

Analyzing the Spatial Dimensions & Consequences of Suburban Poverty in the U.S.

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Introduction & Research Questions

Between 2019 and 2022, the population of Americans living below the poverty line grew by 1.5 million people, with 60% of those people living in suburbs (Kneebone & Berube, 2013). In that same time period, the impoverished population in major metropolitan suburbs grew three times as fast (6%) as in major cities (3%). Between 1990 and 2014, increases in high-poverty census tracts in major metropolitan suburbs has effectively narrowed the gap between central cities and suburbs (Allard, 2017).

Although there is growing scholarship on the suburbanization of poverty, this area of study remains largely neglected in contemporary poverty research. We aim to fill this gap in the literature by addressing the following questions:

1. How has the location and movement of low-income people in the U.S. changed over time?
2. How do educational outcomes change across urban-suburban divides?
3. What barriers exist between low-income people in the suburbs?

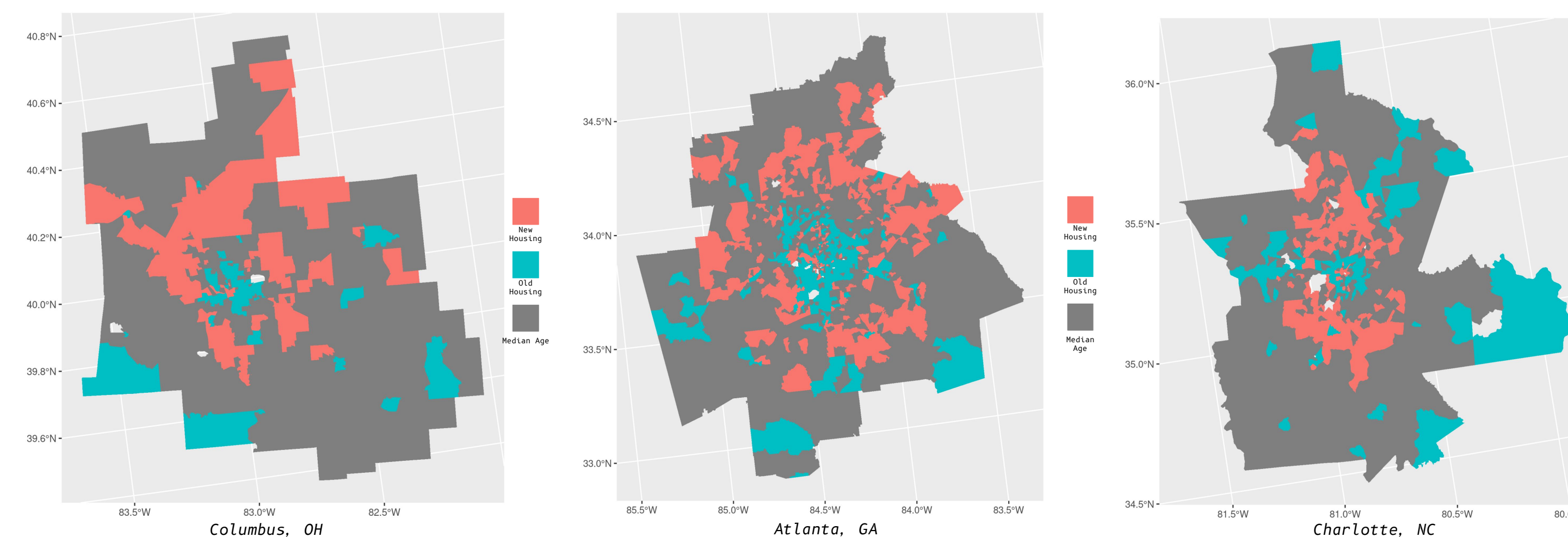
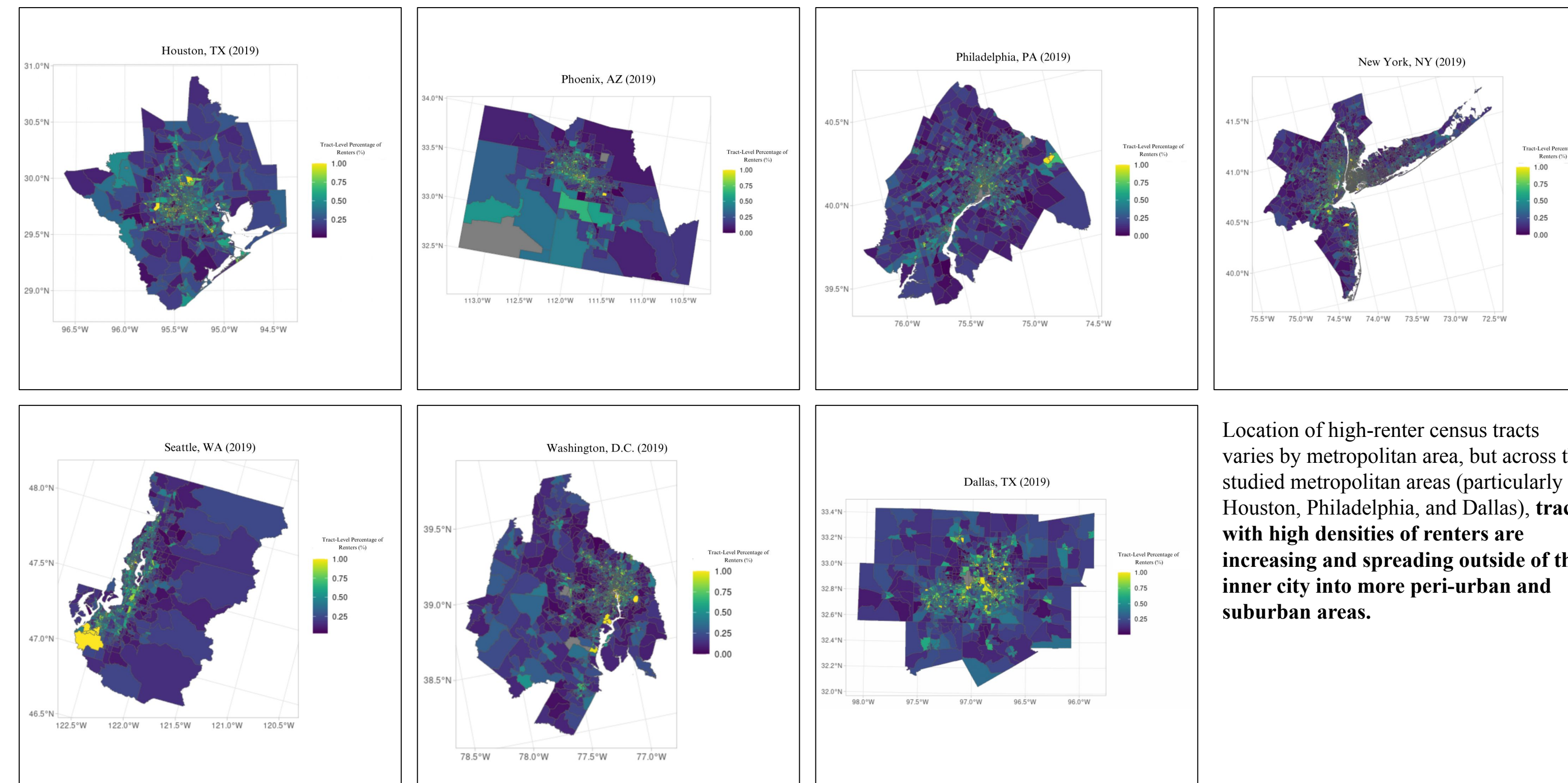
Methodologies

