

Spring 2021

The Eviction Landscape in South Carolina

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Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank my family having supported me throughout my life, but especially during the tough times. I would not have been able to write this without them.

Dr. Conor Harrison, thank you for agreeing to be my thesis advisor and sticking with me through all the twists and turns this project has gone through. Dr. Zhenlong Li, thank you for being my second reader and a huge help with all of the statistics. Thank you to everyone who has helped me to edit and revise this paper and its many previous versions: Dad, Amber, David, Cate, Qian, and most of all Dr. Bryan Grady. Dr. Todd Shaw gave me my first entry into housing research, and I owe much of what I know about research to him. I should also extend my gratitude to the South Carolina Judicial Branch, whose IT department kindly provided me with the case data used in this analysis.

This work is dedicated to all those who pay rent

Summary

This thesis is a guide to the eviction landscape in South Carolina, produced with three main audiences in mind: organizers, researchers, and policymakers. It seeks to address three related questions. First, where are evictions happening? How do they cluster geographically, and what conclusions can we draw from these patterns? Second, who or what responsible for the crisis? What are the main correlates, and how can geospatial statistics shed light on the issue? And finally, how can the South Carolinian crisis be placed within the framework of radical geography and understood in a wider context?

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to describe and analyze the South Carolinian eviction crisis from the perspective of radical geography. South Carolina was chosen for the severity of its crisis and the lack of research at a sub-state level. Court records of eviction filings from 2019 were geocoded and tested for spatial clustering, which was clearly visible. Plaintiff names were used to identify the most frequent filers and distinguish landlords by type. At the census tract level, eviction filing counts were compared with neighborhood characteristics using negative binomial regression, and most were found to be significant in South Carolina. To better capture spatial variation in how eviction filings may be best explained, the paper introduces Geographically Weighted Regression (GWR) to the field of eviction research. This novel approach is shown to be useful at identifying the interactions between eviction and localized housing markets, although it was not established as statistically stronger than linear regression. Finally, this report urges a reorientation of eviction research towards the application of its findings.

Introduction

“They will talk of giving compensation to the landlords, of preparing statistics, and drawing up long reports. Yes, they would be capable of drawing up reports long enough to outlast the hopes of the people.”

—Pyotr Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, 1906

The eviction crisis is not new, but the intensity of scholarly attention to it is. Beginning with the publication of *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City* by Matthew Desmond, this attention has focused on the understanding of eviction as a cause, not simply a result, of poverty (2016). More than just a traumatic experience, eviction causes children to do worse in school, parents to be at a higher risk of losing their jobs, and all family members to be more likely to become involved with the criminal justice system (Hatch & Yun 2020). By 2021, the urgent need for a solution had been made startlingly clear by the COVID-19 pandemic: a working paper from the National Bureau of Economic Research found that stronger limits on eviction could have resulted in a 40.7 percent reduction in COVID-19 deaths in the United States (Jowers et al. 2021). It is hard to characterize the eviction crisis as anything less than “social murder” (Engels 2009). But this crisis is not geographically uniform. In fact, the contrasts between regions, states, and localities mean that it is necessary to confirm the applicability of findings to each local context. Using radical geography as a framework, researchers can fit eviction into a larger story of twenty-first century capitalism and displacement (Smith 2002).

Background and Literature Review

Eviction is a defining feature of housing markets. As pointed out by Sims (2016), the very fact that evictions are spatially concentrated is evidence that they are not simply the result of tenants' failures or bad decisions, but rather the result of external or systemic factors. It is part of the relationship between tenants and landlords that can be traced back to feudalism (Schmidt 2017). The conflict between landlords and peasants was initially chaotic and excessively violent, so successive English kings sought to formalize and systematize the right of landlords to recover property "taken" by tenants who failed to pay rent (Schmidt 2017). During the Industrial Revolution, this feudal relationship was adapted to fit the commodification of housing (Engels 2009; Soederberg 2018). Tenancy was reclassified as a contract between equal parties, but without addressing the underlying power imbalance between landlord and renter, which remained the basic justification for eviction (Schmidt 2017). To quote from Nelson, Garboden, et alia (2021):

"It is important to view eviction as a process reflecting a set of social relations, rather than a singular... event. To imply otherwise would be to suggest that the relationship between landlord and tenant is purely one of financial exchange and not—as economic sociologists have described—an economically articulated, institutionally mediated, social relationship."

