

Black Gun Ownership: Does Perceived Racial Threat Affect Black Americans' Gun
Ownership?

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Abstract

**Black Gun Ownership: Does Perceived Racial Threat Affect Black Americans' Gun
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Sociologists who study gun ownership in the United States have established that guns symbolize what material items and who deserve protection. While the correlation between gun ownership among White Americans, particularly men, and concerns related to status displacement or perceived racial threats by minority groups is well-documented, there is a notable gap in our understanding regarding how gun ownership among racial minorities may be influenced by perceived racial threats emanating from White Americans. Hence, the central inquiry driving this investigation is: Is there a relationship between gun ownership among African Americans and perceived racial threat? To address this question, I have gathered data spanning from 2004 to 2020 from Google Trends to gauge discussions pertaining to racism, coupled with General Social

Survey (GSS) data to estimate rates of gun ownership within the Black American population.

The outcomes of this analysis reveal a positive association between a lagged perceived racial threat and overall gun ownership among Black individuals. Importantly, this relationship remains consistent when examining gun ownership across gender and neighborhood classifications.

However, statistical significance is observed only in the context of overall Black gun ownership and integrated gun ownership within Black household. Understanding the regional, temporal, and gender-based differences about Black gun ownership reveals the different dimensions and perceptions that gun ownership has to offer.

Keywords. race and ethnicity. gun culture. gender. place.

Introduction

Gun culture in the U.S. is deeply ingrained in the nation's history, politics, and identity, playing a significant role in attitudes and access towards gun ownership. Historically, guns have primarily operated as a tool to reinforce the status position of White people, specifically White men. Sociologists have documented how guns in the U.S. have been used as a form of protection of property, including White women, and homes ([Bellesiles 1996](#); [Paul 1986](#)). White males, in particular, utilized guns as a means of protecting their assets from perceived external threats, enforcing normative social orders, such as chattel slavery, Jim Crow, segregation, and immigration.. Additionally, (mainly, but not always) White men have leveraged guns as a power tool to keep people of color 'in their place' conveying death as the alternative option for disobedience (Anderson 2015). However, the narrative of gun culture extends beyond a simplistic portrayal of White dominance over non-White communities. During these periods of racial turmoil, Black and brown people would seek guns to protect themselves from White violence, but were met with many institutional and organizational restrictions (Winkler 2011; Hinton 2021; Hunter 2016). Black and Latino individuals have always wielded firearms as a defensive measure against White violence. Nevertheless, lingering questions persist regarding the potential correlation between gun ownership among non-White, particularly Black, individuals and periods marked by heightened perceived racial threat. The nuanced exploration of this aspect remains an essential avenue for this study.

Bridging insights from historians, the sociology of race and ethnicity, and cultural sociology, I argue, can assist in understanding the rates of Black gun ownership better by attending to the role of place (e.g., region), space (e.g., neighborhood makeup), perceived threat, and gender. By examining Black gun ownership through place, space, and gender in this

historical context, this study dissects what gun culture means for populations of color. More explicitly, this study explores how much, if at all, perceived racial threat influences Black gun ownership and how it might change depending on one's own position physically, by place and space, and socially, by gender. Place and space explores the dynamics that history has to offer in lack of accessibility of gun ownership and the relative closeness of the threat, while gender explores two different historical social systems at play for obtaining gun ownership. The combined analysis of all three enable this study to portray the Black experience within gun culture or ownership as multifaceted rather than monolithic.

To make this argument, I draw on data from historical interracial relations in the United States to conceptualize who the threat is, who was deemed deserving of protection, and who should have such access to this particular form of protection. By integrating historical race relationships and encompassing various oppressive social systems such as racism and sexism, it enables a foundational understanding of past societal dynamics and the evolution of these ideologies in contemporary times. Moreover, it explores how these forms of threat and intimidation for Black individuals continue today. The background literature helps set the stage for how to interpret the different variables that are explored in this study and how vital this analysis is in gun research.

Existing theories in gun research fail to delve into the impact of perceived racial threat on Black Americans, however, this study pioneers an avenue for theories to examine perceived racial threat from the minority perspective. This study uses the General Social Survey (GSS) to evaluate Black gun ownership rates over 15 years. The dimensions of gender, neighborhood makeup, and region amongst Black individuals are also explored using the GSS. Google Trends is used to gather data pertaining to perceived racial threat. Perceived racial threat is measured

using relative frequencies on discussion of racism in the news. Gun ownership for purposes of violent crimes are controlled for in the statistical analysis from Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) data. The results found a positive correlation in gun ownership and lagged discussions of racism suggesting that Black gun ownership increases when perceived racial threat increases. The results indicate the presence of a cultural distinction in gun ownership among Black Americans, which remains largely unexplored.

Current gun ownership research exploring race focuses on the politics, such as violence, crimes, and gun control, and on what ways guns are used. This study explores the racialized rationale behind gun ownership for one minority community. This research enhances our understanding of Black gun ownership through three distinct avenues: first, by examining how regional gun culture manifests within a minority community; second, by exploring the varied responses in gun possession of two genders to an escalation in perceived racial threats; and third, by investigating how individuals respond to an increased proximity of perceived racial threats through the lens of gun ownership. The literature below highlights a disparity in research on the utilization of firearms for communities of color as a means for protection from racialized threats by their White counterparts, while also underscoring the underexplored aspect of heterogeneity in research concerning Black gun ownership.

Literature Review

The intersection of gun culture and perceived racial threat in the United States encompasses a complex web of historical, social, and political dynamics that shape attitudes, behaviors, and policies related to firearms and race. People used guns as a way to secure power over material resources, such as land, and individuals they perceived to be inferior, non-White individuals. Although it can be argued that guns are still used for explicit, and racist, purposes

today, research demonstrates their purpose has been expanding over the decades. Guns are used for more than just intimidation, but also used for psychological factors, political factors, and social factors (Buttrick 2020; Gauchat 2012; Mann and Schleifer 2020; Springwood, C. F. 2008; [T.D Warner et al, 2022](#)). Moreover, it is important to connect how the long history of gun culture is what contributed to a perceived racial threat for minority communities. Illustrating the historical and contemporary contexts in which gun culture has been examined in research provides insight into how communities of color navigate the current use of firearms for their own purposes.

Prior Gun Research

Gun research in America focused on why individuals decide to purchase firearms largely examines ideas of victimization, symbolic power, citizenship, political factors, and sociological factors (Buttrick 2020; [Bellesiles 1996](#); [Winkler 2022](#); Winkler 2011; Springwood, C. F. 2008; Gauchat 2012; Mann and Schleifer 2020; [T.D Warner et al, 2022](#)). These are efforts to understand gun culture, or why people own guns, in America. However, efforts to understand gun culture have overwhelmingly focused on the experience of White Americans as gun owners. The study of gun culture has historically been closely connected to Whiteness and protecting Whiteness and racism ([O'Brian et al 2013](#)). Another study found that White individuals that express high levels of anti-Black sentiments associate gun rights with White people and gun control for Black people. Furthermore, they discovered that those White people would also be less likely to support gun rights if they know Black individuals are exercising those rights more than them (Higginbotham 2022). This connection to Whiteness or anti-Blackness and gun rights has been explored by numerous scholars ([Cramer 1994](#); [Felson and Pare 2010](#); [Filindra and](#)

[Kaplan 2016; Filindra, Kaplan, and Buyuker 2020](#)). This research trends towards a similar direction: some members of society believe being White acts as a qualification for gun ownership. This idea not only has been researched to be true, but also the way in which the research exists emulates this as true.

Social science research tends to focus on how White people, or members of the dominant group, view Black people and guns, and does not examine the inverse: how Black people, and other minority groups, view White people with guns ([Anderson 2021](#); [Carlson 2020](#); [Eberhardt et al., 2004](#); [Payne 2001](#); [Wilson et al 2017](#); [Nielsen et al., 2023](#); [LeCount, R. J. 2022](#)). Essentially, the continuation of the White population as the reference category or comparison category contributes to them as the standard for gun ownership. By examining one and not the other, it perpetuates the stereotype that they seek to expose in their research about the Black population, specifically, that Black people or people of color are not the standard population. Exposing how Black people are negatively being treated or viewed with guns through the White lens, and not exposing the inverse of how positive or negative characteristics are associated with White people through the minority lens, standardizes White people as the norm for gun owners.

Because of the disinterest in gun owners of color, there are crucial features that go unsaid and unspoken. Consequently, gun research misses the ability to understand the cultural uniqueness associated with gun culture and ownership due to the focus on White populations. Scholars engage in this practice by not only narrowing their focus of gun ownership towards the White experience, but also by focusing on gun owners as a whole. This implants a standardized lens of who and what guns are for. By not examining gun ownership through one race, specifically from the perspective of racial minorities, research cannot consider different obstacles created by racism. Gun research looks at Black gun ownership as a comparison group, they do

not, however, look to understand Black gun ownership alone. This research purpose is to expose a possible cultural distinction in gun ownership for, specifically, Black people.

