Gated Communities and Their Consequences: A Systematic Review of Crime, Safety Perceptions, and Other Effects (2000-2024)

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Abstract

This article systematically reviews over two decades of English-language literature on gated communities (GCs) in urban and rural settings. Searching peer-reviewed articles from Scopus and Web of Science published between 2000 and 2024, we identified 202 studies for analysis. Findings indicate a geographical shift in research from Western countries to those of the Global South, where GCs proliferate, reflecting global trends in privatised, exclusive living. Increased privacy, exclusivity, and cohesiveness are associated with GCs, but long-term evidence on crime reduction is mixed, with several studies linking CGs with a false sense of security, spatial segregation, greater car dependency, and reduced walkability. The article concludes by exploring the role of technology in the gating process and analysing recent research shifts that uncover the paradoxical role of GCs in relation to women's safety.

1. Introduction

Gated communities (GCs) have proliferated globally, ranging from small residential enclaves to large, self-contained neighbourhoods (Bekleyen & Yilmaz-Ay, 2016; Grant et al., 2004; Seker, 2019; Webster, 2001). They are areas characterised by restricted access, often enclosed by walls or fences and monitored by security personnel or CCTV systems. In many cases, GCs also have amenities such as shops and leisure facilities, creating a self-sustained environment. As Atkinson and Blandy (2005, p. 177) note, definitions of GCs vary but generally converge around "housing developments that restrict public access, usually through the use of gates, booms, walls, and fences", but a definitive definition is contested by Roitman & Scopes (2012).

Debate around the role and future of gated communities remains contentious and context-dependent. In some regions, GCs are seen as a necessary solution for future residential security (Bekleyen & Yilmaz-Ay, 2016), while in parts of Europe, they are dismissed as a "failed product" (Loader et al., 2015). This divergence reflects broader debates about urban planning, social integration, and inequality, with opinions on GCs varying according to cultural, social, and geographic context. Some view them as a form of exclusivity and enhanced security, while others argue that they reinforce social divisions and exacerbate segregation.

One of the most extensive reviews on GCs by Blandy et al. (2004) remains a foundational reference, but it is virtually limited to the UK context and is now outdated. Building on Blandy et al. (2004), this article examines the contemporary literature on GCs, providing a global and up-to-date overview of the current state of the art of this area, expanding the scope by addressing new urban challenges such as gender dynamics, environmental sustainability, and the role of technology in gating and urban segmentation. We conducted a systematic literature review analysing 202 peer-reviewed articles published between 2000 and 2024, sourced from Scopus and Web of Science.

This review aims to uncover the factors influencing the development, diffusion, and effects of GCs within varying geographical and socio-political contexts, with a particular focus on the impact of GCs on crime and safety. It also explores other themes such as gendered safety, governance, social cohesion, public

health and mobility, technology, and sustainability that have indirect or direct links to (or are affected by) actual crime or the perceptions of safety in GCs. For example, safety perceptions impact how people move around and interact in the neighbourhoods, which impacts mobility, public health, and the social and environmental sustainability of the community. The review is divided into two main parts: a bibliometric analysis and a thematic analysis. The bibliometric analysis examines publication trends and identifies key contributors in GC research. Specifically, the review seeks to investigate the geographical and temporal trends in GC studies and the types of authorship, methods, and journals in GC research. The thematic analysis is structured around ten guiding questions. Together, these analyses provide a comprehensive understanding of the development, impact, and future directions of gated communities as a research field on a global scale, answering the following questions:

1. What are contemporary gated communities like (cultural, local, and global contexts)?
2. What are the triggers or drivers of gated communities?
3. How do gated communities affect actual crime rates and victimisation?
4. How do gated communities affect perceptions of safety inside and outside the gates?
5. What impact do GCs have on gendered violence and women's perceptions of safety?
6. How do gated communities affect the city as a whole?
7. What form of governance do GCs have?
8. What role does technology play in enabling, supporting, or challenging gated communities?
9. What are the effects of GCs on mobility, public health, and other things?
10. How do gated communities affect sustainability and environmental challenges?

The article consists of six parts. First, we describe the methodology, followed by results, bibliometric analysis, and the thematic section in which these questions will be discussed. The final sections are the discussion, conclusions, and recommendations.

2. Methodology

A systematic review seeks to compile all evidence that meets the predefined eligibility criteria to address specific research questions and uses systematic and documented methods to minimise bias (Krnic Martinic et al., 2019). A comprehensive search for academic articles in English was conducted using two different databases, Scopus and Web of Science. The steps applied to identify the relevant and comprehensive literature to be used in the review are illustrated in the Prisma flow diagram in Fig. 1.

First, we conducted a keyword search in each of the databases (Table 1 in the Appendix). A total of 1,075 articles were retrieved; however, these were almost immediately narrowed down to 536 after we had entered additional thematic keywords in the searches in each database. Two of the authors of this article reviewed the list independently and made two separate selections, and later compared these selections with each other with about 75–80% matching. A total of 536 articles were identified for the review. The breakdown of how many articles were generated per keyword and database is seen in

Table 1 in the Appendix. This process led to a further reduction in the number of articles. We established inclusion criteria to determine which articles to include in the review. These were as follows:

1. The literature had to be published between 2000 and August 2024. We only included literature written in English.
2. The review included peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters but excluded conference papers and dissertations.
3. The title and abstract had to include keywords from the search terms (see Table A1 in the Appendix).
4. We were particularly interested in literature that addresses the impact of gating on crime and violence, particularly gendered violence
5. Our search was based on a previous systematic literature review by Blandy et al. (2004), so the keywords we included in our search also reflected the themes discovered by this previous research.
6. Contemporary urban studies and planning topics such as governance, sustainability, gender, counter-urbanisation, technology, and ICT were also included in the literature search regarding gated communities and/or segregation.

The selection based on the inclusion criteria resulted in 235 articles. However, only 213 unique publications were available because the searches included duplicates. After an initial review, it was found that twelve articles and book chapters were unavailable even after contacting the authors of these articles. Three articles were written in foreign languages (German, French, and Spanish) and were excluded. After further review, three articles were excluded as it was found that they no longer fitted our inclusion criteria, e.g., the research did not add anything to our understanding of gated communities because the topic was too different, or the research was, although written within our period of analysis, based on older data collection and was therefore deemed outdated. Furthermore, after the initial search in Scopus and Web of Science, seven additional articles found via Google Scholar were deemed to fit our research objectives and were added to the selection, resulting in 202 articles.

To facilitate the reading, we define some basic concepts that are used frequently throughout in this article, namely the concepts of crime, fear of crime, victimisation and safety (perceptions). A **crime** is an act which is punishable by law. For example, according to the Swedish Penal Code (SFS 1962:700 1–2 §), a crime is "an act described in this code or in another law or regulation and for which a penalty prescribed below is stated. An act shall, unless otherwise specifically prescribed, only be considered a crime if it is committed intentionally." **Crime victimisation** is the state or process of becoming a victim of crime. In contrast, **fear of crime** is the emotional response expressed in relation to a person's perceived risk of potential crime victimisation, fear of crime in general, or fear of symbols of crime (Ferraro 1995).

Safety is a concept with a fluid definition, varying across different fields. Recent literature on transitions and sustainability also adopts "safety" as a synonym for "security" due to its interdisciplinary nature, recognising that these dimensions often overlap. Both the UN and WHO use "safety" in many official documents, adopting the term safety with this same connotation. In some contexts, "safety" is seen as a

subjective feeling, tied to how individuals perceive risk. In contrast, in others, it is understood as the absence of actual risk (i.e., in traffic safety). In this study, we use “safety”, “safety perceptions” or “safe” as an umbrella term to describe studies that deal with both a place that is free from crime and/or the perception of safety expressed by people who feel protected from the threat of crime. In some studies we reviewed, “feeling safe” was not due to low crime risk, but rather because the environment provides cues that reassure the individual, making them feel safe, even if the actual risk of victimisation is high. This definition is supported by empirical research reviewed here that points to a disconnect between perceived and actual safety. It is important to remember that safety here is also a function of an individual’s characteristics, such as age, gender, ethnic background, sexual orientation, economic status, individual activities, substance abuse, and more.

4. Findings

4.1 Bibliometric Analysis

- *Temporal trends and female representation in authorship*

Figure 2 illustrates the trends and peaks of literature published on gated communities from 2000 to 2024. Few articles were published from 2000 until 2004, with a sudden peak in 2005. Although the percentage of articles published each year fluctuates, the graph shows a relative upward trend, with most published in peaks around 2012, 2018, 2020, and 2022. The black line, representing female authorship, shows a fluctuating pattern. Despite the overall increase in publication of articles, the proportion of female authors has not consistently followed that trend. About half of the articles published between 2000 and 2008 were published with a female first author. The highest proportion of female-authored papers was in 2008. Compared to 2008, 2014 and 2018 have relatively high peaks in female authorship. After 2017, female authorship stabilised somewhat, but remained relatively low, staying below 4% for most years.

