

Teasing out the impact of Airbnb listings on neighborhood crime

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A new study on the effects of Airbnb listings on Boston neighborhoods suggests that the prevalence of listings may hamper local social dynamics that prevent crime. However, tourists themselves do not appear to

generate or attract higher levels of crime. Babak Heydari, Daniel T. O'Brien, and Laiyang Ke of Northeastern University in Boston, MA, U.S. present these findings in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* on July 14, 2021.

Widespread sentiment holds that Airbnb listings cause increased [crime](#) in residential [neighborhoods](#). However, there has been limited research to explore and clarify this link.

To better understand the relationship between Airbnb listings and crime, Heydari and colleagues conducted a statistical analysis of listings and data on different types of crime (using categories of 911 calls) in Boston, MA. Covering a period from 2011 to 2017, they focused on two mechanisms by which the presence of short-term rentals might boost crime. First, tourists themselves may generate or attract crime. Second, the presence of Airbnb listings may disrupt local social dynamics that would normally mitigate or prevent crime.

The researchers found that the prevalence of Airbnb listings in a given neighborhood was linked to higher rates of violence, but not to public social disorder or private conflict. In addition, this link did not appear immediately after the listings became available to tourists, but rather arose and grew over several years.

These findings, especially the lag in increased violence, suggest that Airbnb tourists themselves do not cause or attract greater amounts of crime. Instead, an increased proportion of a neighborhood's housing units being converted to short-term rentals may gradually erode local social dynamics, leading to increased violence.

These findings could help [urban planners](#) and [policy makers](#) make better-informed decisions related to the impact of Airbnb listings on neighborhoods. These findings could also be useful for platform

companies to create more effective [platform](#) governance and self-regulating mechanisms. Future research could explore whether similar results are seen in other cities, including those of difference sizes or demographics. Additional studies could also investigate other facets of the presence of Airbnb listings in neighborhoods.

Heydari says: "We show that it's not the number of Airbnb tourists who stay in a neighborhood that causes increase in criminal activities, but it's the creation of transient properties spread throughout a neighborhood that undermines social organization and social capital and over time and can cause disorder and criminal activities as a result.

Heydari adds, "This paper is one of the first papers that measures the causal social impact of sharing platforms at neighborhood level for short-term rental platforms [and] quantifies the causal effect of short-term rentals on criminal activities and disorders in neighborhoods. More importantly, [this paper] identifies the mechanism behind such effects. Identifying causal mechanism is for more effective governance of these platforms, either through government regulations or via designing self-regulating [mechanism](#) by platforms themselves."

More information: Ke L, T. O'Brien D, Heydari B (2021) Airbnb and neighborhood crime: The incursion of tourists or the erosion of local social dynamics? *PLoS ONE* 16(7): e0253315.

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