durable inequality and how certain neighborhoods get locked into a social dynamic that generates further stigmatization, disorder, outmigration, crime, civic withdrawal, and eventually the deepening of poverty. Equally important, however, is how some communities break out of poverty traps and the mold of stigmatizing perceptions. Collective efficacy and organizational action provide a clue.

7 | The Theory of Collective Efficacy

The previous chapter demonstrated that the concept of disorder has played a dominant role in our thinking about the social milieu of cities. Despite frequent attacks, so too has the similar concept of social disorganization. As demonstrated in chapter 2, William F. Whyte attempted to relegate social disorganization theory to the intellectual dustbin in the 1940s. But rather than going away, it actually experienced a vigorous resurgence in the late twentieth-century focus on neighborhood effects. Robert J. Bursik and Harold Grasmick provide a revealing anecdote in their *Neighborhoods and Crime*. Recalling a conversation at the annual meeting of the American Society of Criminology in the late 1980s, they were told by a respected but unnamed colleague that "social disorganization is the herpes of criminology . . . once you think it is gone for good, the symptoms flare up again."[1]

Although I have several suspects in mind as the source of this comment, the late Yale sociologist Albert J. Reiss Jr. is at the top of my list. Ever the ornery intellectual, in an opening essay, "Why Are Communities Important for Understanding Crime?," Reiss trained his critical eye on social disorganization theory.[2] Against a backdrop of admiration for the efforts of Shaw and McKay and others in the social-disorganization tradition, Reiss pointed out that in many so-called disorganized slums, there coexisted criminal networks, organized gangs, and often a complex density of social ties. Surely it would be a mistake to consider Whyte's North End, to use Reiss's example, as simply "disorganized." Yet it did have high crime rates, and many of the features of Shaw and

McKay's delinquency areas. Characteristically, then, Reiss raised a paradox: high-crime areas often seem to be both organized and disorganized simultaneously, yielding an uneasy coexistence within the same boundaries. Wouldn't it be best, as Bursik and Grasmick's critic implied, to simply eradicate social disorganization theory once and for all? At the very least it seems that promoting the reformulation of this classic framework on communities and crime is a risky business. At the same time, I believe that the theory has been unfairly maligned and that the hypothesis lurking underneath the theory is worth saving—*community-level variations in social control contribute to varying crime rates.*

Thus my position is that we should recognize what is useful about social disorganization theory while modifying or discarding what is no longer relevant. I agree that there are good reasons to question the definition of disorganization and to rethink the role of dense personal ties in generating low crime rates. The definitional issue has been a perennial problem. As Bursik noted, a number of early scholars defined disorganization in terms of what they hoped to explain—what better indicator of social disorganization than crime?[3] But if crime (or disorder) is simply a marker for disorganization, then we have defined the cause in terms of outcome-related factors and have not identified any independent explanatory mechanism. For this reason social disorganization research shifted in recent decades to measuring its key construct in terms *independent* of crime, most notably with respect to what is commonly referred to as a "systemic" notion of the density of personal ties.[4] Although this was a necessary move away from tautology, other conceptual problems remained in the theory's treatment of social ties.

First, there is evidence that in some neighborhood contexts strong personal ties may impede efforts to establish social control. Wilson, for example, has argued that residents of very poor neighborhoods may be tightly interconnected through personal networks but without necessarily producing collective resources or social regulation.[5] He argues that ties in the inner city are excessively personalistic and parochial—socially isolated from public resources and role models in the "mainstream culture." Although total social isolation from the media-driven aspects of our larger culture is probably rare, restricted networks and nontraditional coping mechanisms in deprived neighborhoods do appear to yield an uneasy relationship to public institutions of social control such as the police, schools, and courts.[6]

Second, networks connect not just do-gooders but the underbelly of social life, from drug dealers to gang members to crooked politicians. In her study of a black middle-class community in Chicago, Mary E. Pattillo-McCoy addressed the limits of tight-knit social bonds in facilitating social control.[7] She argues that although dense local ties do promote social cohesion, they simultaneously foster the growth of networks that impede efforts to rid the neighborhood of organized drug- and gang-related crime. Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh finds a similar pattern in a low-income neighborhood of Chicago.[8] Thus dense social ties potentially have both positive *and* negative ramifications, reminding us that it is important to ask what is being connected—networks are not inherently egalitarian or prosocial in nature. Christopher Browning extends this idea to explore the conditions under which dense social ties *inhibit* crime control.[9] This argument has a long pedigree in the urban sociological and gang literature, going back at least as far as *Street Corner Society*.[10]

Third, and perhaps most important, shared expectations for social control and strategic connections that yield effective action can in principle be fostered in the absence of thick ties among neighbors. As Mark Granovetter argued in his seminal essay on "weak ties," less intimate connections between people based on infrequent social interaction may nonetheless be critical for establishing social resources such as job referrals because they integrate the community by bringing together otherwise disconnected subgroups.[11] Consistent with this view, there is evidence that weak ties among neighbors, reflected in middle-range rather than either nonexistent or intensive social interaction, are predictive of lower crime rates.[12] Dense social ties are thus not always predictive of better outcomes, as commonly expected.

Finally, as introduced in chapter 1, in contemporary cities the idyllic "urban village" endures largely in myth. Even given ample time or energy, I suspect most people do not want to be close friends with their neighbors. They desire trust with them, not necessarily to eat dinner with them. When ties are "thick," it may even be that outcomes are worse rather than better. More important, there is the mathematical impossibility of relying on friendship or other close personal ties to achieve social order in the contemporary (or any) city—there are simply too many people to know. Indeed, this is the essence of a city as Louis Wirth classically emphasized: one cannot know more than a tiny fraction of one's neighbors on a personal basis. The law of numbers and

the nature of everyday social relations therefore force us to think about how social integration, cohesion, and other aspects of social organization can be achieved in a fully urban world.

From Social Disorganization to Collective Efficacy

To address these conceptual issues, my colleagues and I have proposed a theory of collective efficacy. The concept of collective efficacy draws together two fundamental mechanisms—*social cohesion* (the "collectivity" part of the concept) and *shared expectations for control* (the "efficacy" part of the concept).[13] Our premise accepts the basic idea of social disorganization theory that social control is a collective challenge not attributable to the characteristics of individuals alone and that it constitutes a major source of variation in crime rates and general wellbeing across neighborhoods.[14] But we relaxed the traditional disorganization assumption that the ideal contextual setting for social control is necessarily one characterized by dense, intimate, and strong neighborhood ties (e.g., through friends or kin). This theoretical framework recognizes the transformed landscape of contemporary urban life and assumes that while community efficacy may depend on some level of working trust and social interaction, it does not require that neighbors or local police officers be one's friend. Institutional mechanisms may be sufficient.

Following this logic, we focused on the everyday strategies by which residents address challenges. Examples of informal control strategies include the monitoring of spontaneous play groups among children, sharing information about other children's behavior, willingness to intervene in preventing acts such as truancy and street-corner "hanging" by teenage peer groups, and doing something about persons who are exploiting or disturbing public space. Even among adults, violence regularly arises in public disputes, in the context of illegal markets (e.g., prostitution, drugs) and in the company of peers. The capacity of residents to exercise control (which includes calling the police) is thus expected to be a mechanism influencing opportunities for interpersonal crime in a neighborhood. Informal social control also generalizes to broader institutional issues facing the wellbeing of neighborhoods, such as the ability to extract resources and respond to cuts in public

services (e.g., police patrols, fire stations, garbage collection, housing code enforcement).

Collective efficacy then elevates an active view of social life that goes beyond the accumulation of stocks of personal resources, such as those found in local ties or civic memberships. This conceptual orientation is consistent with the redefinition of "social capital" by Alejandro Portes in terms of "expectations for action within a collectivity."[15] Distinguishing between the resource potential represented by personal ties, on the one hand, and the shared expectations for action represented by collective efficacy, on the other hand, helps to clarify why dense networks are not sufficient for the exercise of control. For this reason we posited an analogy between individual efficacy and neighborhood efficacy: both entail the activation of latent resources to achieve an intended effect. Expectations of action are crucial.

