforementioned SES variables were converted into Z scores, and then the variables median income, high school or higher and home ownership were multiplied by -1. After this procedure, all of the SES variables were combined to create an index called “Low SES2.” A test for multicollinearity was run again using the new variable LowSES2 and all VIF scores were within a normal range ($VIF < 4$), indicating that the problem of multicollinearity had been fixed.

Finally, Ordinary Least Squares Regression models were estimated for the crime statistics. Each model included a crime statistic variable as the dependent variable. The first analysis was conducted for assault, followed by robbery, homicide and the total crime rate (robbery, homicide and assault, units per 100,000), in that order. The independent variables used for each model were the neighborhood characteristics: low SES2, % Italian, population change, % under 18 and Mafia presence.

Table 1

Community Districts and Precincts

NYPD Precincts	Community Districts	Neighborhoods
		Manhattan
1	1	Battery Park, Tribeca
5	3	Lower East Side, Chinatown
6	2	Greenwich Village, Soho
7	3	Lower East Side, Chinatown
9	4	Chelsea, Clinton
13	6	Stuyvesant Town, Turtle Bay
14	5	Midtown Business District
17	6	Stuyvesant Town, Turtle Bay
18	4	Chelsea, Clinton
19	8	Upper East Side
20	7	West Side, Upper West Side
22		Central Park
23	11	East Harlem
24	7	West Side, Upper West Side
25	11	East Harlem
26	9	Manhattanville, Hamilton Heights
28	10	Central Harlem
30	9	Manhattanville, Hamilton Heights
32	10	Central Harlem
33	12	Washington Heights, Inwood
34	12	Washington Heights, Inwood
		The Bronx
40	1	Melrose, Mott Haven, Port Morris
41	2	Hunts Point, Longwood
42	3	Morrisania, Crotona Park East
43	9	Soundview, Parkchester
44	4	Highbridge, Concourse Village
45	10	Throgs Neck, Co-op City, Pelham Bay
46	5	University Heights, Fordham, Mt.Hope
47	12	Wakefield, Williamsbridge
48	6	East Tremont, Belmont
49	11	Pelham Parkway, Morris Park, Laconia
50	8	Riverdale, Kingsbridge, Marble Hill
52	7	Bedford Park, Norwood, Fordham
		Brooklyn
60	13	Coney Island, Brighton Beach
61	15	Sheepshead Bay, Gerritsen Beach
62	11	Bensonhurst, Bath Beach
63	18	Canarsie, Flatlands
66	12	Borough Park, Ocean Parkway
67	17	East Flatbush, Rugby, Farragut
68	10	Bay Ridge, Dyker Heights
69	18	Canarsie, Flatlands
70	14	Flatbush, Midwood
71	9	Crown Heights South, Wingate
72	7	Sunset Park, Windsor Terrace
73	16	Brownsville, Ocean Hill
75	5	East New York, Starrett City

76	6	Park Slope, Carroll Gardens
77	8	Crown Heights North
78	6	Park Slope, Carroll Gardens
79	3	Bedford Stuyvesant
81	3	Bedford Stuyvesant
83	4	Bushwick
84	2	Brooklyn Heights, Fort Greene
88	2	Brooklyn Heights, Fort Greene
90	1	Williamsburg, Greenpoint
94	1	Williamsburg, Greenpoint
Queens		
100	14	The Rockaways, Broad Channel
101	14	The Rockaways, Broad Channel
102	9	Woodhaven, Richmond Hill
103	12	Jamaica, St. Albans, Hollis
104	5	Ridgewood, Glendale, Maspeth
105	13	Queens Village, Rosedale
106	10	Ozone Park, Howard Beach
107	8	Fresh Meadows, Briarwood
108	2	Sunnyside, Woodside
109	7	Flushing, Bay Terrace
110	4	Elmhurst, South Corona
111	11	Bayside, Douglaston, Little Neck
112	6	Forest Hills, Rego Park
113	12	Jamaica, St. Albans, Hollis
114	1	Astoria, Long Island City
115	3	Jackson heights, North Corona
Staten Island		
120	1	Stapleton, Port Richmond
122	2	New Springville, South Beach
123	3	Tottenville, Woodrow, Great Kills