Some trends regarding the peaks of articles published each year could be related to specific issues in different journals. For example, three articles were published in *the International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* in 2011 and four in *Urban Geography* in 2012, both as special issues, see for example ‘Living in Chinese Enclave Cities’ (Breitung, 2012)

Between 2000 and 2024, the literature on gated communities has evolved significantly. Initially, the focus was on defining gated communities, developing typologies, and addressing issues of elitism and segregation. By 2007–2008, attention shifted to the growing fear and anxiety about urban disorder, while still investigating the drivers behind gated communities, including themes such as neoliberalism and urban fragmentation (e.g., Genis, 2007). After 2011, there was a notable increase in articles about crime and safety perceptions within gated communities, alongside a methodological shift towards quantitative studies (e.g., Vilalta, 2011). From 2014 onwards, topics diversified, with no clear trends until a peak in 2020 related to crime and safety perceptions, possibly due to heightened risk aversion during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Li et al., 2021; Segura, 2020). Since then, themes such as rural idealisation and

counter-urbanisation have emerged, transforming the perception of gated communities from ‘suburban elitism’ to a new form of ‘urban sprawl’ and ‘escapism’ from urban life (Balletto et al., 2022; Mistry & Spocter, 2022). Methodologically, early 2000s research was heavily influenced by qualitative approaches mainly exploring drivers and defining GCs. After the 2010s, there was a shift towards more frequent use of quantitative research to measure GCs' effects on crime, property prices, or segregation. These peaks coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2023 and 2024, there has been a move back towards qualitative and mixed-methods research to better understand emerging concepts such as neoliberalism, climate gating, and counter-urbanisation.

- *Geographical authorship by country*

China, the United States, South Africa, Turkey, and Malaysia are consistently highlighted in research due to their extensive adoption of gated or semi-gated communities as housing solutions (Fig. 3). In these regions, different models of privatised security and residential layouts dominate. For instance, in the United States and South Africa, gated communities typically consist of suburban, owner-occupied housing, where physical barriers or privatised roadblocks restrict access. On the other hand, countries like China feature large, high-rise apartment complexes, many of which cater to a mixture of owners and renters, creating a different dynamic in access control and community organisation.

Most studies focus on case studies in China, the United States, and South Africa, where a wealth of case studies is available. Historically, the early 2000s saw a dominance of studies from English-speaking countries, including the U.S., England, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, reflecting a higher level of academic research on GCs conducted by first-authors in those countries. However, between 2014 and 2024, there has been a notable shift toward a broader range of countries, including China, South Africa, Turkey, Malaysia, Ghana, and Brazil, with studies increasingly authored by researchers affiliated with local universities; this shift signifies a rise in research production in the Global South. This shift has also led to a closer alignment between the country of the first author’s university affiliation and the study location, which is important for contextualizing the research and ensuring local knowledge, given that gated communities are highly context-dependent.

- *Geographical authorship by city type*

Gated communities are primarily an urban phenomenon, making it essential to examine the cities and regions studied. Notably, 33% of the research did not specify a location below the country level. Among the specified studies, cities were categorised into four types: 6% focused on major global cities like New York, London, Beijing, and Mexico City; 28% examined less globally connected, but still nationally significant, cities (e.g. capitals and important political and economic centres) such as Jakarta, Istanbul, Accra, and Santiago de Chile; 29% included lesser-known cities, often the second largest in their countries, like Tshwane, Guangzhou, Las Vegas, and Bloemfontein; and only 4% addressed rural areas, with locations such as Temuco and Belo Horizonte. This highlights that most gated community research is centred on urban settings, with a minimal exploration of rural contexts.

- *Methods*

Figure 4 shows insights into the research methods used in the literature reviewed. The figure illustrates a clear preference for qualitative rather than quantitative methods. About half of the studies employ qualitative methods (59% of the articles and book chapters), which suggests that most of the research in this field focuses on understanding experiences, perspectives, and in-depth insights from individuals or small groups in gated communities. They tend to emphasise interpretive analysis and explore social dynamics often via interviews, case studies, or ethnographies. As many as 31% of studies use quantitative methods, such as data from surveys, experiments, and descriptive and regression analyses, to quantify patterns or relationships, particularly around themes such as fear of crime, socioeconomic factors, or safety perceptions in gated communities.

Source: Authors

A smaller portion of studies (10%) uses mixed methods, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. The dominance of qualitative research points to the field's focus on exploring complex social phenomena such as community dynamics, perceptions of safety, and individual experiences in gated communities.

Examples of how some of these papers set up their methodology include qualitative methods such as architectural typology, ethnographic studies or semi-structured interviews (quantitative methods such as ANOVA regressions based on questionnaires, traffic simulations, and hotspot analysis) mixed methods using combinations of interviews and spatial analysis, or field observations and histograms. There was a wide range of methods used, reflecting the diverse fields interested in studying GCs, including studies by criminologists, architects, economists, public health scientists, and urban planners.

- *Journals*

The journals contributing most significantly to the body of research on gated communities include *Housing Studies* (11 articles, 5.6% of the literature), *Cities* (10 articles, 5% of the literature), *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* (8 articles, 4%), and the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* (7 articles, 3.5%). Collectively, they represent the core outlets for research related to gated communities, reflecting their solid thematic alignment with urban and regional studies. These journals span diverse academic disciplines, including geography, psychology, architecture, and technical fields, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of research on gated communities. Additionally, seven book chapters were analysed as part of the literature, including two editions of the *International Encyclopaedia of Human Geography* (2009 and 2020), further expanding the scope of research sources beyond journal publications.

4.2 In-depth Analysis by research themes

1. **Contemporary characteristics of gated communities and gating**

The characteristics of GCs have expanded from their narrow suburban ownership, high-income and extensive house typology to include other tenure types and housing forms. It has become more common for low-income residents and minorities to reside in gated communities as it is seen as a way of ensuring the safety of a place rather than being a status symbol (Kuno, 2022; Chekiel & Benhassine-Touam, 2023; Sanchez et al., 2005; Grundström & Lelévrier, 2023). In some areas, renters are twice as common in GCs as owners (Sanchez et al., 2005). This has various consequences for the community. Burglary rates may increase in rental residential areas with poor social control (Wang et al., 2021). Renters are also associated with more anti-social behaviours (ASB), negatively impacting property prices and crime rates (Yau, 2020). This is argued to be the case because it is perceived that renters or temporary residents lack incentives for long-term investments in the community. In developing countries, housing prices and rents are 48% higher in GCs than in non-gated communities, much higher than in developed countries. This suggests that residents who choose to prioritise this sort of housing premium above standard housing will be likely to stay long-term and invest in the place, as they value the security benefits (Soyeh et al., 2021).

Overall, there are many differences regarding the types of GCs across countries: in terms of age composition, price, high-rise vs single-family. Many of the most recent GCs are now high-rise apartment buildings, which are particularly common in regions such as China, Malaysia, Pakistan, Brazil and Hong Kong (Boonjubun, 2019; Wang et al., 2018). Renters often occupy these high-rise GCs and are primarily driven by the demand for modern amenities, improved lifestyle offerings, and security concerns (Danielsen, 2007; Richter & Goetz, 2007). Despite this growing trend of vertical living, the majority of gated communities continue to be suburban or located on the urban fringe, contributing to urban sprawl (Vesselinov & Le Goix, 2012; Dirsuweit & Wafer, 2016; Petrovic & Ouředníček, 2024; Güzey, 2014; Ortega, 2012; Savchuk & Zapototskyi, 2020). There is a trend toward developing GCs that cater to middle and upper-class families, often sidelining working-class housing options (Tonucci, 2023). These suburban GCs are typically sought after by residents seeking a particular lifestyle, such as a secure environment for raising children or access to better amenities at different stages of their lives (Osman et al., 2021; Muawad et al., 2022).

A third and increasingly popular form of contemporary GCs is rural or nature-oriented gated communities. These developments cater to the growing trend of counter-urbanisation, where residents seek to escape the perceived chaos and disorder of urban life in favour of a rural, nature-based lifestyle (Giglia, 2008; Datta, 2014; Ramsawmy et al., 2020; Spocter, 2013). These GCs attract lifestyle migrants and may serve as full-time residences or second/holiday homes (Chase, 2008; Ramsawmy et al., 2020; Wehrhahn & Raposo, 2005; Morel et al., 2017). While some of these communities integrate harmoniously with the natural surroundings, others merely use nature as a branding tool without genuinely engaging with or preserving the local environment (Hidalgo et al., 2017; Spocter, 2013; Mistry & Spocter, 2022; Kheyroddin & Hedayatifard, 2017). Additionally, these developments frequently conflict with local and indigenous communities, exacerbating social and environmental tensions (Mamonova & Sutherland, 2015; Rojo-Mendoza, 2023; Rojo-Mendoza et al., 2022).

In contrast, in other contexts, some view cities as symbols of civilised urban modernity –orderly and hygienic – while rural areas are seen as disordered and dirty, often associated with migrant workers from whom urbanites seek to distance themselves (Pow, 2007; Zhang & Zheng, 2019). This creates tensions in gated, restrictive resettlement neighbourhoods for migrant workers in urban areas where they are often forced into particular social relations (Zhao & Zou, 2017; Huang et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2017). In the fringes where urban and rural migrant workers meet, home ownership is seen as a legitimate justification for practices of fencing and exclusion. Ownership can also be a lever for attaining the status of an urban resident (hukou); thus, fencing becomes essential for displaying and defending one's social status (Feng et al., 2014).