We also argued that just as self-efficacy is situated rather than general (one has self-efficacy relative to a particular task), a neighborhood's efficacy exists relative to specific tasks and is embedded in conditions of mutual trust and social cohesion. There is good reason to hypothesize that humans will be less likely to expect engagement in acts of social control in contexts (whether neighborhoods or everyday situations) where there is no expectation of future contact or where participants mistrust one another. As Russell Hardin argues, trust is constituted by shared expectations.[16] Collective efficacy theory goes further to argue that repeated interactions, observations of interactions, and an awareness of *potential* interactions that could be invoked all establish shared norms (a sense of the "we") beyond the strong ties among friends and kin.[17] Put differently, a person can perceive trust and infer shared expectations about public behavior without having to know their neighbors in the "urban village" sense of cohesion.

The logic of collective efficacy theory is not disproven by the intermingling of criminal and noncriminal networks that Whyte, Pattillo, Venkatesh, and Martin Sanchez-Jankowski found. Over fifty years ago Solomon Kobrin noted how delinquents had contacts with nondelinquents and vice versa. The development of values and goals simultaneously are exerted in both directions.[18] Shouldn't we expect to find that delinquents have brothers, sisters, grandmothers, and neighbors that know them well? That they defend and love them even as they may con-

demn their behavior? I suspect that middle-class parents are no more or less likely than lower-class parents to disown their children when they get in trouble with the law. The difference is that the disadvantaged are more exposed to the realities of crime, and the proximity of black middle-class communities to high-crime areas means that on a day-to-day basis, their residents must negotiate their way among the "street-wise" and potentially criminal encounters.[19] What matters ultimately is the relative weight of social controls directed toward reducing crime.

What Influences Collective Efficacy?

As with individual efficacy, collective efficacy does not exist in a vacuum. It is partly "endogenous" or contingent on the challenges at hand, cultural contexts, and the stratification of places by key structural characteristics. Existing theory has focused mostly on the role of concentrated poverty, racial segregation, immigrant enclaves, and residential stability. As noted in chapters 2 and 5, economic segregation by race increases the concentration of cumulative disadvantage, intensifying the social isolation of lower-income, minority, and single-parent residents from key institutional resources that support collective social control. Equally salient is the influence of racial and economic exclusion on perceived powerlessness. Research has demonstrated that an individual's socioeconomic status is positively linked to his or her sense of personal control, efficacy, and even biological health.[20] A similar process may work at the community level, where alienation, exploitation, and dependency wrought by resource deprivation act as a centrifugal force that stymies collective efficacy. Even if personal ties are strong in areas of concentrated disadvantage, they may be weakly tethered to collective actions.

The evidence also suggests that newer immigrant groups are less active in local civic affairs and that rapid population change can undermine neighborhood social organization. A high rate of residential mobility, especially in areas losing population or characterized by rapid immigration flows, may weaken expectations for collective life because the formation of trust and social ties takes time. Home owners have a vested interest in supporting the commonweal of neighborhood life when compared to renters. Thus residential tenure and home ownership are likely to promote collective efforts to maintain social control.

Based on these ideas, we tested the hypothesis that collective efficacy is lowered by concentrated disadvantage, immigration, and residential instability. In turn, we asked whether collective efficacy helped explain the association of structural features of the urban environment with rates of interpersonal violence. Specifically, we hypothesized that collective efficacy has independent explanatory power above and beyond the composition of the population and that it partially mediates the effects of neighborhood structural features.

Prior Results

Ecometrics is rooted in the idea that we have to take seriously the measurement of community-level properties in their own right.[21] Stephen Raudenbush and I have argued that without a coherent strategy for evaluating the quality of ecological assessments, a serious mismatch arises in studies that aim to integrate individuals and neighborhoods. The assessment of individual differences, building on decades of psychometric research, employs measures that have withstood rigorous evaluation. This is especially true of measures of cognitive skill and school achievement, but extends as well to measures of personality and social behavior. These measures have been thoroughly evaluated in many studies; each scale includes many items; ill-performing items have been discarded; and psychometric properties have been found to hold up in many contexts. Without comparable standards to evaluate ecological assessments, the search for individual and ecological explanations is likely to overemphasize the individual component.

We further argued that it is tempting at first to describe the challenge as one of needing to understand "the psychometric properties of ecological measures." But this awkward phrasing reveals the individualistic bias of modern social science, underscoring the need to take ecological assessment seriously as an enterprise that is conceptually distinct from individual-level assessment. Ecological constructs are not merely the aggregate of individual characteristics, leading to what we termed the "ecometric" rather than psychometric properties of social-ecological measures. Ecometric assessment, while borrowing tools from the rich tradition of psychometrics, has its own logic and treats neighborhoods as important units in their own right. I set aside the statistical

details here and focus on the basics of how emergent properties such as collective efficacy and other neighborhood social processes can be measured.

Based on the Community Survey of 8,782 residents of 343 Chicago neighborhoods in 1995, we first developed a theoretically motivated measurement strategy. To capture shared expectations about social control, we designed vignettes. Residents were asked about the likelihood that their neighbors could be counted on to take action if: (1) children were skipping school and hanging out on a street corner, (2) children were spray-painting graffiti on a local building, (3) children were showing disrespect to an adult, (4) a fight broke out in front of their house, and (5) the fire station closest to home was threatened with budget cuts. Our measurement relied on vignettes because of the fundamental unobservability of the capacity for control—the act of intervention is only observed under conditions of challenge. If high collective efficacy leads to low crime, then at any given moment no intervention will be observed precisely because of the lack of need. Like Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, the argument is that expectations for control will increase behavioral interventions when necessary, but the scale itself taps shared expectations for social action—in our case ranging from informal intervention to the mobilization of formal controls.[22] The emphasis is on actions that are generated "on the ground" rather than top down. It turned out that residents varied sharply in their answers both within and across neighborhoods. After adjusting for individual differences, our strategy was to measure between-neighborhood patterns in informal social control.

The "social cohesion/trust" part of the measure taps the nature of community relationships and was measured by coding whether residents agreed with the following propositions: "People around here are willing to help their neighbors," "People in this neighborhood can be trusted," "This is a close-knit neighborhood," "People in this neighborhood generally get along with each other," and "People in this neighborhood share the same values." As hypothesized, social cohesion and social control were strongly related across neighborhoods and were combined into a summary measure of collective efficacy, yielding an aggregate-level reliability in the high 0.80s.[23] Individual differences *within* neighborhoods in the ratings of collective efficacy as a result of social position (e.g. age, race, sex, social class, home ownership) were controlled for, and the key question turned on variance *between* neighborhoods.

