

Neighborhood Impacts of Homeless Encampment Cleanings in Los Angeles

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Stanford University · Evidence, Experience, and Pathways – A Convening on Unsheltered Homelessness in LA

Research Question

What are the local effects and spatial spillovers of encampment cleanings on visible homelessness and neighborhood outcomes in Los Angeles, from 2016–2023?

Background & Data

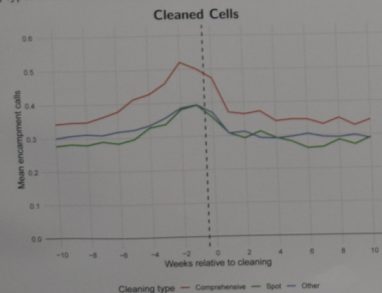
- Unsheltered homelessness has become one of LA's most pressing policy challenges
- Cities increasingly rely on encampment cleanings to address public health and safety concerns, but cleanings may disrupt access to services and social networks for people experiencing homelessness (PEH)
- Do cleanings reduce visible homelessness, or do they displace vulnerable populations to other locations?
- Cleanings:** LASAN comprehensive cleanings, spot cleanings, other; Caltrans highway cleanings
- 311 calls:** myLA311 encampment reports – proxy for visible homelessness (reflects both encampment presence and neighborhood reporting behavior)
- All data geocoded to 200m × 200m grid cells



Descriptive Trends

What are the trends in 311 encampment reports in the weeks before and after LASAN comprehensive cleanings and spot cleanings?

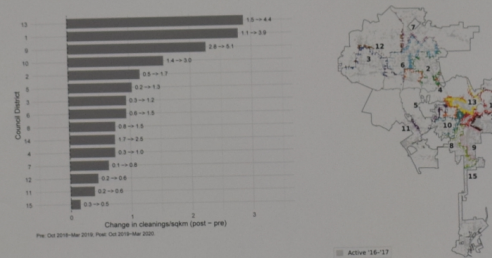
- Restrictions:** cells receive a cleaning type at $k = 0$; not cleaned in the preceding 4 weeks
- Cleaning types inferred from LASAN PIMS resolution field; missings grouped with "other"



CARE Border DiD: Design

Does more cleaning activity reduce visible homelessness across a district? The Oct. 2019 CARE (Comprehensive Cleaning and Rapid Engagement) expansion provides a quasi-experiment:

- Expansion assigned each CD a dedicated cleaning team, with districts setting deployment priorities → sharp, persistent cleaning intensity discontinuities at CD borders
- Compare cells within 600m of CD borders, pre- vs. post-CARE (Oct. 2018–Mar. 2019 vs. Oct. 2019–Mar. 2020)
- Sample restricted to cells with baseline encampment activity (at least 1 encampment 311 call or cleaning, 2016–2017)



Estimating equations:

First stage:

$$\text{CleaningRate}_{it} = \alpha_c + \delta_t + \beta \cdot (\Delta_d \times \text{Post}_t) + \varepsilon_{it}$$

Reduced form:

$$Y_{it} = \alpha_c + \delta_t + \pi \cdot (\Delta_d \times \text{Post}_t) + \varepsilon_{it}$$

- Δ_d : CD-level change in cleaning intensity (CARE dosage)
- α_c : cell FE; δ_t : month FE; SEs clustered by CD

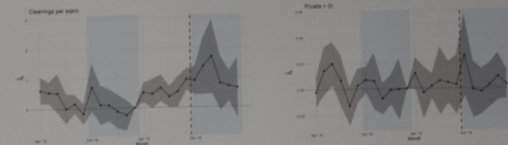
CARE Border DiD: Main Results

	Cleanings/sqkm	P(calls > 0)	1(New encamp.)	1(Cleared encamp.)
CARE dosage	0.928***	0.005	0.010***	0.009*
× Post	(0.243)	(0.007)	(0.003)	(0.005)
Pre-period mean	2.111	0.204	0.097	0.098
Observations	29,988	29,988	29,988	29,988

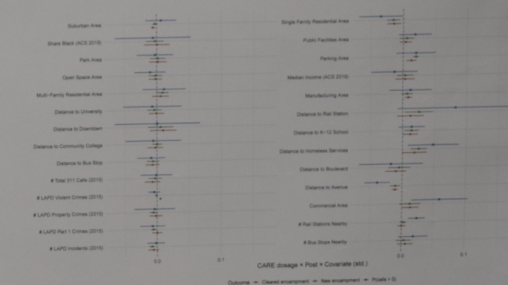
Cell and month FE; SEs clustered by CD. 1(New encamp.) = 1 if calls > 0 and calls_{t-1} = 0; 1(Cleared encamp.) = 1 if calls = 0 and calls_{t-1} > 0. ***p < 0.01, **p < 0.05, *p < 0.1.

- Strong first stage** ($\beta \approx 0.93$, $p < 0.01$): CD-level CARE dosage passes through to border cells
- No statistically detectable reduction in the likelihood of 311 calls in districts with higher cleaning intensity
- But the descriptive trends show reduced 311 call activity within a cell after a cleaning – what explains the null at a broader geography?
- Decomposition:** districts with more cleaning activity see both faster clearance of existing encampments (col. 4) and new encampments appearing where previously absent (col. 3)
- Consistent with evidence that cleanings produce only temporary neighborhood-level reductions in visible homelessness (Ward, Garvey, and Hunter 2023, 2024) and reinforces concerns about the consequences of displacement for PEH and their communities (Abramson et al. 2024)

Pre-Trends Validation



CARE Border DiD: Heterogeneous Effects



Key Findings

- Encampment calls decrease locally after cleanings: ~30% decline in 311 encampment calls at treated locations
- No aggregate reduction in calls: districts with larger CARE-induced increases in cleaning activity show no statistically detectable decline in the overall likelihood of encampment reports
- Cleanings produce offsetting dynamics: higher cleaning intensity accelerates clearance of existing encampments, but also increases the appearance of new encampments in previously quiet cells – the two roughly offset
- Implication:** displacement of visible homelessness rather than resolution, particularly given limited shelter capacity during the study period (Grants Pass v. Johnson, 2024)

Next Steps

- Where are PEH displaced after cleanings?
 - Formalize short-run local effects of cleanings (synthetic control / synthetic DiD)
 - Trace PEH displacement using GPS mobility data (Veraset)
 - Use street-view imagery to improve encampment detection
- What are the broader impacts of cleanings?
 - PEH welfare: hospital visits (HCAI), shelter entries (HMIS), mortality
 - Neighborhood outcomes: crime (LAPD), foot traffic (Veraset), retail sales (CDTFA), rents (RentHub), housing prices (Cotality), transit ridership (LA Metro)
- How do outcomes vary under alternative policy regimes?
 - Evaluate enforcement under greater shelter availability
 - Structural location choice model to assess counterfactual enforcement and capacity configurations

Acknowledgements

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