



CHAPTER 18

GATED COMMUNITIES AND CRIME IN THE UNITED STATES

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18.1 INTRODUCTION

THE idea that neighborhoods and crime are intimately connected has a long history in the field of criminology. Dating back to the era of the Chicago School of sociology, and particularly the work of Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay, researchers have systematically studied neighborhoods in the United States for decades to understand how characteristics of areas within a city are correlated with crime and delinquency. This expansive literature reveals that scholars have learned a tremendous amount about crime rates across neighborhoods, the correlates of neighborhood crime, and the clustering of crime and other social ills in neighborhoods, yielding an important set of “neighborhood facts” (Sampson 2006: 34–35). A vibrant area of research, the investigation of how communities and crime are linked continues today.

Arguably, the theory most associated with the communities and crime literature is social disorganization theory. Social disorganization theory is a theory of places rather than people; it argues that the collective social ties, cohesion, and other characteristics of neighborhoods influence local levels of informal social control, and thus crime (Sampson & Groves 1989; Shaw & McKay 1942). Social disorganization theory has a long history of documenting how negative social conditions such as low socioeconomic status and residential instability differentially, and disproportionately, occur across neighborhoods within the metropolis, and what role they play in neighborhood crime rates. The theory has devoted less attention, however, to specifying how broader social trends shape and impact the structures and processes of communities themselves.

One such important trend is the rising prevalence of gated communities and the growing number of people who choose to live within these residential areas. Gated



communities are private residential areas that use gates, walls, and fences to control who may enter the neighborhood. Since the 1980s, gated communities have become increasingly common across the United States and continue to attract large numbers of prospective residents (Blakely & Snyder 1997). Unfortunately, the precise extent of this trend is unknown. No comprehensive data set exists to document the exact number of gated communities in the United States, although prior research suggests some national-level estimates. In their seminal work on the subject, Blakely and Snyder (1997) estimated that in the 1990s, approximately 20,000 gated communities existed within the United States and that over three million households resided within their borders (see also Low 2003). Later, Sanchez and colleagues (2005) examined a nationally representative sample from the 2001 American Housing Survey (AHS) and reported over seven million “walled and fenced” communities (representing 5.9% of the sample) with over 16 million people living within such communities.¹ More recent estimates than these are difficult to obtain. Given strong consumer demand for homes in gated communities and the lucrative potential for residential developers (Blakely & Snyder 1997), however, there is little doubt that the current number of gated communities has increased considerably from earlier estimates.

Gated communities are found all across the United States, yet they are not distributed evenly across the spatial landscape. They are especially common in the American Sunbelt, which includes states such as Arizona, California, Florida, and Texas (Blakely & Snyder 1997; Romig 2005; Sanchez et al. 2005). Additionally, the growing prevalence of gated communities is not limited to the United States. Gated communities are emerging as a worldwide phenomenon with far-reaching social consequences. A growing literature and numerous researchers discuss the rise of these communities in nations across the world such as Ghana (Asiedu & Arku 2009), New Zealand (Dupuis & Thorns 2008), South Africa (Breetzke & Cohn 2013; Durlington 2006), and the United Kingdom (Atkinson & Flint 2004).

Given the rapid expansion and growing pervasiveness of gated communities in recent decades, it is essential for researchers to consider the implications of this emerging trend on various facets of social life. For the most part, existing studies tend to discuss gated communities and their impact in more abstract terms—for example, how the rise of gated communities reflects the growth of a “risk society” more generally (Dupuis & Thorns 2008)—or focus on case studies of particular communities. Accordingly, there remains a need for “collecting systematic empirical evidence, which is central to understanding the full impact of these enclaves on any society” (Vesselinov 2010: 989). Many questions remain unanswered. In particular, very little is known about the relationship between gated communities and crime, and the handful of studies that do exist provide mixed evidence for this relationship (Addington & Rennison 2013; Blakely & Snyder 1997; Breetzke & Cohn 2013; Wilson-Doenges 2000). In this chapter, we seek to augment this body of literature by analyzing the relationship between gated communities and crime across neighborhoods in Orange County, California, a county with a large number of gated communities (Le Goix 2005; Wilson-Doenges 2000) and considerable diversity in terms of population demographics and crime rates. Given the lack of

systematic data on gated communities, a key challenge for our analysis was developing a sample of gated communities. Drawing on professional real estate data, we identified home listings where the home was located within a gated community, geocoded the addresses, and identified all blocks containing at least one gated community home. We then analyzed the relationship between gated communities and both violent and property crime, respectively, while controlling for sociodemographic characteristics of the focal and nearby neighborhoods.

We begin by defining gated communities and situating the gated communities-crime relationship within existing scholarship and criminological theories. Next, we describe our data and methodological approach, and present findings from our analysis. We conclude by discussing the findings within the context of the study's limitations and by identifying some promising new directions for research on gated communities and crime.

18.2 DEFINING GATED COMMUNITIES

The essence of what constitutes a gated community includes several core elements. From their early research, Blakely and Snyder (1997: 2) outline the main components that define gated communities:

Residential areas with restricted access in which normally public spaces are privatized. They are security developments with designated perimeters, usually walls or fences, and controlled entrances that are intended to prevent penetration by non-residents. They include new developments and older areas retrofitted with gates and fences, and they are found from the inner cities to the exurbs and from the richest neighborhoods to the poorest.

Definitions of gated communities, such as this one, tend to emphasize the physical characteristics of these distinctive neighborhood types, characterizing gated communities as (1) residential developments, that are (2) enclosed by barriers such as walls or fences, with (3) gating mechanisms at community entrances that restrict who may enter the neighborhood (Atkinson & Flint 2004; Low 2003; Romig 2005; Stark 1998; Vesselinov 2008). As their name suggests, an iconic feature of gated communities is the presence of gating mechanisms that control access into the community. In some developments, authorized individuals drive up to an exterior console, enter an access code or swipe a keycard, and retract the gate to open the way into the community (Low 2003). In other developments, private guardhouses are stationed at community entrances and security personnel individually authorize vehicles with legitimate purposes to pass through the gates. Regardless of the entry mechanism, the use of community gating creates a semipermeable entrance into the community where only certain individuals may enter the neighborhood and, by definition, the remaining population is excluded. These gated entryways are generally used to control vehicle access along roadways, although

some gated communities feature even more selective barriers to entry by controlling pedestrian traffic as well. By erecting walls and fences around the development's exterior, gated communities can further limit opportunities for entry. Collectively, these physical barriers foster a sense of territoriality, establishing clearly defined boundaries that may dissuade nonresidents from entering the neighborhood (Felson & Boba 2010; Le Goix 2005).