2. Triggers or drivers of gated communities

There is debate in the literature over which factors play the most significant role in people choosing to live in GCs. The reasons behind the growth and popularity of gated communities (GCs) are varied, with crime, elitism and lifestyle preferences commonly cited (Atkinson & Blandy, 2009; Roitman, 2010; Güzey & Özcan, 2010; Grant & Mittelsteadt, 2004; Shamsudin et al., 2017; Lestari Olivia et al., 2019; Janoschka & Borsdorf, 2004). GCs frequently emerge in regions where state planning policies, policing, and public amenities and infrastructure are considered to be inadequate (Cséfalvay, 2011; Kovács & Hegedüs, 2014). These developments are often driven by private developers who offer exclusive services and infrastructure to fill the gaps in public provision (Permanasari et al., 2024; Ehwi et al., 2021; Frias & Rodrigues, 2018).

While some scholars emphasise safety and the need to protect against crime as a dominant reason (Müller, 2020; Hussein & Uzunoğlu, 2020), others argue that security is not a primary concern (Wu & Li, 2020). Instead, lifestyle preferences or the need for essential infrastructure that public services cannot adequately provide are often cited (Salah & Ayad, 2018; Frias & Rodrigues, 2018; Ehwi, 2022). Another similar driver is the fear of the "other" and a desire to escape the perceived disorder and diversity of urban life in favour of more homogenous, controlled environments (Vesselinov & Le Goix, 2012; Ferreira & Visser, 2015). There is disagreement as to whether the need for privacy is a driver of GCs (Bandauko et al., 2023; Dowling et al., 2010).

Elitism and prestige are often cited as a driver of GCs (Tafa & Manahasa, 2021). However, this is often viewed as secondary to lifestyle and security motivations. For many, these elements are seen as bonuses rather than primary drivers. In some cases, residents of GCs consider themselves egalitarian and reject the notion that their decision to live in a gated community is motivated by elitism or class divisions (Grant, 2005a). Additionally, the perception that GCs are driven by class divisions is shifting. Some gated high-rise residential buildings are becoming more common, even for urban low-income populations. In these cases, security remains essential, but the amenities may not be exclusive, and outsiders can often access them for a fee (Boonjubun, 2019; Breitung, 2012; Grundström & Lelévrier, 2023). In sum, while safety and lifestyle tend to be the most prominent motivations, a range of other

factors (Tafa & Manahasa, 2021; Qureshi, 2023), including infrastructure needs, elitism, and social homogeneity, influence the rise of gated communities.

Developers still play a vital role in promoting GCs and packaging them as a “lifestyle choice” rather than just a form of housing – appealing to status, safety, and exclusivity aspirations. Marketing strategies emphasise the unique amenities and controlled environments that GCs offer, shaping public perception and influencing demand (Elyamany, 2021; Brabec & Machala, 2015; Grundström, 2018; Güzey, 2014; Porchezhian & Irulappan, 2022). An example of a purchasable lifestyle is the senior gated communities that cater to elderly people’s wishes for a calm and safe environment with a strong sense of community between the residents and where a significant focus is on exclusive and discrete care, often allowing the residents to keep their own residences (Spocter, 2016; Grant, 2005b; Came & Humphries-Kil, 2018; Walks, 2014). In the North American context, senior housing may be a relatively recent development, unlike in many Nordic countries, where it has long been an integral part of the housing supply and the welfare state and is not perceived as a gated community (Grundström, 2018).

3. The global and cultural contexts of gated communities

Social, cultural, and historical factors significantly influence the development of gated communities (GCs). Class distinctions, the historical legacy of physical barriers like walls, and local traditions, have all contributed to the rise of gated living spaces (Li et al., 2012; Spocter, 2011; Odunlade et al., 2023; McKenzie, 2005; Hirt & Petrovíc, 2011; Charney & Palgi, 2013; Ferreira & Visser, 2015; Yacobi & Ventura, 2016). The global spread of neoliberalism, combined with deepening class divisions, intertwines with local and global cultural trends to shape the growth of GCs. This trend reflects a merging of local security concerns with global movements towards privatised, exclusive living (Genis, 2007; Candan & Kolluoğlu, 2008; Bandauko et al., 2020; Mycoo, 2006; Yacobi & Ventura, 2016). The commodification of security, with the involvement of private policing and surveillance systems, shifts responsibility from the state to individual communities, highlighting class distinctions (Glebbeek & Koonings, 2016; Pow, 2013; Gimenez et al., 2021; Low, 2017).

A key consequence of this shift is a move from traditional communal arrangements, like family compounds, to individualised nuclear family homes (Danso-Wiredu & Poku, 2020). While this caters to higher-income groups seeking privacy, it challenges low-income families who rely on affordable, extended family housing for social support. The erosion of communal living risks deepening social divisions as affordable options dwindle. However, in Sweden, Grundström (2021) notes that communal forms persist, albeit in new, often elite-oriented forms.

While fences and walls may foster a sense of community among residents, they also isolate them from the broader urban environment, reinforcing socio-spatial divisions (Goldhaber & Donaldson, 2012; Saisanath & Gnanasambandam, 2020; Kaushik, 2019). These communities often emerge in areas already marked by class divisions, further exacerbating social inequalities by creating distinct spheres for the wealthy and the poor (Atkinson & Blandy, 2020; Butler, 2007; Vesselinov, 2008; Hammad et al.,

2024). GCs may also use symbolic, rather than physical, walls to demarcate and exclude others (Holmqvist, 2021). On the other hand, Álvarez-Rivadulla (2007) views GCs as merely an extension of suburban development, suggesting that the segregation they produce is similar to that of typical suburban areas.

While much of the literature highlights the segregation and power imbalances created by gated communities (Saisanath & Gnanasambandam, 2020), Pow (2015) criticises the dominant dystopian view in urban studies. He calls for a more nuanced approach that recognises the diverse dynamics that exist within these spaces and encourages moving beyond the typical “noir” narratives of urban decline.

4. The impact of gated communities on crime and victimisation

An important effect of GCs is on crime and victimisation (Fig. 5). However, there are disagreements regarding the full extent of this effect. Figure 5a illustrates that 32% of the articles mentioning crime found that gating significantly decreased crime and victimisation, 16% of the articles found that it had the opposite effect, and gating increased crime and 52% of the articles concluded that no effect was found or there was no evidence to support any effect of gating on crime. In total, 39 articles were included in the analysis: 19 focus on crime, while 24 explore the fear of crime, with some overlap between the two. Consequently, the N-values in the graphs below differ accordingly (Appendix Table A2).

Gating generally positively affects perceived safety and crime rates (Addington & Rennison, 2015). According to Adnan et al. (2023), gating decreases property crime inside GCs from 12% to 8.36%. Donnelly & Kimble (2006) observed a 24% decrease in crime in gated communities, though the effect was not sustained in the long term. Branic & Kubrin (2017) found that gating reduced property crimes by 22.3% but had no impact on violent crimes. This impact may affect people differently. Zhang et al. (2022) state that segregation affects the poor negatively (more crime) and the affluent positively (less crime). A few articles noted an increase in crime due to gating. Wu & Tan (2023) found gated communities more unsafe, with higher instances of burglary, fights, and malfunctioning lifts. Breetzke et al. (2014) and Breetzke & Cohn (2013) highlighted higher burglary rates in gated communities compared to the rest of the city, with gating increasing burglaries in both day and night models.

Some articles observed no changes. Wilson-Doenges (2000) and Atkinson & Smith (2012) found no significant change in crime rates within gated communities, although high levels of fear persisted, particularly among low-income communities. Yau (2020) found no effect on crime due to gated communities, with antisocial behaviours and a higher proportion of renters having a more significant effect. Rogers (2013) indicated a perceived decrease in property crimes due to gating, though the evidence did not support this perception.

5. The impact of gated communities on safety perceptions and fear of crime

Many articles addressing the fear of crime indicate that gating effectively reduces residents' fear of crime, accounting for 42% of the studies (Fig. 5b). Conversely, 8% of the articles found that gating increases the fear of crime, at least outside the gates, as it perpetuates a fear of the "other". Additionally, 50% of the articles reported no significant effect of gating on fear of crime. Many studies reported an increase in perceived safety among residents of gated communities (Yip, 2012; van 't Wout & Molina, 2024; Segura, 2020; Bekleyen & Yilmaz-Ay, 2016; Iqbal et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2023; Ergun & Kulkul, 2018; Kim & Seidel, 2012).

Most articles reported no significant effect of GCs on fear of crime, either from observing no changes at all or from observing impacts in both directions and differing effects for different people, therefore being neutral (Vilalta, 2011). Jacobs and Addington (2016) found that gating did not reduce robberies and could create a false sense of security. Durington (2009), Tanulku (2018) and Barrantes-Chaves (2024), noted that while GCs fostered a perception of safety within the gates, it also increased anxiety about the outside world, which could perpetuate crime and fear outside the gates and reinforced racial and class segregation. Kaker (2014) also found that gating perpetuated violence and conflicts over space. Kinlocke (2011) found that gating did not lower the fear of crime, particularly for women who continued to exhibit avoidant behaviours.

Wilson-Doenges (2000) noted that higher-income communities had higher feelings of safety, but low-income gated communities did not see the same benefit. Tanulku (2018) observed that while residents felt safer inside gated communities, their fear of the outside world increased. Ewhi (2021) reported that residents felt their internal house walls provided more security than the gates. Sun & Webster (2019) reported that gates and guards alone could not make residents feel safe from crime. Additional measures, such as security grills on windows, were necessary for a greater sense of security.

