OXFORD

Social Forces, 2024, **102**, 880–901

https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soad123

Advance access publication date 30 September 2023

Original Article

Beyond Gentrification: Housing Loss, Poverty, and the Geography of Displacement

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We assess the relationship between gentrification and a key form of displacement: eviction. Drawing on over six million court cases filed in 72 of the largest metropolitan areas across the United States between 2000 and 2016, we show that most evictions occurred in low-income neighborhoods that did not gentrify. Over time, eviction rates decreased more in gentrifying neighborhoods than in comparable low-income neighborhoods. Results were robust to multiple specifications and alternative measures of gentrification. The findings of this study imply that focusing on gentrifying neighborhoods as the primary site of displacement risks overlooking most instances of forced removal. Disadvantaged communities experienced displacement pressures when they underwent gentrification and when they did not. Eviction is not a passing trend in low-income neighborhoods—one that comes and goes as gentrification accelerates and decelerates—but a durable component of neighborhood disadvantage.

Introduction

Glass (1964) coined the term "gentrification" after witnessing working-class Londoners being displaced by middle-class newcomers. Ever since, displacement has been a major theme in studies of gentrification. In a review of the literature, Zukin (1987:135) wrote that "all studies of gentrification confirm that a fairly homogenous group of in-movers reduces residential density and replaces an existing population." Newman and Wyly (2006:25) observed that gentrification "involves direct, conflict-ridden displacement," while Slater (2011:572) called displacement "the most serious consequence of gentrification."

In recent years, however, studies have questioned the link between gentrification and displacement (Freeman and Braconi 2004; Hwang and Ding 2020). In turn, still other researchers have challenged these findings, sparking debates over definitions of forced mobility (Sims and Iverson 2021; Slater 2009), measurement of gentrification (Carlson 2020; Easton et al. 2019), and the disconnect between the null findings of quantitative studies and descriptions of displacement

Received: October 8, 2022. **Revised:** July 7, 2023. **Accepted:** July 27, 2023

from qualitative work (Hyra 2015; Newman and Wyly 2006). Fundamental questions about the nature of gentrification and the drivers of displacement are far from settled.

This study analyzes the relationship between gentrification and eviction. We improve upon previous research in four ways. First, we analyze eviction records, a tractable metric of forced removal. Second, we make use of data from 72 of the largest metropolitan areas in the United States, allowing us to account for variation in the gentrification-displacement relationship. Third, we foreground neighborhood racial composition and racialized differences in trajectories of change (Owens and Candipan 2019; Rucks-Ahidiana 2020). Fourth, we assess the robustness of our findings by employing multiple measures of gentrification, contributing to a growing literature on gentrification measurement (Barton 2016; Preis et al. 2021).

Drawing on the records of over six million cases filed across the United States between 2000 and 2016, we show that the vast majority of evictions took place in neighborhoods that were not gentrifying. Comparing otherwise-similar neighborhoods that did and did not gentrify, we find that eviction rates were lower at the end of the period in gentrifying neighborhoods, and they fell more over time in such spaces. Evictions were less likely to spike in gentrifying neighborhoods in the intervening years, as might be the case if vulnerable long-term residents were forced out by this mechanism. These findings are robust to multiple specifications and several operationalizations of gentrification.

In short, we demonstrate that (*a*) displacement in the form of eviction is prevalent in urban neighborhoods, (*b*) it occurs in gentrifying spaces, but (*c*) it is far more common in low-income neighborhoods not undergoing gentrification. In most cases, forced displacement from housing was not the result of a disruption of the neighborhood status quo caused by gentrification; rather, high eviction rates were the status quo in low-income communities. To focus on gentrifying neighborhoods as a site of displacement risks overlooking most instances of forced removal. Our findings help to motivate a research agenda that seeks to understand the prevalence, location, and causes of housing loss more broadly.

Gentrification and Displacement

Scholars long have identified displacement as a direct consequence of gentrification (Atkinson 2000). Glass's (1964:xvii) seminal description notes that "once this process of 'gentrification' starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the working class occupiers are displaced." Likewise, Clay (1978:20) claims that new residents of gentrified neighborhoods "often displace lower-income households which have lived in the neighborhood for some time." Marcuse (1985:229) argues that "gentrification is linked inherently with the displacement of lower-income households."

Qualitative researchers have documented a relationship between gentrification and displacement. As gentrifying neighborhoods attract new, higher-income residents, landlords raise rents (Mirabal 2009; Newman and Wyly 2006; Stabrowski 2014) and employ a range of tactics to replace tenants, including curtailing utilities, verbal harassment, neglecting repairs, and buy-outs (Mele 2000; Stabrowski 2014). When these tactics fail, heightened surveillance may provide the pretext for eviction (Stabrowski 2014). New homeowners, attracted to upgrading neighborhoods, look for ways to remove inherited tenants and renovate properties (Taylor 2002:109). Under these conditions, long-term residents of gentrifying neighborhoods report fears of displacement and difficulties keeping up with rising costs (Newman and Wyly 2006).

Quantitative studies, however, have found little evidence of displacement from gentrifying neighborhoods, either in absolute terms or relative to equivalent neighborhoods not undergoing gentrification. This is true for studies that examine national data (Brummet and Reed 2019; Ellen and O'Regan 2011; Freeman 2005) and those that have focused on a number of large, East-coast cities, including Boston (Vigdor 2002), New York City (Dragan, Ellen, and Glied 2019; Freeman and Braconi 2004; Laniyonu 2019), and Philadelphia (Ding, Hwang, and Divringi 2016; Hwang and Ding 2020). The unsettled debate over gentrification's role in driving displacement continues

to generate new studies, commanding considerable scholarly attention (Brown-Saracino 2017; Hwang and Ding 2020).

Quantitative research investigating links between gentrification and displacement is limited in four critical ways. First, studies rarely directly measure displacement. Instead, the literature has relied, as Easton et al. (2019:15) note, on "proxies for actual displacement, such as broad indicators of population churn, changes in owner-occupation or changes in the ethnic and class make-up" of communities. For example, in studying population change in low-income neighborhoods, Ellen and O'Regan (2011) used American Housing Survey data to analyze exit rates among residents in gentrifying neighborhoods. Yet they acknowledge, "the term displacement of course connotes not just exit, but exit for a particular reason—a shock to housing costs or eviction/demolition" (Ellen and O'Regan 2011:92).

Second, most studies have been limited to a single city, typically a large metro area on the East Coast that experiences extreme gentrification pressure (Maciag 2015).[1] But doing so risks establishing a body of research biased by the particularities of cities characterized not only by high costs but robust tenant protections and community resources (Hatch 2017; Small 2008). Multiple attempts have been made to analyze gentrification and displacement at the national level (Ellen and O'Regan 2011; Freeman 2005; Martin and Beck 2018), but all rely on indirect measures of displacement and none address heterogeneity between metropolitan areas in the gentrification–displacement relationship (for a recent exception, see Lee and Perkins 2022).

Third, few studies have considered how the link between gentrification and displacement is mediated by neighborhood racial composition (though see Ding et al. 2016; Hwang and Ding 2020). Not all low-income neighborhoods are equally likely to gentrify, particularly not low-income Black and Latinx neighborhoods (Hwang and Sampson 2014; Rucks-Ahidiana 2020; Timberlake and Johns-Wolfe 2017). The pre-gentrification racial composition of neighborhoods also affects the population of in-migrants (Owens and Candipan 2019). Yet previous work rarely assessed how neighborhood racial composition influences the gentrification–displacement link.

