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Neighborhoods with the Highest Eviction Filing Rates Have the Lowest Levels of COVID-19 Vaccination

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Abstract

The aim of this visualization is to determine whether populations at greatest risk for eviction have been vaccinated against COVID-19 prior to the end of the U.S. federal eviction moratorium. The authors identified nine jurisdictions in which both records of recent eviction filings and data on COVID-19 vaccination were available at the ZIP code level. In every jurisdiction, the ZIP codes with the highest rates of eviction filing during the pandemic had the lowest vaccination rates. These areas are also disproportionately home to majority Black and Hispanic populations. Given previous research demonstrating links between eviction and the spread of COVID-19, the present findings support the continuation of eviction protections. Communities at risk for eviction should be prioritized in vaccination campaigns.

Keywords

eviction, public health, racial disparities, COVID-19

Eviction is associated with increased COVID-19 transmission, infection, and mortality (Jowers et al. 2021; Leifheit et al. 2021). Recognizing the public health risk posed by eviction during the pandemic, policy makers at the federal, state, and local levels adopted a range of protections for renters (Benfer et al. 2021). Taken jointly, eviction moratoria prevented an estimated 1.55 million eviction filings in 2020, reduced COVID-19 infections by 3.8 percent, and lowered the U.S. death rate by 11 percent (Hepburn et al. 2021; Jowers et al. 2021). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention eviction moratorium, which expired July 31, 2021, and was then reimposed for most U.S. counties on August 3, 2021, represents the most significant remaining protection for renters, and a spike in eviction filings is likely when it ends. Mass vaccination against COVID-19 may mitigate the public health effects of the resulting displacement, but this depends on whether those at risk for eviction have been fully vaccinated against the virus.

In this visualization, we assess the degree to which people in neighborhoods with the greatest risk for eviction were vaccinated against COVID-19. Across nine cities for which we were able to locate sufficient data, we find that areas with higher eviction filing rates during the pandemic were more likely to have lower vaccination rates. In the visualization (Figure 1), we plot ZIP code–level COVID-19 vaccination rates against eviction filing rates. Each ZIP code is shaded according to its racial majority. For each city, we report the correlation between the two rates, weighted by the ZIP code population, and superimpose a line showing the population-weighted linear relationship between the two rates.

The negative correlation between eviction filing rates and vaccination rates holds in every jurisdiction in our sample, with the strongest correlations found in New York City and Philadelphia. Differences between neighborhoods are substantial. In Phoenix, for instance, the average neighborhood with a low eviction filing rate since the start of the pandemic (less than 5 percent) had a vaccination rate of 56 percent. By contrast, the average ZIP code with a high eviction filing rate (greater than 15 percent) had a vaccination rate of 35 percent.

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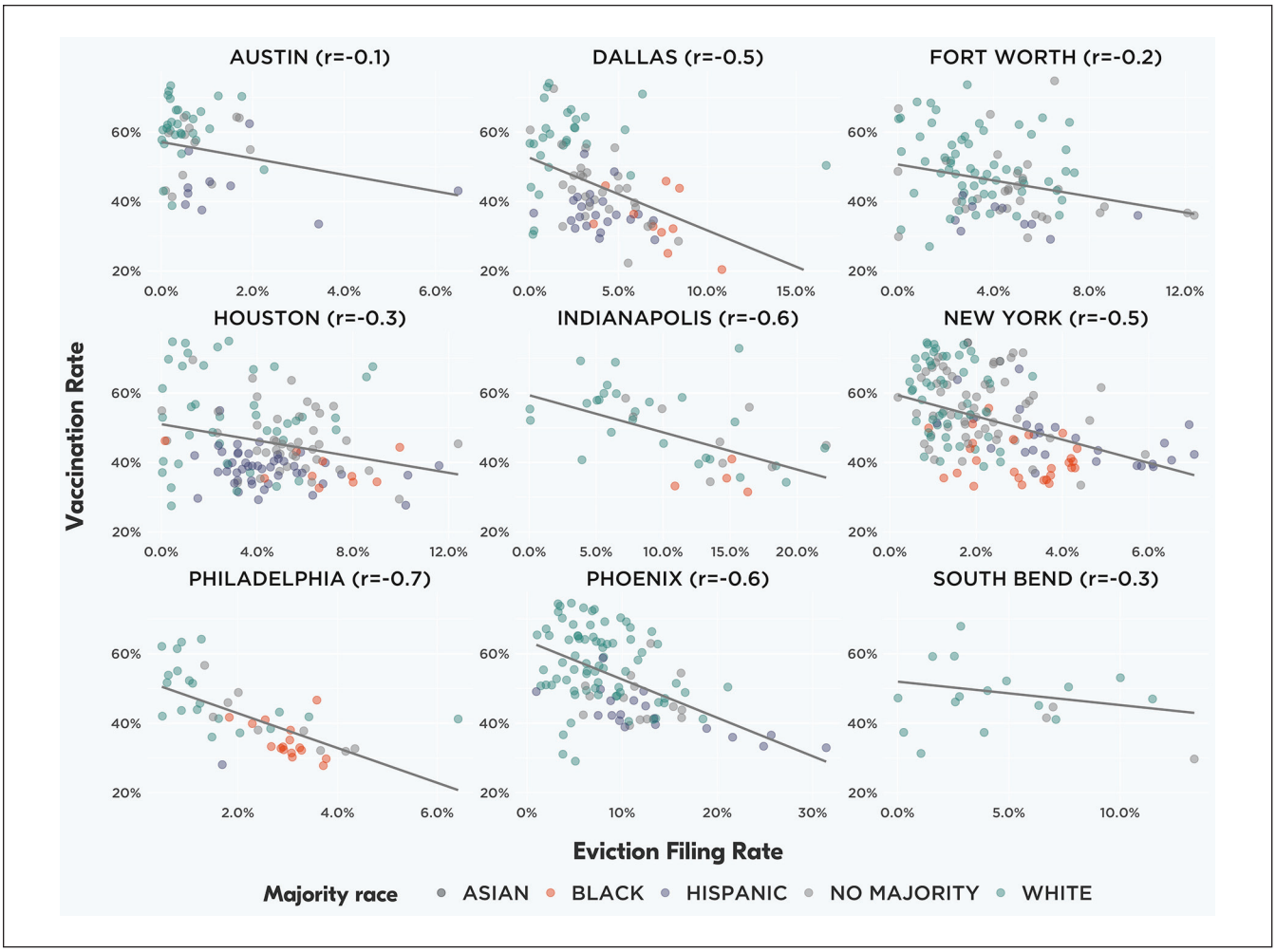