Approximation of Community Districts and Precincts in New York City's five boroughs

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CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

Four models were run to determine the effects of the Italian-American Mafia presence on neighborhood public safety. Each model has an N of 59. The mean rate for assault is 369.07 (SD= 255.10) indicating that on average, about 369 assaults occur per 100,000 residents in each community district in a given year. The mean rate for robbery is 455.25 (SD=257.42), showing that the reported level of robberies are greater than that for assaults. The mean rate for homicide is substantially less with 8.86 per 100,000 (SD=7.42). The crime rate has a mean of 821.54 (SD=487.48), so on average, about 822 crimes (assaults, homicides and robberies) occurred per 100,000 people in New York City for the years 1998-2001. Percent Italian has a mean of 1.31 (SD=.73) and Percent Russian has a mean of 1.25 (SD .71) indicating that on average each community district has about 1% Russian and 1% Italian foreign-born. **Table 2** shows the standard deviations and the means for the neighborhood characteristics and the crime statistics for New York City. **Table 3** compares the crime statistics for rumored mafia neighborhoods in New York City with the means of the crime statistics for all 59 community districts.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Neighborhood Characteristics and Crime Statistics in New York City 1998-2001

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Assault	369.07	255.10	59
Robbery	455.68	257.42	59
Homicide	8.86	7.42	59
Crime Rate	821.54	487.48	59
Percent Italian	1.31	.72	59
Mafia Presence	.14	.35	59
Percent Russian	1.25	.71	59
Percent Under 18	24.70	7.61	59
Density	43519.12	25437.03	59
LowSES2	.00	4.40	59

Table 3

Crime Statistics for Rumored Mafia Neighborhoods in New York City, 1998-2001.

Rumored Neighborhood	Community District	Percent Italian	Assault Rate*	Robbery Rate*	Homicide Rate*	Crime Rate*
Arthur Avenue	Bronx 6	3.10	623	660	24	1307
Howard Beach	Queens 10	5.10	211	349	4	564
Todt Hill	Staten Island 2	11.40	117	90	2	209
Princess Bay	Staten Island 3	20.40	38	19	1	58
Bensonhurst	Brooklyn 11	13.20	193	300	4	497
Dyker Heights	Brooklyn 10	6.80	150	190	0	340
Little Italy	Manhattan 2	3.80	194	395	3	592
All **	All**	N/A	369.07	455.68	8.86	821.54

*Rates are per 100,000 people

** Rates are the means for all 59 community districts

Correlations

Table 4 shows several notable correlations between the variables. There is a positive and significant correlation between LowSES2 and crime rate ($r=.616$). This indicates that when there are more residents of lower socioeconomic status, a higher crime rate is likely. Percent Russian has a significant and negative relationship with the crime rate ($r=-.251$). This indicates that the higher percent Russian residents, the lower the crime rate. The magnitude for this relationship is low but the primary hypothesis is supported because the Russians have a sizeable organized crime group in New York City. This result potentially indicates that the presence of their crime groups has negative effects on the crime rate. There is a significant and negative correlation between percent Italian and crime rate ($r=-.378$). Though the magnitude for this relationship is low, it suggests the possibility that the higher the percent of Italian residents, the lower the crime rate will be. This relationship does support the primary hypothesis of the thesis.

The proxy variable Mafia presence has a significant and negative correlation with robbery ($-.223$), indicating that as Mafia presence in neighborhoods increases, robbery decreases. This correlation supports the initial hypothesis that Mafia presence decreases crime. Other significant correlations include percent Russian ($r= -.251$) and percent Italian ($r= -.391$) which are both significantly and inversely correlated with robbery. This suggests that the higher the percent of Russian or Italian residents, the lower the instances of robbery. Notably, percent Italian is correlated at a higher magnitude than the percent Russian. LowSES2, however, has the strongest correlation with robbery ($r=.467$).