Gated communities may also impact the safety and crime immediately outside them as the streets adjacent to many gated communities become inactive due to the lack of permeability and interaction with the public. As a result, outsiders may perceive these streets as more insecure, as there is little social control or oversight from residents behind the walls (Kostenwein, 2021). There is also a common sense that the measures of GCs could also create a false sense of security, and some issues in enforcement and risk awareness can arise (Störm & Minnaar, 2020).

Several studies highlight the importance of environmental design and social cohesion over gates for perceived safety (Grönlund, 2011; Hashim et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2020; Stefanizzi & Verdolini, 2018). They point to the design of the built environment, clean areas, greenery, and visibility and natural surveillance as more significant contributors to safety than gates (Bint-e-Waheed & Nadeem, 2020; Paydar et al., 2017; Al-Khazaleh et al., 2024; Makinde, 2020; Hedayati-Marzbali et al., 2017). Hatipoglu and Alsavada (2022) refer to this as Newman's defensible space theory. Thus, to derive benefits from crime and safety perceptions similar to those that residents believe they get from GCs, it is crucial to develop natural surveillance and environmental design. Natural surveillance is also cheaper for developers than advanced access technology and surveillance (CCTV) (Hew et al., 2019). This could also

include adapting houses for more visibility from the street (as opposed to tall bushes, etc.), which lessens privacy but allows for burglars to be caught (Chakwisira, 2023). Another version of GCs is neighbourhoods that, through their environmental design, are uninviting and have exclusionary landscaping instead of gates and policing, which reinforces a sense of self-othering where the residents feel safe, and the outsiders feel excluded and do not dare to enter (Rofe, 2006; Rosen & Grant, 2011).

6. Gated communities, gendered violence and women's perceptions of safety

Another critical theme is how women perceive their safety and quality of life within gated communities (GCs) (Cranston & Lloyd, 2018). Understanding GCs requires a gender perspective as safety is experienced differently. While GCs may reduce some public risks, they often offer less protection against private or domestic violence. Lower visibility and reduced street activity within these areas can increase women's vulnerability and shape distinct patterns of fear and exposure. In a study of a GC, residents cited lifestyle, rather than security, as their primary reason for choosing to live there. They reported strong social connections inside and outside the GC (AlQahtany, 2022). However, the study noted that women from the community did not participate in the surveys. Thus, a critical perspective is missing from the study (AlQahtany, 2022). However, in Kinlocke's (2011) research, women exhibited persistent fear and avoidance behaviours, even within the perceived security of the gates. This suggests that the physical barriers did not alleviate their concerns.

In another study, Paydar et al. (2017) found that the presence of gates worsened women's perceptions of safety, as the reduced flow of people made it less likely that witnesses would be around. This led women to avoid walking within the gated areas. For them, the design of the built environment – factors such as visibility, pedestrian flow, traffic, and cleanliness – were more important for their sense of safety than the gates themselves. This raises an important question about how men's and women's experiences of safety in GCs differ and what precisely the gates should protect women from.

Atkinson and Smith (2012) also found that femicides, particularly gendered intimate partner violence, were the most common type of homicide within GCs. Their research revealed no significant difference in homicide rates between gated and non-gated communities. GCs promise security, but this sense of safety is often illusory, as domestic violence and intimate partner violence still occur within these enclaves. The privatised and isolated nature of GCs can also conceal signs of abuse, with neighbours often unaware of escalating violence until it ends in tragedy. Another frequent pattern is family annihilation, where men, often under financial stress, kill their spouses, children, and themselves. Though rare, these cases highlight the extreme pressures within affluent gated spaces.

On the other hand, gated communities can sometimes serve as long-term shelters for victims of intimate partner violence. According to Rempel et al. (2024), these shelters provide necessary protection and support from staff and other survivors. However, they can also be intrusive and isolating, with staff monitoring women's social interactions, conversations, and visitors and restricting their ability to leave

the premises. In these cases, the gated environment functions not only to shield women from further harm but also to control their movements and interactions. Thus, walls embody a dual function: they both enclose the violence occurring inside the gated community and shield against violence from outside.

7. The impact of gated communities on the city as a whole

Physical and symbolic boundaries in gated communities intensify social stratification, limiting social cohesion between residents and surrounding areas. This segregation can affect crime patterns (by concentrating disadvantage outside the gates) and heighten fear of crime through the “othering” of non-residents, even in the absence of measurable victimization rates. Gated communities have varied impacts on different income groups, affecting insiders and outsiders in contrasting ways. For instance, they create islands of wealth that primarily benefit a select few (Apak, 2015; Coy & Pohler, 2002; Coy, 2006). By fostering the privatisation of public spaces, GCs often lead to the exclusion of lower-income groups, benefiting the urban rich through the development of exclusive roads, highways, and even entire towns (Borsdorf & Hidalgo, 2008; Low, 2008; Rogers, 2013; Dirsuweit & Wafer, 2016; Handal & Irazábal, 2022; Klaufus et al., 2017).

For example, when previously open streets are gated, residents within these areas reclaim the street as a semi-public space, fostering a sense of community and improving perceptions of safety (Handal & Irazábal, 2022). However, these benefits are primarily confined to the insiders. Similarly, the gating of previously open communities often negatively impacts low-income groups, particularly by restricting access to public spaces where they earn their livelihoods, such as through street vending (Lata, 2022).

Integration between classes occurs through employment, urban services and shared public space and is not impacted by poor people’s proximity to GCs (Treuke, 2023). Adedeji et al. (2016) propose a direct relationship between social status and spatial territoriality, exemplified by residential fencing and gating. They argue that heterogeneous housing schemes can foster self-defensive communities. While integrating vastly different social classes poses significant challenges, promoting interactions among proximate social classes offers a viable approach to reducing social inequality and, by extension, urban insecurity (Adedeji et al., 2016). Integration (cross-class interactions) between affluent and poor neighbourhoods depends on public spaces (Treuke, 2020). Residents, however, are unwilling to make the gated communities open or semi-open as they argue they have paid a lot of money and do not want to share (Wu et al., 2021).

8. The governance of gated communities

Internal governance systems, including private security and resident associations, directly regulate access, behaviour, and surveillance. These mechanisms may change the type and frequency of crimes experienced inside the gates, while shaping residents’ perception of risk and trust in formal public

policing. GCs impact property values, mainly through security features such as guards and patrols, though gates may not always add value (Allen & Fraser, 2022; Tedong et al., 2014; Teck-Hong, 2010). Private governance in these communities is in demand to enhance perceived safety and manage property values (Allen & Fraser, 2022; Le Goix, 2005). Private housing governance affects property law and land division (Harris & Patterson, 2024). Collective action plays a crucial role in managing shared spaces within GCs, with homeowner associations managing communal areas such as club goods and deciding rules for the community (Asiedu & Arku, 2009; Canales et al., 2023; Le Goix, 2015). There are challenges in defining management responsibilities for public as opposed to private spaces (Lichtenbaum & Rosen, 2018; Shi et al., 2022; Shi & Ling, 2022).

Through thorough planning, GCs are viewed as improving residential environments and social cohesion (Blandy & Parsons, 2003; Manzi & Bowers, 2005). Governance of communal areas and neighbourhood issues becomes more accessible with a higher sense of community and social cohesion. GCs often score well on social sustainability metrics, especially in more significant developments. Strategic management, focusing on social capital and well-being, is essential for sustaining these communities (Abdullah et al., 2019; Abed et al., 2022). Garip and Sener (2012) reported high satisfaction levels with social relations in GCs. Ruiu (2014) states that a sense of community is not a motivator or aim in GCs as opposed to co-housing. Jimmy et al. (2020) also reported low social networks in GCs.

9. Gated Communities, crime and technology

Security technologies (e.g., CCTV, electronic access systems) deployed in gated communities are integral to their crime-prevention rationale. These tools not only alter opportunities for offending but also contribute to a constant awareness of security threats, which may paradoxically reinforce fear of crime. Smart cities and neoliberal urbanisation emphasise the integration of technology and AI to help manage urban environments, often creating efficient, intelligent infrastructures (Yusof & van Loon, 2012; Berg & Shearing, 2024; Chakrabarty, 2019). However, these urban projects frequently overlook social inequalities, resulting in landscapes that prioritise the needs of elite groups (Chakrabarty, 2019). Technologies such as AI-driven access monitoring extend these inequalities by establishing invisible boundaries – not only through physical gates but also by regulating road accessibility and controlling visitor movement (Teawcharoenporn et al., 2022).

Digital platforms such as the Nextdoor app exemplify how technology intersects with social control, enabling residents to monitor their neighbourhoods online (Kurwa, 2019). This form of digital gating reinforces exclusionary practices, often informed by racial bias, which exacerbates social divisions. Within gated communities (GCs), AI-powered smart home assistants, such as Safebot, provide personalised security by monitoring entrances, windows, and environmental conditions (Chkroun & Azaria, 2021).

Surveillance technologies, including video surveillance in public spaces and surveillance balloons, enhance the perceived sense of security (Zhang et al., 2023; van 't Wout & Molina, 2023). However, the

omnipresence of surveillance in GCs can intrude on privacy, operating under the principle that “if you have nothing to hide, you should not be concerned”. This approach risks enabling over-scrutiny by property managers, whose subjective judgments may lead to exclusion from the community (Monahan, 2006). Additionally, there are significant concerns regarding the security of information collected in GCs, which includes sensitive data about residents and visitors (Li et al., 2022).