The space within gated communities is *privatized* space, which includes the private status of features within the gates and walls (e.g., roadways, amenities) but also the internal governance and management of the community (Blakely & Snyder 1997; Vesselinov 2008). Gated communities fall within a larger designation of what are known as common interest developments (CIDs) (McKenzie 1994), where residents retain a communal interest and share in the collective neighborhood. As a safeguard for these shared community interests, CIDs establish internal governing bodies “where elected boards oversee the common property and establish covenants, conditions, and restrictions (CC&Rs) as part of the deed” (Vesselinov 2008: 539). These homeowners’ associations (HOAs) fulfill a variety of roles. For example, HOAs often arrange for municipal services such as garbage collection, employ private security to monitor the neighborhood, and handle maintenance of the community. These organizations also perform other administrative roles such as determining common regulations and standards for community residents, enforcing residents’ compliance with these regulations, and moderating disputes between residents. Thus, gated communities feature their own private systems of government that regulate what goes on in the neighborhood and require residents to follow contractual stipulations in order to remain a part of the community.

For many people, the phrase “gated community” connotes imagery of affluent, idyllic, and upper-class neighborhoods, although in truth there is greater variation across the demographic landscape of gated communities, as noted earlier in Blakely and Snyder’s (1997) definition. Sanchez and colleagues (2005: 285) observe that gated communities may feature both owner-occupied and renter-occupied households, and find that “owners and renters have significantly different demographic profiles.” Moreover, they find that socioeconomic status and income levels vary considerably across gated communities, a conclusion supported in other research (e.g. Blakely & Snyder 1997; Stark 1998; Wilson-Doenges 2000). Thus, the widely held belief that all gated communities are bastions of affluence is not accurate; rather, one might argue that affluent, high socioeconomic status gated communities represent a *type* of gated community. In turn, these varying conditions across gated communities suggest variation in the processes and outcomes often studied by neighborhood-level researchers, such as social organization and local crime rates, a point we return to later.

Building upon this discussion, we develop an operational definition of a gated community for the current study. First, a gated community is a residential area where gating mechanisms control who may enter the neighborhood and feature walls and fences along community borders. These exterior structures define the boundaries of the community and also distinguish the private space within from the public space without. Second, a gated community features private governance in the form of HOAs. As



discussed earlier, HOAs create a private system of rules and conditions that residents must follow in order to live in the neighborhood. These regulations, in turn, help shape the social atmosphere within a gated community and the types of residents who live there. Third, a gated community consists of owner-occupied homes rather than rental units. This distinction is important for conceptual reasons. Gated communities with rental properties do not feature HOAs, making owner- and renter-occupied communities distinct from one another in a critical way (Sanchez et al. 2005). Restricting our definition to homeowner-only gated communities ensures that our definition is internally consistent.

18.3 RESEARCH ON GATED COMMUNITIES

Beyond just being a popular commodity, gated communities represent an important shift in how we conceptualize neighborhoods and subsequently understand neighborhood-level characteristics and processes. The growing number of gated communities challenges several important assumptions surrounding neighborhood-level research. Particularly important is the difference between public and private space. Research generally treats neighborhoods as public spaces with open access to anyone. From this perspective, a resident in one neighborhood could pass into an adjoining neighborhood without restriction, engage in social interaction, or commit a crime (or perform any number of other actions). Gated communities, however, consist of privatized spaces that create a certain discontinuity in the social landscape. In particular, the private space within gated communities necessarily restricts the mobility patterns of nearby nonresidents and shapes the social interactions and networks of gated and nongated residents alike (e.g., Asiedu & Arku 2009; Blakely & Snyder 1997; Low 2003). Considerations such as these have important ramifications for criminological theories.

In the context of social disorganization theory, there are several reasons why one might seek to characterize gated communities as ideal, prototypical socially organized neighborhoods. In theory, the presence of a homeowners' association should reinforce social solidarity and shared values within the community, as HOAs dictate the collective rules and expectations that community members agree to follow. HOAs also support and reinforce social homogeneity among residents (Le Goix & Vesselinov 2014), critical to developing internal consensus according to social disorganization theory. Moreover, one might expect that privatized spaces made available only to community members would foster cohesion and social interaction, reinforcing social ties between neighbors. In gated communities with lifestyle amenities such as private parks, golf courses, swimming pools, or playgrounds, residents may not need to leave the confines of the gates to participate in their preferred activities and, as a result, may spend yet more time engaging socially with community members (Blakely & Snyder 1997). Conversely, nonresidents may find themselves unable to partake in the activities located within a private community and instead must seek other activity hubs. The reduction of shared



activity spaces between gated and nonresidents, then, may promote relations between community members but reduce the interactions and social ties between members and nonmembers residing within the same broader community (Lemanski 2006; Low 2003; Mantey 2017; but see Asiedu & Arku 2009).

At the same time, there are important reasons to question levels of social organization in gated communities. First, and despite their title, gated communities do not necessarily foster a sense of “community” among residents. Consistent with social disorganization theory, many neighbors within gated communities do interact and develop strong social ties through shared pastimes, activities, or participation in community-based organizations; yet research also finds that some residents remain consciously isolated from their gated peers (e.g., Blakely & Snyder 1997; Low 2003). Indeed, prior research supports the notion that gated communities are not inherently conducive toward a sense of community among residents. In her survey of gated and nongated community residents, Wilson-Doenges (2000) found that members of a high-income gated community reported a lower sense of community than residents of a comparable high-income nongated community, although sense of community was not significantly different between residents in low-income gated and nongated neighborhoods. Moreover, social interactions between residents may not be especially pronounced in all gated communities. As Blandy and Lister (2005: 294) find based on their qualitative research with gated community residents in the UK, “For the majority, a low level of informal associative contact with neighbours was both what they anticipated, and all that they wanted.” While these points also apply to social life in nongated neighborhoods, it is important to dispel common stereotypes depicting gated communities as idealized social havens, or as perfectly socially organized neighborhoods.