Fourth, nearly all analyses rely on a single definition of gentrification, and these definitions vary from study to study. As a phenomenon, gentrification is subject to as many conceptual and measurement issues as displacement (Hwang 2016; Papachristos et al. 2011). No agreed-upon definition has become paradigmatic, and it is rare for a study to replicate a previously employed definition. This makes it difficult to assess whether findings of a given study reflect how gentrification was operationalized.

Study Design & Research Questions

The present study moves beyond these four limitations. First, instead of measuring displacement with proxies, we rely on court records of eviction cases. Because they include addresses and action dates, eviction records offer a clear accounting of when and where households were formally threatened with removal and forced from their homes (Sims 2016). These data require cleaning and validation, as well as careful attention to heterogeneous legal and regulatory policies that shape their creation (Nelson et al. 2021a). Court-administered evictions represent only one form of displacement. There are many other ways that long-term residents may be directly or indirectly displaced from their neighborhoods (Grier and Grier 1980; Marcuse 1985). There are also many off-the-books, informal evictions that do not leave a trace in the court records (Desmond 2016). Still, formal evictions are one clear instance of displacement.[2] Evidence suggests that neighborhoods with a high concentration of formal evictions also display a high concentration of other forms of involuntary moves.[3]

Second, while several single-site studies have relied on eviction records to analyze the relationship between gentrification and displacement (Chum 2015; Lens et al. 2020; Mah 2021; Nelson et al. 2021b; Raymond et al. 2021; Sims 2016, 2021), we draw on a much larger sample of eviction records from 72 of the largest metropolitan areas in the United States. Our design ensures that our conclusions are not driven by the particularities of a single city or a specific

kind of urban context. In addition, we highlight variation in gentrification and displacement dynamics.

Third, we foreground neighborhood racial composition when analyzing the gentrification–eviction relationship. In the United States, any study of housing access and instability must account for segregation, neighborhood racial composition, and trajectories of socio-demographic change (Massey and Denton 1993; Owens and Candipan 2019). We analyze gentrification and persistent neighborhood poverty jointly rather than in isolation from one another (Brown-Saracino 2017; Hwang 2016), exploring displacement across different neighborhood contexts and identifying racial disparities.

Fourth, to ensure that findings are not a function of how we define the key independent variable, we conduct analyses using four measures of gentrification. We employ our own novel definition of gentrification and three recent, distinct measures of the phenomenon. This allows us to both confirm the robustness of our findings and contribute to the growing body of literature seeking to measure gentrification (Barton 2016; Preis et al. 2021).

Our central research question is, are residents of gentrifying neighborhoods evicted in large numbers, either in absolute terms or relative to those living in equivalent neighborhoods that did not gentrify? We investigate whether eviction rates are higher or increasing in gentrifying areas, relative to comparable neighborhoods not undergoing gentrification. We conduct both cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses, using multiple methods and specifications.

Data & Methods

Measuring Displacement

We draw on the court records of 6,007,475 eviction cases filed between 2000 and 2016 across 72 of the 200 largest metropolitan areas in the United States. Evictions take place when tenants are removed from their homes as a result of legal proceedings. We measured displacement by focusing on eviction judgments: findings against tenants that order them to quit the premises.[4]

There is no uniform reporting mechanism for eviction records, and the availability of such data varies between jurisdictions and over time. We relied on individual-level case records that were collected by LexisNexis Risk Solutions and compiled by the Eviction Lab at Princeton University. Records were cleaned, stripped of duplicates and commercial eviction cases, geocoded, and validated against publicly available data sources published by county- and state-court systems (Desmond et al. 2018).[5] We identified serial eviction filing cases—the same household threatened with removal from the same address multiple times—and removed all but the last judgment against the household.

We focused on tracts in the 200 most populous metropolitan areas (n = 178,591 tract-years of validated data).[6] Within these areas, we constructed a series of purposive samples based on the availability of court records. We have no reason to believe that the availability of such records is itself systematically related to the gentrification–eviction relationship—a source of potential bias—but we emphasize that our samples were non-random. Because processes of neighborhood socio-demographic change and gentrification are not constrained within city lines (Delmelle et al. 2021; Jones 2020), we included both urban and suburban neighborhoods in our analyses.[7] Following Kneebone and Berube (2013), we considered tracts urban if they were in either the first principal city in the OMB name of the metropolitan area or any subsequent named city with a population >100,000. All other tracts in the metropolitan area were marked as suburbs.

Measuring Gentrification

There is limited agreement about how best to measure gentrification. Typically, researchers use Census, administrative, or geo-located survey data measured at two or more time points to assess net changes in the characteristics of neighborhood residents. Low socioeconomic status (SES) neighborhoods considered eligible to gentrify at time t are marked as "gentrifying" if they

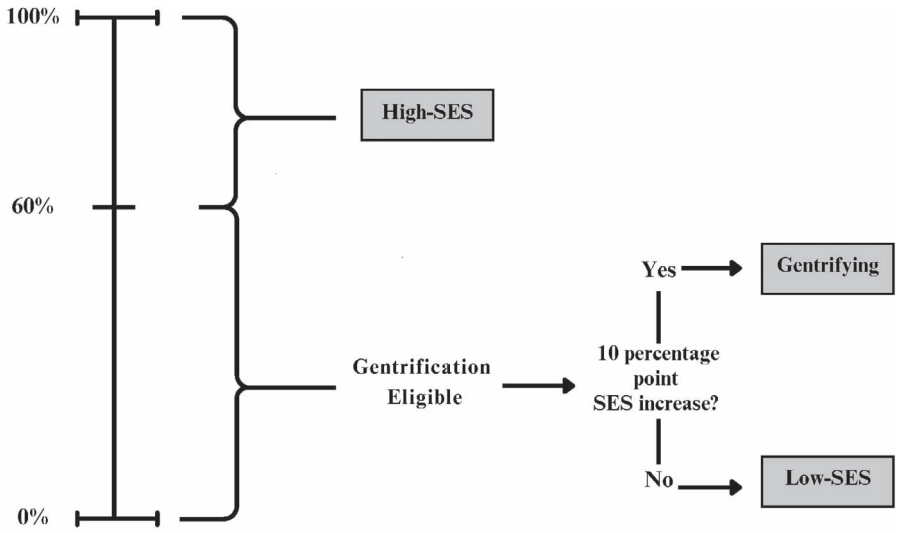

Figure 1. Classification of tracts

meet a threshold of change by time t + x. Researchers often use principal components analysis (PCA) to reduce multiple variables to a single factor measuring SES (Owens and Candipan 2019; Papachristos et al. 2011). Analyses then compare initially low-SES neighborhoods that did and did not gentrify.

Following this model, we constructed a tract-level SES scale in both 2000 and 2016 based on PCA of four variables: percentage of residents over age 25 with more than a high school degree; percentage employed in technical or professional occupations; median home value; and median rent. Education and occupation serve as measures of residents' class position, allowing us to account for college students or artists—likely gentrifiers who may have low income but significant future earning potential. Home values serve as an indicator of neighborhood reinvestment and changes in the built environment, while rents reflect affordability.