Protection measures within GCs are also heavily influenced by social class and income levels (Plöger, 2012). The middle class tends to rely on individualised technological measures such as alarms and cameras. At the same time, upper-class gated communities offer freedom within their internal spaces but impose strict controls at their peripheries. In contrast, those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often resort to makeshift security solutions like dogs and fences (Segura, 2020).

10. Gated communities, safety and the impact on mobility and public health

Gated layouts restrict or channel pedestrian and vehicular traffic, influencing street use patterns, surveillance, and emergency service accessibility. Restricted mobility can reduce casual social contact, which has an impact on both informal social control and a sense of safety, as well as health outcomes related to walkability and stress. The impact of gating on health is mixed. While gating and surveillance are often believed to enhance safety in GCs, they can also limit outdoor activities such as walking and playing (Gul et al., 2018). Some studies suggest that GCs may foster a sense of security that encourages outdoor engagement (Li et al., 2022), but concerns about safety outside the gates tend to have a more substantial influence on walking behaviour (Calonge-Reillo, 2022; Iqbal et al., 2024).

Studies consistently show that walking is less common in GCs compared to open spaces due to factors such as street connectivity and accessibility (Gul et al., 2018). Features such as well-connected pavements and green spaces promote walkability, while gates do not significantly affect this behaviour (Dong et al., 2019). Increased access points can encourage activities such as walking or biking to school (Balletto et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2018).

Additionally, tree coverage and sanitation facilities help create safer environments for children’s independent activities (Zhou et al., 2022). Paradoxically, GCs may increase fear, anxiety, and risk perception, leading to distrust of the outside world and a disconnected community (Dupuis & Thorns, 2008). This anxiety has public health implications and played a role in the rise of GCs during the COVID-19 pandemic, as they were seen as safe zones where physical distancing was possible, contributing to increased housing prices (Asfour, 2022; Hu & He, 2024; Teawcharoenporn et al., 2022; Li et al., 2021).

11. Gated communities and social and environmental sustainability

Gated communities are frequently deemed environmentally unsustainable due to sprawl, car dependence, and loss of shared green space, which can reduce public activity and natural surveillance

while increasing crime opportunities and fear of crime. While communal resource control, such as shared water management, can reduce individual consumption, it may also shield private extraction from scrutiny. Socially, they may foster strong community cohesion while deepening mistrust of outsiders, reinforcing urban divisions that shape both actual victimisation risks and perceptions of safety. GCs, therefore, serve as a symbol of the trade-offs between conflicting sustainability goals.

Gated communities have various impacts on environmental sustainability, both positive and negative. Du Plessis and Jacobs (2018) and Du Plessis et al. (2020) found that gated communities consume less municipal potable water than conventional suburbs. This reduction is attributed to several factors: centralised water management systems, which allow for better regulation and oversight, efficient irrigation practices and strict homeowners' association (HOA) guidelines regarding garden sizes, vegetation types, and pool specifications. Furthermore, water is often viewed as a club good within these communities, with shared amenities like pools and landscaped areas managed by the HOA. This reduces the need for individual homeowners to maintain their water-intensive features, easing overall water demand.

GCs often restrict traffic flow within select neighbourhoods using gates or partial road closures (Makhale & Landman, 2018; Kuno, 2023). However, this can lead to spatial fragmentation, forcing individuals to travel longer distances to enter and exit the GC or navigate around it. As a result, auto-dependency increases, and walkability tends to be low in GCs (Ascencio-Anaya et al., 2019). Despite this, Cai et al. (2020) found that opening GCs has only minor effects on mobility and traffic efficiency. However, in some GCs, movement is tightly controlled through a network of security checkpoints and gates, with access stratification based on social class. Residents have convenient access with private cars, buses, and multiple gates. At the same time, service providers, domestic workers, and construction workers face restricted entry and must use designated, segregated entry points and transportation systems (Greene, 2024). As a result, mobility and sustainability—both social and environmental—within these communities become clearly linked to class, determining who can access resources, engage in activities, or feel safe, thereby reinforcing existing social divisions.

5. Discussion

Previous literature reviews on gated communities have largely been theoretical and descriptive (Blandy et al., 2004). They focused on key issues such as residents' attitudes toward gated communities, their motivations for choosing GCs, and their satisfaction with both the living spaces and the sense of community. They also addressed topics such as the impact of gating on overall city property values, governance, and the legal frameworks surrounding GCs. This paper builds on this literature and expands to incorporate a broader range of studies published during the two decades. These themes – residents' motivations, the emergence of gated communities, and their impacts on social cohesion and crime – remain of central importance in the international literature of GCs. Previously, themes such as mobility disruption, urban fragmentation, and the implications of GCs for urban planning have gained momentum in past literature. The increasing variation and diversity in CGs worldwide have made it difficult to

establish a unified definition or generalise why people choose to live in them. Despite the growing body of literature, the last two decades have seen limited progress in fully understanding the genesis of GCs; instead, there has been a greater acceptance of their complexities and manageable impacts. This suggests that the international research community still faces gaps in fully understanding the broader social, economic, and urban impacts of gated communities, even as new challenges emerge.

We have noted that gating encompasses various forms beyond walls, reflecting broader social dynamics and historical legacies in urban planning (Holmqvist, 2021; Odunlade et al., 2023). It involves the deliberate creation of residential enclaves that separate individuals based on factors such as age, income, and lifestyle, reinforcing a sense of self-othering through the built environment (Borsdorf & Hidalgo, 2008; Ferreira & Visser, 2015; Holmqvist, 2021). The garden city planning paradigm exemplifies this trend by establishing boundaries delineating space, fostering exclusivity and self-containment, and an ideal of healthier living while masking underlying social divisions. This complex interplay between physical separation and social stratification highlights the multifaceted meanings of gating in contemporary urban landscapes (Hedayati-Marzbali et al., 2017; Hew et al., 2019; Hussein & Uzunoğlu, 2020).

Several new themes have been identified in the last twenty years, including barriers to walkability, environmental sustainability, the declining desirability of GCs as commodities, and ongoing concerns about city segregation. These developments highlight changing attitudes toward GCs and a priority shift among residents and urban planners. The increased emphasis on walkability and environmental sustainability signals a growing awareness of community well-being, ecological responsibility, and housing beyond the gates (Abdullah et al., 2019; Li et al., 2022). Similarly, the perception of GCs as fewer desirable commodities suggests a potential shift away from the traditional allure of exclusivity and security that has historically attracted residents. These new considerations are reshaping the conversation around what makes a community liveable and sustainable in a rapidly urbanising world. Moreover, there is a disconnection between the concerns of researchers and the international community on the one hand and the interests of enclave residents, developers, and local governments on the other. In some cases, local governments may have a vested interest in promoting GCs, as they can drive up property values and generate higher tax revenues, further complicating efforts to align urban design with emerging social and environmental concerns (McKenzie, 2005).

A remaining theme concerns the impact of gating on crime and the fear of crime. Research shows that gated communities can reduce crime within gated areas and, in some cases, surrounding neighbourhoods. Additionally, many studies report a decrease in residents' fear of crime, contributing to a heightened sense of security. Nonetheless, these effects were often short-term and mainly limited to property crime, not more violent crimes and homicides (Adnan et al., 2023; Donnelly & Kimble, 2006; Branic & Kubrin, 2017; Yip, 2012). Additionally, these studies vary highly in methodology. Some employ rigorous testing with multiple control variables, while others rely on qualitative surveys limited to residents' perceptions. Many studies lack benchmarks or reference points, making it challenging to draw scientifically sound conclusions about the true impact of gating on crime. Moreover, in some areas of

the globe, gated communities are viewed as the ultimate standard of living, with little critical examination of their effects (Hedayati-Marzbali et al., 2017; Hew et al., 2019; Hussein & Uzunoğlu, 2020). In these contexts – often characterised by stark inequalities in income, gender, and social status – gated communities thrive as idealised solutions to safety concerns despite the potential limitations of the research supporting their benefits. Other factors may mediate the link between less crime and gating. Many studies emphasise the role of the built environment, mobility, natural surveillance, social cohesion, and informal security mechanisms as more influential factors in promoting safety than gating itself (Grönlund, 2011; Hashim et al., 2019). For instance, factors such as the visibility of streets from houses – enhanced by features such as low hedges – might contribute more to safety than gating itself. However, gates are often credited with positive outcomes (Hatipoglu & Alsavada, 2022), despite the need to understand better how the broader environment and social fabric may play a more central role in crime reduction than the gates themselves. Following the same vein of thought, we have also witnessed how low walkability is a significant issue in many gated communities, where dense condominiums often feature thick walls on all sides, leaving little to see during walks or runs, making the experience monotonous (Gul et al., 2018). The lack of interconnected pavements and the absence of shops or activities further diminish outdoor appeal (Dong et al., 2019). Safety concerns are amplified due to there being fewer people in the area, which leaves residents feeling vulnerable, affecting women, children, and men differently based on their varying tendencies to avoid unsafe situations (Paydar et al., 2017).