In light of social disorganization theory, one might also expect that gated communities would exhibit greater levels of informal social control than nongated communities, thereby reducing crime in gated enclaves. Informal social control reflects the capacity of a community to regulate its residents according to mutually desired goals, such as the desire to live in a safe and crime-free environment. Indeed, the financial resources available in comparatively affluent gated communities allow some HOAs to hire private security personnel to guard entrances, patrol the community, or perhaps both. Private security personnel monitor the access of nonresidents into the neighborhood, dissuade deviant or criminal behavior from occurring, and may intervene when such events occur. Social disorganization theory suggests that homogeneity and an internal consensus among neighborhood residents on important norms and values should also lead to greater levels of informal social control (Kornhauser 1978) such as the formation of neighborhood watch associations, where volunteer residents actively patrol and monitor the neighborhood (Blakely & Snyder 1997). While not all gated communities demonstrate strong social ties and cohesion, as noted earlier, there are certainly many gated neighborhoods that do feature strong consensus and shared investment, which bolsters informal social control. Thus, concerned residents may group together and act to enforce the rules and standards within their community, which should result in less crime.

Many features of gated communities also lend themselves to theories of environmental criminology such as routine activities theory (Cohen & Felson 1979) and situational

crime prevention (Clarke 1995). Indeed, some past studies on gated communities and crime have situated their research within these theoretical frameworks (Addington & Rennison 2013; Breetzke & Cohn 2013). As posited by Cohen and Felson (1979), routine activities theory consists of three central elements: (1) the presence of a suitable target, (2) the presence of a motivated offender, and (3) the absence of a capable guardian. When these elements converge in space and time, the likelihood of a crime occurring increases, whereas the lack of any of these elements may be sufficient to prevent a crime from occurring. Similarly, Clarke's (1995) theory of situational crime prevention enumerates various strategies, such as surveillance, target hardening, and controlled access, all of which focus on reducing opportunities for crime.

Of particular interest is the function of guardianship within gated communities and how the security implements located in these neighborhoods may impact local crime rates. Gated communities are designed to feature multiple layers of security, including gates, walls, and private security, which may dissuade potential offenders from entering and committing crimes (Branic, forthcoming; Cohen & Felson 1979; Felson & Boba 2010). It is likely, however, that the effectiveness of guardianship in gated communities depends on the level of securitization (i.e., the degree of *capable* guardianship discussed by Cohen and Felson (1979)). Luymes (1997: 198) describes how levels of physical security vary across gated communities, where increasingly sophisticated gating mechanisms (e.g., a 24-hour guarded gate vs. an unguarded electronic gate) improve controlled access into the neighborhood and more comprehensive community walls increase levels of "perimeter impermeability." Greater development of community gates and walls, Luymes argues, should correspond with greater levels of perceived security for the community. By extension, greater perceived security should translate to stronger, more efficacious guardianship against crime, although no research directly examines this hypothesis.

Gated communities may also play a role in shaping how neighborhoods relate to one another, an area of interest for communities and crime scholars. In their spatial analysis of southwestern US metropolitan areas, Le Goix and Vesselinov (2014) examined the social distance between gated and nongated communities in contiguous block groups, as reflected in levels of dissimilarity among neighborhood indicators of socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, and age. The authors find that gated communities contribute to patterns of social segregation, noting that "the level of differentiation between gated enclaves and their vicinities is higher than the differentiation usually observed in the urban area between two adjacent neighbourhoods" (635). Thus, gated communities exert spatial influences critical for understanding the interdependence between neighborhoods.

18.4 GATED COMMUNITIES AND INEQUALITY

Decades of research suggest that social segregation and inequality are central to the study of neighborhoods and crime (Hipp 2007; Massey & Denton 1993; Massey, Gross, &

Shibuya 1994; Squires & Kubrin 2006). Building upon this literature, emerging scholarship suggests how gated communities may reinforce or contribute to patterns of inequality and segregation (Atkinson & Flint 2004; Le Goix 2005; Le Goix & Vesselinov 2014; Low 2003; Vesselinov 2008; Vesselinov, Cazzesus, & Falk 2007), although the extent to which gated communities do this is likely dependent upon the area or region being studied. We focus our discussion on two types of inequality related to gated communities: (1) neighborhood selection and residential migration, and (2) social segregation.

As noted earlier, one of the key defining features of gated communities is the controlled access of nonresidents into the neighborhood; yet there are reasons to suspect that gated communities produce controlled access for *prospective* residents as well, unequally influencing who may move into the neighborhood. This issue relates more broadly to neighborhood selection—where individuals choose the types of neighborhoods that they would like to move into—and residential migration, the process by which individuals relocate to a new home. Research finds that not all individuals are equally able to move into particular neighborhoods (Sampson & Sharkey 2008; Squires & Kubrin 2006). A key limitation for potential in-movers to a neighborhood, gated or not, is a lack of necessary financial capital. For example, home mortgage loans, which individuals apply for to purchase a home, are important mechanisms influencing where potential residents may ultimately end up living, although access to these loans is not equal across the population (Squires & Kubrin 2006). Specifically, bias in the home mortgage lending industry precludes some, often lower-income individuals and minorities, from securing mortgage loans that would otherwise enable them to purchase homes (Ross & Turner 2005). Additionally, particular aspects of gated communities may further prevent some individuals from accessing the neighborhood. In addition to the high home values found in many gated communities, there are extra costs associated with living in these communities that might prevent some from establishing long-term residence. To fuel the services offered by HOAs, residents are required to pay regular financial dues that contribute to the broader community. These additional expenses exist in tandem with a system of contractual rules and regulations that all residents must follow in order to reside in the community. “These legal residential contracts,” Vesselinov (2008) argues, “serve to exclude potential buyers based on income, race, or ethnic origin” (539; see also Low 2003), thus reinforcing inequality.