Figure 1. Eviction filing rate by vaccination rate, by ZIP code, in nine cities.
Note: Eviction filing rates were calculated over the period from March 15, 2020, to June 1, 2021, using data from the Eviction Tracking System (ETS). Through the ETS, we observe case numbers, filing dates, plaintiff and defendant names, and addresses associated with all eviction filings. These filings represent the population of households most at risk for displacement after federal protections expire. We clean the data, removing duplicate cases and filings against commercial defendants, geocode addresses, and produce weekly counts that feed into the ETS Web site (https://evictionlab.org/eviction-tracking/), where we also make aggregate data publicly available for download. For the visualization, we calculated pandemic-specific eviction filing rates as the count of evictions filed over the study period divided by the number of renter households in the ZIP code, taken from five-year American Community Survey (ACS) estimates for 2015 to 2019. ZIP code–level vaccination data were collected from state and local government and public health departments. We report the percentage of ZIP code residents 15 years and older who were fully vaccinated against coronavirus disease 2019 as of June 4, 2021. Data on the number of residents 15 years and older were also retrieved from the ACS, as were data necessary to calculate ZIP code majority race. ZIP codes were marked majority white if more than 50 percent of residents reported being non-Hispanic white, majority Black if more than 50 percent reported being non-Hispanic Black, majority Hispanic if more than 50 percent reported being Hispanic, majority Asian if more than 50 percent reported being Asian, and as having no racial majority otherwise. Correlations and linear regressions are weighted by ZIP code population, also collected from the ACS. Data and code necessary to replicate this visualization will be made available at http://evictionlab.org/filing-and-vaccination-rates/replication-code.

Patterns reflect racial disparities in both eviction risk and vaccine uptake. Black and Hispanic Americans face disproportionately high risk for eviction and are less likely to be vaccinated against COVID-19 (Hepburn et al. 2021; Painter et al. 2021). ZIP codes with heightened eviction risk and lowest vaccination rates were disproportionately majority Black and Hispanic areas. Of ZIP codes with eviction filing rates less than 5 percent and vaccination rates greater than 50 percent, more than two thirds (68 percent) were majority white. By contrast, roughly three fourths (74 percent) of ZIP codes with eviction filing rates greater than 5 percent and vaccination rates less than 50 percent were majority nonwhite.

These findings yield two public health implications. First, eviction moratoria and other protective measures to prevent displacement remain a necessary measure to prevent the further spread of COVID-19. Vaccination rates in neighborhoods with the greatest risk for eviction lag behind those in neighborhoods where few evictions have been filed during the pandemic. Second, vaccination efforts should target neighborhoods where eviction risk is heightened. Because

there is a strong correlation between neighborhood eviction filing rates before and during the COVID-19 pandemic (Hepburn et al. 2021), historical data may be used to identify high-risk areas where current data are not available.

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Olivia Jin is a research specialist at the Eviction Lab at Princeton University. Her current research at the Eviction Lab includes exploring eviction and educational outcomes, as well as residential stability in poor neighborhoods. As an undergraduate, she conducted research on topics such as labor market hardships and policy preferences, relative economic welfare, and subjective wellbeing.

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