Using this SES scale, we considered tracts eligible to gentrify if they were in the bottom 60% of the SES distribution in a metropolitan area in 2000. Among that group, we marked tracts whose position in the distribution increased by 10 percentile points or more by 2016 as "gentrifying." We referred to tracts that were eligible to gentrify in 2000 but had not by 2016 as "low-SES" and those tracts in the top two SES quintiles in 2000 as "high-SES." Figure 1 describes the classification logic.

The ethno-racial composition of a neighborhood is an important predictor of whether gentrification occurs, what form it takes, and what effects it has (Hwang and Sampson 2014; Rucks-Ahidiana 2020). We further classified neighborhoods according to their racial majority in 2000: Black, Latinx, white, and other/none. Unless otherwise specified, data were drawn from the 2000 decennial Census—standardized to 2010 geographies in the Longitudinal Tract Database (Logan et al. 2014)—and the 2012–2016 American Community Survey (ACS).

In table 1, we provide a description of neighborhood characteristics in 2000 and 2012–2016 by gentrification status across all tracts in the 200 most populous metropolitan areas. High-SES tracts in 2000 were overwhelmingly white and were only slightly less so at the end of the study period. Most low-SES tracts were also majority-white in 2000, as well as nearly two-thirds of tracts that went on to gentrify. Median rent increased fastest in gentrifying neighborhoods, rising

Table 1. Neighborhood Characteristics by Gentrification Status, Top 200 US Metropolitan Areas

	High-SES		Low-SES		Gentrifying	
	2000	2012–2016	2000	2012–2016	2000	2012–2016
White majority	91.7%	83.5%	58.2%	46.7%	64.4%	61.6%
Black majority	1.83%	2.29%	15.3%	15.5%	14.5%	11.5%
Latinx majority	1.34%	2.20%	13.0%	19.4%	10.7%	10.5%
Other/No majority	5.12%	12.0%	13.4%	18.5%	10.4%	16.3%
Median rent ($)	939	1,216	681	903	606	988
Total housing units	35,035,368	42,366,188	38,536,464	42,188,901	9,986,040	12,804,998
Vacant units	2,239,910	3,860,691	2,844,499	4,604,004	897,866	1,466,847
Average Vacancy rate	5.92%	8.36%	7.28%	11.0%	8.78%	11.6%
Owner-occupied units	22,743,881	25,926,687	21,532,910	21,147,642	5,733,836	7,134,091
% Owner-occupied	64.9%	61.2%	55.9%	50.1%	57.4%	55.7%
Renter-occupied units	10,051,577	12,578,810	14,159,055	16,437,255	3,354,338	4,204,060
% Renter-occupied	28.7%	29.7%	36.7%	39.0%	33.6%	32.8%
Number of tracts	20,982		24,187		7088	

Note: Median rent is reported in 2016 dollars.

from $606 in 2000 to $988 in 2012–2016 (inflation-adjusted 2016 dollars), but rents in low-SES neighborhoods increased considerably during this time as well, rising from $681 to $903.

Analytical Strategy

We began by analyzing a *cross-sectional sample* focused on the years 2012–2016. In this sample, we included any of the top 200 US metropolitan areas in which at least half of tracts had valid eviction data for at least one year between 2012 and 2016 (n = 46,870 tract-years from 15,190 unique tracts in 72 metropolitan areas). This included a wide range of metropolitan areas, both large (e.g., Houston, Miami, Seattle) and small (e.g., Cedar Rapids, Eugene, Tuscaloosa). Metropolitan areas were distributed across the country, with particularly strong representation of the Midwest and Southeast but, notably, no coverage in New York and only one metropolitan area in California (Chico). To limit the effects of year-to-year noise in the data, we measured average eviction judgments per year within each included tract over the window 2012 to 2016. For the average metropolitan area, we included 85.1% of unique tracts.

Using this sample, we conducted three analyses. First, we explored the relationship between gentrification and eviction at the metropolitan level, assessing whether metropolitan areas that saw more neighborhoods gentrify also had higher eviction rates. Second, we estimated the share of evictions and eviction rates in gentrifying, low-SES, and high-SES neighborhoods, highlighting variation by the racial composition. Third, we documented heterogeneity across metropolitan areas, estimating eviction rates in gentrifying and low-SES neighborhoods in each of the 72 metropolitan areas in the sample.

These analyses, however, do not reveal how eviction patterns changed over time or whether those changes were larger or smaller in gentrifying neighborhoods. We therefore conducted a second set of analyses, which required a new sample. In this *paired sample,* we included any metropolitan area from the cross-sectional sample that met the same set of inclusion criteria for the period 2000–2004 (n = 38 metropolitan areas). This sample retained a wide variety of metropolitan areas, both in terms of population and geographic distribution. Of the 27 states represented in the cross-sectional sample, 16 were included in paired sample. Within the included metropolitan areas, 87.7% of tracts observed in the later period were observed in the earlier period. As with the cross-sectional sample, we averaged evictions within each tract between 2000 and 2004. The resulting dataset included 7,108 unique tracts with two observations each (one in each period).

Naïve comparison between low-SES and gentrifying neighborhoods is complicated by heterogeneity within each category. Two neighborhoods within the same metropolitan area—one gentrifying and one low-SES—could be incommensurable for any number of economic, sociodemographic, or historical reasons. To address this issue, we conducted a multivariate regression predicting changes over time in eviction rates in gentrifying and low-SES tracts while controlling for observed differences between them.[8] The model can be written as

$$Y_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Gentrification_{ij} + \beta_2 Suburb_{ij} + \beta_m X_{mij} + \alpha_j + u_{ij}$$

Our dependent variable (Y_{ij}) was the change between 2000–2004 and 2012–2016 in the eviction rate of tract i in metropolitan area j. We modeled this as a function of tract gentrification, whether the tract fell in a suburb, and changes in a set of m neighborhood characteristics (the vector $X_{mij}; m = 10$): percent non-white residents; percent families with children; percent foreign born; percent single-mother households; median household income (logged); unemployment rate; vacancy rate; percent owner-occupied units; total number of owner-occupied households (logged); and share of renter households with income of $50,000 per year or more (standardized to 2016 dollars). We used ordinary least squares regression to model these changes and included metropolitan area fixed effects (α_j) to account for differences in eviction rates between metropolitan areas. The regression offers a test of whether changes in eviction rates were smaller or larger in gentrifying neighborhoods as compared with observationally equivalent low-SES tracts.

The timing of gentrification within our study period could affect our findings. Evictions could occur early following the onset of gentrification as landlords attempt to open up more units (Chum 2015), or later if residents hang on as long as possible until rent increases max them out (Freeman 2005). We repeated regression analysis of the paired sample on subsamples limited to early and late gentrifying neighborhoods. To do so, we distinguished between gentrifying neighborhoods, replicating tract-level PCA of SES using data from the 2006–2010 ACS. Among tracts that we classified as gentrifying over the full study period, those that met the threshold of a 10-percentile point increase by 2010 were classified as "early gentrifying." All other gentrifying tracts we refer to as "late gentrifying."

Still, analyses comparing changes in eviction rates between the early-2000s and the mid-2010s exclude the intervening years. To explore eviction patterns over the full study period we created a third, *longitudinal sample* in which we captured annual variations in evictions. To do so, we started with the 38 metropolitan areas that made up the paired sample. We included all tracts in these metropolitan areas for which we observed at least four tract-years of valid data between 2000 and 2016. We removed any metropolitan area in which we observed <50% of all unique tracts or in which none of the observed tracts ever gentrified. The final sample consisted of 76,406 tract-years from 7,241 unique tracts across 36 metropolitan areas. The composition of this sample was very similar to the paired sample; the two metropolitan areas removed were Lexington, Kentucky and North Port, Florida. The median tract was observed for 12 years.