We found that collective efficacy varied widely across Chicago neighborhoods and was associated with lower rates of violence measured by independent methods, while also controlling for concentrated disadvantage, residential stability, immigrant concentration, and a comprehensive set of individual-level characteristics (e.g., age, sex, SES, race/ethnicity, home ownership) as well as indicators of personal ties and the density of local organizations. Whether measured by homicide events or violent victimization reported by residents, neighborhoods high in collective efficacy consistently had significantly lower rates of violence. This finding held up controlling for prior neighborhood violence, which was negatively associated with collective efficacy. This pattern suggests a dynamic process in which prior violence depresses collective efficacy (e.g., because of fear or cynicism), while collective efficacy helps stave off future crime. We found that after adjusting for the prior-violence link, a two standard-deviation elevation in collective efficacy was associated with a 26 percent reduction in the expected homicide rate.[24]

Another key finding was that the association of concentrated disadvantage and residential instability with higher violence declined after collective efficacy was controlled, suggesting a potential causal pathway at the community level. This pathway is presumed to operate over time because collective efficacy is undermined by the concentration of disadvantage, racial segregation, family disruption, and residential instability, which in turn fosters more crime. A follow-up study that considered additional factors showed that the density of personal ties was associated with higher collective efficacy and hence lower crime, although the former did not translate directly into lower crime rates—its association with crime was indirect.[25] These findings are consistent with the hypothesis that collective efficacy helps explain the effect of both structural deprivation and the density of personal ties on crime rates. As noted at the opening of this chapter, however, we must bear in mind that social ties are neutral in the sense that they can be drawn upon for negative as well as positive goals. A study by Browning and colleagues extended Al Reiss's concern by showing that dense networks attenuate the effect of collective efficacy on crime, adding another twist to the idea that strong ties are not necessarily a good thing.[26] In what is termed a *negotiated coexistence* model, collective efficacy is negatively associated with the prevalence of violent crime in urban neighborhoods, but the density of exchange networks interacts with collective efficacy

such that as network density increases, the regulatory effect of collective efficacy on violence declines.

What are the kinds of structural and normative contexts that promote (or undermine) collective efficacy and nonexclusive social networks other than those already considered? This is a question that cannot be answered easily and that I will come back to in chapter 8. But there are clear hints in our data that the civic infrastructure of local organizations and voluntary associations helps sustain a capacity for social action in a way that transcends traditional personal ties. Organizations are equipped to foster collective efficacy, often through strategic networking of their own or by creating tasks that demand collective responses.[27] Whether disorder removal, school improvements, or police responses, a continuous stream of challenges faces contemporary communities—challenges that no longer can be met by relying solely on individuals. I thus conceive of shared expectations for control and effective social action as depending in part on organizations and connections that do not directly reflect the density of personal ties in a neighborhood. PHDCN-related research supports this position by showing that the density of local organizations as reported by residents and their involvement in voluntary associations predicts higher levels of collective efficacy, controlling for poverty, social composition, and prior crime rates.[28] The following chapter and chapter 14 will reconnect with the organizational story by exploring a new perspective on collective civic action and the ways in which networks of ties among community leaders and organizations knit together collective efficacy.

In the meanwhile, the data from the PHDCN and other studies of neighborhood social process are for the most part consistent with the inference that collective efficacy is an independent source of variation in crime rates and that it partially mediates the effect of neighborhood characteristics like concentrated disadvantage, residential stability, and local network ties. Travis Pratt and Frances Cullen conducted an independent review of more than two hundred empirical studies of neighborhood and crime rates from 1960 to 1999.[29] Using the technique of meta-analysis, they found that collective efficacy had a mean correlation of −0.303 (on a scale of −1 to 1) with crime rates in relevant studies (the 95 percent confidence interval is −0.26 to −0.35). By meta-analysis standards this is a robust finding, and when weighted by sample size the authors rank the magnitude of collective efficacy ahead of more traditional suspects such as poverty, family disruption, and race. Although the number of studies directly measuring social processes is much smaller than for factors like poverty (under twenty-five), and while there is considerable variability in the specification of measures, we can conclude that collective efficacy has a consistent negative association with crime rates.[30]

The Reach of Collective Efficacy

It is important to emphasize that the original social disorganization theory and collective efficacy theory were both designed mainly to explain variations across neighborhoods in rates of crime and other behaviors. I have been addressing the evidence on this question. Asking whether the collective efficacy of one's residence reaches further to explain how neighborhoods influence the criminal behavior of individuals no matter where they happen to be at the time or in later years is a compatible but logically different question. In this case neighborhoods would have developmental or lagged effects. The separation of types of explanation is important to consider because residents often traverse the boundaries of multiple neighborhoods during the course of a day. Adolescents, for example, typically occupy different neighborhood contexts outside of home, especially when it comes to schooling and hanging out in the company of peers. It is thus possible for the prevalence of participation in some crimes to be spread fairly evenly across neighborhoods, even as crime events are ecologically concentrated.

Research on the Chicago PHDCN data that I have led finds that collective efficacy in the neighborhood of residence does not have a direct association with the self-reported violence of adolescents.[31] It appears that whereas collective efficacy predicts the event (or location) rate of violence in a neighborhood, it does not necessarily predict the violent offending propensity of neighborhood youths that may occur elsewhere in the city. This pattern suggests that collective efficacy is situational when it comes to crime. But this does not imply causal irrelevance, of course, because the earlier results logically suggest that neighborhood collective efficacy consistently influences the probability of crime within its borders. The offending of PHDCN adolescents may thus still be influenced by the collective efficacy of the *nonresidential* neighborhoods in which they hang out. A study of robbery locations in Chicago

supports this idea—low collective efficacy is an "attractor" for robbery offenders even if they do not live in the neighborhoods.[32] A further study of routine activities and ecology in England shows that individual delinquency by crime-prone adolescents is significantly deterred by the collective efficacy of neighborhoods where the adolescents spend their leisure time.[33] Consistent with the routine-activity approach, studies based on the PHDCN have reported direct effects of collective efficacy on unstructured socializing with peers and early initiation of sexual behavior. The contextual influence of collective efficacy on teenage sexual behavior among Chicago adolescents suggests a broad role for neighborhood-level supervision or regulation.[34] A recent study also argues that neighborhood collective efficacy is significantly associated with adolescents' unstructured socializing with peers, and that this relationship must be accounted for when studying violence. In particular, a significant negative effect of collective efficacy on violent behavior by neighborhood adolescents became evident "only upon including the effect of unstructured socializing with peers."[35] This finding implies that the influence of collective efficacy on individual violence was suppressed in our earlier study.

Taken together these results suggest that much more than "street crime" is at stake. In fact, Christopher Browning argues that collective efficacy reduces domestic violence "inside the home" as well, through the hypothesized mechanism of disclosure by women at risk of partner abuse to third parties in neighborhoods characterized by high collective efficacy.[36] PHDCN-related research by others has also documented significant links between collective efficacy and rates of *asthma, birth weight, self-rated health,* and *heat-wave deaths.*[37] Collective efficacy thus reaches out to capture a number of health-related dimensions that go well beyond the original application of the theory to street crime.

A sketch of the argument made to this point is shown in figure 7.1. I argue that inequality in resources and other structural forces outside the immediate control of residents (e.g., organizations) bear on the production of collective efficacy. By this account collective efficacy theory is not an attempt to shift the burden of social regulation solely onto residents (or to "blame the victim," as some would have it). Macrolevel and spatial processes beyond the local neighborhood also matter, as do individual selection processes—these are represented in dotted boxes outside the circle of present findings. I defer empirical examination and

