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Business environment ecology and crime: A robust test across 182 cities

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ABSTRACT

Studies assessing the question of how certain types of business establishments are related to the level of crime on blocks typically do not account for the general business context of those blocks. The present study extends one previous study that did so by using a large sample of blocks across 182 cities in the U.S. We assess whether measuring the general business context of blocks as three broad categories of businesses—consumer-facing businesses, blue-collar businesses, and white-collar businesses—along with the heterogeneity of consumer businesses on a block can explain where crime occurs. The study finds that these four measures explain much of the variation in crime due to businesses across blocks. Furthermore, whereas 12 specific types of businesses exhibit strong relationships with crime when not accounting for this business context, their relationships with crime greatly diminish, or completely evaporate, once accounting for the general business context. Finally, blocks with more consumer business heterogeneity have higher levels of crime, and this relationship is stronger in small population cities and in low population areas.