To analyze these data, we first plotted eviction rates over time, highlighting differences in trajectories according to gentrification classification and neighborhood racial composition.[9] Second, we checked for the presence of large jumps in evictions between years, spikes that could accompany substantial tenant replacement. We measured year-over-year changes in eviction judgments in each tract. We recorded a spike as an increase in the number of evictions in the tract that was two standard deviations above the metropolitan area-specific mean change in evictions between the given pair of years, accounting for variations across time and between jurisdictions.[10] For example, if the number of evictions in a tract increased from 25 to 45 between 2014 and 2015 (+80%) in a metropolitan area where evictions increased by only 10% during that time, we would record that as an eviction spike.

Table 2 describes the three samples and the prevalence of gentrification and eviction in each. We include a column summarizing the distribution of gentrification across the 200 most populous

Table 2. Description of the Three Analytic Samples

	Top 200 metropolitan areas	Cross-sectional	Paired	Longitudinal
Number of tracts	52,257	15,190	7,108	7,241
Number of metropolitan areas	200	72	38	36
High-SES	20,982 (40.2%)	6,251 (41.2%)	3,000 (42.2%)	3,008 (41.5%)
Low-SES	24,187 (46.3%)	6,935 (45.7%)	3,155 (44.4%)	3,242 (44.8%)
Gentrifying	7,088 (13.6%)	2,004 (13.2%)	953 (13.4%)	991 (13.7%)
Gentrifying White	4,566 (8.74%)	1,400 (9.22%)	693 (9.75%)	735 (10.2%)
Gentrifying Black	1,027 (1.97%)	293 (1.93%)	142 (2.00%)	141 (1.95%)
Gentrifying Latinx	756 (1.45%)	141 (0.928%)	33 (0.464%)	33 (0.46%)
Gentrifying Other/No majority	739 (1.41%)	170 (1.12%)	85 (1.20%)	82 (1.13%)
Early gentrifying	3,678 (7.04%)	1,020 (6.71%)	462 (6.50%)	490 (6.77%)
Late gentrifying	3,297 (6.31%)	952 (6.27%)	479 (6.74%)	490 (6.77%)
Eviction judgments		1,139,983	891,553	1,781,507
Tract-years		46,870	39,536	76,406

Note: Tracts were not included in a particular sample owing to one of three reasons: (1) changing Census geographies between 2000 and 2012–2016; (2) small population in 2012–2016 (under 200 total residents); and (3) tract-level data missing in one or more of the variables used in constructing the measure.

metropolitan areas.[11] Across the top 200 metropolitan areas, 13.6% of tracts were classified as gentrifying between 2000 and 2016. Almost half of all neighborhoods (46.3%) were low-SES in 2000 but did not gentrify by 2016. Among gentrifying neighborhoods, there was a nearly even split between early and late gentrification.

To test for the possibility that findings are biased by our measure of gentrification, we replicated all analyses using three other gentrification definitions. Our first drew on Ding et al. (2016) study of gentrification and displacement in Philadelphia. The second pulled from Timberlake and Johns-Wolfe's (2017) analysis of the correlates of gentrification in Chicago and New York City between 1980 and 2010. The third measure derived from Rucks-Ahidiana's (2020) study of neighborhood racial composition and trajectories of gentrification. Each used Census data to track changes in neighborhood SES and mark gentrification, but relied on different sets of variables, eligibility thresholds, and measures of change. Complete description of how gentrification was defined in each and results from all replications are available in Online Supplement Section 2. In the main text, we provide key findings from these robustness checks.

Results

Gentrification and Eviction across Metropolitan Areas

Between 2000 and 2016, roughly 13% of tracts gentrified in the typical metropolitan area in our cross-sectional sample, but there was variation between sites. For example, just 7.8% of tracts in Akron, Ohio gentrified compared with 21.4% of tracts in Asheville, North Carolina. A number of metropolitan areas that experienced significant gentrification in the 1990s—e.g., Boston, Seattle, Denver—fell below the median, suggesting a leveling-off of socio-demographic change. By contrast, several metropolitan areas with higher rates of gentrification were sites not typically associated with the phenomenon, including Appleton, Wisconsin and Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The geography of these changes points to the need to expand the study of gentrification beyond coastal super-cities.

In figure 2, we plot metropolitan eviction rate against the share of tracts in the metropolitan area that gentrified between 2000 and 2016. We measured eviction rate as the average number of evictions recorded between 2012 and 2016 in tracts included in the cross-sectional sample divided by the total number of renter households in those tracts. The proportion gentrifying was recorded

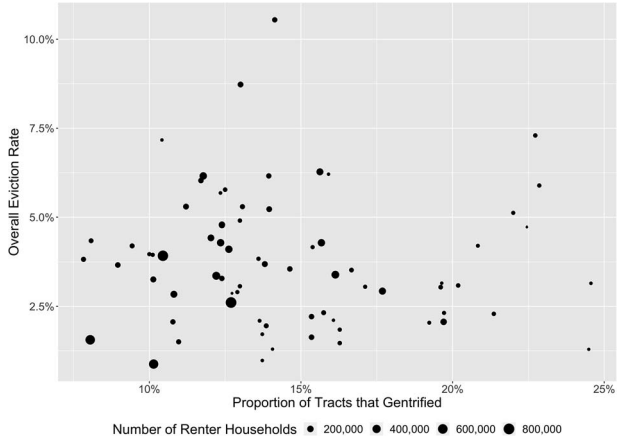

Figure 2. Metropolitan area eviction rate by proportion of tracts gentrified. *Note:* Metropolitan area eviction rate is measured as the average total number of evictions from 2012–2016 divided by the total number of renter households. The proportion of tracts gentrifying is measured as the fraction of all Census tracts in the metropolitan area that gentrified between 2000 and 2012–2016

across all tracts in the metropolitan area, regardless of sample inclusion. Metropolitan areas were scaled according to the number of renter households.

Metropolitan areas with higher gentrification rates did not have higher eviction rates. The simple unweighted correlation between these two variables was −0.06, suggesting almost no association. Two of the metropolitan areas with the highest eviction rates—Richmond, Virginia and Evansville, Indiana—saw <15% of tracts gentrify over the study period. By contrast, nearly a quarter of tracts in Tuscaloosa, Alabama and Appleton, Wisconsin gentrified, but eviction rates were relatively low in both. Simply put, gentrification does not appear to be correlated with eviction at the metropolitan level.

Gentrification and Eviction across Neighborhoods

Most evictions occurred in low-SES neighborhoods that did not gentrify. Figure 3 displays the share of neighborhoods by gentrification status and the share of evictions between 2012 and 2016. Gentrifying neighborhoods comprised 13.2% of all neighborhoods and saw 11.7% of evictions. By contrast, low-SES neighborhoods that did not gentrify comprised 45.7% of all neighborhoods but saw over 60% of evictions.[12]

We converted these absolute numbers into rates calculated across the denominator of renter-occupied housing units. Between 2012 and 2016, eviction rates were highest in low-SES neighborhoods. The median low-SES tract experienced an eviction rate of 3.53%, compared with 2.65% in the median gentrifying neighborhood, and 1.62% in the median high-SES tract. An eviction rate of 5% means that one in twenty renter households was evicted in a given year. Among gentrifying neighborhoods, under a quarter (23.6%) had an eviction rate this high, compared with over a third (34.4%) of low-SES neighborhoods. Eviction rates varied depending on neighborhood racial composition, but the gap between gentrifying and low-SES neighborhoods was consistent: using two-tailed t-tests to compare neighborhoods of the same racial/ethnic majority, we found significantly lower eviction rates in gentrifying neighborhoods than in low-SES ones.