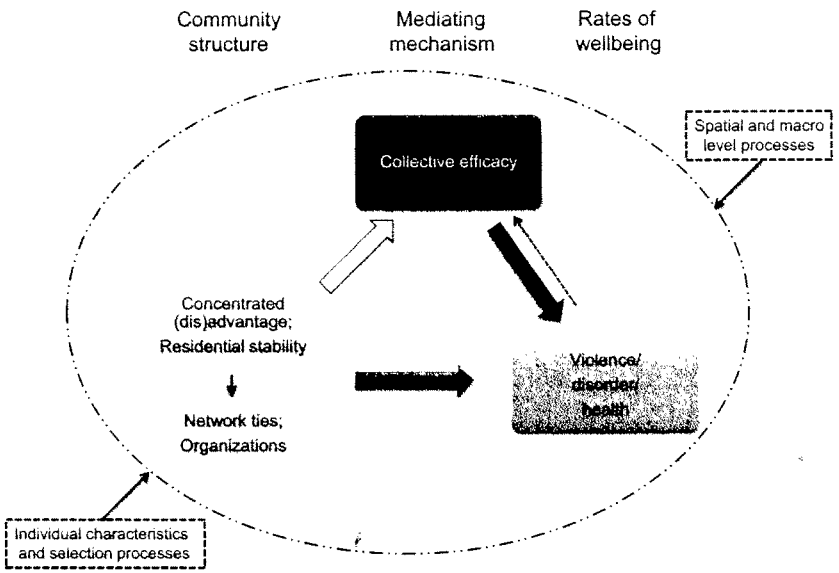

FIGURE 7.1. Conceptual framework of collective efficacy theory and community wellbeing

theoretical elaboration of these dynamics to a later chapter, but to anticipate one finding, the pathways in figure 7.1 hold up after I account for spatial interdependence. Recall also that the results described above account for the compositional makeup of neighborhoods. I will address selection bias and hypothesized reciprocal or feedback effects later, but would note that while most research is unidirectional, the bulk of studies control for prior violence or other neighborhood challenges and thus anticipate a feedback loop (dotted arrow). Figure 7.1 is meant to convey a parsimonious but empirically supported conceptual scheme reflecting how neighborhood socioeconomic resources (or the lack thereof), organizations, and the density of ties influence rates of violence and wellbeing in part through the mediating role of collective efficacy.

Comparative Ecometrics: Sweden and Beyond

The logic of collective efficacy is not limited to specific cities, the United States, or any country, for that matter. Just how far can we push collec-

tive efficacy theory? Is it applicable in societies like France, where republican values and strong norms that the government bears responsibility for intervention might conflict with the idea that neighbors should take some responsibility for action? Does it hold in welfare states where concentrated disadvantage is less tenacious, or in former Soviet states where public spiritedness is allegedly on the wane? Our comparative knowledge base is unfortunately limited—very few studies have been carried out with the explicit goal of cross-national comparison of crime rates and community social mechanisms.

I have attempted one comparison by systematically studying Chicago and Stockholm in collaborative work with Per-Olof Wikström.[38] This choice of cities is, at first blush, counterintuitive—why Chicago and Stockholm? After all, Sweden and the U.S. are worlds apart along a number of dimensions, including the concentration of poverty, welfare support, the planned nature of housing, and, not least, violence. Compared to Stockholm, Chicago is very violent, segregated, and characterized by great economic inequality. Yet from a comparative perspective, this is analytically strategic if our goal is to examine whether there are social characteristics that transcend cultural and national boundaries. Following the simple but efficient "most different" research design for comparative studies,[39] our motivation was to discover whether there are common relationships in these highly disparate cities, and if so, along what dimensions. Chicago and Stockholm not only fit the bill, they represent the third-largest and largest city in the U.S. and Sweden, respectively.

To accomplish this goal we integrated census data on structural differentiation, geocoded police records on violent events, and coordinated surveys of individual characteristics and neighborhood context. The Stockholm study was designed to replicate key portions of the PHDCN community survey and was carried out within a year of the first wave, in 1996. Questionnaires were administered to a random sample of five thousand residents of the county of Stockholm, which includes both the inner city and Greater Stockholm suburbs. Based on a response rate of 80 percent, the final sample was composed of 3,992. These respondents are spread across geographic neighborhoods (average size = 5,000) where boundaries were constructed by city-planning authorities based on family status, housing tenure, transportation access, and other land-use considerations. Stockholm neighborhoods with at least five survey respondents (representing over 90 percent of the original sample) were

selected for the comparative analysis, yielding two hundred areas compared to 343 neighborhood clusters in Chicago.

In both the Chicago and Stockholm surveys, the design was explicitly multilevel, so that respondents were asked about personal and household characteristics along with a set of questions designed to assess neighborhood context. At the individual level we constructed core measures in both sites in a way that was directly comparable: *age*, *sex*, *college education*, *length of residence* in the household, *home ownership*, *married*, residence in *public or government housing*, and *unemployment*. Each respondent was also asked whether he/she had been victimized by a violent crime in the neighborhood in the six months prior to the survey. We were therefore able to examine individual-level risk of violent crime in addition to the effect of neighborhood social context on rates of violent crime measured by police records.

Racial or ethnic status is a different matter when it comes to cross-national comparison. Nevertheless, at a broad level it is possible to examine the ecological distribution of what we can think of as the disadvantaged group with respect to discrimination or "outgroup" status in each country. In Chicago, as in the U.S. at large, African Americans have long been segregated by neighborhood, and a long line of research including prior chapters suggests they are a disadvantaged minority group. In Sweden, race/ethnicity make little sense as a concept, but immigration from Turkey and the former Yugoslavia in particular is increasing, and there is emerging evidence of spatial clustering and segregation of the non-Swedish-born. We thus created an indicator in Stockholm of foreign-born status, which we selectively compare to African American status in Chicago. They are not tapping the same manifest characteristic, of course, but they tap a larger and more interesting factor, namely the ecological segregation of minority groups that are disadvantaged or discriminated against by the societal mainstream.

To save on costs, a reduced set of collective efficacy items was asked in the Stockholm study, two from the cohesion scale ("People around here are willing to help their neighbors" and "Neighbors can be trusted") and two from efficacy/control (about children spray-painting graffiti and fighting in front of a house). At the neighborhood level these constructs are strongly and similarly related, with a correlation in excess of 0.7 in both cities. We thus created a modified collective efficacy scale that combined the constituent items that were highly reliable across areas.

Although the community surveys measure key aspects of social stratification, we chose to collect independently measured census characteristics. *Concentrated disadvantage* is defined, as it was for Chicago, by the percentage of families with low income, percentage of families receiving public assistance, and percentage of families with children that are female headed. These indicators covary in a similar pattern in both cities—areas that are high in public assistance are also low income and characterized by the concentration of female-headed families. *Residential stability* is defined as the percentage of residents five years old and older who lived in the same house five years earlier, and the percentage of homes that are owner-occupied.

Finally, we collected independent event data from the Chicago and Stockholm police on violent offenses. Locating the occurrence of the crime, we tallied the counts of all interpersonal violence (homicide, aggravated assault, and robbery) matched to the years of the survey. For total violence, we examined the log of the event rate per hundred thousand persons at risk.

Although the focus of this chapter is collective efficacy, it is important to note that the stigmatized minority group in each city faces ecological dissimilarity with respect to socioeconomic resources, but the disparity is much greater in Chicago than Stockholm. As foreshadowed in chapter 5, there are considerably more segregated minority areas in Chicago than in Stockholm, and these areas are more sharply related to concentrated disadvantage. But even in egalitarian Stockholm, as the percentage of immigrants goes up, so does their socioeconomic spatial isolation.[40] One wonders what will happen as the pace of immigration increases in this and other European cities. Will a threshold be passed? The logic of this analysis predicts that tensions in places like Stockholm are likely to increase given their relatively homogeneous past.