Understanding Black gun ownership within place, space, and gender is pivotal in research as it provides a cultural distinction in gun ownership. Historically, guns were used on Black Americans and forced out of their hands by laws and by threats of death (Winkler 2011). Today, Black Americans have increased access to gun ownership and increased protection options. Yet, the research on psychological effects for owning a gun has largely focused on gun owners as a whole and overwhelmingly focuses on White gun ownership. . An example of this is a study from 2020 which found that guns have been used as a coping mechanism to alleviate the psychological threats to White Americans' safety, control, and power (Buttrick 2020). This research, along with many other articles, focuses on gun ownership through all gun owners rather than a heterogeneous population ([Felson, R. B., & Pare, P.-P. 2010](#); [Vegter, A., & Haider-Markel, D. P. 2022](#); [Buttrick and Mazen 2022](#)). When researchers do separate gun owners out by sub groups to examine psychological influences that might inform gun ownership (like gender, region, religion, political status), they do not take in how structural disadvantages might make some people more vulnerable to violence, and therefore inform their relationship to gun ownership¹.

All in all, this contributes to the standardization of White people as gun owners and others as not. Indeed, there are neglected possibilities about how these dynamics might differ for racial minorities. Moreover, by limiting the analysis of different populations intersecting with race, it dismisses how much cultural and historical backgrounds of individuals' race play into the psychological reasons for owning a gun. Lastly, it misses the deeper understanding that looking

¹ See Kelley 2022

at one race with different cultural aspects provides for analyzing the psychological decision to own a gun, such as history, region, complexion, and gender, like this study does.

When examining psychological reasons for owning guns, protection is a primary motivator of owning a gun ([Gallup, 2014](#); [Stroebe 2017](#); [Levine and McKnight 2017](#)). This is due to the historical present that guns worked to solve. Purposes of gun ownership was the ability for White people to defend themselves or their family, without intervention of the government or police ([Vandercoy 1994](#); [Bellesiles 1996](#)). Their purpose was to protect White superiority and crimes against it or white individuals ([Razack 2020](#)). Hypotheses like racial threat and group threat theory, combined with the historical stereotyping of Black people as criminals, makes the clear assumptions that Black people are the ones to fear ([Blalock 1967](#); [Blumer 1958](#); [Sidanius and Pratto 2001](#); [Muhammad 2011](#)). Criminologist today demonstrates a strong connection between gun ownership and crime, suggesting as crime increases, feelings of unsafety, fear of crime, and perceived risk of victimization increases as well, and are resolved by obtaining a gun ([Cao, Cullen, & Link, 1997](#); [DeJong, 1997](#); [Kleck et al., 2011](#); [Williams & McGrath, 1976](#)). Perceived risk of victimization and reasons to fear, however, look different for people of color as hate crimes are also included in the possibility of being victimized. This makes non-White people, specifically Black people, more vulnerable as they have more to be fearful of.

According to 2022 data, the majority of hate crimes were against Black Americans ([Statista 2023](#)). Perceived risk of victimization by gun violence also is disproportionately affected mostly for the Black population compared to others ([Badolato et al. 2020](#); [Kalesan et al. 2014](#)). Research also suggests that Black people tend to have an increase in safety concerns regardless of gun ownership status ([Gallup, 2014](#); [Ward 2023](#)). These dynamics create a unique experience for Black gun owners and their purpose in owning a gun. Unfortunately, research has not explored

what forces Black people, or people of color, are seeking protection from, specifically that differ from their White counterparts. The research on gun ownership seemingly misses how specific populations interpret perceptions of safety differently due to their own unique cultural background to guns and threats presented in society. This research, however, expands on one possible safety concern, perceived racial threat.

Perceived Racial Threat

Perceived racial threat in research has only been thought of as perceived discrimination, however, I argue that the racial discrimination presented by racism should be thought of as a threat. The definition of discrimination is treating someone unfairly or unjustly due to their identity ([American Psychology Association 2022](#)); however, when the unfair treatment goes to the extent of causing possible physical or psychological harm, it should be thought of as racial threat. Additionally, cultural theory explains how White people's negative view of Black people does not change their racist ideologies when in their presence. Perceived racial threat, in this context, formulates off this theory as a response by the Black community to such knowledge ([Dixon and Rosenbaum 2004](#)). Therefore, similar analysis in group threat theory, perceived racial threat likely not only increases when there is a large presence of White people, but also when there is an increase in racial threats happening in society ([Quillian 1995](#); [Alang S. McAlpine D, McCreedy E, Hardeman R. 2017](#)).

Perceived racial threat can also be thought of as a branch of perceived victimization. Perceived racial threat, however, incorporates a race aspect to victimization. Hence, perceived racial threat can be defined as perceptions of possible physical or psychological harm, or victimization, based on one's race. Perceived racial threat in this context is something that only

populations of color face as it incorporates a racism element. Additionally, based on colorism, darker skin complexion is associated with higher likelihood of encountering discrimination or perceived threat ([Allen et al. 2000](#); [Edwards 1973](#); [Hughes and Hertel 1990](#); [Ono 2002](#); [Ransford 1970](#)). This idea takes a criminology approach to colorism and discrimination. By examining the Black population, in this context, it presents the idea of how much perceived racial threat plays into the acquisition of guns for populations of color.

Black Heterogeneous Experiences with Perceived Racial Threat and Gun Ownership

This research, compared to others, focuses on one singular race, Black, and takes their gun ownership from a heterogeneous perspective. Examining Black gun ownership from different points of view assists in understanding the relationship to gun ownership better. Understanding Black people in different places, spaces, and gender helps display what experiences are drawn to guns more. Displaying the historical struggles helps shape how these aspects place Black gun ownership in the context of perceived racial threat. What follows demonstrates historical struggles and obstacles that Black Americans endured that limited their ownership access and where that places them in their possible (un)willingness to obtain a gun.

Gender and Gun Ownership

The usage of guns has always been gender divided. Historically, men were given access to this right legally and socially. Women, however, fought for equal acceptance of this right as they were heavily discouraged from owning a gun ([Japenga 1994](#)). Guns were symbols of power, force, aggression— all things associated with masculinity, regardless of race (Stange and Oyster 2000). Even in the 21st century, a time when women have access to such rights, women still battle this image closely connected to masculinity. According to Jennifer Carlson (2015), guns

serve as a form of protecting the down-fall of someone's perceived masculinity. Another study by [T.D Warner et al \(2022\)](#) found that investment or buy-in to the stereotypical masculine ideals, are “linked to support for discourses associated with protective gun ownership and empowerment”. Guns are also used in an effort to overaccount one's masculinity by being hypermasculine (Matson, K., Russell, T. D., & King, A. R. [2019](#)). Black women, however, encountered unique struggles in taking their second amendment rights.

The Black womanhood image has always been countered as being not feminine enough and inherently possessing masculine traits ([Means Coleman, 1998; Newsome, 2003](#)). Black women sat in a position of being not White enough, but also not woman enough. Throughout the history of gun ownership in the Black community, Black women's access to guns was coupled with the access Black men had. As Crenshaw explains in *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color*; when discussing race or gender, its perspective is thought through the lens of those with more privilege, Black men in this case ([Crenshaw 1991](#)). Black women, even after fighting for their rights regarding their racial status, also had to also fight for their rights as women. Again, fighting against the narrative of their perceived inferiority in two oppressive factions. However, according to the National African American Gun Association (NAAGA), Black women today are the fastest growing gun population and currently hold the majority share of memberships for the organization ([Queens of Defense 2022](#)). Additionally, a survey conducted by The Cut looking at individuals who purchased a gun for the first time from Jan. 2019 and Apr. 2021, found that 21 percent were Black individuals, and 48 percent of the 21 percent were Black women ([Aning 2022](#)).

There are minimal research articles on gun ownership looking specifically at women of color. When examining gun ownership by gender, it has not been explored with an

intersectionality approach. It focuses on male versus female in the general sense and has not explored if male versus female differs depending on the race (Kelley 2021; [Carlson 2014](#); Brush 2005). By not including an intersection analysis on just females and race it limits our understanding of how cultural background plays with womanhood. Further, by not examining male versus female in one race, it lacks the explanation of how womanhood status influences ownership. In essence, by not including a race dissection it eliminates the possibility of understanding cultural distinctions and gender distinctions. By specifically looking at one race, as the study does, it allows for possible future dissection of how cultural background interplays with gender when it comes to access or comfortability having access to a firearm.

U.S. Region and Gun Ownership

Due to the historical and racial relationship to guns, Black gun owners may have influence towards or against ownership. More specifically, when looking at history, slavery and place heavily informed gun culture in the US. Guns were used to control Black and brown people specifically during enslavement. White southern political power was under threat once Black people were offered enfranchisement. This led them to target the Black population to maintain their political power ([Brown 2004](#)). White southerners again turned to weapons and to Klansmen as a way of maintaining such power and decreasing their political threat ([Woodward CV. 1951](#); [Foner E. 2011](#)). The constant fear and threat of death by White people on Black men and women continued. Transitioning into the 21st century, slavery or White supremacy roots are still relevant when discussing region, race, and gun ownership.