In figure 4, we show differences in median eviction rates between gentrifying and low-SES neighborhoods for every metropolitan area in the cross-sectional sample. The median eviction rate in low-SES neighborhoods exceeded that in gentrifying neighborhoods in 62 of the 72 metropolitan areas in our sample. The largest disparity was in Tucson, Arizona, where the median eviction rate in low-SES tracts was 5.85% (n = 108), compared with 1.55% in gentrifying tracts

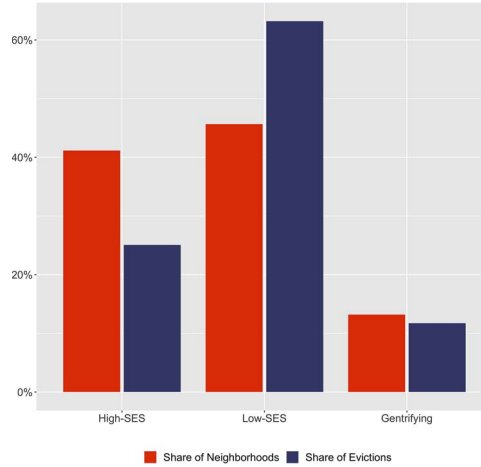

Figure 3. Share of tracts and eviction judgments by neighborhood gentrification classification (2012–2016)

($n = 25$). Several large metropolitan areas had notable differences in this direction, including Charlotte and Raleigh, North Carolina (2.38 and 2.37 percentage points, respectively), Jacksonville, Florida (2.22 percentage points), and Austin, Texas (1.33 percentage points). Median eviction rates were higher in low-SES areas both in metropolitan areas where eviction is common (e.g., Richmond, Virginia, Durham, North Carolina) and in those where it occurs much less often (e.g., Seattle, Washington, Birmingham, Alabama).

For the ten metropolitan areas where eviction rates were higher in gentrifying neighborhoods than in low-SES ones, the largest disparity was in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, where the median eviction rate in low-SES tracts (1.42%, $n = 20$) was 1.20 percentage points lower than what we observed in gentrifying tracts (median of 2.62%, $n = 14$). Gaps in this direction were small and, notably, were not found in the larger metropolitan areas where gentrification research has tended to focus. Figure 4 displays significant between-metro heterogeneity with respect to the prevalence of eviction in gentrifying and low-SES neighborhoods, a pattern that cautions against drawing broad conclusions about these dynamics from single-site studies.

Changes in Eviction over Time

To explore how neighborhood eviction rates changed over time, we turn to the paired sample of 38 metropolitan areas in which we compared eviction rates in 2000–2004 with those in 2012–2016. We fit a multivariate regression model predicting change over time in eviction rate as a function of gentrification, suburban status, and changes to a wide array of socio-demographic and economic indicators. We fit two versions of this model: one in which we treated all gentrifying tracts as equivalent (Model 1) and one where we distinguished between early and late gentrification (Model 2). Results are presented in table 3; reported coefficients represent changes in eviction rates over time. As an example of interpretation, we find that eviction rates increased by 0.2 percentage points in suburbs compared with observationally equivalent urban neighborhoods.

All else held equal, gentrifying neighborhoods saw larger declines in eviction rates than otherwise-comparable low-SES tracts. Controlling for neighborhood characteristics, eviction rates were predicted to drop by 0.6 percentage points between 2000–2004 and 2012–2016 in gentrifying tracts (constant term of −0.003 plus the gentrification term of −0.003), compared with 0.3 percentage points in low-SES neighborhoods that did not gentrify ($p < .001$). When we accounted for the timing of gentrification (Model 2), we found decreases in eviction rates were concentrated

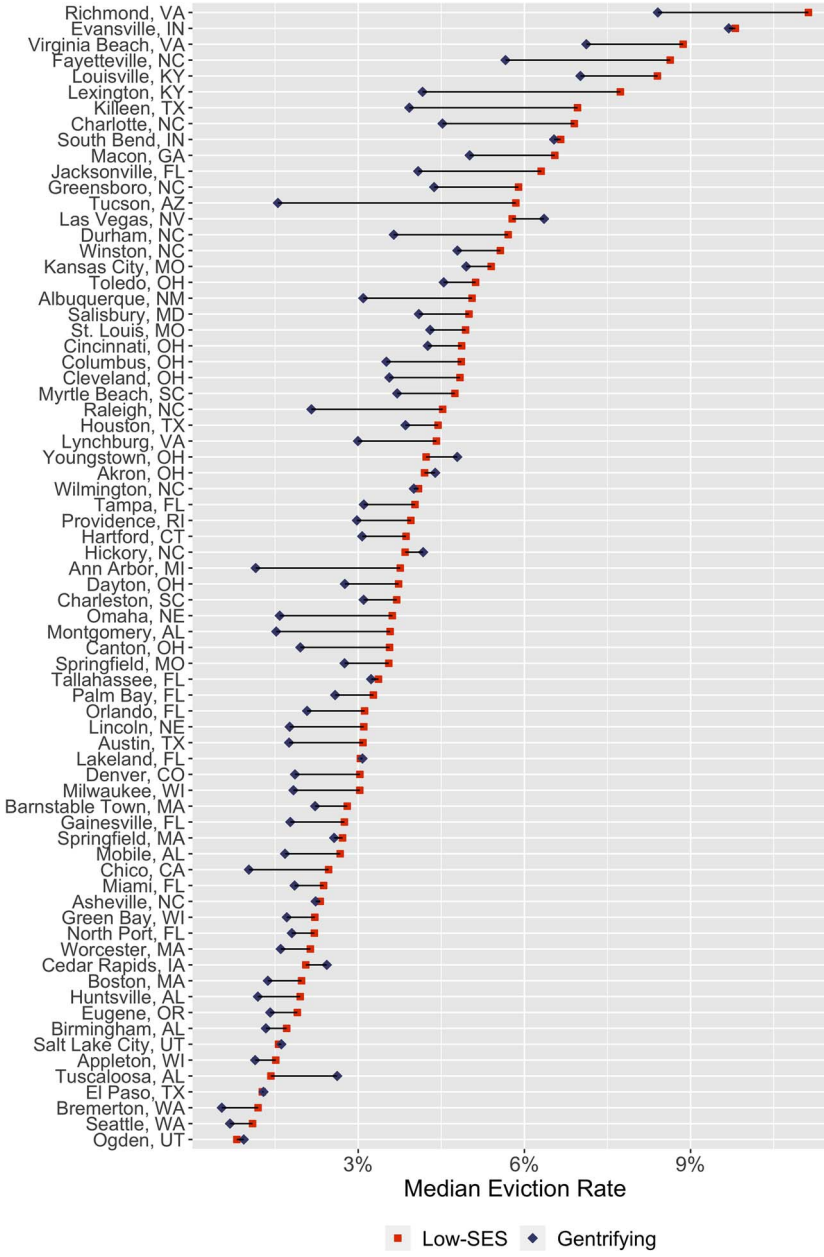

Figure 4. Median eviction rate by neighborhood gentrification classification and metropolitan areas (2012–2016)

in early gentrifying tracts. Other results from table 3 are consistent with findings from previous studies (Desmond 2012; Desmond and Gershenson 2017): rates increased in neighborhoods that saw growing shares of non-white residents and families with children, but declined as median household income rose.