The significant variables most strongly correlated with assault were percent under 18 ($r=.490$) and LowSES2 ($r=.699$). Percent Russian ($r= -.238$) and percent Italian ($-.339$) were also significantly correlated with assault, although negatively and at a lower magnitude. This suggests the possibility that the percent Russian and percent Italian do have an effect on the amount of reported assault.

Many of these correlations seem to support the hypothesis that Mafia presence has a negative impact on crime. An OLS regression was performed to determine the stability of these relationships with other variables controlled. **Table 4** shows the zero-order correlation coefficients (Pearson's r) for the independent and dependent variables.

Table 4

Correlation Coefficients

	Pearson's r									
	X ₁	X ₂	X ₃	X ₄	X ₅	X ₆	X ₇	X ₈	X ₉	X ₁₀
X ₁	--	-.113	-.115	-.109	.795*	-.064	.490	.179	.677	.332*
X ₂	-.113	--	.215	-.118	-.164	.420*	-.238	-.203*	-.251	-.251*
X ₃	-.115	.215	--	-.362*	-.339*	.452*	-.339*	-.391	-.316*	-.378*
X ₄	-.109	-.118	-.362*	--	.236*	-.028	.079	.144	.129	.146
X ₅	.795*	-.164	-.339*	.236*	--	-.120	.699*	.467*	.830*	.616*
X ₆	-.064	.420*	.452*	-.028	-.120	--	-.189	-.223*	-.181	-.210
X ₇	.490*	-.238*	-.339*	.079	.699*	-.189	--	.757	.828	.779
X ₈	.179	-.251*	-.391*	.144	.467*	-.223*	.757	--	.661	.796
X ₉	.677*	-.203	-.316*	.129	.830*	-.181	.828	.661	--	.464
X ₁₀	.332*	-.251*	-.378*	.146	.616*	-.210	.779	.796	.464	--

X₁= Percent Under 18
 X₂= Percent Russian
 X₃= Percent Italian
 X₄= Density
 X₅= LowSES2

X₆= Mafia Presence
 X₇= Assault
 X₈= Robbery
 X₉= Homicide
 X₁₀=Crime Rate

* indicates statistically significant, p<.05

Ordinary Least Squares Regression

Model 1 uses assault as the dependent variable. After conducting an ANOVA, $F=10.861$ and is significant at $p \leq .000$. This indicates that model 1 is a good fit. In the OLS model, two of the predictor variables were statistically significant, density and LowSES2. For density, the coefficient is $B = -.002$, significant at $p \leq .046$, indicating a negative relationship to assault. As population density increases by 1 unit, assaults will decrease by .002. LowSES2 had a coefficient of $B = 54.275$ at the .000 significance level, this indicates a positive relationship between low socioeconomic status and assault. As LowSES2 increases by 54.275, assaults will also increase by one unit. The standardized coefficient for LowSES2 is .945 and for population density $\beta = -.233$ showing that LowSES2 has a much stronger effect on assault. The regression for model 1 indicates that the measures of organized crime do not have a significant relationship with assault. **Table 5** highlights the B coefficients and R2 for model 1.

In Model 2, homicide is the dependent variable. The ANOVA showed $F=20.466$ with a significance level of $p \leq .000$. This score shows that model 2 is also a good fit. In the OLS model, the only variable considered significant is LowSES2 with coefficient $B = 1.34$ at a .000 significance level, indicating a positive relationship between low socioeconomic status and homicide in New York City. As low socioeconomic status increases, homicide also increases. This model indicates that low socioeconomic status is the most influential factor on homicide in New York City. Again, none of the measures for organized crime appeared significant ($p < .05$) in this model, indicating that organized

crime does not have a strong relationship to homicide. See **Table 5** for a detailed look at the B coefficients and R2 for Model 2.