In fact, a study found using data from 1999 to 2016, that the higher rates of historical enslavement in a particular county, the higher the county-level gun ownership rates ([Buttrick and Mazen 2022](#)). Further, there seems to be a connection with political status and gun ownership.

Pew research found that gun rights are approved more by republican voters than democratic voters ([Pew Research 2023](#)). Moreover, according to the 2024 presidential election consensus forecast map, Southern and Northwestern states are projected to have a more conservative population or towards a more republican demographic ([Electoral Ventures LLC 2024](#)). The states that have higher rates of historical enslavement also tend to have higher republican or conservative presence. Republicans or conservatives are also more likely to approve of gun rights, and those that approve of gun rights are more likely to have higher racial resentment attitudes (Higginbotham et al., 2022). This provokes the question of how Southern racism and Southern gun culture affect Black people's access to guns. Specifically, how much do the regions differ in relation to the Atlantic Southern region for Black gun ownership?

Neighborhood Segregation Status and Gun Ownership

As indicated, group threat theory suggests the larger presence that White individuals have in a space, the higher perceived racial threat Black individuals have. This use of group threat theory, however, has not been explored for gun ownership acquisition in the neighborhood context. It is unknown whether gun ownership access has been restricted by neighborhood, like it has for gender and region, but perceived racial threat, from the White and Black perspective, has influenced neighborhoods dynamic with actions like red-lining, White flight, and segregation in America (Hinton 2021). Furthermore, the historical racism and lack of gun ownership access for Black Americans generally translated through all realms regardless of wherever they lived. In the twenty-first century, gun scholars have not explored gun ownership amounts for Black American in different neighborhood segregation status. This analysis finds this intersection of interest because perceived racial threat is increased for Black Americans depending on neighborhood segregation status. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how historical racial oppression shapes

gun ownership for Black individuals living near White people and those that do not. These three “space”, gender, region, and neighborhood, point to the need to explore the heterogeneous experience of Black gun ownership and ownership’s potential response to racial threat

Neighborhood makeup (segregated or integrated status), region, and gender are simply the onset of weeding out what shapes gun ownership for people of color. This research aims to present one possible influence people of color have to gun ownership by making the connection between perceived racial threat and gun ownership for non-White people, specifically Black people. Gun ownership research today only examines questions about gun culture as a whole, or examines it through a White race lens. This practice standardizes the White population as the reference category and cultivates the White population as the norm population. By not solely focusing on the minority's experience without comparisons to other races, research suppresses the cultural nuances that contribute to the motivations for obtaining a gun. One of these motivators that should be examined is perceived racial threat as it exists for only people of color and contributes to the perceived victimizations that people obtain guns for. Additionally, understanding one racial group's uniqueness in obtaining a gun should be dissected from different vantage points, like place, space, and gender. These three distinct vantage points have different relationships to gun ownership and perceived racial threat that is equally deserving of further investigation.

The literature presented demonstrates a clear gap in gun ownership research, specifically within race and cultural experiences of people of color. It explores the potential influence of White historical and current violence on communities of color as a possible factor in firearm ownership among populations of color, which is often overlooked in research on gun ownership.

This study expands knowledge on the nuances of gun ownership for populations of color, specifically for Black individuals.

Methods

Design and Setting

This is a quantitative research project that analyzes the relationship between Black gun ownership and perceived racial threat using a pooled time series design. Looking across a 15-year period over 9 US regions, I assess whether perceived racial threat affects gun ownership rates for Black Americans. To answer this question, I compiled data from three different sources to create one combined dataset that includes estimates of Black gun ownership rates as a whole and within subgroups of sex and neighborhood segregation status. Perceived racial threat, region, and crime rates are independent variables included in the regression analysis. Region assisted in increasing data observations as well as assessing the manifestation of gun culture around a minority community. There are nine regions and nine years presented for each of the regions. Thus there are 81 total observations in the regression analysis. Each regression analysis includes a time-series structure by incorporating autoregressive errors. Eleven regressions are tested.. Five of the regressions include region, year, and two lagged variables, perceived racial threat, and crime rate. The other six replace the lagged variables with their contemporaneous form. Each ownership subgroup (by sex and by neighborhood segregation status) type, I present 2 or 3 regressions. Results from the best models will be discussed further in the discussion section.

Data and Sources

Estimates of the rates of gun ownership are based on the General Social Science (GSS) biennially self-reported survey. I use a 15-year period with measurements for years in 2004,

2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018, and 2021. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 was skipped and was picked back up in 2021. Each GSS year provided point estimates for the level or rate of gun ownership in the Black population as a whole and for Black ownership by sex (male/female ownership) and ownership in spatial residence (integrated/segregated neighborhoods). The following were used from the GSS data to get estimated rates of gun ownership for Black identifying individuals.

Race was determined by the GSS variable RACE. The question in the survey asked respondents, “What race do you consider yourself?” Options were 1 for White, 2 for Black, 3 for others, and I for not applicable. Prior to 2021, interviewers coded this question with a few exceptions, therefore this is solely based on how society would view their race and not how they would identify their race. For the analysis only those coded as Black were used for determining the different sub-groups and rates of Black gun ownership.

Gun ownership was determined by the GSS variable OWNGUN. Survey respondents were asked, “ Do you happen to have in your home (if house: or garage) any guns or revolvers?” Those that answered yes to the question were used to determine gun ownership rates. These rates were separated out by the subgroup within a particular region. I calculated gun ownership rates for the Black females, Black males, Black Americans in segregated neighborhoods, Black Americans in integrated neighborhoods, and the total Black sample population. This is the makeup of the different gun ownership observations for the regression analysis. The formula calculation is as follows:

$$\frac{(\text{Subgroup who identified yes to having a gun in the home of that region})}{(\text{All “subgroup” individuals of that region})}$$

The subgroup sex was determined by the GSS variable SEX. Prior to 2021, the interviewer coded the sex of the participant. Thus, the analysis is based on how society would

likely deem their sex and not by how they view their own sex. The variable was coded and this analysis only included those marked as either male or female, removing options like other and not applicable. The dataset for the regression analysis only included those coded as male and female.

Neighborhood makeup gun ownership rates were determined by the GSS variable RACLIVE. The question survey respondents answered was: Are there any (“Whites” for Black respondents, “Blacks” for non-Black respondents) living in this neighborhood now? Because the analysis only uses Black Americans, the question they were asked was: Are there any Whites living in this neighborhood now? Those coded as yes were deemed as living in integrated neighborhoods. Those coded as no were deemed as living in segregated neighborhoods. All others that were coded as D for “don’t know” or S for “skipped on web” were removed for the analysis.

The region is split into nine different sections by the GSS, which are based on the Census definitions. The nine different regions include: New England (MA, VT, NH, MA, CN, RI), Mid-Atlantic (NJ, PA, NY), East North Central (IL, WI, OH, IN, MI), West North Central (SD, IO, NE, MO, KA, MN), South Atlantic (FL, FE, SC, NC, VI, WV, MA, DE, D of C), East South Central (MS, AL, TN, KE), West South Central (AR, OK, LO, TX), Mountain (MT, ID, WY, NE, UT, CO, AZ, NM), and Pacific (CA, OR, WA, AK). All regions were used and the final analysis includes information for all 50 states and the District of Columbia. This 9 regional split was also used when determining the perceived racial threat by region.

Two variables are taken from different sources of data: perceived racial threat and violent crime rates. Violent crime data was pulled from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Crime rate variable was created by averaging each state’s violent crime rate within the respective

region. This process was completed for each year in the analysis. Crime rates were included in this study due to the commonly known connection between crime rate and guns (needs cite). Including this variable is important as it controls the violent crime rate as a reason for getting a gun. By controlling for violent crime, the analysis can better determine if the increase or decrease in gun ownership was caused by perceived racial threat and not by the fluctuation of violent crime rates.

Perceive racial threat is being measured by Google Trends data. The data source compiles information that was published and searched on Google. From there, it takes the average of each month that the topic or word was searched, appeared, or talked about. It calculates this in a percentage format that is based on the peak of the data frame suggested. For this project the term “racism” was explored as a topic in this data source; sources of racism topic were restricted to the news category. The time period that was pulled was January 1st, 2004, to December 31, 2021. This was done for all of the United States as a whole population, individual states, and the District of Columbia. The individual states’ and territory’s rates were aggregated by region. All states in a particular region were added and averaged to create the entire regional sample for the perceived racial threat variables. Note this variable capturing the relative frequency of the use of racism is referred to as perceived racial threat throughout this paper.