Many consider gated communities a modern form of social exclusivity and residential segregation, where certain groups within society seclude themselves from other groups (e.g., Atkinson & Flint 2004; Blakely & Snyder 1997; Durlington 2006; Le Goix 2005; Le Goix & Vesselinov 2014; Low 2003; Vesselinov 2008; Vesselinov & Le Goix 2012; Vesselinov et al. 2007). In this respect, gated communities represent what have been termed contemporary “fortress-building” practices and mentalities (Blakely & Snyder 1997; Dupuis & Thorns 2008). A key driver behind the popularity of gated communities and subsequent residential segregation, Setha Low (2003) and others argue, is fear. Many seek out gated communities due to fear of crime and victimization, expecting that life within the gates will provide added security and safety. Moreover, prospective residents frequently elect to live in gated communities out of a fear of “others,” for

example, immigrants or those who contribute to “ethnic change” (Low 2003; see also Dupuis & Thorns 2008; Durington 2006). A common feature of gated communities is their homogeneity, where residents’ demographic characteristics tend to be much more similar than different (e.g., Blakely & Snyder 1997; Low 2003; Romig 2005). In this way, then, gated communities can contribute to—and reinforce—larger patterns of social segregation and inequality. For example, in their spatial analysis of gated communities in three US metropolitan areas, Vesselinov and Le Goix (2012) find that the emergence of gated communities produces a “new layer of suburbanization” (218). In particular, they argue that both the growing prevalence of gated communities in the modern era and the mass suburbanization movement (e.g., “white flight”) in past decades collectively create affluent, homogenous enclaves that seclude certain members of the population from others. Overall, then, the findings from the literature suggest that gated communities can contribute to social seclusion and segregation practices that reinforce divisions across different population groups, perpetuating social inequality. What are the implications of this for neighborhood crime rates? How do these broader patterns impact the neighborhood-crime relationship, both in and around gated communities?

18.5 GATED COMMUNITIES AND CRIME

Despite the rapid growth of gated communities in recent decades, only very few studies examine the relationship between these residential areas and local crime rates, and the studies that do provide mixed findings. Analyzing National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) data for the years 2010 and 2011, Addington and Rennison (2013) find that homes in gated communities experience comparatively fewer burglaries. The authors report 33% lower odds of burglary victimization for gated community households compared to similar households in nongated communities. Breetzke and Cohn (2013) also examine the relationship between gated communities and burglary, yet they reach the opposite conclusion. Examining communities in South Africa, the authors find that gated neighborhoods have higher risks of both daytime and nighttime burglaries, respectively. Finally, some research suggests that there may be no significant relationship between gated communities and crime. In their national-level study of gated communities in the United States, Blakely and Snyder (1997) analyzed a series of communities across the nation and concluded that gated communities offer no particular protection against crime. Instead, the authors found that gated communities may actually inhibit first responders such as police because of the gates that restrict easy access into the community. Likewise, Wilson-Doenges (2000) found no significant differences in crime levels between gated and nongated communities. In her study, Wilson-Doenges randomly surveyed residents from four California neighborhoods: two gated and two nongated. She split these pairs of communities, respectively, in terms of income levels, with one being affluent and one being lower-income. After accounting for neighborhood socioeconomic status, Wilson-Doenges (2000) found that crime rates did not

significantly differ across the gated and nongated communities in her sample. Given the limited number and mixed findings of these studies, clearly more research is warranted.

The present study analyzes the relationship between gated communities and crime in Orange County, California, an area known for its concentration of gated communities (Blakely & Snyder 1997; Le Goix 2005; Wilson-Doenges 2000). Our study makes several contributions to the current body of research. First, as just noted, findings on the relationship between gated communities and crime are both limited and inconclusive. Our study seeks to provide additional evidence and further the discussion surrounding these types of residential places. Second, we assess the relationship between gated communities and crime while including key control measures utilized in neighborhood-level research, adding to the robustness of our conclusions. Lastly, we incorporate spatial measures into the analysis, which allow us to examine the gated communities-crime relationship while accounting for the broader community context as well as address concerns related to spatial autocorrelation.

18.6 DATA AND METHODS

Before conducting analyses, it was necessary to develop a sample of gated communities for the study. Because no comprehensive data set of gated communities exists for the United States, prior research has generally utilized national-level survey data (Addington and Rennison 2013; Sanchez et al. 2005; Vesselinov 2008; 2012) and small-sample case study data (e.g., McKenzie 2005; Romig 2005; Wilson-Doenges 2000). Le Goix (2005), however, suggests an alternative and innovative approach to identifying the spatial locations of gated communities, which involves creating “a database derived from the same sources as a prospective homebuyer would use” (325). Specifically, Le Goix (2005) constructed his sample of gated communities using Thomas Guides maps, real estate advertisements, and county assessor’s maps. We draw from Le Goix’s approach and develop our sample of gated communities using real estate listings for Orange County, California. In particular, we utilize data from the Multiple Listing Service (MLS)² to identify individual homes classified as being within a gated community. We compiled records between May 2014 and January 2015 and obtained specific addresses for individual homes located within gated communities. We then geocoded these addresses using ArcGIS v10.2 and used the coordinate data to identify all Orange County census blocks containing at least one home listed as being located within a gated community. Thus, we capture the presence of a gated community as a binary measure, where a value of 1 indicates at least one gated community home within a particular block and a value of 0 indicates no gated community homes present within the block.

As a check on our data, we assessed the temporal ordering of the gated communities in our sample relative to the 2010 census measures in order to ensure that the gated communities in the sample were built *before* 2010, the year measured by our census variables. Otherwise, our demographic data might predate the construction of a particular

gated community and thus not necessarily represent the demographic characteristics therein. To make this assessment, we used the reported age of each gated community home, information that is included in the MLS listings, which served as a proxy for when the other homes in the neighborhood were constructed. We deemed this measure an effective proxy given that gated communities are often built as entire residential developments rather than individual homes. A tabulation of these data revealed that no gated community was developed later than 2010, suggesting that temporal ordering was not an issue for our analyses.