Map Creation and Analysis: all maps were created through R, with map data coming from Census, American Community Survey (ACS), National Historic Geographic Information System (NHGIS), Common Core of Data (CCD), LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (LODES), Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), and Housing and Urban Development (HUD) data.

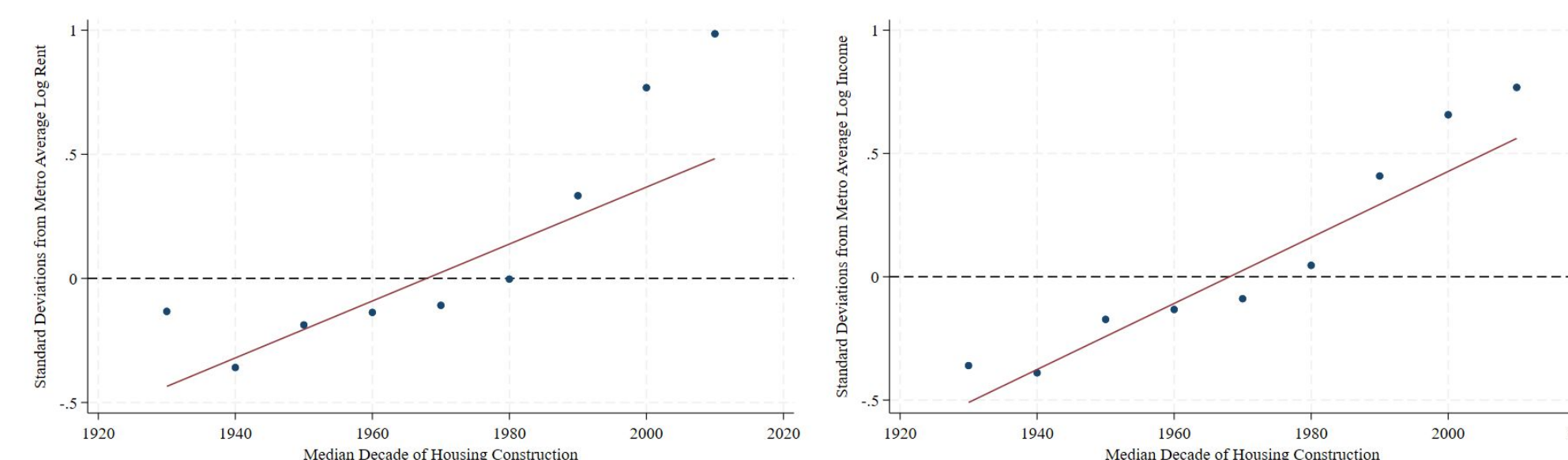
Policy Review: conducted to determine the effect of governmental policy on influencing the demographic (e.g., financial, racial, educational) makeup of American metropolitan areas. Main policies examined were the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program, Free and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL), and the 1940 Lanham Act.



