

Presentation title:

The role of local government services in achieving public safety

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Since the summer of 2020, there has been renewed interest in reimagining public safety. Most of the attention has been focused on funding for police departments. However, other local government departments may play a pivotal role in producing public safety. In fact, recent research has established a relationship between some characteristics of the built environment such as the cleanliness of vacant lots and crime. It is plausible that the equity with which local government departments provide services across the city such as streets and trees and then effectively maintain them may be related to crime. The vigor with which city departments regulate the quality of the built environment via controls on residents, property owners, and business owners is also likely to be related to crime. This paper examines the spatial patterning in the quality of the street-related built environment provided, maintained, and regulated by local government departments and how it links to crime. Data are from two cities in the United States. Because of the importance of the streetscape to perceptions of places, this investigation focuses on services that affect the quality of the streetscape and the buildings that face the street. The following outcome and process measures are used to quantify the provision of government services at the street block unit of analysis: street pavement quality, litter, street code violation notices, trash cans, vacant lot cleanliness, and the tree canopy. Backcloth characteristics such as racial heterogeneity, socio-economic status, and stability are included. The results inform more holistic discussions of public safety, that extend beyond police departments, to encompass local government departments more generally.