Using Google Trends data, although valid, does create some micro variation in the measurements. Because the variable perceived racial threat used discussions of racism in the news as the quantifier, there seems to be a difference in how the variable is collected and analyzed. The variable is collected and analyzed from the peak point in the 15 year period by state creating variations in peak points. This means if in 2004 Mississippi had a peak point in December, but in Tennessee they had their peak point was in January 2006, their rates are

different in relation to each other as their peak points differ. Because it is in a percentage of discussion or rate based on peak point, Mississippi's 2004 peak might have been posting about racism more than Tennessee's 2006 peak, but because the peak is listed as 100%, it would appear that they had similar amounts of conversation. Within their state the rate of conversation on racism makes sense, but it doesn't take into account how much more one state talked about racism more. This creates limitations in the regional analysis of perceived racial threat. In this analysis, it is understood that perceived racial threat is therefore being measured by the rate of news conversation including the term "racism".

Racism, similar to other topics, tends to be talked about more when that topic is happening in the verbage context. Therefore, racism is talked about in the news more when more racist events are happening in society . Black Americans, who were the majority target of hate crimes in 2022, have increased awareness or knowledge of racist events due to the news ([Statista 2023](#)). This awareness, in theory, then heightens their understanding of the perceived threat around them. The goal of this study is to understand the Black response to their level of perceived threat around them.

Violent crime data was pulled from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Crime rates were extracted for each state for the years examined in the analysis. The data was divided into the nine respective regions and then averaged by each of those years. Crime rates were included in this study due to the commonly known connection between crime rate and guns ([Siegel M 2013](#); Klecker 2004). Including this variable is important as it controls the violent crime rate as a reason for getting a gun. By controlling for violent crime, the analysis can better determine if the increase or decrease in gun ownership was caused by perceived racial threat and not by the fluctuation of violent crime rates.

Study Aims and Questions

Based on the literature review detailing that guns are sought when individuals feel a need for personal protection, self-defense, and/or see an increase in threat, my first research question is as follows:

R1: As perceived racial threat increases, do Black gun ownership rates increase?

Further, because guns have historically been geared towards men and are associated with masculinity, my second research question is as follows:

R2: As perceived racial threat increases, do Black male gun ownership and Black female gun ownership rates increase and do Black male gun ownership rates increase at greater rate than Black female gun ownership?

Because of how politicized gun ownership is, access and ownership may be more restricted in some regions than others. Those that are more conservative, specifically southern states, might have looser laws regarding ownership than more liberal states. This makes the third research question as follows:

R3: Do Southern regions have a higher likelihood of owning a gun in the home than all other regions?

Based on group threat theory, I hypothesize there is likely a difference in gun ownership rates between neighborhoods described as integrated and one described as segregated in gun ownership. This, then leads to the final research question:

R4: As perceived racial threat increases, do the segregated and integrated gun ownership rates increase? Do integrated gun ownership rates have a greater increase with perceived racial threat than segregated neighborhoods?

Results

Descriptive Data and Preliminary Data

To get a better understanding of perceived racial threat, I take a sample of the entire United States from Google Trends Data for each year. The years analyzed include 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2021. The national data pointed to several spiking periods, however, each data point is using June 2020, the highest peak, as its reference. The reference point, June 2020, was the killing of George Floyd. This indicates that the year 2020 had the highest level of racism discussion in the news, thus had the highest perceived racial threat. All other years base their perceived racial threat according to 2020.

Additional spikes appeared in 2004, 2008, and 2016. These spikes correspond with election years. In 2004, the case of Emmitt Till was also reopened which sparked a lot of controversy along with the presidential election. The peak in 2008 corresponds with the United States first elected Black president, President Barack Obama. Because he was the first Black president, the topic of race and racism was discussed more widely during his presidential race and term. Racism was discussed as many racial remarks were made about President Obama's race and citizenship status. These remarks were heavily supported by our preceding president, Donald Trump. The 2016 peak was likely a result of President Donald Trump's election. His race was based on the slogan "Make America Great Again" which was often construed as being racist, homophobic, and sexist. It has also been found that racism, sexism, and anti-immigrant are more strongly linked to his success in winning the presidential race in 2016 than any economic reason (Schaffner 2022). His presidential term, specifically in the year leading up to the election and his first year as president, provided individuals with the comfort of speaking out and taking action on their bias and hate.

Moreover, separating the data state-by-state rather than a total US summary provided a less aggregated lens on how each state's peak, or reference point, differed. Analyzing the data from a single state angle, it provided a much larger range of peaks. The data, however, still had many similarities by average regional perceived racial threat. The regions tended to have three years in common, 2014, 2016, and 2020. Regionally, looking at the average of the perceived racial threat each year, it was found that 2016 showed up as a top three peak year for five out of the nine regions. Additionally, 2016 was commonly paired with 2020 in all five peaks. The year 2020 showed up as a top three peak year for eight out of the nine regions.

The GSS point estimates for gun ownership were based on a sample that averaged approximately 230 respondents each year. This varied by year from 2004 to 2021. Clearly when looking at regions the point estimates were based on smaller numbers. For example, New England tended to have the lowest denominator averaging four respondents, while the South Atlantic, tended to have the larger denominator averaging with 82 respondents. The lowest sample population was in 2004 with only 111 respondents, while 2021 had the most at 400 observations. These observations were only to gather data regarding Black gun ownership and not for statistical analysis. **(Table 1)**.

After calculating Black gun ownership across the nine different regions, it was found in this sample that East South Central had the most Black home gun ownership ranging from 27% to 48% over the time period. The lowest, expectedly, was New England ranging from 0% to 25%. For females in this sample, the highest home gun ownership appeared in the South Atlantic while New England had the lowest across 2004 through 2021. The Mountain region had the highest Black male gun ownership and New England had the lowest. For the segregated population in this sample, the Mountain region had no black individuals to make estimates from 2004-2018 resulting in NA throughout their data except for one 0% gun ownership in 2021. Overall, the segregated population had very low data. In fact, out of all nine regions for all the years represented, 27 year by region observations had no data available to estimate these rates of ownership. The segregated population had the least amount of data to make estimates with. The most data for the segregated regions came from all South Atlantic regions: East South Central, West South Central, and South Atlantic. The integrated sub-group provided much more data with the East South Central region having the most gun ownership with a peak of 50% in 2018. New

England had the least gun ownership with seven 0%. Based on this data, the reference category for the regression analysis will be South Atlantic due to having the largest sample of individuals.

Table 1:

Year	New England		Mid-Atlantic		East North Central		West North Central		South Atlantic		East South Central		West South Central		Mountain		Pacific		Overall Total
	New England Gun Owners	New England Total	Mid-Atlantic Gun owners	Mid Atlantic Total	East North Central Gun Owners	East North Central Total	West North Central Gun Owners	West North Central Total	South Atlantic Gun Owners	South Atlantic Total	East South Atlantic Gun Owners	East South Atlantic Total	West South Atlantic Gun Owners	West South Atlantic Total	Moutain Gun Owners	Mountain Total	Pacific Gun Owners	Pacific Total	
2004	0	2	1	11	0	11	1	5	9	49	3	8	10	21	0	1	0	3	135
2006	0	1	5	37	5	37	2	7	16	101	5	11	16	55	1	3	3	14	319
2008	0	3	4	30	3	27	1	3	12	65	4	11	4	27	0	2	1	11	208
2010	0	2	1	23	4	22	1	5	6	52	6	15	9	41	0	3	1	17	208
2012	0	4	2	24	6	24	1	9	9	67	7	24	9	19	0	3	4	17	229
2014	0	5	1	33	2	28	1	12	15	86	9	31	10	30	2	11	2	24	302
2016	0	3	1	27	10	49	2	18	13	101	9	33	11	41	1	14	1	18	352
2018	1	4	1	27	7	31	3	12	20	89	16	33	7	27	0	8	2	15	302
2021	1	9	4	35	17	74	5	20	41	123	15	46	9	51	3	15	6	27	500
Total	2	33	20	247	54	303	17	91	141	733	74	212	85	312	7	60	20	146	2555

Examining total Black gun ownership across the entire US for this sample, the least gun ownership rates were in years 2008, 2010, 2014, and 2016. All four years had 16%-gun ownership, while 2006 had the most gun ownership at 27%. When looking at the direct relationship with perceived racial threat, commonly, when Black home gun ownership would decrease, perceived racial threat rate increased. This indicates that there is likely a negative relationship between Black gun ownership and perceived racial threat (**Figure 1**). It can also be argued that there may be a lag effect happening in the data. It's possible that there is a positive connection between the two variables if individuals took time to purchase a gun after a possible racial threat happened. The limitation with the lag exists as the lag is measured in two years rather than one. If the data is shifted one unit over (one unit = two years) to represent this, it can be seen that both variables follow a similar pattern (**Figure 2**).