An emergent field of research evokes gendered violence and the paradox of safety and autonomy. In some cases, gated communities play a role in crime also after it has been committed, for example, as safe havens and long-term shelters for victims of gendered intimate partner violence and abuse (Rempel et al., 2024). Thus, gating becomes a form of protection for the insiders from outsiders. However, although these women appreciate the support they receive from staff and other victims in the haven, they are also subject to extensive control and monitoring. The staff monitors their visitors and communication; even grown-up sons are often forbidden access (Rempel et al., 2024). The women cannot leave the compound except in certain circumstances; some activities are limited. They are isolated and often feel lonely. Paradoxically, the women who were victims of crime are put into a form of “captivity” where they are stripped of their autonomy. This creates a conflicting dynamic between the need for safety and the desire for autonomy. Furthermore, the regulations designed to ensure security can inadvertently reinforce feelings of powerlessness among residents.

A new emerging theme that has yet to be explored to this extent is the impact of gated communities on sustainability. Evidence suggests that gated communities often consume fewer resources due to strict regulations enforced by homeowner associations. For instance, in some South African gated communities, residents use less municipal potable water (Du Plessis & Jacobs, 2018; Du Plessis et al., 2020). However, this raises questions about whether their resource consumption has been lowered or is being redirected. These communities may rely on alternative sources, such as private wells or new water infrastructure, which could have environmental impact. Therefore, while regulations might reduce municipal resource use, the overall sustainability of resource management in gated communities requires further examination. Their resource consumption was compared primarily to standard suburban

areas, which may not provide a complete picture. More densely populated and well-connected housing types, such as semi-detached homes, row houses, or multi-family units, could exhibit lower resource use since their consumption needs would be distributed across a smaller area. This suggests that the potential efficiencies of alternative housing models warrant further investigation to understand their overall impact on resource consumption and sustainability. The comparison of resource consumption in gated communities could be further enhanced by including variations in income levels, as income significantly influences consumption patterns (Du Plessis & Jacobs, 2018).

Integrating advanced technologies, such as enhanced fencing systems and facial recognition, is becoming increasingly common in gated communities (Yusof & van Loon, 2012). These innovations aim to elevate security by granting more control over residential access. For example, smart fencing systems equipped with sensors can alert residents to potential breaches, while facial recognition can streamline entry for authorised individuals. Other potential applications include automated incident reporting, real-time security breach monitoring, and improved communication between residents and security personnel. Some systems, for instance, allow visitors to check in and out automatically through guard authorisation at entry points, with additional tracking capabilities to ensure visitors leave the premises as intended. However, the adoption of such technologies raises significant privacy and ethical questions. While these tools can deter crime and enhance safety, they bring with them concerns regarding data collection, surveillance, and the potential misuse of information to exclude or profile individuals based on characteristics such as race, age, income, or appearance (Kurwa, 2019; Monahan, 2006; Li et al., 2022). Surprisingly, the existing literature on these technologies in the context of gated communities is very sparse, especially when compared to the rapid growth of technology and AI in everyday life. This gap indicates a pressing need for further research to explore both the positive applications of these technologies and their potential drawbacks in urban planning, safety, and gated communities.

Table 1 summarises the benefits and drawbacks of gated communities (GCs) as an urban form. While most entries are based on studies included in this literature review, a few have been drawn from external sources where they were considered to offer valuable nuance. This is not an exhaustive list, and the identified benefits and drawbacks should not be assumed to apply universally, as the characteristics of GCs vary widely depending on their size, demographic composition, and type (e.g., horizontal, vertical, urban, rural). For example, GCs located in remote areas often are more car-dependent and tend to generate greater environmental impacts than those situated within cities (Hidalgo et al., 2017). In some cases, homeowner associations (HOAs) exert considerable control over residents' water usage; however, this likely varies depending on local context and the priorities of those in charge (de Plessis et al., 2020). Urban dynamics also shape how GCs function—larger cities or those experiencing rapid population growth are more frequently associated with crime (Gimenez et al., 2021).

Table 1
Advantages and disadvantages of GCs according to a selection of literature published between 2000 and 2004.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Increased feeling of security (short-term) (Bekleyen & Yilmaz-Ay, 2016)	Physical and symbolic barriers (Barrantes-Chaves, 2024)
Reduced crime rates in GC (short-term) (Donnelly & Kimble, 2006)	Elitism and “we” and “them” feeling (Kaker, 2014)
Maintenance or increase in property value (McKenzie, 2005)	Fewer entries and exits, deliveries or services can take longer, and visitors spend long at check-ins (Teawcharoenporn et al., 2022)
Autonomy, exclusivity and status (Borsdorf & Hidalgo, 2008)	Increased susceptibility to violence and crime in the larger context (Glebbeek & Koonings, 2016)
Less car traffic inside the GC (Kuno, 2023)	Susceptibility to “arrastãos”, which is a form of crime where a group of thieves quickly “mass rob” (Condup Adm Condomínios, 2019)
Homeowner associations enable more controlled and efficient resource use (e.g., water) within GCs (de Plessis et al., 2020)	Access to resources (e.g., water) is restricted or selectively controlled, limiting access from “outsiders” (Low, 2008)
‘Safe haven’ and long-term shelters for victims of gendered violence (Rempel et al., 2024)	Environmental degradation (Hidalgo et al., 2017)
More privacy (Bandauko et al., 2023)	Access control may cause residents to feel isolated or confined, and raises ethical/legal concerns around surveillance and misuse (van ‘t Wout & Molina, 2024)
Cohesiveness and a positive sense of belonging (Garip & Şener, 2012)	Higher living costs (Branic & Kubrin, 2018)
Aesthetic appeal (Chase, 2008)	Unique rules may lead to car crashes inside GC (Caldeira, 2000)
Homogeneous population (Came & Humphries-Kil, 2018)	Public transport users, especially disadvantaged groups, face long travel times (Greene, 2024)
Technology helps deter crime and provides evidence (Monahan, 2006)	Loss of public spaces (Coy & Pohler, 2002)
Shared facilities, access to exclusive amenities not provided by the public (Ehwi, 2022)	Urban sprawl (Güzey, 2014)
Improved quality of life (Al-Khazaleh et al., 2024)	Social inequality leading to segregation and unsustainability (Zhang et al., 2022)

This study makes several important contributions to the scientific community and to practice. First, it advances academic research by uncovering the complex factors that influence the development and effects of GCs across different geographical and socio-political contexts. By examining not only the impact of GCs on crime and safety but also their connections to themes such as gendered safety,

governance, social cohesion, public health, mobility, technology, and sustainability, the study enriches the scholarly understanding of how these communities shape urban life.

Second, it provides practical value for urban planners and practitioners by offering insights into how perceptions of safety within GCs influence mobility, neighbourhood interactions, and overall community well-being. These findings serve as a guide for designing and managing cities more sustainably, with fewer negative social and environmental consequences. In this way, the study bridges academic knowledge and practical application, helping to inform both future research and urban policy.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

This paper set out to uncover the factors influencing the development, diffusion, and effects of gated communities within varying geographical and socio-political contexts, focusing on their impact and crime and safety. A total of 202 articles published in the last two decades, between 2000 and 2024, were reviewed for the systematic literature review.

The bibliometric analysis of literature on gated communities reveals significant global trends. The geographical focus has broadened, with increasing attention given to the Global South, where gated communities are becoming more prevalent. Notably, the analysis indicates a predominance of qualitative research methodologies, reflecting a deeper exploration of social dynamics within these communities. Over the years, research has shifted from defining gated communities to exploring their implications on safety perceptions and crime rates, especially during periods of heightened anxiety such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The thematic analysis reveals that gated communities exert a wide range of effects, impacting not only crime rates and perceptions of safety but also contributing to segregation, mobility challenges, public health issues, governance dynamics, and sustainability concerns. Additionally, it examines the dual role of gated communities in both protecting and isolating women, highlighting the complexities of security and autonomy within these spaces. Furthermore, the study addresses the advancement of technology and artificial intelligence in residential areas, exploring how these developments affect various demographics. While previous literature focused primarily on defining gated communities and generating typologies, this updated analysis shows how the field expanded to encompass critical themes such as segregation, mobility, public health, and sustainability. It highlights emerging societal values, particularly the importance of walkability and environmental concerns, which challenge the traditional allure of gated living. The relationship between gated communities and crime varies according to the type of studies and methods, revealing potential reductions in crime rates but making it more challenging to draw definitive conclusions from these findings. Moreover, studies on gendered violence highlight how women may feel confined within these compounds, creating a paradox between safety and autonomy, underscoring the need for further research in this area.

Resource consumption patterns indicate that while GCs may reduce municipal water or energy usage, further investigation is necessary to assess their long-term implications. Additionally, technological

advancements such as surveillance and AI pose multifaceted tools that can be used to improve societal functions; however, they also raise ethical questions regarding privacy and potential exclusionary practices. Ultimately, this discussion calls for a critical examination of the societal implications of gated communities, encouraging future research to explore the balance of their advantages and disadvantages. By doing so, we can better understand the winners and losers in this context and inform more equitable urban planning and policy decisions.

This systematic literature review has several limitations worth noting. Firstly, we restricted our review to literature published in English, which is the common language among the authors and encompasses a substantial portion of existing research. However, this choice may have led us to overlook critical studies written in other languages that could offer valuable insights into local contexts and nuances. Additionally, we focused on the measurable impacts and effects of gated communities rather than fully capturing individuals' lived experiences, which might reveal more intricate challenges and perspectives. Despite these limitations, this systematic literature review encompassed a broad array of literature on gated communities in their various forms. It has enhanced our understanding of the physical barriers these communities represent and their symbolic significance. Consequently, this study contributes to the existing knowledge regarding the emergence of gated communities and their multifaceted impacts on different aspects of society.