For model 3, the dependent variable is robbery. The ANOVA showed $F=5.830$ and the predictors were statistically significant at .000, indicating that the model is a good fit. In the OLS model, two variables appeared as significant, LowSES2 and percent under 18. LowSES2 has a coefficient $B= 53.049$ at a .000 significance level, this indicates that LowSES2 has a direct relationship with robbery in New York City. As LowSES2 increases by 53.049, robbery will also increase by one unit. Percent under 18 has a coefficient of $B= -20.746$ at a .004 significance level, indicating a negative relationship between % under 18 and robbery in New York City. As the percent under 18 decreases, robbery will increase. The standardized coefficients (betas) are .916 for LowSES2 and -.614 for percent under 18, this shows that LowSES2 has the greatest impact on robbery. See **Table 5** for highlights of the B coefficients and R2 for model 3.

Model 4 used Crime Rate as the dependent variable. The ANOVA shows $F= 9.018$ ($p \leq .000$) indicating the model is a good fit. The coefficients that are significant are LowSES2 ($B=112.721$, $p \leq .000$) and percent under 18 ($B= -34.630$, $p \leq .006$). LowSES2 has a positive relationship to the crime rate. As the crime rate increases by one unit, LowSES2 increases by 112.721. The standardized coefficient for LowSES2 is larger than 1 which usually indicates multicollinearity. When the offending variable (under 18) was removed, there was no change in the results. The original results are kept, despite the high standardized coefficient. The percent under 18 has a negative relationship with the crime rate. As percent under 18 decreases by 34.630, the crime rate increases by one

unit. The standardized coefficients indicate that LowSES2 (beta= .1.027) has the strongest effect on the crime rate compared to the percent under 18 (beta= -.541). Again, in this model, the proxy variables for Mafia presence are not statistically significant.

Table 5 shows the B coefficients and R2 for model 4.

Density is significant in model 1, percent under 18 is significant in models 3 and 4, and LowSES2 is significant in all 4 of the models. LowSES2 is the variable with the strongest effect on the dependent variables in each of the models. Next we will look at the possible reasons for the significance of these variables.

Table 5

OLS Regressions of Assault, Robbery, Homicide and Crime Rate in New York City 1998-2001, N=59

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)/Standardized Coefficients (Beta)			
	<u>Model 1:</u> <u>Assault**</u>	<u>Model 2:</u> <u>Homicide**</u>	<u>Model 3:</u> <u>Robbery**</u>	<u>Model 4:</u> <u>Crime rate**</u>
LowSES2	54.275* (.945)	1.374* (.823)	53.049* (.916)	112.721* (1.027)
Density	-.002* (-.233)	-2.470E-5 (-.085)	-.002 (-.437)	-.004 (-.223)
Percent Italian	-39.757 (-.133)	-.361(-.035)	-70.819 (-.136)	-94.587 (-.141)
Mafia presence	-.025 (.000)	-1.026 (-.048)	-4.358 (.006)	-9.133 (-.006)
Percent Russian	-43.734 (-.122)	-.528 (-.051)	-55.044 (-.126)	-94.150 (-.137)
Percent Under18	-10.515 (-.314)	.001 (.001)	-20.746* (-.614)	-34.630* (-.541)
R ²	.556	.703	.402	.510
Standard Error	255.10	7.42	257.42	487.48

* indicates variable is statistically significant, p<.05.

** indicates model is significant

parentheses indicate standardized coefficient (Beta)

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

Socio-economic status has long been a bench mark for high crime or lack of crime (Park and Burgess, 1925; Shaw and McKay, 1969; DeSena, 1994; Patillo, 1998; Bursik and Grasmik 2001), and it is not surprising that this variable had strong and consistent influence on the various crimes and crime rates in New York City. Consistently turning up with a significance level of $p < .000$, low socioeconomic status was the most influential predictor of assault, robbery, homicide and the overall crime rate.