Figure 1: National Black Gun Ownership

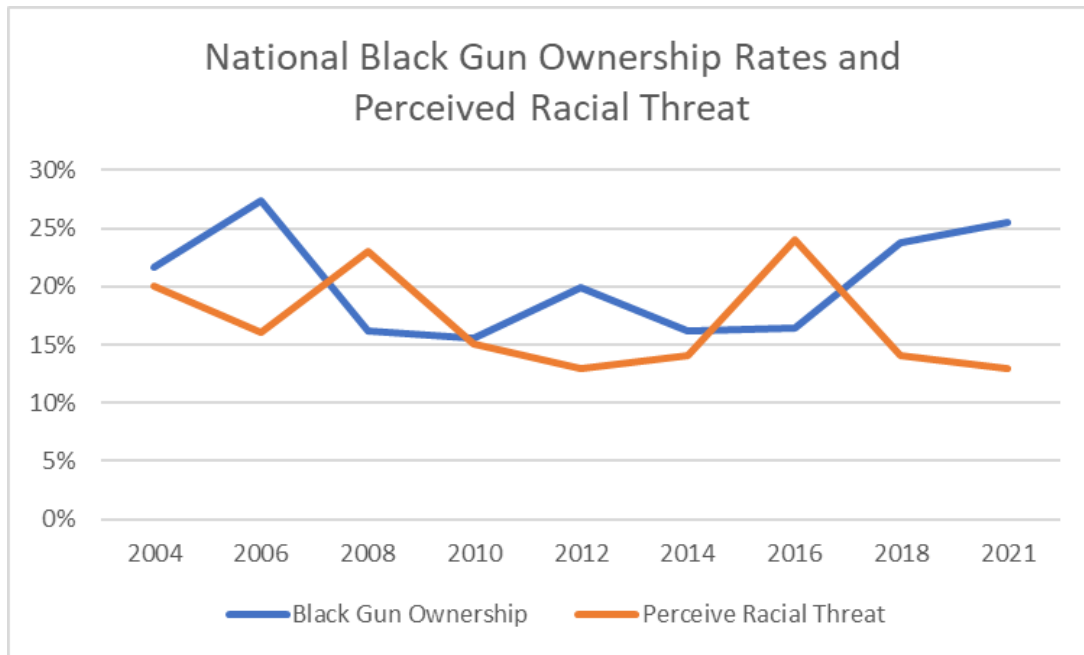
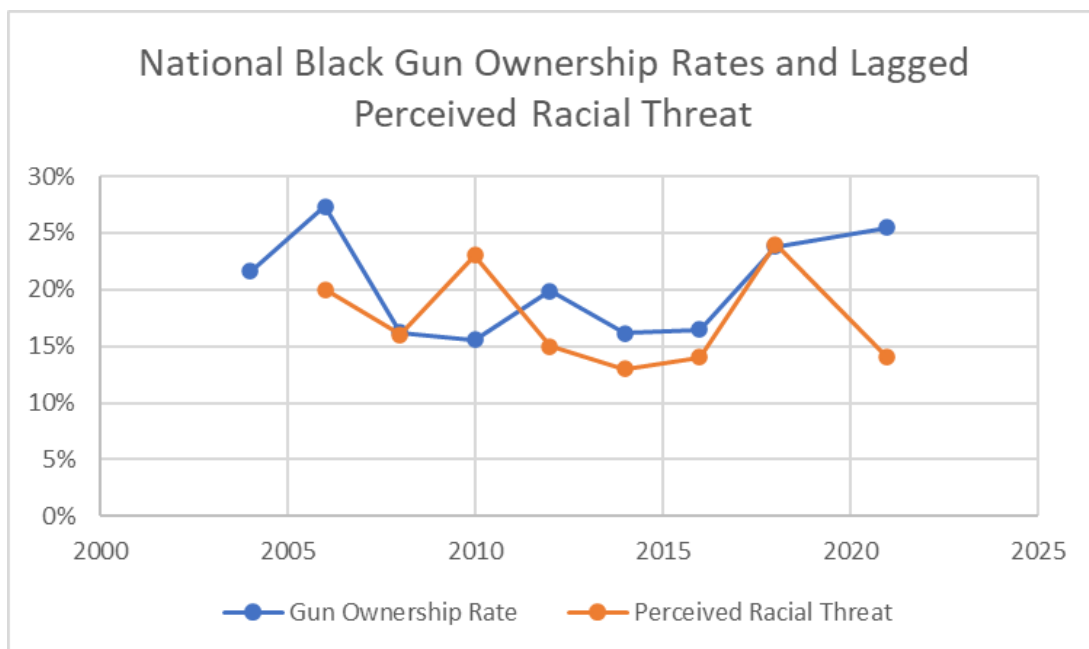


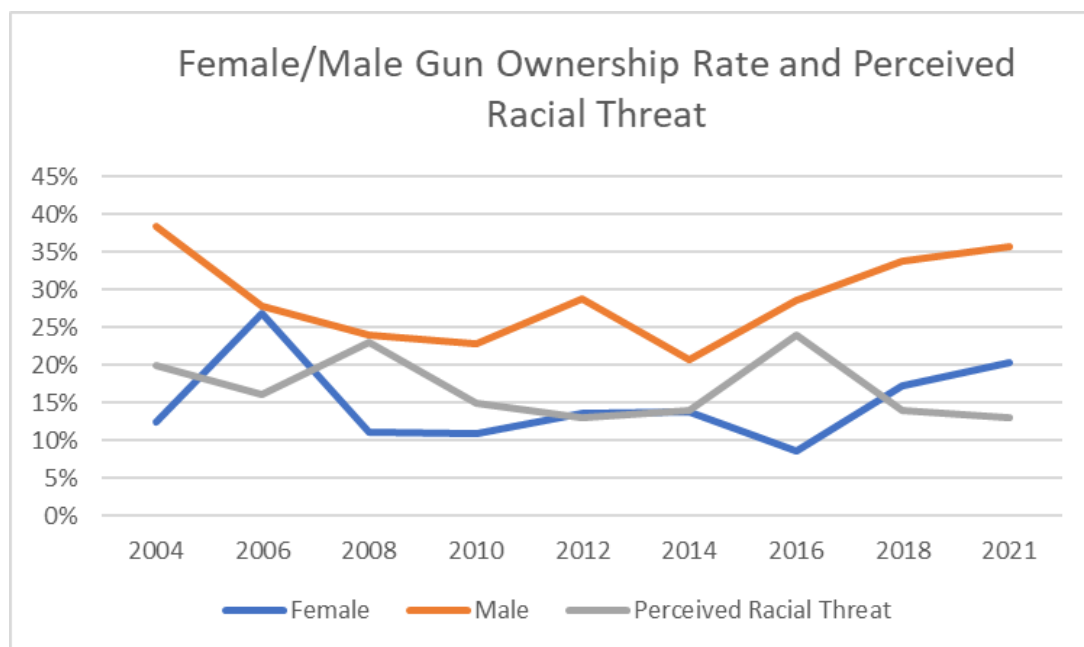
Figure 2: National Black Gun Ownership (Lagged)



Male and female gun ownership in relation to overall perceived racial threat have many similar patterns. Males had much higher overall gun ownership rates than females. Males ranged

from 21% to 38%, this is a 17% increase over 15 years. From 2016 to 2018 there was a 5% increase; this increase also happened within the female population as well. Female gun ownership ranged from 9% to 27%; this was an 18% increase. For the female population, 2016 had the least gun ownership while 2006 had the most at 27%. Based on figure 3, perceived racial threat tended to be opposite of female gun ownership. When overall female gun ownership was high, perceived racial threat was low and vice-versa. This suggests that there is likely a negative relationship between the two variables. Male gun ownership relationship to perceived racial threat was a bit more difficult to interpret. Male gun ownership was always higher than the perceived racial threats and by just looking at the graph. This indicates that males are likely to have a weaker correlation with perceived racial threat than the female population.

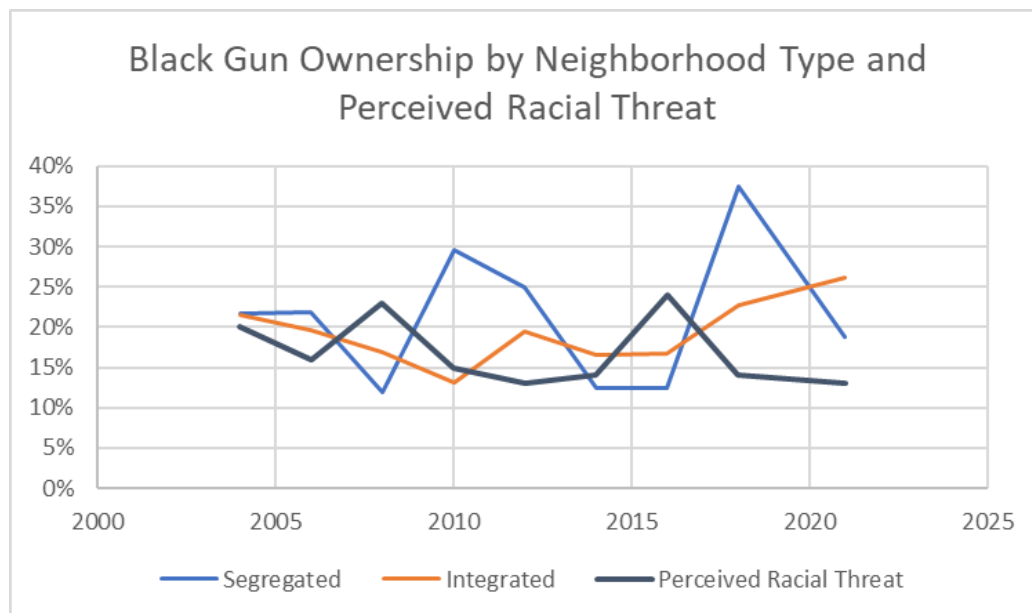
Figure 3: Female/Male Black Gun Ownership



Neighborhood status is defined by its racial makeup and is separated by its integrated or segregated status. The integrated neighborhoods range from 13% to 26% gun ownership from

2004 to 2021. The highest rate was in 2021 and the lowest was in 2010. A negative relationship is presented when examining perceived racial threat simultaneously. As perceived racial threat increased, integrated gun ownership decreased (**Figure 4**). This was also reflected in the segregated population. Gun ownership had a larger range in segregated neighborhoods ranging from 12% in 2008 and 38% in 2018. Due to the sample size, segregated neighborhoods have more fluctuation in the data. As perceived racial threat increased, segregated Black gun ownership decreased, however, it appears there may be a lag. If perceived racial threat shifted the x axis by one, the segregated population would have almost the exact same pattern, but the integrated population appears to still have a negative relationship. (**Figure 4**).