Chapter 1 presented an initial look at the association of concentrated disadvantage with increasing violence in both cities (fig. 1.6). Further analysis reveals that this pattern holds for each component of disadvantage and when controlling for residential stability and disorder.[41] Concentrated disadvantage also predicts lower collective efficacy in both cities, albeit with a trailing off, nonlinear pattern. After controlling for neighborhood stability and individual-level characteristics, collective efficacy sharply declines in both Stockholm and Chicago as concentrated disadvantage increases, up to about one standard deviation above the

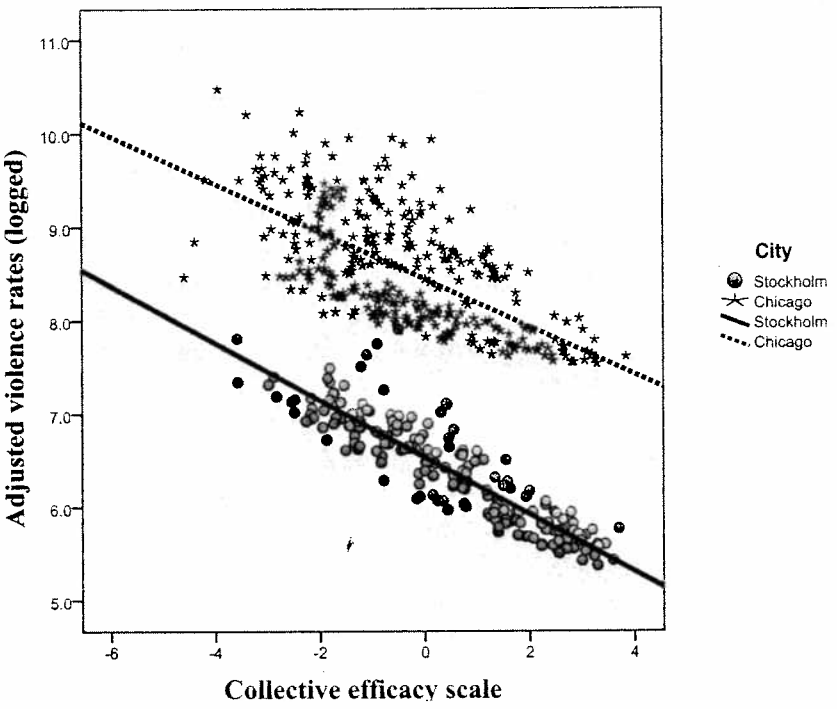

FIGURE 7.2. Similar prediction of violence in Chicago and Stockholm neighborhoods from collective efficacy, adjusting for concentrated disadvantage, percent black/immigrants, and residential stability

mean. As seen in figure 1.6, after that point no more Stockholm neighborhoods are represented. Only in Chicago is severe concentrated poverty found, and it is in these "truly disadvantaged" areas that disadvantage shows a weakened relationship with both violence and collective efficacy. One might say that the damage has already been done, with further disadvantage not registering.

Figure 7.2 graphs the negative relationship between collective efficacy and the expected rate of violence based on a neighborhood's disadvantage, stability, and minority/immigrant composition. The slope of the collective efficacy–violence relationship is clearly negative and similar in each city despite the fact that Chicago sits "atop" Stockholm across the board because of higher levels of violence. The multivariate results show that collective efficacy is directly linked to lower violence in both cities, mediating a portion of the proposed influence of struc-

tural antecedents. The collective efficacy–violence link is also robust to additional controls at the neighborhood level, including a conservative test in which social disorder was adjusted.[42] The direct effect of concentrated disadvantage still looms large, however, especially in Chicago.

These data reflect the social order of violence in a cross-national, comparative framework and support the conclusion that neighborhood-level variations in ecological structure, collective efficacy, and violence accord with theoretical predictions in a reasonably consistent fashion in two cities with a vastly different makeup and history. Indeed, Chicago and Stockholm could not be more different in most respects, and the data confirm important differences in how social resources are ecologically distributed. Despite the ecological disadvantage encountered by immigrants with respect to poverty, for example, Stockholm is much more equal at the neighborhood level relative to Chicago and most other U.S. cities. Yet the nature of the relationship between community social structure and violence is remarkably similar. Because the same features account for violence in both cities, while these very same features are differentially allocated according to larger principles of societal organization, the results tap into a macrolevel or societal explanation of city differences in violence. It remains to be seen how well this framework stands up to future tests, and the "Chicago effect" remains large after controlling for disadvantage, possibly owing to deep cultural differences.

Replications and extensions of the Chicago Project are now underway in Los Angeles, Brisbane (Australia), England, Hungary, Moshi (Tanzania), Tianjin (China), Bogotá (Colombia), and other cities around the world. The results so far point to a significant cross-cultural role for collective efficacy. A recent publication based on a direct replication of PHDCN and modeled after the Chicago-Stockholm study shows that collective efficacy predicts lower crime across communities in Brisbane, controlling for the density of social ties and other compositional features.[43] Lorraine Mazerolle and colleagues report that despite cultural differences between the United States and Australia, collective efficacy is a significant mechanism in explaining the spatial distribution of crime. In the very non-Western culture of China, a recent study based on PHDCN items finds that collective efficacy has a direct negative association with burglary victimization in Tianjin, controlling for characteristics of both households and neighborhoods.[44] Felton Earls of PHDCN took the ideas of collective efficacy to Africa to mount an AIDS and sexual abuse prevention trial. As part of this study, a community survey measuring collective efficacy was administered to both adults and children. Early results reveal that an intervention to improve children's health behaviors was significantly associated with perceptions of increased collective efficacy.[45] In the United Kingdom, the PHDCN survey was replicated and integrated with the Environmental Risk Longitudinal Twin Study directed by Terrie Moffitt. A paper from this study finds that neighborhood collective efficacy is negatively associated with levels of children's antisocial behavior at school entry for those living in deprived neighborhoods. This relationship held after controlling for neighborhood problems and family-level risk factors.[46] In Hungary, a national survey used PHDCN items to measure collective efficacy. Controlling for confounders, collective efficacy showed the second-strongest association (after education) with reduced mortality among both men and women.[47]

Latin American countries may prove to be the exception. Research in Brazilian neighborhoods suggests that poverty concentrated in the *favelas* leads to higher and not lower cohesion, perhaps aiding survival.[48] A similar relationship appears to be emerging in Bogotá, Colombia, where resistance to armed militias and corrupt police in poor areas creates a unique challenge that shapes the association of collective efficacy with violence in a manner apparently quite different than other countries.[49] One might also expect collective efficacy to serve a different function in regions of Mexico where drug cartels control many low-income neighborhoods and the police are considered corrupt. Intervening in such contexts means risking one's life. Here, collective efficacy may serve something of a survival function by which residents band together to protect each other from the organized forces of drug violence.

Back in the U.S., PHDCN replications are being designed by the new National Children's Study[50] and in several cities around the country. The largest city study is the Los Angeles Family and Neighborhood Study (LAFANS). Early reports from LA based on over eight hundred adolescents in sixty-five neighborhoods find that collective efficacy is directly associated with lower rates of obesity measured in three different ways.[51] Using the same data, another LAFANS study finds that collective efficacy significantly predicts lower teen birth rates in Angelino neighborhoods

with less than 50 percent Hispanics. In areas of concentrated immigration, however, the same relationship is attenuated, suggesting an interaction of collective efficacy with Latino culture.[52]

In sum, although the manifestation of collective efficacy is dependent on societal culture and local challenges, creating a relationship with crime and health that is variable rather than invariant, what is striking is the fact that large community-level variations can be detected and ecometrically assessed in such divergent country settings. Wherever people have looked so far, the emergence of variation in collective efficacy beyond that expected based on the aggregated composition of individuals suggests that the capacity for social control is a basic social property, one that transcends poverty and race and in many cases predicts lower violence and enhanced public health. Similar to the message of chapter 5, at a broad conceptual level Chicago is not as unique as many seem to assume when it comes to a comparative international context. In the next section I show that collective efficacy has enduring properties that cut across time as well.

Stability and Change

It is ironic that studies of community social processes are largely static despite the "process" logic underlying key concepts. To confront this challenge I examine the dynamics of collective efficacy, analyzing both its long-term sources and its own predictive power in explaining crime-rate variations up to the middle part of this decade, using the most recent data available. I begin by examining a deceptively simple question: How stable is collective efficacy? The answer is that it is surprisingly durable, more than I had originally expected. As explained in chapter 5, the evidence points to social reproduction amid a period of overall change.