Table 3. Multivariate Regression Predicting Changes in Eviction Rates by Gentrification Status

	Model 1	Model 2
Gentrifying	−0.003*** (0.001)	
Gentrifying early		−0.004*** (0.001)
Gentrifying late		−0.001 (0.001)
Suburb	0.002* (0.001)	0.002** (0.001)
Percent Nonwhite	0.018*** (0.005)	0.019*** (0.005)
Percent families with children	0.031*** (0.011)	0.028*** (0.011)
Percent foreign-born	−0.069*** (0.009)	−0.068*** (0.009)
Percent single mother households	0.007 (0.007)	0.009 (0.007)
Median household income (logged)	−0.010*** (0.003)	−0.011*** (0.003)
Unemployment rate	0.012** (0.005)	0.011** (0.005)
Vacancy rate	0.040*** (0.008)	0.042*** (0.008)
Percent owner-occupied households	0.060*** (0.006)	0.060*** (0.006)
Total owner-occupied households (logged)	−0.003* (0.002)	−0.002 (0.002)
Share of high-income renters	−0.012*** (0.004)	−0.007* (0.004)
Constant	−0.003 (0.004)	−0.003 (0.003)
Observations	4108	4096
R^2	0.157	0.160
Adjusted R^2	0.147	0.150
Residual Std. error	0.027 (df = 4058)	0.026 (df = 4045)
F statistic	15.461*** (df = 49; 4058)	15.422*** (df = 50; 4045)

Note: All reported models include metropolitan area fixed effects. $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$

Year-to-Year Changes in Eviction

Last, we turn to the longitudinal sample to investigate potential spikes in eviction in tracts that gentrified between 2000 and 2016. Figure 5 plots eviction rates by neighborhood gentrification classification for every year over this period. We split the figure according to the racial majority of the tract in 2000 and plotted the renter population-weighted average of eviction rates each year. We used a loess algorithm to plot a smooth trend line displayed with 95% confidence interval bands.

In 2000, eviction rates in low-SES neighborhoods that gentrified and those that did not were comparable in the full sample and all subsamples except the one limited to majority-Latinx neighborhoods. In majority-Black and majority-white neighborhoods, both rates overlapped for much of the first 5 years of the study period but were lower in gentrifying tracts from 2007 onwards. The difference was even more pronounced in tracts with no racial majority, where eviction rates in gentrifying tracts were comparable with those in low-SES tracts in 2000, but then dropped throughout the study period as the rates in low-SES neighborhoods rose.

We measured year-over-year changes in evictions in each tract, recording increases in the number of evictions that equaled or exceeded two standard deviations above the metropolitan area-specific mean change in evictions between the given pair of years. Eviction spikes did occur in gentrifying neighborhoods, but significantly less often than in low-SES neighborhoods. One in seven gentrifying neighborhoods (14.3%) experienced at least one such spike, compared with nearly one in four low-SES tracts (23.8%). Early gentrifying neighborhoods experienced fewer spikes than late gentrifying ones (11.4 vs. 17.2%); however, spikes were equally likely before and after 2008 in both early- and late-gentrifying neighborhoods.

Alternative Measures of Gentrification

To rule out the possibility that our findings were driven by our definition of gentrification, we replicated all analyses using three alternative measures. We highlight four findings here; complete

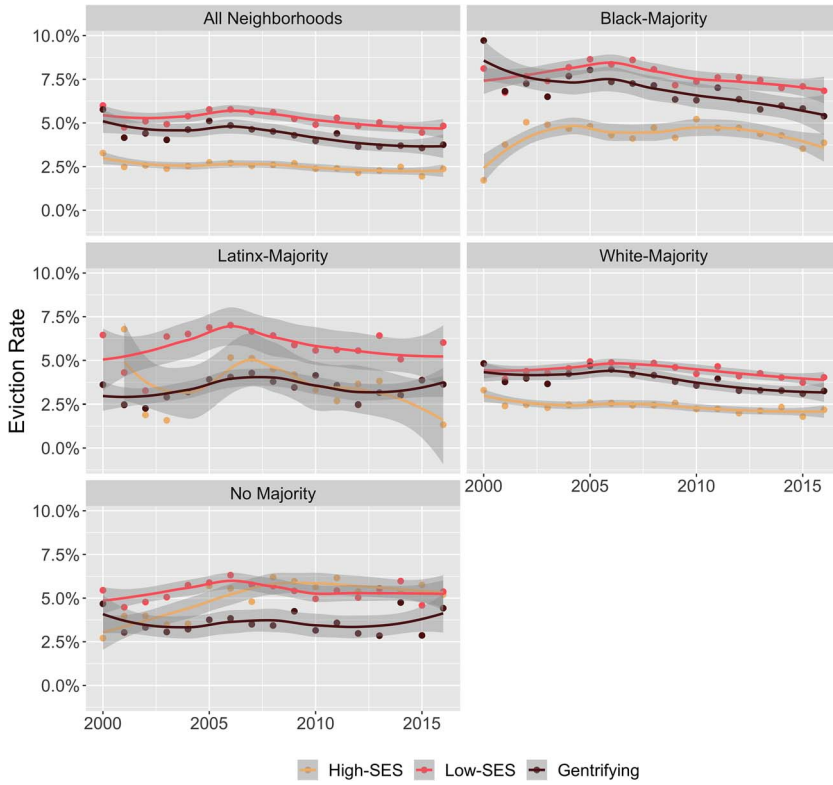

Figure 5. Average (weighted) eviction rate over time by neighborhood gentrification classification and tract racial majority in 2000

results are available in Online Supplement Section 2. First, between 2012 and 2016, regardless of the definition employed, gentrifying neighborhoods accounted for a modest portion of all evictions, while non-gentrifying low-SES neighborhoods accounted for an outsized share. Second, eviction rates fell over time significantly more in gentrifying tracts than in non-gentrifying low-SES tracts. We replicated regression analyses modeling changes over time in eviction rates using each of the gentrification definitions (table 4). Though not identical, key findings are robust to multiple definitions. Third, as in figure 5, eviction rates in gentrifying tracts either started or fell below those of low-SES tracts. Fourth, we found no evidence that neighborhoods that gentrified between 2000 and 2016 were more likely than non-gentrifying low-SES tracts to experience a spike in eviction filings. By all definitions, spikes were most common in non-gentrifying low-SES neighborhoods.