Drawing on annual, address-level crime incident data provided by police departments across Orange County, we constructed two dependent variables for our analyses: total property crimes and total violent crimes. For these measures, we averaged block-level counts of property (burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft) and violent (aggravated assault, murder, robbery) crimes for the years 2009 to 2011, respectively. Taking a three-year average allowed us to control for idiosyncratic fluctuations in crime levels between years, which may distort any observed effects in our statistical models.³

We constructed several control variables to include in our statistical models by drawing on data from the 2010 census. Social disorganization theory informed the selection of these variables, which are commonly utilized in neighborhood-level research (Kubrin & Weitzer 2003; Sampson & Groves 1989). First, we accounted for the racial and ethnic composition of each neighborhood using a series of population percentage measures for Asian, black, Latino, and other race, respectively (percent white population is the reference category). Similarly, we included a measure of percent foreign-born within each neighborhood as a growing literature demonstrates that immigrant concentration is negatively associated with neighborhood crime rates (see Kubrin & Desmond (2015) for a review of this literature). We also controlled for neighborhood residential stability by including a measure of the percentage of residents who reported living within the same home five years ago. Lastly, we included a factor measure for concentrated disadvantage in the neighborhood, which included (1) average household income, (2) percentage of residents with a bachelor's degree, and (3) percentage living at or below 125% of the poverty level.⁴ A principle components factor analysis on these variables revealed one factor with an eigenvalue greater than one and all factor loadings above 0.72.

In addition to these control variables, which represent the characteristics of each block in the sample, we also included spatially lagged versions of these variables in the models in order to account for the broader community context as well as potential spatial dependence between explanatory variables in adjacent blocks. The spatially lagged measures encompassed a half-mile buffer around each block; in other words, these variables captured the characteristics of all other blocks within a half-mile radius around the focal block. Thus, we were able to control for the characteristics of each particular block in the sample as well as the characteristics in adjacent blocks. There was no evidence of multicollinearity problems, as the variance inflation factor values (VIFs) were all below 5.9 (Kennedy 1998).

Prior to analysis, we imposed two restrictions on our sample. First, we dropped all blocks that contained zero population, as these blocks would have missing values for the

control variables. Second, list-wise deletion from analyses dropped any additional cases with missing data ($n = 2,921$; these blocks were primarily [90%] missing data on violent and property crimes, due to the fact that not all police departments in Orange County provided access to crime data). Our final sample included 13,564 blocks in Orange County, of which 844 blocks identified as having at least one gated community located within. Because our dependent variables, property and violent crimes, measured counts within each block, we used Poisson-based regression models for the analyses. To account for overdispersion in our dependent variables, we estimated negative binomial regression models where appropriate (Osgood 2000). Following Osgood's suggestion, we included total block population as an exposure term in the models and constrained the coefficient to a value of one, which made our models comparable to examining per capita crime rates.

We estimated these models in three stages. First, we included only gated community status of the block as a predictor in the model. Next, we added demographic control variables for the focal block into the model. Finally, we added spatially lagged control variables into the model. This three-step approach allowed us to examine the effects of community gating while gradually controlling for the demographic context around each block, bolstering confidence in our findings. We begin our discussion of the findings by examining the spatial distribution of gated community blocks in Orange County. Next, we present descriptive statistics for the sample as a whole as well as split by gated and nongated neighborhoods. Lastly, we discuss the results from our regression models.

18.7 FINDINGS

Figure 18.1 presents the distribution of gated communities across a subset of census blocks in Orange County, California.⁵ Blocks shaded black reflect the presence of gated communities, whereas unshaded blocks indicate nongated neighborhoods. Figure 18.1 provides some useful insights about how gated communities are distributed across the county as well as their spatial relationships with other neighborhoods.

An important—but not surprising—observation is that gated communities are not equally distributed county-wide but rather are clustered. Two emergent patterns are the clustering of gated communities near both the southern edge and central area of the map, although the characteristics of these two clusters are notably different. The former includes cities such as Newport Beach and Huntington Beach, which occupy the Orange County coastline and are comparatively affluent. For example, the median household income across all Huntington Beach blocks was approximately \$107,000, with a median poverty rate of just 6.5%. Moreover, 42% of residents, on average, held a bachelor's degree and the average length of residence in one's home was twelve and a half years. The latter, central cluster includes cities such as Garden Grove, Orange, and Santa Ana, which exhibit comparatively less affluence than those along the coast. For instance, the median household income in all Santa Ana blocks was approximately \$42,000 and the