The data come from the two community surveys described in chapter 4, with identical items asked at each wave. The difference in the two surveys is sample size, with the second survey interviewing less than half as many people as the original (3,105 vs. 8,732). The empirical result is that collective efficacy (CE), and virtually all other neighborhood processes, are measured less reliably in 2002 than 1995.[53] The latter values are higher because of the larger sample within community areas than

clusters at both waves. Tract reliabilities are the lowest, at 0.58 and 0.37 in 1995 and 2002, respectively, but tracts provide more than ten times the number of analytic units as community areas, and overlap ("multicolinearity") is lower. Hence there is a direct tradeoff—community-area measures are more reliable but the units are bigger and less numerous. I manage the tradeoff by analyzing relationships across multiple levels and focusing on the consistency of findings in light of theoretical considerations.

Despite the varying reliabilities and independent (or repeated cross-sectional) samples at the different points of time, communities scoring highly in 1995 on collective efficacy look quite similar seven years later. This result is robust, holding whether we look at census tracts, neighborhood clusters, or community areas, and despite changing population composition. To get a simultaneous visual and statistical sense of this relationship, figure 7.3 presents the correlation for community areas arrayed by low, medium, or high in percent black—a simple indicator of relative racial heterogeneity. Figure 7.3 first reveals that collective efficacy seems to be transmitted across years, even as residents fluctuate in or out of the community (recall fig. 3.2). That is, despite rapid movement of individuals in and out of the neighborhood, and despite a separate sample of residents in the two community surveys, collective efficacy is correlated at 0.73 over time. Communities that are high tend to stay high, and vice versa.[54]

Second, stability is patterned across the full spectrum of racial composition and ethnic diversity. The social disorganization tradition leads us to expect more unfavorable outcomes as ethnic homogeneity declines, but the data have not supported this prediction and neither does figure 7.3. For example, one sees that areas in the middle range of percent black are represented at the *top* of the scale at both periods. This being Chicago, truly integrated communities are rare, and a full third of the city's communities are essentially all white. Mount Greenwood is no exception, but it is nonetheless in the middle third of the race distribution and produces high collective efficacy while proximate to what is widely thought of as the "South Side ghetto." Beverly is a stable middle-class area proximate to the same ghetto, and one third of its residents were black in 2000, probably more like 40 percent by mid-decade. Yet Beverly stands out as the most efficacious community in Chicago in 1995 and second best in 2002 after Mount Greenwood. Figure 7.3 shows

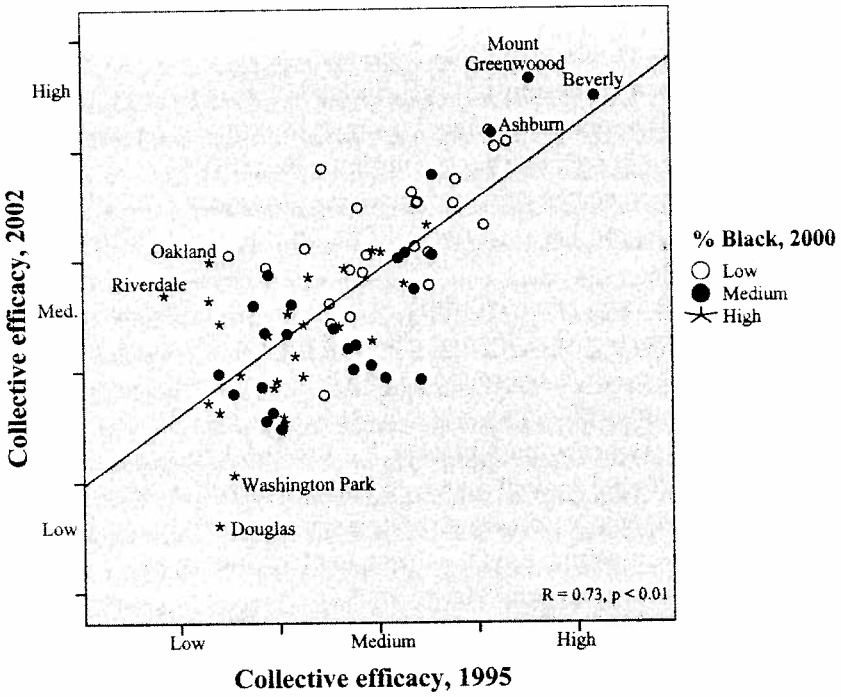

FIGURE 7.3. Stability of collective efficacy across time, by racial composition

that Ashburn is also a mixed-race community (43 percent black, 37 percent white, and 17 percent Latino) and high in collective efficacy. At the other end of the spectrum are the depressed and homogeneously black communities of Washington Park and Douglas, although they are not far from the communities above. That the extremes of the collective efficacy distribution are all on the widely denigrated South Side and that the high end comes not from all-white communities underscores my emphasis in the book on social processes over composition.

Third, even though there is no information about collective efficacy earlier than 1995, we can go back in time to measure key structural aspects of inequality that the last two chapters suggest portend a legacy for later social processes like collective efficacy. It turns out that concentrated poverty in 1970 has a long reach, and its traces have not been easily overcome. Figure 7.4 maps this phenomenon. With few exceptions, most communities above the median in 1970 poverty appear

in the lowest third of collective efficacy. Although a few high-poverty communities in 1970 have a high level of collective efficacy in 1995, they experienced some of the highest *decreases* in poverty between 1970 and 2000 along with the highest increases in collective efficacy from 1995 to 2002 (data not shown). This picture of the systematic nature of change—the "stability of change"—is embedded within a pattern of spa-

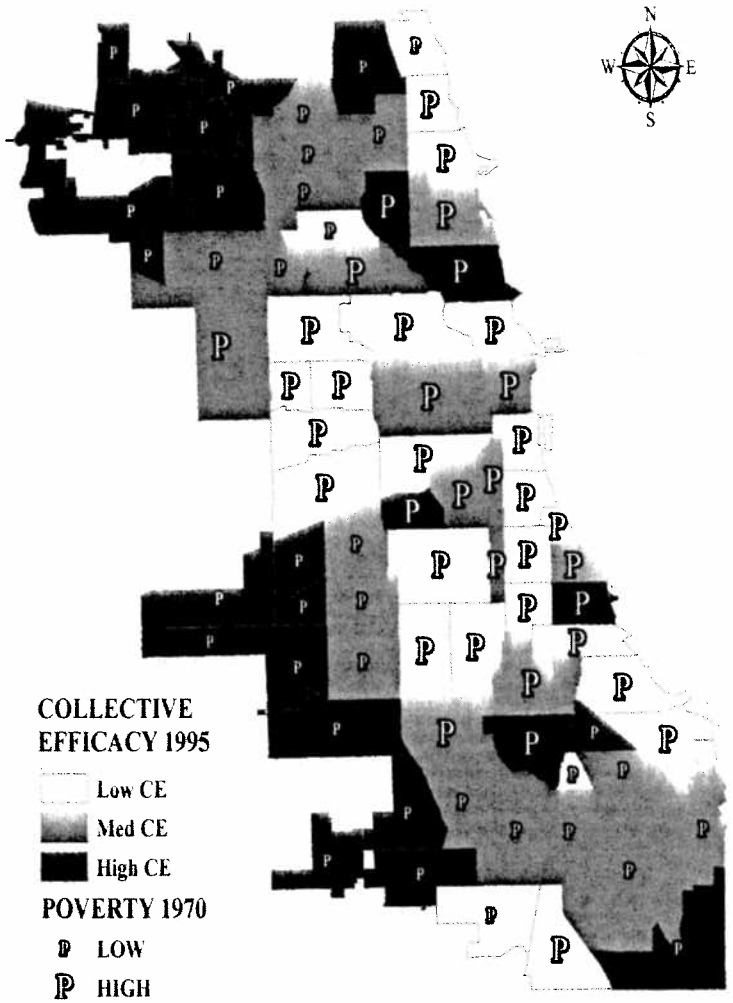

FIGURE 7.4. Legacy of concentrated poverty for collective efficacy twenty-five years later

tial clustering, where communities with low levels of collective efficacy are proximate to each other and overlap with poverty clusters, combining into what appear to be unfortunate traps of spiraling vulnerabilities and reinforcing spatial risks. I will return to this spatial mechanism in greater detail in chapter 10.