Future research could further explore how distinguishing contexts, such as geographical locations and broader structural conditions, shape the relationship between gating and crime and/or safety perceptions. In particular, we recognise that there is a general lack of empirical research on the experiences of women in gated communities, both as a place that allows violence to happen (e.g. domestic violence) but also as a refuge from external threats from outside. Research of this kind would also enable us to critically examine how the built environment can be designed to support women's safety and autonomy, challenging the assumption that gender-neutral spaces automatically promote safety. While universal accessibility through well-lit, navigable paths is essential, safety also requires a more profound commitment to community involvement, with mixed-gender initiatives that go beyond superficial engagement to address underlying unequal gender power dynamics that go beyond the gated community walls.

Additionally, a significant lack of research critically examines the type of society we aspire to create and how we passively accept gated communities as a defining societal feature. Are these enclaves the ideal we seek, or do they represent a troubling detachment from civic engagement? The prevalence of gated communities can foster a mindset among residents that they are superior to those outside, thereby perpetuating inequality. This raises important questions about the kind of society we wish to inhabit – questions that remain largely unaddressed in the existing literature.

Declarations

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Author Contribution

J.L. and V.C. prepared the research design, methods, and selected the literature to be reviewed. J.L. downloaded and classified literature to prepare for review. S.L. conducted bibliographic and systematic literature review and wrote the main manuscript text. S.L. prepared tables and figures. All authors reviewed the manuscript and made contributions to the text.

Data Availability

The author confirms that all data generated or analysed during this study are included in this published article

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Figures

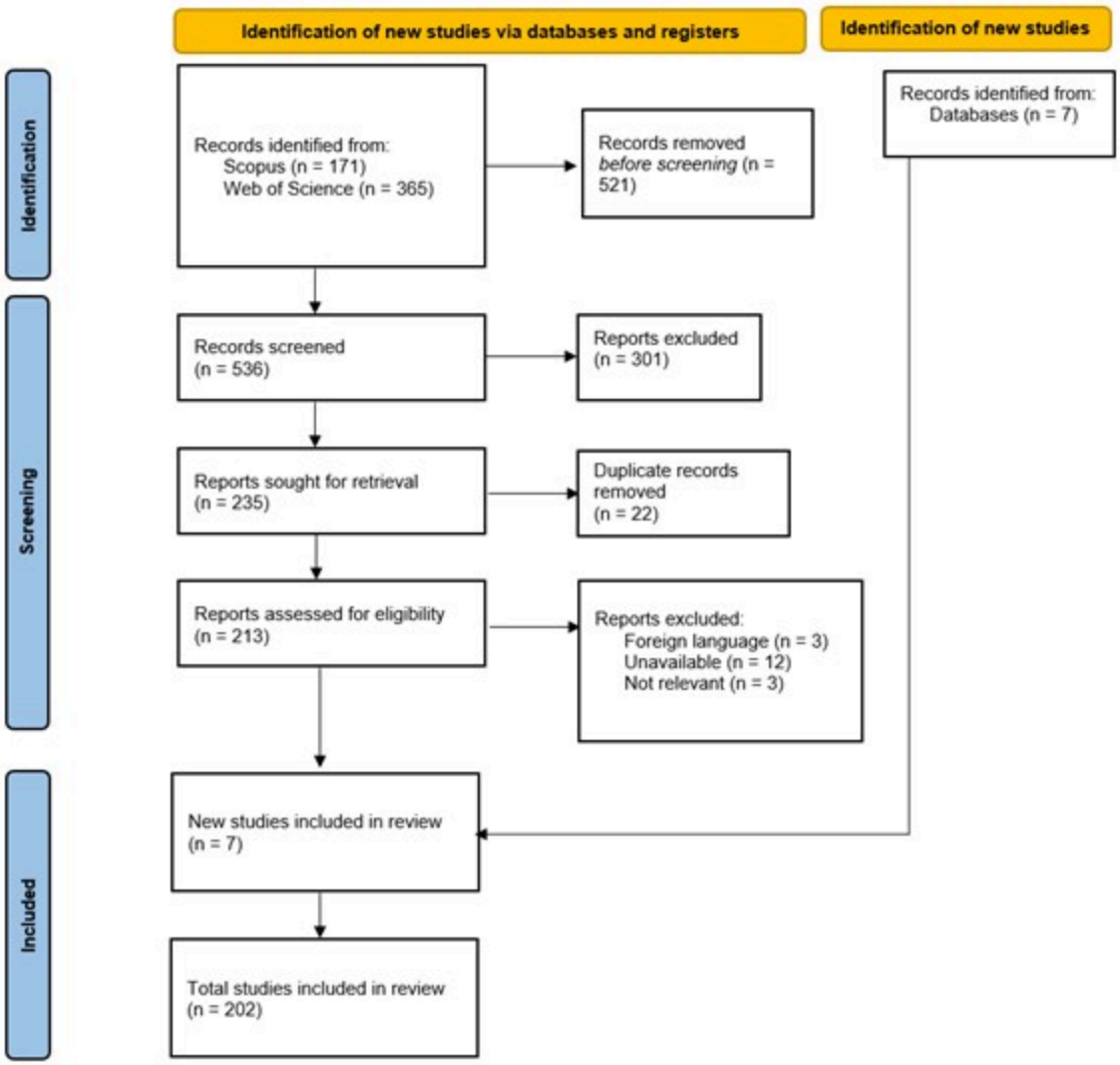

Figure 1

PRISMA 2020 flow diagram of the data collection.

Source: Adapted from Page MJ, et al. BMJ 2021;372:n71. DOI: 10.1136/bmj.n71.

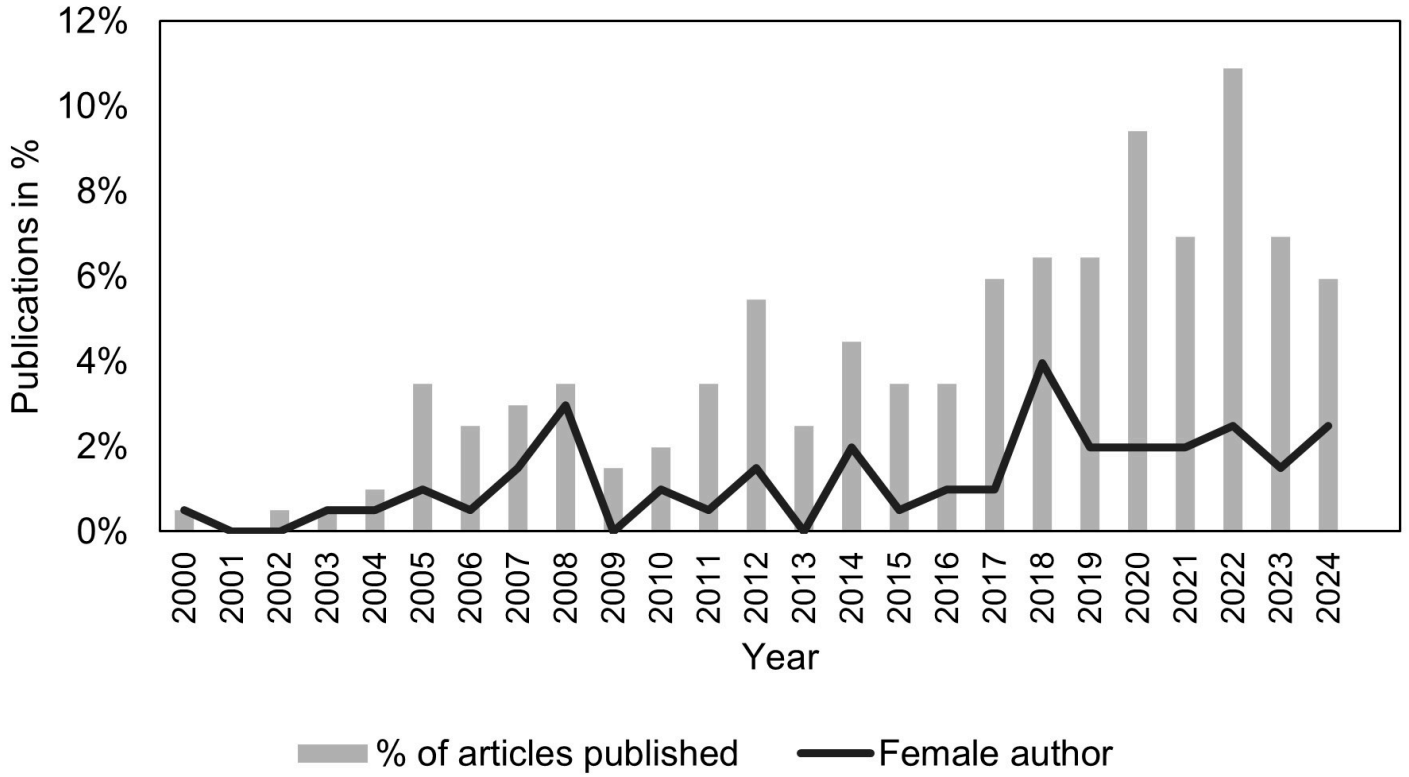

Figure 2

Journal articles and books published per year as a percentage of the total literature reviewed, including the percentage of articles written by a female first author. N= 202. Source: Authors