Figure 4: Black Gun Ownership by Neighborhood Type



Regression Results

Statistical Analysis

The first step in this analysis was to get a base understanding of the patterns of Black gun ownership in relation to perceived racial threat. The descriptions below indicate that there might be a lagged effect taking place in the data. Gun acquisition can be a time-consuming process resulting in some delay in the acquisition in response to threat. Therefore, I tested the impact of the perceived racial threat with a lag for five of the eleven regressions and without a lag for the remainder. Arguably, increased crime rate may also have a lagged effect for owning or possessing a gun. For this reason, the crime rate variable is also lagged in the same five of the eleven regressions. The other six regressions do not have a lag in any of the variables. This allows for a comparison between the regressions to determine which of them is the best for the analysis. All eleven regressions include perceived racial threat, year, crime rates, and region. I perform a general linear regression with autoregressive errors for each of the tested models.

Overall Gun Ownership

Model 1 looks at the relationship in the pooled region by year dataset of total Black gun ownership with perceived racial threat, year, and region in the model. This statistical model used two lagged variables, perceived racial threat and crime rate, and incorporated autoregressive errors to include a time series structure. Crime rate in this model was used as a control agent. This model included two statistically significant variables, perceived racial threat and region. Additionally, out of the eight regions compared to the South Atlantic region, five of them were statistically significant. Lagged perceived racial threat was significant with a P-value of 0.06. The coefficient of this variable was 0.476. This coefficient indicates that as perceived racial threat increases by 1 percentage point, overall gun ownership increases by about $\frac{1}{2}$ a percentage point (.476 $\sim$.5). This analysis indicates a positive relationship between the two variables.

Additionally, there seems to be a regional connection with Black gun ownership for this sample. Using the South Atlantic region as the reference category, this model found these regions statistically significant: Mid-Atlantic ($p = 0.08$, $B = -0.161$), and East South Central region ($p = 0.02$, $B = 0.174$). Mid-Atlantic had a negative relationship with the dependent variable suggesting that it was less likely to have a gun in the home in comparison to the South Atlantic region. The East South Central region, however, had a positive relationship with the dependent variable meaning this region had a higher likelihood of having a gun in the home than the South Atlantic region.

Model 2 replicates model 1 but removes that lagged effect for crime rate and perceived racial threat variables. Perceived racial threat had a negative relationship with the dependent variable, but had no statistical significance in this model ($p = 0.424$, $B = -0.197$). This model only had significance in just the region variable. Two of the eight regions compared to the South Atlantic region were statistically significant. Further, they both demonstrated a positive relationship with the dependent variable: East South Central ($p = 0.010$, $B = 0.194$) and West South Central ($p = 0.0124$, $B = 0.145$). This suggests that they are more likely to have guns in the home than the South Atlantic region.

Based on the results of the two models, model 1 with lagged variables and autoregressive errors is the best model. The results for model 1 had more similarities to the preliminary results, more significant variables, and a stronger explanatory base for having lagged variables compared to model two. Both the BIC, AIC, and log likelihood were all better for model 1 than for model 2. Model 1 BIC equals -36.58, while model 2 is -33.139. I can conclude for this section that model 1 is best for the analysis. The results suggest that based on this sample, as perceived racial threat increases, Black gun ownership also increases creating a positive relationship at a

statistically significant rate. Because these two models are presented in opposite directions for their coefficients, it is intriguing to understand what complexity is hidden in the data that cannot be quantified.

Table 2:

Total Black Gun Ownership Regression Results		
=====		
	Dependent variable:	

	Gun Ownersip Rates	
	Model 1	Model 2

Lagged Perceived Racial Threat	0.476* (0.249)	
Lagged Crime Rate	-0.0002 (0.0003)	
Year	0.001 (0.002)	0.002 (0.003)
Perceived Racial Threat		-0.197 (0.245)
Crime Rate		0.0001 (0.0004)
New England	-0.186 (0.128)	-0.110 (0.130)
Mid-Atlantic	-0.161* (0.091)	-0.076 (0.089)
East North Central	-0.032 (0.083)	-0.014 (0.082)
West North Central	0.014 (0.096)	0.033 (0.097)
East South Central	0.174** (0.073)	0.194*** (0.073)
West South Central	0.078 (0.062)	0.145*** (0.056)
Mountain	-0.056 (0.081)	-0.101 (0.080)
Pacific	-0.128 (0.079)	-0.062 (0.075)
Constant	-0.932 (5.035)	-3.162 (5.625)

Observations	72	72
Log Likelihood	49.002	47.277
Akaike Inf. Crit.	-68.003	-64.554
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	-36.588	-33.139
=====		
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Sex

Female Gun Ownership

Model 3 tests the connection between female gun ownership, perceived racial threat, crime rate, years, and region. This model includes two lagged variables, perceived racial threat and crime rate. The model also includes autoregressive errors for the time series analysis. Model 3 had only one statistically significant category in the region variable, East South Central ($p=0.057$, $B=0.170$). This region had a positive relationship with the dependent variable suggesting that in comparison to the South Atlantic region, the reference category, East South Central region is more likely to have guns in the home for this sample. All other variables were not found to be statistically significant. However, it is important to note that perceived racial threat did indeed have a positive relationship ($p=0.616$, $B=0.151$) with Black female gun ownership. This suggests that as perceived racial threat increased, Black female gun ownership increased as well.

Model 4 tests the same variables, however, it removes the lagged effect on the two variables, crime rate and perceived racial threat. The New England region was the only statistically significant category in the region variable ($p=0.096$, $B=-0.250$). All other variables in this model were not found to be statistically significant. Additionally, model 4 did have a lower P value for perceived racial threat ($p=0.301$, $B=-0.323$) than the lagged version ($p=0.616$, $B=0.151$). This model also had a negative relationship to the dependent variable for perceived racial threat, while the lagged perceived racial threat had a positive relationship. These two models seem to be having the same conversion as the overall Black gun ownership models. Whereas, the model with lagged variables had a positive relationship with perceived racial threat, while the model without lag had negative relationships with the variable.

Based on the two models in this section, model 3 is the best model as it has more statistical significance. Additionally, when looking at the preliminary data, shifting perceived racial threat rate by one unit for years, the two variables seem to reflect one another. They both tended to spike and decline at the same time. This suggests that of the two models, model 3 presents a stronger statistical analysis due to a need in lagged variables. In other words, we can conclude that as perceived racial threat increased, Black female gun ownership also increased.

Male Gun Ownership

Model 5 examines the relationship male gun ownership, perceived racial threat, crime rate, years, and region. This model includes two lagged variables, perceived racial threat and crime rate. Although the perceived racial threat variable in this sample does not present any statistical significance ($p = 0.303$, $B = 0.429$), it does have a positive relationship with male gun ownership. Moreover, this model does include two statistically significant regions: East South Central ($p = 0.0145$, $B = 0.241$) and West South Central ($p = 0.0069$, $B = 0.188$). The East South Central and West South Central regions both have positive relationships suggesting that these sample populations are more likely to have a gun in the home more than the South Atlantic region.

Model 6 examines the same relationships except it removes the lag on crime rate and perceived racial threat. There were two significant regions in this model, the East South Central region ($p = 0.041$, $B = 0.246$) and West South Central region ($p = 0.028$, $B = 0.206$). These two regions both had positive coefficients to male gun ownership. The analysis for this indicated that the sample of East South and West South regions have higher gun ownership rates than the South Atlantic region. Additionally, the perceived racial threat variable ($p = 0.727$, $B = -0.155$) was not

found significant in this model either, but it did have a negative relationship with the dependent variable suggesting that as perceived racial threat increased, Black gun ownership for males would decrease.