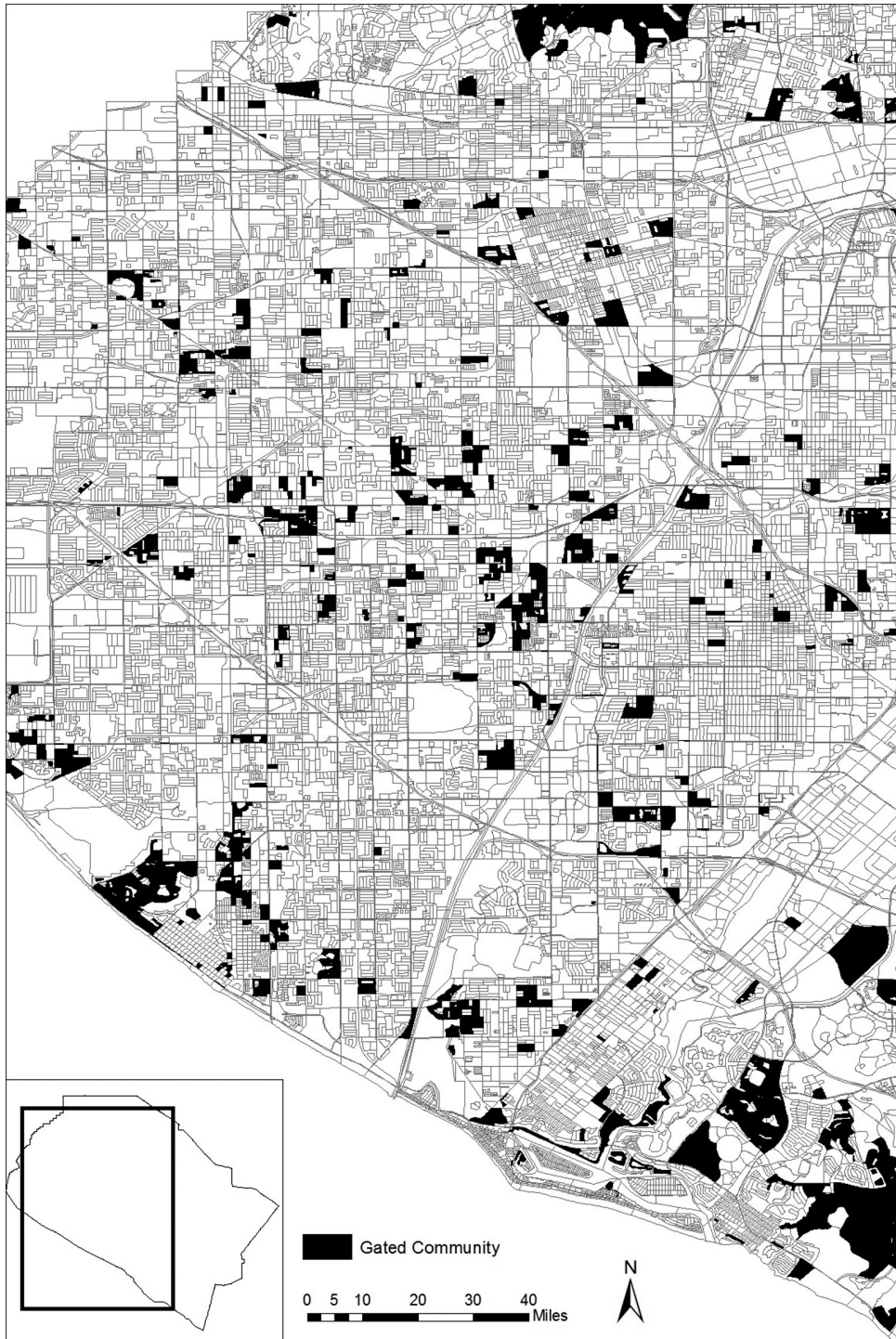


FIGURE 18.1 Gated communities in Orange County, California (U.S.), 2010



median poverty rate was about 20%, over three times that of Huntington Beach. While the percentage of residents with bachelor's degrees, on average, was lower in Santa Ana (31%), the average length of residence was also approximately 12 years. Thus, as suggested earlier, we find that gated communities cluster in cities with markedly different sociodemographic profiles, which may have implications for the relationship between gated communities and crime.

Table 18.1 presents a descriptive overview of the data in our sample. Overall, approximately 6% of the blocks in the sample contained at least one gated community home ($N = 844$). Descriptive statistics suggest some noteworthy differences between gated and nongated neighborhoods in Orange County. One salient difference is seen in the percentage of Latino residents, which was almost double in nongated communities. Moreover, the percentage of white residents in gated communities (63%) was higher, on average, than in nongated communities (51%). Differences between other characteristics, however, were less pronounced. While the percentage of Asian or "other" residents

Table 18.1 Descriptive Statistics for Gated, Nongated, and All Blocks in the Sample

	Gated Communities ($N = 844$)		Non-Gated Communities ($N = 12,720$)		Total ($N = 13,564$)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Violent Crime	0.19	0.51	0.17	0.47	0.17	0.47
Property Crime	2.40	5.14	1.53	4.36	1.58	4.42
Gated Community					0.06	0.24
Pct. Asian	18.67	20.85	16.69	20.72	16.81	20.73
Pct. Black	1.03	2.06	1.19	3.99	1.18	3.90
Pct. Latino	14.60	19.30	28.20	29.53	27.36	29.19
Pct. Other	3.11	5.02	2.90	5.19	2.92	5.18
Pct. White	62.58	27.08	51.01	30.21	51.73	30.16
Pct. Foreign-Born	30.63	40.53	35.52	41.01	35.21	40.99
Residential Stability	64.97	37.17	68.79	35.50	68.55	35.61
Avg. Income	140,966.20	154,091.00	134,076.50	170,116.60	134,505.20	169,166.70
Pct. Bachelor's Degree	42.63	40.85	40.31	39.49	40.45	39.58
Pct. Poverty	11.06	15.17	15.28	18.46	15.02	18.30

were somewhat higher in gated communities, the percentage of black residents was only slightly higher in nongated communities. The percentage of foreign-born residents was higher on average in nongated than gated communities. Similarly, residential stability was slightly higher in nongated communities. The three variables comprising the concentrated disadvantage factor also indicated some slight differences within the sample. Namely, gated communities featured greater average household incomes, a higher percentage of residents with bachelor's degrees, and a lower percentage of residents living in poverty than nongated communities. Finally, the descriptive statistics presented here show that gated communities have, on average, slightly higher counts of violent and property crime, contrary to expectations. However, these crime measures do not account for the total population living within each neighborhood. Converting the crime measures into rates shows that gated communities in the sample averaged 0.26 violent crimes per 100 residents, whereas in nongated neighborhoods the average rate was 0.61 violent incidents per 100 people. Additionally, gated communities averaged 3.28 property crimes per 100 people, while non-gated neighborhoods averaged 6 incidents per 100 people.

We begin presenting our regression results by focusing on the violent crime models as displayed in Table 18.2. Model 1, which included only the binary gated community predictor, reveals a negative relationship between blocks classified as gated communities and levels of violent crime. Gated community blocks were associated with 42.4% fewer violent crimes $[(\exp(-0.551)-1) * 100]$ compared to blocks not designated as gated communities. As reflected in Model 2 of Table 18.2, this negative relationship between community gating and violent crime persisted after adding the control variables; controlling for important neighborhood demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, gated communities were still associated with 28.6% fewer violent crimes. Finally, the addition of spatially lagged variables in Model 3 only slightly reduced this effect, where the presence of gated communities corresponded with a 22.7% decrease in expected violent crimes. Overall, then, we find that gated community blocks were consistently and negatively related to counts of violent crimes even after controlling for neighborhood-level characteristics, in line with the findings of Addington and Rennison (2013).