For now, the data support the argument that the durability of structural deprivation is interwoven with sharp differences in the construction and maintenance of collective efficacy. What about alternative explanations? To assess this question, I examined the predictive power of concentrated disadvantage across several decades, alongside residential mobility, population diversity, and spatial interdependencies in collective efficacy. I found that poverty from the 1970s had a resilient and significant negative association with collective efficacy extending to 2002. To the extent that the 1970 level of poverty is highly associated with more recent levels of community poverty (chapter 5), this finding is not entirely unexpected. Interestingly, however, *1990 poverty is less strongly associated with contemporary collective efficacy than 1970 poverty*, a strong empirical indication of a cumulative "Matthew Effect" of poverty. Perhaps more unexpected was the durable effect of 1970 poverty on *recent decreases* in residents' trust and collective efficacy, controlling for increases in poverty that also predicted decreased efficacy. It appears that poverty and its associated pitfalls, such as perceived disorder and violence, may have a lasting and cumulative effect on collective memories, distorting a community's reputation and perceived "local character," fostering a spiral of further disadvantage and mistrust.[55]

The other major finding is that after controlling for poverty and residential stability, diversity in 1970 and changes in diversity across three decades do not significantly predict collective efficacy in 1995 *or* change in collective efficacy from 1995 to 2002, respectively.[56] This finding suggests that any zero-order association between racial diversity and lower collective efficacy is accounted for by a common association with poverty and stability.

Overall then, we can see that there is a great deal of continuity in collective efficacy and its sources: there is a legacy to inequality and to inequality's relationship with collective efficacy. Considering the measurement imprecision inherent in the enterprise at hand, figures 7.3 and 7.4 indicate an impressive persistence in a community's character that is related to residents' trust and shared expectations for control,

and its prior levels of disadvantage. The change that does occur, moreover, is structurally patterned and not random, an issue to which I will return in the final section with updated data.

Explaining Crime, 1995–2006

As a final assessment, I examine the ability of collective efficacy to predict variations in crime rates in a dynamic fashion. Guided by the results above, we know that collective efficacy is relatively stable, which implies that change is relatively rare and not measured with great precision. Preliminary analysis also showed a similar negative relationship between collective efficacy and crime rates in both surveys. I combine these two pieces of information to form a pooled neighborhood panel with two "levels" of analysis—time and neighborhood. At the first level, the unit of observation and the predictors vary over time *within* each neighborhood. An example would be the collective efficacy of the same neighborhood in 1995 and 2002. In the second level, the unit of analysis is *between* neighborhoods, and the goal is to estimate the average within-neighborhood effect of collective efficacy on crime rates.

The panels were set up as parallel in their measurement strategy. In the first panel collective efficacy and other social processes from the 1995 survey, along with census predictors from 1990, are used to model variations in crime in the late nineties. For the second wave, collective efficacy from 2002 and structural characteristics from the census 2000 are used to predict crime rates from 2002 onward. My main outcome is the homicide rate per hundred thousand residents, which is very well measured across time and space. Every homicide event known to the Chicago Police Department was geocoded to census tracts for the individual years 1995 to 2006.[57] I estimate a predictive model to reduce the risk of feedback effects and pool homicide across years to stabilize rates and increase precision of estimates.

I begin with a basic model that includes key structural predictors so far—concentrated disadvantage, residential stability, and population density. Capitalizing on the panel-based community survey, I also adjust for density of friendship ties and the moral/legal cynicism among residents.[58] All predictors are measured prior in time to the outcomes, and I estimate models both with and without a control for lagged crime.[59] By pooling the data, I draw strength from the two surveys and am able

to estimate a single and more reliable estimate of the average effect of collective efficacy, adjusting not only for structural characteristics and other social processes, but for period effects on crime.[60] I focus here on an overview of results that emerged as consistent across crime types and specifications. First, we know that crime declined in the late nineties and then leveled off (recall fig. 5.4), and that this is reflected by the significant negative effect of the wave 2 time indicator in all models. Second, concentrated disadvantage had a large and positive association with violence across the board as well, whereas the pattern for residential stability was inconsistent. Third, the main factor of interest, collective efficacy, directly predicted lower homicide after accounting for prior homicide (coeff. = -0.87, t-ratio = -3.04). Legal cynicism was also directly linked with higher homicide (t-ratio = 3.04). A subsequent study using the PHDCN replicated both the collective efficacy and cynicism findings.[61]

To illustrate the main results in a more straightforward way, figure 7.5 displays the estimated homicide rate for neighborhoods in the lowest and highest quartile of collective efficacy, by time period and adjusting for the effects of poverty, stability, density, friendship ties, moral cynicism, and prior challenge in the form of violence. Hence the figure represents the average association of collective efficacy with homicide, expressed for clarity to show rates per 100,000. For the highest quartile of collective efficacy in the first wave, homicide rates are approximately 10.4 per 100,000. By contrast, in lower efficacy neighborhoods, the rates are over 16 per 100,000, more than a 50 percent increase. To put this in perspective, one can also see that the "period effect" is about the same, a 50 percent reduction in the homicide rate. In terms of body counts, given the size of Chicago overall the data translates to an estimated 168 fewer killings associated with high collective efficacy. By any standard this is a large estimated effect.

I also repeated these procedures on official rates of robbery and burglary and survey-reported violence rates. Overall the results were consistent with the homicide rate patterns. For example, collective efficacy had a direct negative association with robbery rates *after* adjusting for prior robbery (which is highly stable) and all other covariates.[62] Perceived violence was strongly predicted by collective efficacy as well controlling for the total crime rate in the prior period. Similar results were obtained at the community-area level.

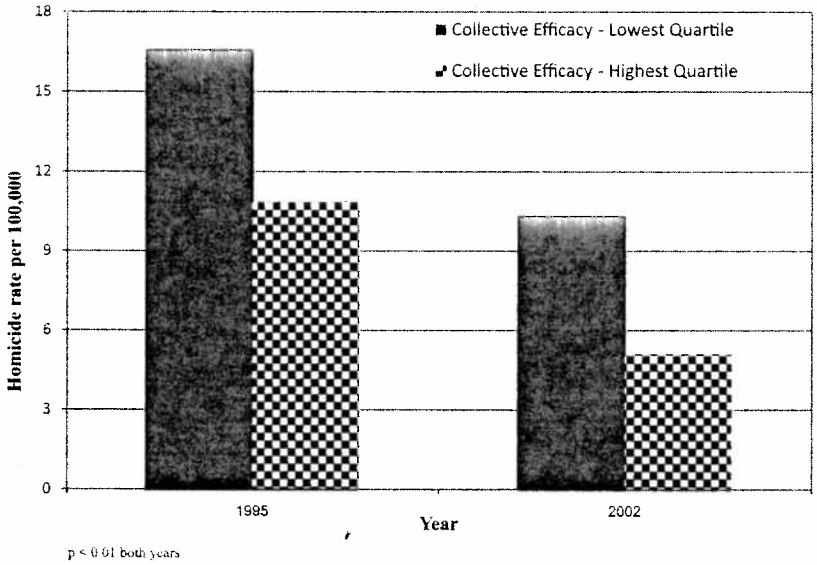

FIGURE 7.5. Association of collective efficacy and time period with homicide rates, controlling for concentrated disadvantage, residential stability, population density, friend/kinship ties, legal/moral cynicism, and prior homicide

I then took advantage of the time series data on crime and looked at annual variations from 1996 to 2006, after the 1995 survey.[63] I thus can explicitly assess change in a key subset of predictors—disadvantage, stability, diversity, and collective efficacy—in an attempt to decompose stability and change effects. Collective efficacy in 1995 predicts a lower mean level of homicide during this period adjusting for stability, diversity, and concentrated disadvantage. Moreover, although relatively stable overall, *change* in collective efficacy is associated with a greater *decrease* in homicide in this period, and homicide in disadvantaged neighborhoods declined at a slower clip than those not suffering from concentrated disadvantage. Figure 7.6 graphs the trajectories of the collective efficacy and disadvantage relationship based on the full model with all controls. The bottom line shows how the greatest declines in homicide are found in neighborhoods that experienced *increases* in collective efficacy and *decreases* in disadvantage. By contrast, the top line shows that increasingly disadvantaged and low efficacy neighborhoods declined less rapidly in homicides. Collective efficacy appears to exert a protective factor in confronting change.