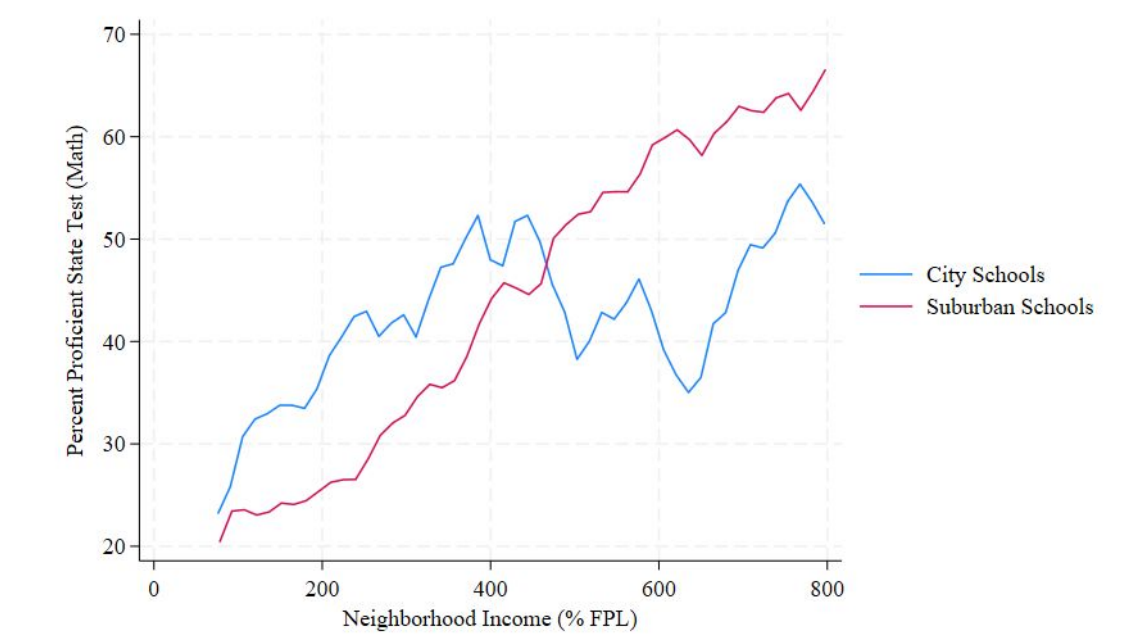
Results: Renting, Housing Age, and Filtering



New model of gentrification finds that across major U.S. metros, when housing in the CBD gets too old it is torn down and replaced by newer housing (Guerrieri et al. 2013). This generates a pattern of housing age that resembles “ripples on a pond,” where development expands outwards and sequentially tears down old housing. **By eliminating housing age variation, the locational tendency of higher-income households is significantly weakened.**



Results (cont.): Educational Outcomes



We find that kids in central city schools outperform students in inner-ring suburban schools up to average neighborhood income to poverty ratios of 400%. Our findings suggest that **low-income students in inner-ring suburban schools have less access to certain services geared towards them (e.g., FRPL)**. Previous literature suggests that welfare benefits as a whole are more inaccessible to residents of suburban areas (Butz, 2016).

Conclusions

Key findings:

1. Suburban poverty is expanding in major American metropolitan areas. Low-income households and renting households have expanded out of city centers into metropolitan suburbs.
2. Relative age of housing stock is an important indicator for suburban poverty. By running a regression analysis through R, we were able to find that in America's 100 largest metros, housing age and logged median household income are closely correlated.
3. Low-income students are faring off worse in the suburbs and may not be receiving necessary welfare services at rates comparable to center-city youth. Though further analysis is needed, we believe that this trend is likely correlated with fewer resources for low-income students that we would expect in central, inner-city schools (e.g., Title I, FRPL, ESL programs, etc.).

Policy recommendations:

1. Provide more welfare services at the state level rather than county or municipality, to reduce access disparities in the suburbs
2. As America's housing stock grows older, interventions are needed to ensure that low-income Americans have access to both quality *and* affordable housing. HUD should work to expand public housing and HCV programs to higher-quality, newer affordable housing.
3. Interventions are needed to ensure that low-income Americans in the suburbs have access to different welfare services. Schools in the suburbs should work to expand FRPL programs.

Bibliography

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