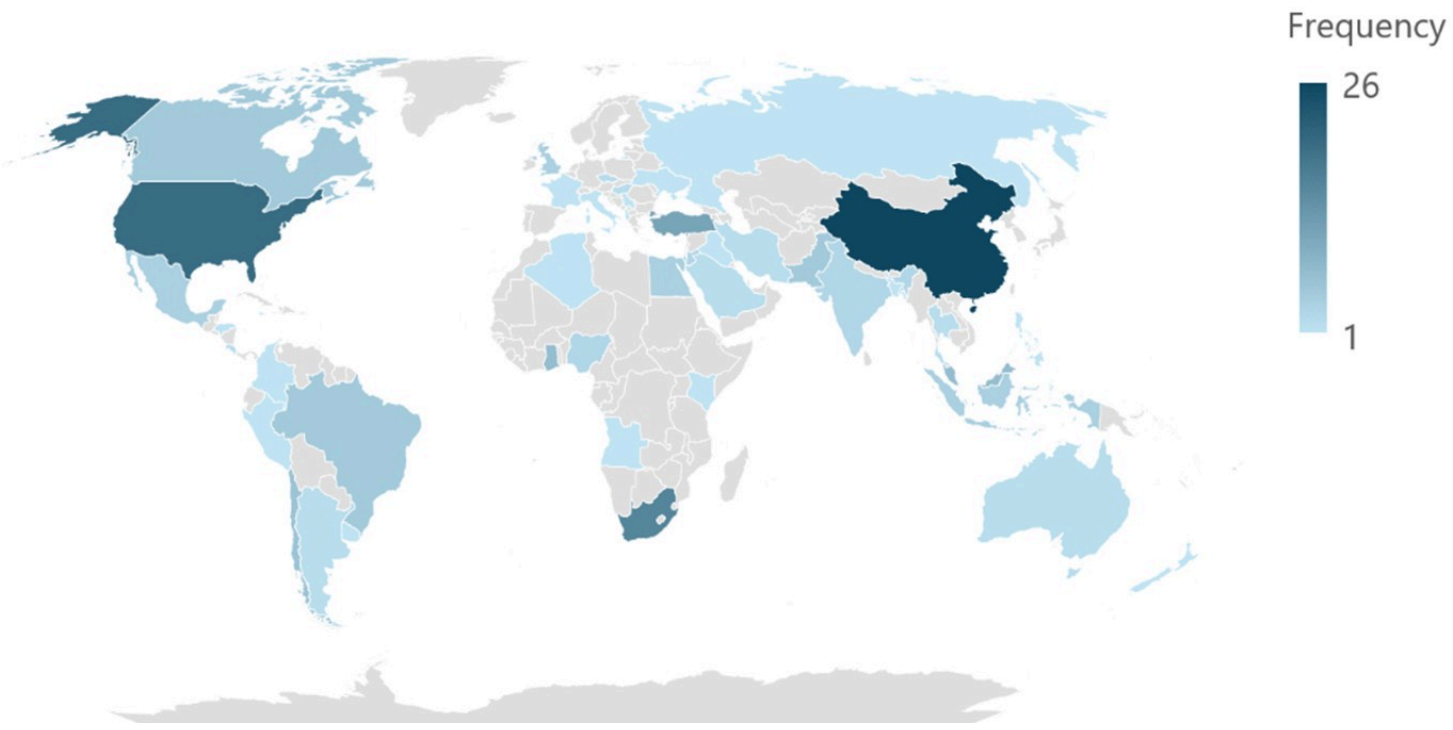

Figure 3

Frequency of articles per country of first author university. N = 202.

Source: Authors

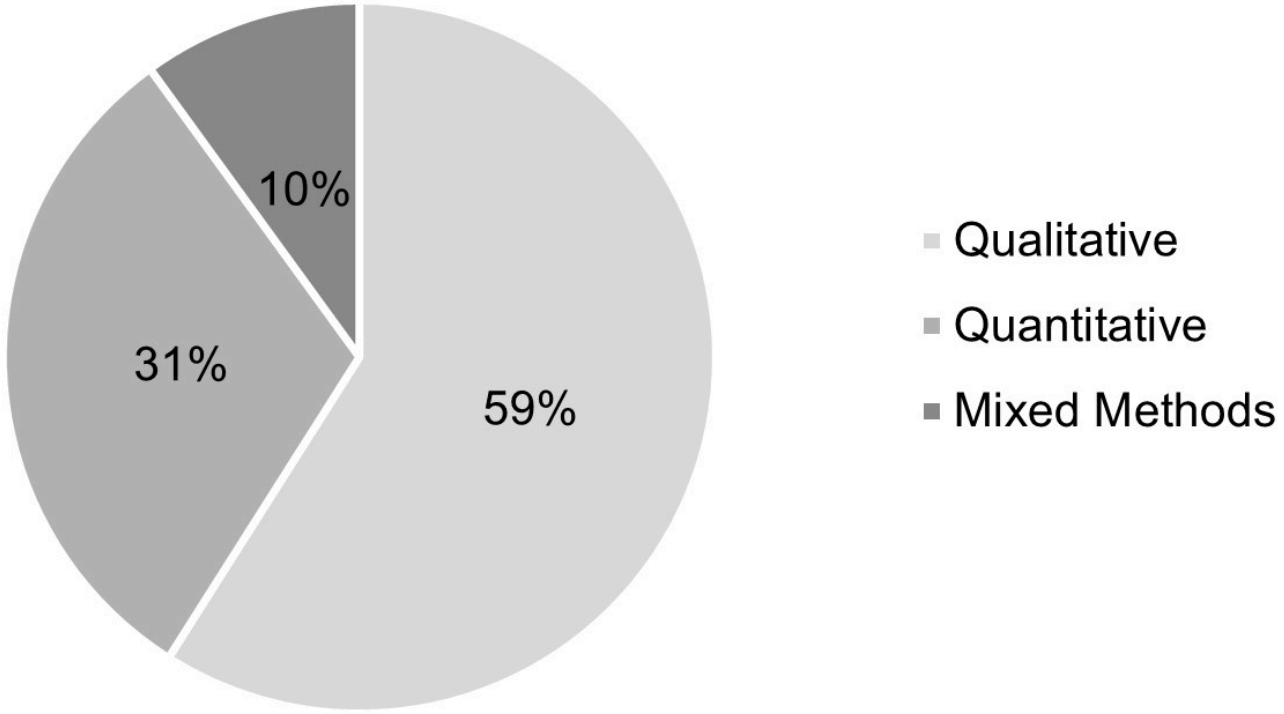

Figure 4

Methodology of the literature reviewed in percentages. N – number 202.

Source: Authors

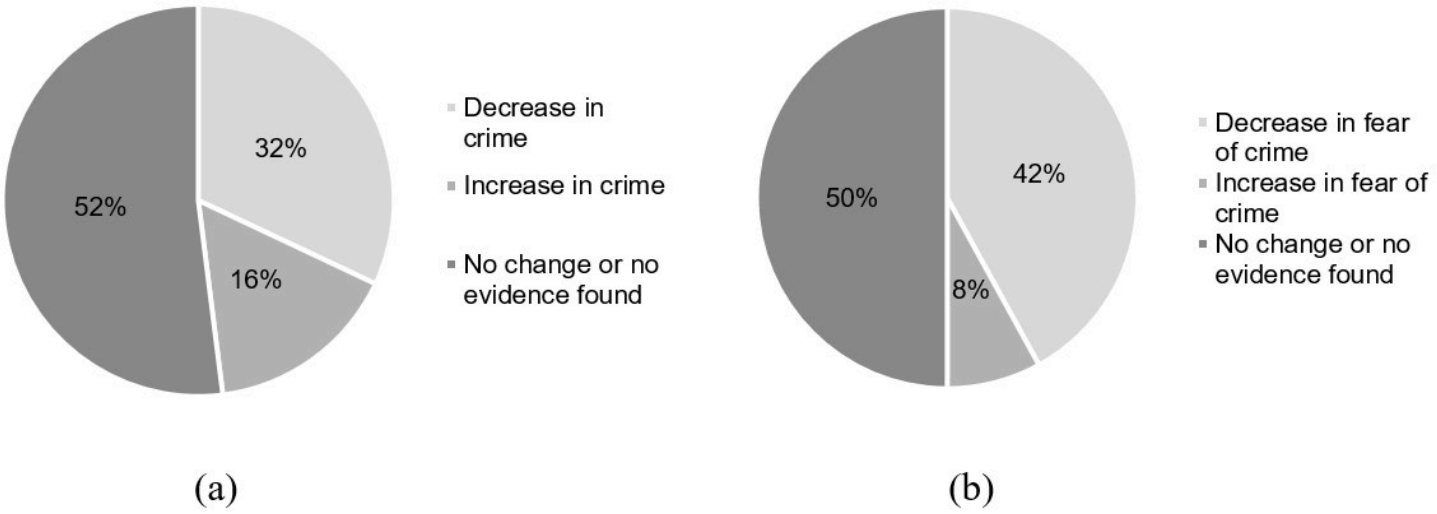

Figure 5

Impact of gated communities on crime and victimization. The impacts of gated communities on crime rates (a) and fear of crime (b). Source: Authors (a) N = 19 and (b) N = 24.

Supplementary Files

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