Percent under 18 also has negative and significant effects on robbery and the crime rate in New York City. This significance is not surprising because crime is typically low in areas that have a large number of children. This does not support the primary hypothesis of the thesis, but it does support the theory that social control keeps neighborhoods safer. Families with children are more likely to personally insure that the area they live in remains safe.

This significance of the negative correlation of percent Italian shown in **Table 3** is interesting and deserves a closer look. This does not necessarily have to mean that if there are Italian immigrants in New York City they will be involved in crime or a threat to any given neighborhood, but it does mean that there is a negative relationship between foreign-born Italian-Americans in a particular area and the crime statistics chosen for this project. As the percent foreign-born Italian increases, assault, robbery, homicide and crime rate decrease. While it is not the most significant correlation compared to some

other independent variables, it is interesting that a relationship exists. Now obviously, this result does not indicate that Mafia presence has anything to do with neighborhood public safety, because being born in Italy does not mean that you become involved with the Mafia in the U.S. However, there is a high incidence of native-born Italians joining or being indoctrinated into Mafia activities in the United States, and this is what makes this result most intriguing.

The proxy variable Mafia presence had no significance relating to assault, robbery homicide and crime rate in New York City. This could be because the variable does not accurately measure Mafia presence; there is no easy way to measure the activity or membership of the Mafia at the neighborhood level. Another reason for the difficulty in assessing Mafia presence could be the strict enforcement of the RICO laws during the 1980s and 1990s. The many arrests of those involved in racketeering operations may have changed the density of the Mafia presence in neighborhoods, perhaps there are less Mafia members now and, therefore, the families have less influence on their historic strongholds.

There are many weaknesses in this study. The crime statistics may not represent actual crime because I did not use all of the reported crimes in New York City, and not all crime is discovered or reported. Therefore, the actual crime rate may be significantly higher in some communities. The neighborhood characteristics chosen may not represent the communities in the appropriate way because what appears in the Census may not be an accurate picture of what is going on in the community; especially since the Census is not conducted annually. In urban areas like New York City, neighborhoods and

communities tend to change more rapidly than other types of cities. Community districts are broader than neighborhoods and may include smaller areas that are homogenous with respect to organized crime.

Although, there are many flaws in this study, it seems to be a good starting point for future research. Further investigations on this topic should focus on obtaining a more accurate measure of Mafia presence, either collecting addresses of those arrested under the RICO act as initially planned or finding another more valid measure of Mafia presence. In addition to this, it would be beneficial to see what happens if smaller community units are analyzed, like zip code, area code or census tracts.

CONCLUSION

The literature suggests that neighborhoods with organized criminal networks would have lower crime rates than other neighborhoods or communities, because of the social control their organization exerts on residents and visitors. The strictly organized Italian-American Mafia seems to have characteristics that would translate throughout the neighborhood: People will not participate in overt illegal behaviors because they do not know who is watching, and the fear of what the Mafia might do keeps residents and visitors to the neighborhood relatively well-behaved. Using crime statistics from the NYPD and census data for neighborhood characteristics, four linear regressions were calculated. The results indicate that low socioeconomic status is the main factor explaining neighborhood crime rate variations in New York City. The percent of the population under 18 and density were also listed as influential factors for some variables. The percent of foreign-born Italians was noted as significant in the correlation models, though it is not yet clear what this might truly indicate. The proxy variable for Mafia presence was not significant, and this can either be due to inaccuracies of the measurement of the variable or a true decrease in the influence of Mafia presence after the string of RICO arrests in the 1980s and 1990s. The results imply that Mafia presence does not influence neighborhood social control, but they do reinforce social disorganization theory. The foundation of this theory is neighborhood stability; the more unstable a neighborhood is, the more susceptible the neighborhood is to crime and

dysfunction. Factors like low socioeconomic status and density influence neighborhood stability. Future research should attempt to have more accurate representations of Mafia presence and neighborhood characteristics.

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