Title: Property Crime, Fear of Crime, and Social Control of Homelessness

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Abstract: Visible homelessness is frequently conflated with crime by the public, resulting in complaints to the police and city government. For individuals experiencing homelessness, complaints may result in criminalization, displacement, and property loss. Because little data exist on where individuals who are homeless live, it is difficult to disentangle neighborhood propensity to report crime or homelessness from the underlying distribution of the unsheltered population. This may induce a spurious association between crime and homelessness. We address this using a census of unsanctioned encampments joined to official records and survey data to measure the associations between visible homelessness, citizen complaints, property crime, and fear of crime. Preliminary results indicate encampments are unrelated to property crime or fear of victimization, and only weakly predict citizen complaints. In contrast, citizen complaints about homelessness are strongly predicted by property crime. Citizen complaints about homelessness may be driven more by property crime and social control capacity than visible homelessness. We discuss ramifications for our unhoused neighbors and next steps for examining the consequences of citizen complaints.