The violent crime models reveal several significant relationships between neighborhood-level characteristics and crime. As shown in Model 3, higher levels of residential stability were associated with lower violent crime rates in the focal block, consistent with social disorganization theory. To contextualize this finding, we multiplied the coefficient by the average residential stability value for the sample (68.55%) and found that a neighborhood with an average level of stability corresponded with 47.8% fewer expected violent crimes, net of controls. At the same time, however, the model also indicated that greater stability in the area surrounding the block was associated with slightly higher levels of expected crime, a somewhat puzzling finding. The findings for concentrated disadvantage were similarly puzzling; whereas greater levels of disadvantage in the surrounding area were associated with greater levels of crime, consistent with the predictions of social disorganization theory, disadvantage in the focal block corresponded with fewer violent crimes. Previous research has identified similar

Table 18.2 Poisson and Negative Binomial Regression Models Predicting Violent Crime in Orange County, CA, Blocks ($N = 13,564$)

	Model 1 ^a	Model 2 ^b	Model 3 ^b
Gated Community	-.551*** (0.086)	-.337*** (0.083)	-.258** (0.084)
Pct. Asian		.003 (0.002)	.005* (0.003)
Pct. Black		.048*** (0.005)	.033*** (0.007)
Pct. Latino		.020*** (0.001)	.007*** (0.002)
Pct. Other		.006 (0.010)	.022* (0.009)
Pct. Foreign-Born		.001 (0.001)	.000 (0.001)
Residential Stability		-.009*** (0.001)	-.007*** (0.001)
Concentrated Disadvantage		-.048** (0.016)	-.056*** (0.016)
Pct. Asian (0.5 mile)			-.007 (0.004)
Pct. Black (0.5 mile)			.106*** (0.020)
Pct. Latino (0.5 mile)			.001 (0.003)
Pct. Other (0.5 mile)			-.166*** (0.031)
Pct. Foreign-Born (0.5 mile)			-.014*** (0.004)
Residential Stability (0.5 mile)			.005 (0.003)
Concentrated Disadvantage (0.5 mile)			.071*** (0.006)
Constant	-6.613*** (0.022)	-7.131*** (0.093)	-6.282*** (0.304)
LR Chi ²	47.28***	1,252.51***	1,575.23***

Note: Results presented as logged odds coefficients and (standard errors).

^a Negative binomial regression model.

^b Poisson regression model.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

mixed findings regarding the impact of concentrated disadvantage (both in the focal and nearby areas) on crime at smaller units of analysis (Wo, Hipp, & Boessen 2016: 234).

Next, we discuss the results for the property crime models presented in Table 18.3. Similar to findings for violent crime, gated community blocks were associated with lower property crime rates. Model 4, or the baseline model, indicated that gated communities corresponded with a 22.8% reduction in expected property crimes compared to nongated blocks in the sample. This negative relationship persisted after including control variables for the focal block (Model 5), where the gated community indicator was associated with a 22.3% reduction in expected property crimes, and including spatially lagged control variables (Model 6) adjusted this effect to a 16.9% reduction in expected property crimes. Thus, the gated community variable demonstrated a robust negative relationship with property crime, consistent with findings from previous research (Addington & Rennison 2013).

Unlike in the violent crime models, we found that residential stability exerted a consistent negative effect on property crime at both the focal and surrounding levels, consistent with social disorganization theory. In other words, greater levels of stability in the focal tract as well as nearby were associated with fewer property crimes. Yet concentrated disadvantage continued to demonstrate a mixed relationship with crime rates. Each one-point increase in the disadvantage factor corresponded with an 8.4% decrease in expected property crimes, whereas a one-point increase in disadvantage in the surrounding area was associated with a 5.5% increase in property crimes, net of controls. Again, these mixed findings for concentrated disadvantage have been documented in similar block-level crime research (Wo et al. 2016).

18.8 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The study of neighborhoods and crime has a long history in the United States. Research in this vein typically has reflected the changing dynamics of America's urban centers. Consider, for example, the work of the Chicago School scholars, which developed during the first part of the 20th century—a period marked by rapid political, economic, and social change that affected virtually all aspects of life. Industrialization, urbanization, and immigration were central features of the American landscape during this time, and these changes paved the way for early research on how communities and crime may be linked (Shaw & McKay 1942). Following this foundational work, scholars have examined varying facets of the neighborhoods-crime nexus as US cities continue to evolve and undergo significant transformations such as deindustrialization (e.g., Sampson & Wilson 1995) and gentrification (e.g., Hwang & Sampson 2014), among others.

Arguably one of the most significant shifts in the American landscape over the last few decades is the rapid expansion of gated communities, especially in the Sunbelt states. As we detailed at the outset of the chapter, the number of gated communities in the United States has been steadily rising since the 1990s (Blakely & Snyder 1997). As community

Table 18.3 Negative Binomial Regression Models Predicting Property Crime in Orange County, CA, Blocks ($N = 13,564$)

	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Gated Community	-.259** (0.052)	-.253*** (0.047)	-.185*** (0.047)
Pct. Asian		.001 (0.001)	.005*** (0.001)
Pct. Black		.026*** (0.003)	.022*** (0.003)
Pct. Latino		-.000 (0.000)	-.002* (0.001)
Pct. Other		.017*** (0.003)	.019*** (0.003)
Pct. Foreign-Born		.002*** (0.000)	.000 (0.000)
Residential Stability		-.014*** (0.001)	-.012*** (0.001)
Concentrated Disadvantage		-.065** (0.015)	-.087*** (0.015)
Pct. Asian (0.5 mile)			-.004* (0.002)
Pct. Black (0.5 mile)			.057*** (0.014)
Pct. Latino (0.5 mile)			-.006*** (0.002)
Pct. Other (0.5 mile)			-.042** (0.013)
Pct. Foreign-Born (0.5 mile)			-.012*** (0.002)
Residential Stability (0.5 mile)			-.006** (0.002)
Concentrated Disadvantage (0.5 mile)			.054*** (0.003)
Constant	-4.153*** (0.014)	-3.521*** (0.044)	-2.411*** (0.003)
LR Chi ²	24.22**	1,984.97***	2,462.83***

Note: Results presented as logged odds coefficients and (standard errors).

