Safety, Scenery, and Schools in Long Beach, CA: Consistency of Survey and External Data
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Introduction
The Knight Foundation conducted the Soul of the Community Survey in 2008, 2009, and 2010, with about 43,000 total respondents in 26 US cities. Respondents rated their attachment to the community and the quality of its social and entertainment offerings, aesthetics, government, and other features.

Abstract
Are respondents’ opinions in the survey consistent with external data on crimes, park availability, and school quality? We investigate the relationship between the zip code level for Long Beach, CA (the only city in the survey with zip code information) and respondents’ ratings of local safety and parks with external data.

Methods
We have 1,208 total respondents from Long Beach (about 400 in each of 3 years), which were combined to ensure a large enough sample from each zip code.

Income and Demographics
The weighted distribution of respondents by zip code is similar to the 2010 US Census population distribution. Long Beach is a large coastal city south of Los Angeles, with a diverse population and the second busiest port in the US.

The survey data show a stark demographic divide within the city, with the western areas having more racial minorities and a less wealthy population.

Local Crime and Safety —Consistent
Respondents were asked to rate both (1) how safe they feel walking home at night, and (2) how high they perceive crime rates to be in their community (the interpretation of ‘community’ was left to the respondent).

Counts of crimes committed against property or persons in 2010 were aggregated from police reporting districts (RDs) to zip codes using shapefiles. Respondents’ reporting of feeling unsafe (■) was significantly correlated with actual crime rates (against property or persons) by zip code.

Respondents’ reporting of high crime in their community (▲) was not significantly correlated with crime rates. The safety question asks specifically about safety near one’s home, but when rating crime, respondents may think about their city overall.

Public School Quality —Inconsistent
Respondents were asked to rate the quality of local public schools.

We use the school’s 2010 Academic Performance Index (API) score from the California Department of Education as a proxy for school quality.

API is a number (200–1,000) summarizing performance on statewide assessments. The city school district has won the National Broad Prize for Urban Education for academic performance while improving achievement for minority and low-income students.

Availability of Parks —Consistent
Respondents were asked to rate the availability of parks and green spaces. These responses match well with actual park locations. Though golf courses are not public parks, their presence may still positively affect the sense of local green spaces.

Perception of school quality
The right side of the figure on the right displays each zip code’s red shade from the map of school quality ratings.

No information is available on respondents’ children’s school attendance.

The right figure shows that respondents from wealthier zip codes rate school quality worse, but schools there actually have higher API. Why the reverse association?

A possible explanation:
In a 2013 poll of Californians, wealthier families were less concerned about school dropout rates, and fewer supported increasing funding to schools with more low-income or English-learning students.

Schools in wealthier areas may have higher API if they enroll students with higher socioeconomic status, but wealthier respondents may still rate schools low due to lack of concern for public education and for issues affecting lower-income students.

References
• Shapefiles of Long Beach city boundary, schools, parks, and police RDs, and crime reports were from the Long Beach city government website. The zip code boundary shapefile and population totals were from the US Census Bureau. School APIs were from the California Department of Education. Supplemental information came from the Port of Long Beach and LBUSD websites.