Discussion

Drawing on the records of millions of court cases from 72 large metropolitan areas across the United States, we found no evidence that neighborhoods that gentrified between 2000 and 2016 experienced higher rates of eviction than low-SES neighborhoods that did not. Evictions occurred in gentrifying neighborhoods, but they were not concentrated in those spaces: roughly 13% of neighborhoods in our cross-sectional sample gentrified, but only 11.7% of eviction judgments between 2012 and 2016 occurred in these areas. By contrast, three-fifths of evictions occurred in

Table 4. Multivariate Regression Predicting Changes in Eviction Rates by Gentrification Status, by Gentrification Definition

	TJW		DHD		RA	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Gentrifying	−0.002		−0.002**		0.003***	
	(0.001)		(0.001)		(0.001)	
Gentrifying early		−0.003*		−0.002*		−0.003**
		(0.002)		(0.001)		(0.001)
Gentrifying late		−0.001		−0.002		−0.003**
		(0.001)		(0.001)		(0.001)
Observations	4,163	4,163	3,588	3,588	7,108	7,108
R^2	0.159	0.159	0.172	0.172	0.152	0.152
Adjusted R^2	0.149	0.149	0.160	0.160	0.146	0.146
Residual Std. error	0.026 (df = 4113)	0.026 (df = 4112)	0.025 (df = 3538)	0.025 (df = 3537)	0.025 (df = 7058)	0.025 (df = 7057)
F Statistic	15.870*** (df = 49; 4113)	15.577*** (df = 50; 4112)	14.949*** (df = 49; 3538)	14.646*** (df = 50; 3537)	25.738*** (df = 49; 7058)	25.222*** (df = 50; 7057)

Note: We employ three alternative definitions of gentrification: "TJW" refers to Timberlake and Johns-Wolfe (2017); "DHD" to Ding, Hwang, and Divringi (2016); and "RA" to Rucks-Ahidiana (2020). All models contain the full set of control variables included in table 3 (not displayed here) and metropolitan area fixed effects. $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$

the 45.7% of low-SES neighborhoods that did not gentrify. In six of every seven metropolitan areas, the median eviction rate in low-SES neighborhoods exceeded that in gentrifying neighborhoods. Relative to low-SES neighborhoods, gentrifying tracts experienced larger net decreases over time in eviction rates and were significantly less likely to experience a spike in evictions. These findings were robust to alternative specifications that account for the timing of gentrification, the racial composition of neighborhoods, and different measures of gentrification. Metropolitan areas with the highest rates of gentrification between 2000 and 2016 were not "superstar" cities, but rather metros in Wisconsin, North Carolina, and Iowa. This finding, along with figure 4 documenting between-metro heterogeneity in the gentrification-eviction relationship, reinforces the importance of studying neighborhood dynamics at a national scale to avoid generalizing from particular local settings (Lee and Perkins 2022; Nelson et al. 2021a; Sims and Iverson 2021). Doing so also incorporates places that have received scant attention from urban sociologists.

Eviction is not synonymous with displacement. Rather, it represents one form of direct displacement (Grier and Grier 1980; Marcuse 1985). It remains possible that renters in gentrifying neighborhoods are disproportionally displaced by other means. If this were the case, we would expect to see fewer long-term residents in such neighborhoods, compared with low-SES neighborhoods that did not gentrify. To assess this possibility, we analyzed 2012–2016 ACS data on the share of renters who reported having lived at their current address either before 2000 or before 2010, by neighborhood type (table 5). In both low-SES and gentrifying neighborhoods, on average 9.2% of renters reported having lived at their current address since before 2000, and roughly two-thirds reported having lived there since before 2010. In other words, renters in gentrifying tracts were just as likely to be long-term residents as those in low-SES neighborhoods. This is a striking finding given that gentrifying neighborhoods experienced more growth in rental housing supply and therefore, mechanically, had more renters of shorter tenure. Although we cannot observe the prevalence of forms of displacement that occur outside of the legal system, (*a*) previous data find formal and informal evictions co-occur in the same neighborhood, as mentioned above, and (*b*) we find no evidence that gentrifying neighborhoods had a smaller share of long-term residents than low-SES neighborhoods.

Our findings should be interpreted in the context of several limitations. First, reliable data on evictions do not exist everywhere and at all times. Many major cities of interest in the study

Table 5. Average Share of Renter Householders Living in the Tract Prior to a Given Year, by Neighborhood Gentrification Status

	Before 2000	Before 2010
High-SES	7.2%	67.3%
Low-SES	9.2%	65.1%
Gentrifying	9.2%	66.0%

of gentrification (e.g., New York, Philadelphia) were excluded from our analyses. Analyses were restricted to the years 2000–2016; gentrification-eviction dynamics may be different in other periods. Second, while eviction cases are typically the result of landlord–tenant disputes, they can also arise through no fault of the tenant when a landlord chooses to sell their property. The latter may be more likely in gentrifying neighborhoods where rising property values incentivize landlords to sell, though this mechanism so far lacks empirical support (Nelson, Gromis, et al. 2021). We cannot distinguish the underlying causes of the cases we analyze and are therefore unable to test this hypothesis. Third, while we documented heterogeneity in the gentrification–displacement relationship within and between metropolitan areas, we did not attempt to explain that variation. We commit this area of inquiry to future research. Fourth, we cannot track renters' moves over time, precluding longitudinal analysis of gentrification-associated mobility patterns, another area for future research. Fifth, our focus here is on the risk of eviction among renter households; we do not assess the risks of displacement faced by homeowners.

How Do Neighborhoods Gentrify?

If gentrification is not associated with higher rates of eviction and the replacement of displaced low-income tenants, by what mechanism do neighborhoods gentrify? Statistics in table 1 indicate that increases to residents' SES in low-income neighborhoods are likely driven by economically advantaged newcomers moving into new housing stock, particularly as homeowners. Between 2000 and 2016, gentrifying neighborhoods experienced a 25% increase in renter-occupied units and a 24% increase in owner-occupied units. By comparison, over that time low-SES neighborhoods experienced a 16% increase in renter-occupied units and a 2% decrease in owner-occupied units. If qualitative researchers report *seeing* gentrification (Hyra 2015; Stabrowski 2014), it is in part because gentrification entails capital investments that dramatically change the housing stock of a neighborhood. Construction is a visible manifestation of gentrification that stands in sharp contrast to the disinvestment that characterizes many low-SES neighborhoods.

Indeed, the pace of construction may prove particularly important in understanding the relationship between gentrification and displacement. While growth was the norm in gentrifying neighborhoods, roughly one-third (32.9%) of such tracts in our cross-sectional sample saw no increase in total occupied housing units between 2000 and 2016. Comparing low-growth gentrifying neighborhoods with high-growth gentrifying neighborhoods, we found that eviction rates in 2012–2016 were higher in the former than the latter (medians of 3.7% and 2.3%, respectively). Using the longitudinal sample, we also found that eviction spikes were more common over time in low-growth gentrifying neighborhoods than in gentrifying neighborhoods that saw considerable increases to their housing stock (15.9 vs. 13.5%). The pressures of gentrification may be felt most acutely in places where housing supply is constrained, pointing to the significance of developer practices and zoning ordinances in shaping the gentrification–displacement relationship.

If gentrifying neighborhoods experienced larger net decreases in eviction rates compared with low-SES neighborhoods, it was likely because gentrification resulted in a kind of urban enclosure that reduced the share of households most vulnerable to displacement: those comprised low-income renters (Newman and Wyly 2006; Smith 1979). New housing stock is out-of-reach for many low-income tenants (O'Flaherty 1996) and, as such, is typically occupied by in-movers

who are economically advantaged relative to long-term residents. By upscaling urban space, and disproportionately catering to homebuyers, gentrification reduces eviction risk. Gentrification's biggest impact on renters, then, may occur not in the immediate aftermath of neighborhood change (via forced displacement), but in subsequent years and through the construction of new housing stock beyond the reach of low-income tenants.