Both Model 5 and 6 have the same amount of statistically significant variables. They both did not find perceived racial threat significant, but they did find two regions statistically significant; they both happened to be the exact same regions and had positive relationships with the dependent variable and around the same coefficients. Overall, model 5 is the best regression model for this subgroup analysis. The overall results indicate that as perceived racial threat increased, Black male gun ownership also increased.

Table 3:

Black Gun Ownership by Sex Regression Results				
Dependent variable:				
	Female Gun Ownership Rates		Male Gun Ownership Rates	
	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Year	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.004 (0.003)	0.006* (0.004)	0.002 (0.005)
Lagged Perceived Racial Threat	0.151 (0.300)		0.429 (0.413)	
Lagggged Crime Rate	0.00003 (0.0004)		0.0001 (0.0005)	
Perceived Racial Threat		-0.323 (0.310)		-0.155 (0.442)
Crime Rate		-0.0004 (0.0004)		0.0004 (0.001)
New England	-0.118 (0.154)	-0.250* (0.148)	-0.124 (0.169)	-0.103 (0.209)
Mid-Atlantic	-0.071 (0.107)	-0.129 (0.100)	-0.149 (0.114)	-0.078 (0.143)
East North Central	-0.009 (0.098)	-0.094 (0.092)	-0.016 (0.105)	-0.037 (0.132)
West North Central	0.050 (0.115)	-0.103 (0.109)	-0.013 (0.126)	0.017 (0.156)
East South Central	0.170* (0.087)	0.104 (0.083)	0.241** (0.096)	0.246** (0.118)
West South Central	0.049 (0.072)	0.061 (0.061)	0.188*** (0.067)	0.206** (0.091)
Mountain	-0.068 (0.096)	-0.157* (0.091)	-0.069 (0.105)	-0.106 (0.129)
Pacific	-0.026 (0.093)	-0.096 (0.083)	-0.080 (0.094)	-0.043 (0.122)
Constant	1.708 (6.063)	7.729 (6.681)	-12.374 (7.737)	-4.629 (9.342)
Observations	71	70	70	69
Log Likelihood	36.819	33.852	16.530	12.837
Akaike Inf. Crit.	-43.638	-37.703	-3.059	4.325
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	-12.475	-6.796	27.848	34.971
Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01				

Neighborhood Makeup

Integrated

Model 7 examines the relationship of gun ownership for Black Americans in integrated neighborhoods with perceived racial threat, crime rate, years, and region. This model includes two lagged variables, perceived racial threat and crime rate. Model 7 is similar in nature with model 1, model 3, and model 5 by having lagged variables. This model consisted of two statistically significant variables, including two statistically significant regional categories: lagged perceived racial threat ($p = 0.082$, $B = 0.469$), East South Central ($p = 0.005$, $B = 0.220$), and West South Central ($p = 0.088$, $B = 0.105$). All variables and categories had a positive relationship with gun ownership. This suggests that as perceived racial threat increased, Black gun ownership for integrated neighborhoods increased as well. Additionally, the data demonstrates that the two regions had higher home gun ownership rates than the reference category, South Atlantic. East South had the highest coefficient in this model suggesting Black gun ownership in integrated areas were more likely to have greater gun ownership compared to all other regions.

Model 8 regression is a bit different. This model looks at the relationship directly between perceived racial threat and Black gun ownership in integrated neighborhoods. This model does not include region, crime rate, and year. There are also no lagged variables. The perceived racial threat variable was significant at the 95% confidence interval ($p = 0.036$, $B = -0.501$). Additionally, the coefficient is negative suggesting that in this sample as perceived racial threat increases, Black gun ownership in integrated neighborhoods decreases.

In model 9, the region, crime rates, and year variables are placed back into the regression; the perceived racial threat variable is no longer statistically significant ($p = 0.191$, $B = -0.344$). Model 9 did have statistically significant regions; East South Central ($p = 0.003$, $B = 0.229$) and West South Central ($p = 0.0183$, $B = 0.135$) are significant and have positive relationships with the dependent variable. Of all the regions, East South Central has the highest coefficient suggesting in this sample that they were more likely to have Black gun ownership in integrated neighborhoods than all other regions.

In this section, it was important to include a version where both the lagged version and non-lagged version had statistical significance and had opposite relationships with the dependent variable. This, in part, assists in the argument for the complexity Black gun ownership has and even more so complexity when discussing close proximity to the possible threat. Only models with all variables will be considered to determine best fit. This leaves only model 7 and model 9 for consideration, which both have the same number of observations. Therefore, model 7 is the best regression model as it has the lowest BIC (-28.48), AIC (-59.90), and Log Likelihood (44.9), in comparison to model 9 (BIC= -28.06, AIC= -59.4, and Log Likelihood= 44.73)

Segregated

Model 10 analyzes the relationship between Black gun ownership in segregated neighborhoods with perceived racial threat, crime rate, year, and region. Model 10 includes two lagged variables, perceived racial threat and crime rate. Model 11 was reflective of model 10, however, model 11 removes the lag on perceived racial threat and crime rate. Of the two models, only Model 11 had any significance. The Mid-Atlantic region was significant with a negative relationship ($p = 0.074$, $B = -0.456$). The Pacific region was significant with a negative

relationship ($p = 0.062$; $B = -416$). What was most interesting about these two models was that even though this sample did not have the perceived racial threat variable as significant, the coefficients were both positive. In previous models, the regression with lagged variables always had a positive relationship, while the original variables had a negative relationship. These two models, 10 and 11, both had a positive relationship between perceived racial threat and segregated Black gun ownership. This suggests that as perceived racial threat increased, Black Americans in predominantly Black neighborhoods also had increased gun ownership regardless of a possible time lapse.

Determining which model is the best for the segregated sample is difficult. When looking at models 10 and 11, the BIC, AIC, and Log Likelihood all differ when suggesting which model is best. Both models include 47 observations. Model 10 has the best log likelihood of -9.04, while model 11 log likelihood is -9.09. Rather, model 11 has the best BIC of 68.35 and AIC 46.18 while model 10 BIC is 48.09 and AIC is 71.43. Based on the regression analysis and preliminary results, a lagged effect in the analysis looks to create a stronger relationship between perceived racial threat variable and the dependent variable. There is strong evidence that a lag should be used. Based on this, model 10 is the best model for the segregated sample. This ultimately indicates that as perceived racial threat increased, Black gun ownership for individual living amongst predominately other Black Americans increased as well.

Table 4:

Black Gun Ownership by Neighborhood Regression Results					
	Dependent variable:				
	Integrated Gun Ownership Rates			Segarated Gun Ownership Rates	
	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11
Year	0.002 (0.003)		0.002 (0.003)	-0.008 (0.011)	-0.012 (0.010)
Lagged Perceived Racial Threat	0.469* (0.265)			0.742 (0.862)	
Lagged Crime Rate	-0.0001 (0.0004)			-0.0003 (0.001)	
New England	-0.117 (0.131)		-0.067 (0.130)	-0.297 (0.435)	-0.659 (0.466)
Mid-Atlantic	-0.109 (0.091)		-0.025 (0.089)	-0.361 (0.263)	-0.456* (0.248)
East North Central	0.008 (0.084)		0.009 (0.082)	-0.251 (0.254)	-0.374 (0.228)
West North Central	0.040 (0.098)		0.045 (0.097)	-0.067 (0.351)	-0.359 (0.316)
East South Atlantic	0.220*** (0.075)		0.229*** (0.074)	0.001 (0.217)	-0.052 (0.191)
West South Atlantic	0.105* (0.061)		0.135** (0.056)	-0.019 (0.138)	0.074 (0.124)
Mountain	-0.033 (0.082)		-0.074 (0.080)	-0.184 (0.274)	
Pacific	-0.031 (0.078)		-0.013 (0.075)	-0.339 (0.260)	-0.416* (0.215)
Perceived Racial Threat		-0.501** (0.236)	-0.344 (0.260)		0.321 (0.657)
Crime Rate			0.0002 (0.0004)		-0.001 (0.001)
Constant	-3.091 (5.290)	0.200*** (0.067)	-3.298 (5.710)	17.322 (21.900)	23.962 (21.498)
Observations	72	81	72	47	47
Log Likelihood	44.952	73.066	44.737	-9.047	-9.092
Akaike Inf. Crit.	-59.903	-136.132	-59.475	48.094	46.184
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	-28.488	-124.285	-28.060	71.425	68.354
Note:					
*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01					

Discussion

Overall for each section, Black gun ownership, sex, and neighborhood makeup, the models with the lag effect were the most logical and statistically sound models. All estimated coefficients were positive and suggested that there was an increase in Black gun ownership when perceived racial threat increased, albeit only five of the lagged effects were strongly distinguishable from zero. Of the five models with the lagged effect, only two had statistical significance with perceived racial threat: overall Black gun ownership and Black gun ownership in integrated neighborhoods. Based on this analysis, research question one (R1) can be answered as yes, as perceived racial threat increases, it is more likely that overall Black gun ownership will increase. Further analysis can be explored to determine how much these factors change for other populations of color and how much perceived racial threat affects their ownership.

