Introduction

There are more than 552,820 people who experienced homelessness in the United States in 2018, and the number is growing each year. Four in 10 people who are homeless were African American (219,809 people). One-fifth of people experiencing homelessness on a single night in 2018 were children (205,016 or 111,592).

Out of 552,820 homeless people, California takes over 24% alone, surpassing the second-largest state (NY) by over 30,000 people. Within the state of California, I chose to investigate LA as it possesses the highest number of homeless people.

The scale of the issue has prompted me to study this phenomenon, to understand the possible causes, and perhaps evaluate the effectiveness of the current emergency response.

Methodology

Map 1: Data from total number of homeless people in 2018 were presented in the gradual color to showcase the overall distribution among different states. To contrast the ratio between the total number of homeless people and the number of unaccompanied minors, a point layer was created.

Map 2: Since the Continuum of Care counts the number of homeless people across counties, the shapefile for California was merged from 42 individual shapefiles. The point layer of year-round beds was created to compare the discrepancy between supply and demand for shelter programs in California.

Map 3: City-level socioeconomic data from the American Community Survey 2017 was joined to LA shape file. The point layer of the total homeless people was created by using gradual symbols. To demonstrate the causal relationship between unemployed status and number of homeless people, Hot Spot analysis was used.

RESULTS

Map 5 shows California, New York, and Florida are the top three states that hosted the highest number of homeless people in 2018. The ratio between number of homeless people and unaccompanied minors are pretty much positive, however, states like Nevada, Oregon, and Minnesota have disproportioned number of unaccompanied minors comparing with their overall number of homeless people.

A closer look of California in Map 2 illustrates that the majority of homeless people come from Los Angeles City and County (69,995/129,972), and San Diego City and County hosted second largest number of homeless people (81,768/129,972). The distribution seems clustered in the southern part of the California state. Cities that have a higher number of homeless people tend to have a higher number of year-round beds. However, the supply is significantly less than the demand. For every 5 homeless people, only 1 person can find shelter to stay in LA city and county.

Limitations

The limitations to this analysis include but are not limited to the availability of certain data, e.g., socioeconomic characteristics of homeless people, the accuracy of number of homeless people since the HUD only conducts biannual counting and the nature of head counting. The comparative study between NY and CA could help understand if both states share similar challenges or not.

Conclusion

Over half a million people in the United States have experienced homelessness in 2018, which is the magnitude of the issue raises serious concerns over the root causes and government response. Though the total number of homeless people remains unchanged over the decade, however, the stagnation of situation also presents question of the effectiveness of current emergency response and policies, with LA as the perfect example. The growing number of unaccompanied homeless minors should also alarm the government in terms of preventing the emergence of chronic patterns among homeless people.

- Minimizing root causes: The prevention of growing number of homeless people requires the government to address some of the core issues, e.g., rising cost of housing in both CA and NY area, unemployment rate. Policies like affordable housing, skill training should be implemented.
- Improving shelter program: Both Map 2 and Map 6 show the asymmetric demand and supply for shelters, cities have a significant number of homeless people need to invest further in terms of building shelter centers around the most clustered areas and food aid, particularly, in the cold season.
- Enriching data pool: Currently, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development is the leading institute combating the homelessness, the data and reports around homeless are thus, very limited. Data about socioeconomic characteristics of the homeless people would be helpful in turn of uncovering more information about their background and offering more effective help and programs.

References


All figures are projected as North America (2011) Albers.