Toward a Sociology of Displacement

Gentrification has become a theory of urban change and displacement itself, not just a specific neighborhood phenomenon. In a summary of the literature, Brown-Saracino (2017:518) observes that sociological studies "collectively present gentrification's scope as nearly limitless" by depicting "the inevitable advancement of gentrification in certain neighborhoods." Our findings show that a comprehensive theory of urban housing dynamics must look beyond gentrification as the central explanation of displacement. Plainly, gentrification is not the leading cause of housing loss among renters. Even if there were a consensus that gentrification caused displacement that would explain only a small fraction of forced moves because it remains a relatively rare phenomenon. Gentrification is exceptional, but displacement is not. Roughly 3.6 million eviction cases were filed across the United States in 2018 (Gromis et al. 2022). One in seven children born in large US cities between 1998 and 2000 were evicted at least once by age 15 (Lundberg and Donnelly 2019). As we document here, the vast majority of evictions are executed in low-SES neighborhoods that were not gentrifying.

Focusing on gentrification may lead researchers to overlook most forms of involuntary housing loss, which take place outside of transitioning neighborhoods. Low-SES neighborhoods experience significant displacement pressures in the absence of gentrification. For example, although over our study period rents accelerated faster in gentrifying neighborhoods than in low-SES neighborhoods, the latter areas still experienced significant rent hikes. Across the 200 largest US metropolitan areas, between 2000 and 2016 inflation-adjusted median rent increased by 63% in low-income neighborhoods that gentrified and 33% in those that did not (table 1).

Nowhere is the disjuncture between the potential of gentrification and the threat of displacement more pronounced than in majority-Black neighborhoods. In the metropolitan areas we studied, one in sixteen renter households was evicted each year in majority-Black neighborhoods, compared with one in thirty-eight renter households in gentrifying neighborhoods. Studies have found Black neighborhoods to be resistant to gentrification (Hwang and Sampson 2014). Eviction, however, is a racialized phenomenon, disproportionately concentrated in segregated Black communities (Hepburn et al. 2020).

This study supports calls for a shift toward a broader agenda that seeks to document the geography, causes, and consequences of urban displacement writ large (Brown-Saracino 2017; Cornelissen and Jang-Trettien 2023; Hwang 2016). Research in this vein explores how cities have come to be characterized by the segregated coexistence of durable and expanding poor and affluent neighborhoods (Hwang 2015; Owens 2012). This entails addressing fundamental unanswered questions about displacement: Why did rents in low-SES neighborhoods accelerate at such a fast pace? Are evictions diffuse across low-SES neighborhoods or concentrated in specific blocks or buildings? Where do people go after being displaced from poor neighborhoods? How does residential instability affect daily life in low-SES communities? Addressing questions like these is essential to understanding housing and neighborhood dynamics for most low-income families in the United States.

This study also holds implication for identifying core mechanisms of urban displacement. According to the gentrification perspective, displacement is caused by the new: new residents, new property owners, new shops, and new rents. External political and economic forces change previously poor neighborhoods, leading to displacement (Newman and Wyly 2006; Stabrowski 2014). But if displacement primarily occurs outside of gentrifying neighborhoods, then the main drivers of housing loss are not unique and exogenous to those communities but routine and internal. Urbanists have dedicated considerable attention to articulating a theory linking

reinvestment with displacement (Lees, Slater, and Wyly 2008; Smith 1996). We know far less about the mechanisms driving displacement in neighborhoods characterized by disinvestment and concentrated poverty.

From the perspective of low-income families, affordable housing is scarce in both gentrifying and non-gentrifying areas. The majority of poor renting households spend at least half of their income on housing (JCHS 2022). Recognizing that these families face affordability challenges and displacement in the absence of gentrification motivates the need for more research on rising rents, the dynamics of the low-income rental market, and housing loss. Just as tenants do not need gentrification to face rent burden and eviction, landlords do not need gentrification to turn a profit (Desmond and Wilmers 2019; Garboden and Rosen 2019). Housing loss and residential churn appear to be normal features of poor urban neighborhoods—features connected to other aspects of neighborhood life, like public safety and political participation. Displacement is not a passing trend in low-SES neighborhoods, one that comes and goes as gentrification accelerates and decelerates, but a durable component of neighborhood disadvantage.

Endnotes

1. For exceptions, see Sims and colleagues (Sims 2021; Sims and Iverson 2021) on Dane County, Wisconsin, Raymond and colleagues (Raymond et al. 2016, 2021) on Atlanta, Georgia, and Mah (2021) on Detroit.
2. Eviction may result from a tenant's conscious choice to stop paying rent, in which case "displacement" may not describe the event well. We cannot measure circumstances that lead to specific evictions, but we expect that "elective" evictions are extraordinarily rare.
3. There is limited data on forced mobility outside of the legal system. The Milwaukee Area Renters Survey, a survey of 1086 Milwaukee renters conducted between 2009 and 2011, asked respondents to report their history of both formal and informal evictions, those executed without legal proceedings. At the zip code level, we found a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.825$) between reports of formal and informal evictions, both of which Desmond and Shollenberger (2015) treat as instances of "forced moves."
4. Tenants threatened with eviction may move out before the court process is completed (Hartman and Robinson 2003:463). We replicated all analyses using eviction filings as the dependent variable. Results are substantively identical; see Online Supplement Section 5. Because such data do not exist, we cannot replicate with measures of informal eviction.
5. Eviction court records are rife with incomplete, ambiguous, and inaccurate data (Porton, Gromis, and Desmond 2021). The address cleaning and geocoding processes employed by the Eviction Lab resulted in 93.7% of cases being assigned to a point- or street-level geocode (and in turn a Census tract); the remainder was assigned through geographic imputation (Desmond et al. 2018). Data cleaning protocols were designed to remove duplicate cases and identify serial filings. Nearly all records were associated with a date. These measures—as well as validation against external metrics—give us a high degree of confidence that we are capturing all (or nearly all) formal eviction filings in a given tract-year.
6. Restricting to the top 200 most populous metropolitan areas allowed us to focus on areas with sufficient number of tracts to allow reliable assignment of gentrification status.
7. We found similar results when we replicated all analyses with samples restricted to urban neighborhoods; see Online Supplement Section 4.
8. We also conducted a series of matching analyses detailed in the Online Supplement; these analyses yielded functionally identical results (Online Supplement Section 6).
9. In Online Supplement Section 8, we formalize this analysis using a three-level Poisson regression model to test for significant differences in neighborhood eviction trajectories over time based on gentrification status.

10. Sensitivity analyses that used different definitions of what constituted an eviction spike returned similar results; see Online Supplement Section 8.
11. In table A1 of the Online Supplement, we detail the number of high- and low-SES and gentrifying tracts in each of the top 200 metropolitan areas, overall and included in each of the three samples.
12. Eviction rates in gentrification-adjacent tracts were similar to or lower than those observed in low-SES tracts. See Online Supplement Section 3.

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Supplementary Material

Supplementary material is available at *Social Forces* online.

Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge feedback provided by members of the Eviction Lab at Princeton University and participants in the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee Graduate Student Sociology Association Colloquium.

Funding

The Eviction Lab is funded by the JPB, Bill & Melinda Gates, and Ford Foundations as well as the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative. Research reported in this publication was supported by The Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health & Human Development of the National Institutes of Health under Award Number P2CHD047879. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.

Data Availability

The data underlying this article are publicly available at https://evictionlab.org/get-the-data/. Code to replicate analyses will be made available upon request.

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