When cross examining the sex, female and male, they both displayed positive relationships to the dependent variable. For females, as perceived racial threat increased, Black female gun ownership increased by .151 percentage points. For males, as perceived racial threat increased, Black male gun ownership was estimated to increase by .429 percentage points . Between the two, males had a higher rate than females. Based on these results, it can be concluded that research question two (R2) can be answered as yes, both regressions, male gun ownership and female gun ownership, had a positive relationship with threat. Black male gun ownership did in fact increase more, having a stronger response to threat than Black female gun ownership. Although Black women are increasing in gun ownership rates, they do not, according to the result, succeed Black men when cross examined with perceived racial threat. There is a continued gender difference in gun ownership between men and women observed for Black

Americans as in other populations. Additionally, when thinking about the way in which perceived racial threat is measured, through news and media's discussions of racism, the media tends to circle around Black men and their experiences more than Black women's experiences. This likely could have influenced Black men to also have a strong relationship with the perceived racial threat in comparison to Black women, as the media tends to suggest the threat towards Black men. Also based on the literature this could also be a result of how guns are symbolized as masculine.

Region was tested in each model to see how Black gun ownership differed depending on where someone lived. In each model the South Atlantic region was used as the reference category. East South Central, West South Central, and West North Central had positive coefficients for six of the ten regressions the region variable was in. West South Central and East South Central were positive in nine of the ten regression. Overall, research question three (R3) can be answered as yes, southern regions had a higher likelihood of Black gun ownership than all other regions. Black gun ownership in southern regions, compared to other regions, seem to have a commanding presence regardless of gender or neighborhood type. Further research should explore, based on these results, if gun ownership in southern and western regions will have a stronger response to gun ownership with increased perceived threat than other regions.

Lastly, neighborhood makeup results were unexpected. For the integrated model, perceived racial threat had a positive relationship with the integrated Black gun ownership having a coefficient of 0.496; this was also found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.1$). For the segregated model, perceived racial threat also had a positive relationship with segregated Black gun ownership with a coefficient of 0.74; this was not found significant. Research question four found that although perceived racial threat had a positive relationship in both models, perceived

racial threat in the segregated model had a higher coefficient to Black gun ownership. This suggests that as perceived racial threat increases both segregated and integrated neighborhoods increase their gun ownership, but perhaps Black ownership in segregated populations increase more rapidly. Although unexpected, the sample size of the gun ownership rates for segregated Black individuals likely contributed to the unexpected results.

Conclusion

This study deconstructs the significance of gun culture for communities of color exploring ideas of race, racism, and sexism. The purpose of this project was to draw on the complexities of possessing a gun as a Black American. Specifically, it investigates the extent to which perceived racial threat impacts Black gun ownership and how this relationship may vary based on individuals' physical location, represented by region and neighborhood racial makeup, as well as their social positioning, characterized by gender. It provokes questions of how and if these complexes shift focus when perceptions of possible racial threat increase. The results develop new research possibilities for understanding the relationship between perceived racial threat, as experienced by racial minorities, and the possession of a gun, in this case Black Americans. These findings demonstrate that Black Americans seek guns when their perceptions of racial threat increases. There was statistical significance not only for overall Black gun ownership, but also for the integrated population as well. This increase in gun ownership during heightened perceived racial threat demonstrates that Black people do resort to guns, likely as a form of protection.

Scholars have not extensively examined the relationship between gun ownership and racial minorities; more specifically, they have not examined how racial minority gun ownership

is challenged by their encounters with systemic and institutionalized racism. Lawmakers, throughout U.S. time, have used the power imbued in their role(s) to limit, if not outright prevent, Black and Brown Americans from accessing key social institutions during periods of racial turmoil, namely their gun rights (e.g., Black/Slave codes, post-emancipation, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights movement). The explicitly racist gun laws that were used to enshrine White men as the primary gun owners have ceased, but implicit forms still exist and are embedded in many of our institutional systems today through gun control and hyperincarceration.² In this study, this knowledge is the center of question presented as it focuses on the right to access and own a gun for a minority population. Understanding the minority perspective allows for a deeper analysis of the extent in which historical White terror is embedded in ownership.

Even though sociologists know that the racialized social system adapts to retain unequal racial hierarchies (and specifically keep certain groups ‘at the bottom of the well’), when sociologists study gun culture and gun ownership in the United States, they overwhelmingly focus on the experiences of White Americans (Bonilla-Silva 1997).³ Even in the 21 century, Black Americans still face constraints; however, these hurdles have not stopped Black Americans from fighting for a right they equally deserve. During the beginning of the 21 century, Black Americans persevered through the challenges in obtaining a firearm during periods of racial turmoil. This perseverance is not only demonstrated in this study, but also as the rate of Black gun ownership increases across the US in 2020 after the killing of George Flyod ([Schleimer et al. 2021](#); [NSSF 2021](#)). This study demonstrates that Black Americans still seek gun

² Wacquant, L. (2014). Class, Race and Hyperincarceration in Revanchist America. *Socialism and Democracy*, 28(3), 35–56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08854300.2014.954926>

³ Bell, Derrick. 1992 [2018]. *Faces at the bottom of the well: The permanence of racism*. Hachette UK.

ownership, despite the challenges to access, likely for their protection when their perceived racial threat increases due to an increase in racial turmoil.

The results of this study highlight that there is, indeed, a cultural distinction at play when understanding the psychological reasoning of why individuals obtain guns. This research emphasizes that victimization should not be thought of in the general sense, but rather it should be dissected further to understand how certain populations' victimization looks different. Black and Brown people have been the targets of hate crimes and are disproportionately targets for gun violence, and yet all research on guns looks at how White people feel or respond to Black and brown ownership and presence. The continued focus on the White population centers them as the standard and continues a damaging and dangerous cycle of pinning Black and Brown people as the villain or criminal.

Black and Brown people are not the villains or criminals that the media and some researchers make them out to be. The historical destruction of Black and Brown communities because of White violence and harassment throughout U.S. history is important to understand how and why they own guns in the twenty-first century. In this study, I argued that these conditions play a key role in our understanding of how Black and Brown people perceive violence, understand their own vulnerabilities to violence, and why they need to protect themselves from White supremacist violence. This historical knowledge helps Black and brown people understand how they should maneuver in predominantly White spaces, most notably neighborhoods.

In this study, I argued that understanding the dynamic between Black Americans and their neighborhood makeup is important because it brings attention to the double-edged sword of

upward mobility for racial minorities. As Black Americans continue to enter predominantly White spaces that can improve their life outcomes— such as neighborhoods— they must be cognizant of the importance of protecting themselves. Additionally, understanding where Black Americans live is not only important for understanding their racialized experiences, but it is also essential if we want to understand their relationship to gun ownership. Although all Black Americans interact with the racialized social system— and its historical roots in chattel slavery— the racialized experiences of Black Americans living in the South are not the same as the racialized experiences of Black Americans living in the Midwest or Pacific Northwest.

Additionally, incorporating place to understand Black gun ownership and its power dynamics requires an intersectional analysis. In other words, the study of Black gun ownership cannot center the experiences of Black men *only*— it must also include the multitude of Black experiences: poor Black people, Black women, and Black queer folks. When researchers exclusively analyze firearms from the perspective of White men it perpetuates the standard for gun ownership. This reinforces both the patriarchal structure that women continue to challenge and the racist system that Black and brown individuals still confront. Moreover, it also negates the lived reality for many Black and brown women, who are the most oppressed voice in this conversation. All in all, by not looking at the intersectionality of place, space, and gender within one minority racial category, research continues to dismiss and silence those other voices that matter.

Finally, current research on Black Americans and gun ownership examines their experiences through the White lens rather than directly looking at Black Americans' experience. Even scholarly theory replicates this issue, as demonstrated in the research on racial threat theory, group threat theory, contact theory, and cultural theory— all of which have historically

used the perspectives of White Americans as the standard. These theories have neglected underdeveloped possibilities to understand how Black and brown people see the world based on their lived experiences, most notably informed by the color of their skin and vicarious or lived trauma of White violence. Research and society still focus on the White perceptions and are fascinated about racism, although important, the lack of interest in populations of color perception in research essentially dismisses the historical desecration of Black and brown communities by White people. Previous research has extensively examined how White people perceive threats. This study departs from these studies by shifting the gaze to understand how people of color respond to perceived threats—specifically, how historical ties and generational trauma from White violence amongst a racial communities inform their perceptions of violence and the necessary actions that are needed to protect themselves from a potential threat. This research does exactly that. This study takes the historical understanding of White violence to construct perceived racial threat and looks to analyze how that affects Black gun ownership. This research could further examine how historical White violence and present day White violence affects Black Americans' views with gun ownership and their physical access to ownership. Furthermore, it can be explored how Black people perceive their own form of gun ownership and what that means to them. This study takes the first step to understand Black gun ownership, more specifically, to understand what role cultural uniqueness has in it.

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