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

gating becomes increasingly prevalent, researchers have spent considerable time and energy examining the implications of this emerging trend on various facets of social life, including the interactions between residents (Asiedu & Arku 2009; Blandy & Lister 2005; Durlington 2006) and patterns of social segregation and inequality (Atkinson & Flint 2004; Durlington 2006; Le Goix 2005; Le Goix & Vesselinov 2014; Low 2003). Surprisingly, however, communities and crime scholars have been near silent on how the rise in gated communities may be impacting neighborhood crime rates. There are only a handful of studies on crime in and around gated communities, and to date they have produced mixed findings. For this reason, we know very little about gated communities and crime in the United States today.

The aim of this study has been to augment this small body of literature by analyzing the relationship between gated communities and crime across neighborhoods in Orange County, California. In doing so, we created a unique data set that draws on professional real estate data to identify where gated communities are located. Our findings show a consistent negative relationship between gated communities and crime. In particular, the presence of gated communities corresponded with a 22% decrease in expected violent crimes and a 17% decrease in expected property crimes in Orange County, after controlling for the standard neighborhood correlates of crime and taking into account broader spatial dynamics. These findings are consistent with Addington and Rennison (2013), although their study only examined the crime of burglary. Despite corroborating these earlier findings, it is premature to conclude that gated communities are simply safer than nongated communities, as much more research is necessary to fully tease out the nexus between gated communities and crime.

Findings from this study bear implications for contemporary theories of neighborhoods and neighborhood-level processes. For example, the findings from our study seem to support the arguments of social disorganization theory. Recall that this theory suggests that neighborhoods marked by high socioeconomic status, residential stability, and racial/ethnic homogeneity, among other factors, are likely to experience lower crime rates, in large part because they generate stronger social ties among residents, which activate informal social control and prevent crime. Gated communities share many of these characteristics; as presented in Table 18.1, they are generally places with high residential stability and high average incomes. Moreover, as previously discussed, research finds that gated communities are typically homogenous along demographic characteristics (Sanchez et al. 2005). Finally, gated communities often feature mechanisms of informal social control, such as neighborhood watch organizations and private security personnel, that can be important deterrents to local crime rates. Unfortunately, we do not have direct measures of these social processes, so at this point we are only able to speculate that the reason gated communities exhibit lower crime rates in our study is due to the mechanisms outlined in social disorganization theory.

Of course, our findings need to be interpreted within the context of the study's limitations. One important limitation is our operationalization of gated communities, which is somewhat rudimentary. In the current study, utilizing data from the Multiple Listing Service (MLS), we capture the presence of a gated community as a binary measure,

where a value of 1 indicates at least one gated community home within a particular block and a value of 0 indicates no gated community homes present within the block. There are shortcomings to this approach. First, this coding method relies on home-listing data, which provide a useful avenue for identifying the locations of gated communities but may not be entirely exhaustive. We minimized this potential shortcoming by collecting realtor data over the course of several months, thus attempting to properly identify as many gated communities as possible, although we cannot determine the extent to which some communities may be missing from the sample. Second, using a binary measure of a gated community assumes homogeneity across gated communities rather than heterogeneity. In other words, treating all gated communities as conceptually similar (i.e., simply a value of 1) neglects important differences in design and organization that may impact crime rates, social processes, or other outcomes. Prior literature suggests some important ways that gated communities vary—for example, whether communities are designed to foster prestige, lifestyle, or security for residents (Blakely & Snyder 1997; see also Grant & Mittelsteadt 2004)—that our operationalization does not account for.

Yet this limitation is not unique to our study, and other researchers have faced similar challenges, owing largely to the fact that no comprehensive data set of gated communities exists for the United States. As we noted earlier, prior research typically utilizes national-level survey data (Addington & Rennison 2013; Sanchez et al. 2005; Vesselinov 2008; 2012) and small-sample case study data (McKenzie 2005; Romig 2005), both of which have their own limitations. Still, future researchers should attempt to more accurately and comprehensively capture the presence of gated communities beyond the binary measures we employed in the current study.

Another limitation of the current study is the fact that our data span a very short and specific time period, which raises questions both about whether the findings would be replicated in a different historical time period (for example, during the 2007–2008 housing market collapse) and whether a more dynamic methodological approach would yield similar findings. Concerning the latter point, our analysis reflects a cross-sectional analysis of the gated communities and crime relationship. Yet as we discussed earlier, there has been an exponential growth in the number of gated communities over time, and their rising prevalence has continued to shape the social landscape. Thus, longitudinal approaches to studying gated communities would help to bolster the findings of existing research.

A final limitation involves the generalizability of our findings. Because our study focused solely on neighborhoods in Orange County, California, our ability to extend these findings to other places—whether in the Sunbelt, across the United States, or in contrast to other nations—is limited. For example, while our study found a negative relationship between gated communities and crime, Breetzke and Cohn (2013) find a positive relationship in their analysis in South Africa. Important social, cultural, and historical differences between these two parts of the world may have influenced the difference in conclusions.

In sum, then, while the findings from the current study help to inform scholarship on gated communities, much work remains to be done. Future research should continue to analyze crime in and around gated communities, and build upon existing research—not

in the least because gated communities are likely to remain popular for the foreseeable future.

NOTES

1. Sanchez and colleagues' definition is more inclusive than that used by Blakely and Snyder, which limits our ability to make comparisons between the two studies. While gated communities are in fact "walled and fenced," the definition used by Sanchez et al. also includes places such as military housing, which fall outside of what most researchers consider a gated community (Addington & Rennison 2013; Vesselinov 2008).
2. The Multiple Listing Service (MLS) is a professional realtor database that records detailed information on all homes currently listed on the real estate market. These data provide many characteristics of the individual home and attributes of the broader community where it resides, including whether or not the home exists within a gated community. The professional nature of the data set bolsters our confidence in the quality and accuracy of these data.
3. We acknowledge a key limitation of our study, as with nearly all communities and crime studies, is an inability to identify certain attributes of offenders. In this particular case, we are unable to distinguish whether crime rates within gated communities reflect crimes committed by outsiders or gated community residents.
4. The census does not provide these variables at the block level, so we imputed the measures based on other variables available in the census data (see Boessen and Hipp 2015 for greater detail on this approach).
5. Due to the small spatial scale of census blocks, presenting an overview of the entire county would be difficult to interpret and less than intuitive compared to maps presenting data at, for example, the census tract level. Thus, we focus on a subset of blocks contained within the larger county.

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