It is important to remember here that collective efficacy is a social process hypothesized to be variably related to challenge, and crime is one of the ultimate challenges in a free society. As I and others have argued, crime may reduce later expectations for control, and observations of what happens when crime is witnessed may also lead residents to update their prior beliefs in a Bayesian-like way.[64] It is thus not surprising, for instance, that the average resident in Stockholm perceives greater collective efficacy than her counterpart in Chicago—the latter is demonstrably more violent. I have controlled for prior crime rates in the above models, but a more direct way to test this feedback process is to conduct cross-lag analyses that get at reciprocal associations. Put differently, I have shown that collective efficacy predicts crime in future years, but does the reverse hold—does crime predict collective efficacy in future years as well? Or is collective efficacy driven largely by

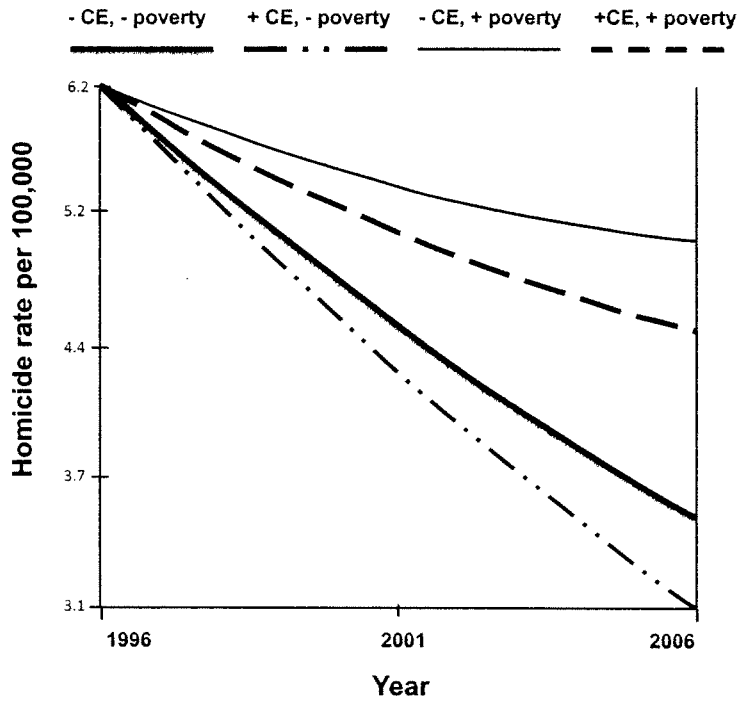

FIGURE 7.6. Changes in collective efficacy (CE) and concentrated poverty explain trajectory of homicide decline in Chicago neighborhoods, 1996–2006

structural conditions? I examined this question by reversing the above procedures and considering collective efficacy in 1995 and 2002 as the simultaneous outcomes in the hierarchical panel framework. The predictors were lagged census characteristics, prior crime, contemporaneous friendship ties, and moral cynicism.

The results support the idea of a reciprocal feedback loop (fig. 7.1). Collective efficacy increased over time in Chicago and is significantly higher in neighborhoods characterized by residential stability (t-ratio = 8.29), friendship ties (t-ratio = 7.01), lower moral cynicism (t-ratio = −4.63), lower density (−8.44), and lower concentrated disadvantage (−8.28). The total crime rate in the neighborhood prior to the survey, net of these important predictors in their own right, was associated with lower collective efficacy (t-ratio = −6.05). Moreover, when I controlled for lagged collective efficacy, prior crime continued to be important, suggesting that *changes* in collective efficacy over time are in part a response to prior experiences with crime. For example, the t-ratio for the effect of lagged homicide (five-year average) on collective efficacy in 2002 was −3.12 with a standardized coefficient of −0.12. This result holds for yet other crimes and is consistent with the updating and feedback notion underlying how efficacy works over time. Nonetheless, concentrated disadvantage was the strongest predictor. It was more than three times larger in magnitude than prior crime (standardized coeff. = −0.36, $p < 0.01$). These findings suggest that while prior violence should be accounted for, concentrated disadvantage is the ultimate challenge in large part because it is more visible as a social construct (chapter 6).

Conclusion

The research on collective efficacy cuts across a number of different studies, investigators, specifications, time periods, outcomes, and more. Limitations of data and method are always present. For these reasons I focus on commonalities that are unlikely to be dependent on any single estimate. Overall the results presented here and by others in a growing number of studies around the world suggest that in communities that are otherwise similar in composition, those with higher levels of collective efficacy exhibit lower rates of crime. There is also evidence that collective efficacy is relatively stable over time and that it predicts fu-

ture variations in crime, adjusting for the aggregated characteristics of individuals and traditional forms of neighbor networks. Although more infrequently studied, highly efficacious communities seem to do better along a number of dimensions besides crime, such as birth weight, teen pregnancy, asthma, and mortality, suggesting a link to the general concept of population wellbeing.

When I examined what predicts collective efficacy that may help explain the results, I demonstrated that prior experiences with violence typically reduce later expectations for control. This finding makes sense from expectations rooted in self-efficacy theory and our individual lives—past experience matters. But concentrated disadvantage mattered more, and I showed that traces of poverty from prior decades independently predicted current collective efficacy. Institutional and cultural mechanisms are apparently at work in social reproduction, inducing another form of legacy. How do these legacies—both good and bad—get passed on, despite the high rates of residential mobility that characterize city life? And how also to account for neighborhoods like Beverly and Mount Greenwood in Chicago, which maintain high levels of collective efficacy in spite of the structural challenges they face? The next chapter takes up these and related questions by exploring a new perspective on collective civic action and how organizational life bears on collective efficacy and other aspects of the urban social fabric.

8 Civic Society and the Organizational Imperative

> To outsiders, the men and women gathered inside a sleepy West Side restaurant may have seemed unlikely power brokers: a janitor, a real estate agent and others hardly known outside their circuit of neighborhood dances and back-yard barbecues.
>
> *Chicago Tribune*, April 6, 2007[1]

The attack on "community organizing" by the Republican ticket in the 2008 national election generated sharp debate on the value of Barack Obama's experience to the presidency. Much was made of Obama's roots in the South Side of Chicago, especially his early years organizing the poor at the Altgeld Gardens Project in Riverdale.[2] The image painted by the conservative Right was that community organizing was socialist in leaning and subversive of American ideals.

The irony is that community organizations and the nonprofit organizational sector more generally are the unsung heroes tilting against the narrative of "community lost" that has long worried observers of civil society, especially traditionalists.[3] While we might know fewer of our neighbors than in the past, every day thousands of nonprofit organizations around the country are busy organizing and creating opportunities for new associations. Community nonprofits and voluntary associations also span the political spectrum, from allegedly Left-leaning community organizers a la Obama to conservative church groups, community recreation centers, after-school programs for children, fraternal societies, block associations, and more. What could be more American than organizing the annual Fourth of July block party?

This chapter probes the social, organizational, and spatial contexts that produce collective civic events. We know little about this type of community organizational life in the contemporary era, surprisingly so, given the national prominence of the "civic society debate" in America. Across a wide field of commentators, a dominant argument has been