Today, eviction is the "stick" with which landlords extract rent, or failing that, harass, exploit, or remove their tenants (Huq and Harwood 2019; Garboden and Rosen 2019; Balzarini and Boyd 2020). It is therefore essential to the functioning of the landlord-tenant relationship. Without eviction, it would be impossible for landlords to harass, exploit, or remove their tenants, and ultimately, impossible for them to continue to demand rent. Removal, however, is only the most extreme possible outcome; landlords (especially in South Carolina) routinely file with an expectation that the tenant will pay back their debts at some point before the case is resolved (Garboden and Rosen 2019; Leung, Hepburn, and Desmond 2020). The filing is meant to scare or

threaten tenants with the possibility of removal (Garboden and Rosen 2019; Moore 2020a; Leung, Hepburn, and Desmond 2020), while simultaneously making such a move more difficult for the tenant, since they will now have to find a landlord who will tolerate an eviction record (Kleysteuber 2007; Desmond 2012; Rosen 2014; Humphries et al. 2019; Porton, Desmond, and Gromis 2020). This combines to create a powerful incentive for the tenant to pay back the rent and try to remain in the home they still have (Garboden and Rosen 2019). As a bonus, landlords often use eviction as an opportunity to impose late fees and bill tenants for court fees, adding an average of \$180 on top of rent (Leung, Hepburn, and Desmond 2020; Moore 2020a). Marking tenants with a “Scarlet E”, so to speak, serves a larger purpose beyond the immediate one of charging fees and collecting rent (Desmond 2016). Tenants with a record form a captive market, allowing landlords to “milk” deteriorating properties for high rents (Smith 1979; Desmond and Wilmers 2019; Teresa and Howell 2020).

Because eviction is an outcome of housing market dynamics, researchers over the past decade have made great progress in predicting eviction using neighborhood characteristics.¹ These can broadly be divided into population characteristics, housing characteristics, landlord characteristics, and the legal environment (see Figure 6). Population characteristics have been the most widely studied, and almost all studies in this area include some measure of race and income (e.g., Desmond 2012; Medina et al. 2020; Nelson, Gromis, et al. 2021). Other factors identified over the years include children as a percent of the total population (Desmond et al. 2013; Goodspeed, Benton, and Slugg 2021), single-mother households as a percent of all households (Desmond 2012; Goodspeed, Benton, and Slugg 2021), and several other metrics of concentrated disadvantage (Desmond and

¹ Because of its documented use as a gentrification tactic (e.g., Huq and Harwood 2019; Mah 2020), eviction’s relationship to gentrification on a neighborhood level has been an issue of longstanding scholarly interest. While some researchers have found success with novel methods and/or redefined terms (Chum 2015; Lanionu 2019), in general the relationship appears ambiguous at best and is most likely too localized to be captured with areal units (Freeman 2005; Desmond 2012; Desmond and Gershenson 2017; Lens et al. 2020; Mah 2020; Nelson, Gromis, et al. 2021).

Gershenson 2017; Lens et al. 2020; Nelson, Gromis, et al. 2021). The central role of landlord characteristics is beginning to be understood, as corporate property managers, large property managers, and even subsidized housing contribute disproportionately to the crisis (Smith 2002; Raymond et al. 2016, 2018; Huq and Harwood 2019; Immergluck et al. 2019; Balzarini and Boyd 2020; Teresa and Howell 2020; Lens et al. 2020; Nelson, Gromis, et al. 2021). The effects of housing characteristics appear to be more complex, since factors like median rent may have nonlinear effects (Leung, Hepburn, and Desmond 2020). But vacancy, low home values, and the median year rental properties were built have all been shown to be significant (Desmond and Gershenson 2017; Leung, Hepburn, and Desmond 2020; Lens et al. 2020; Nelson, Gromis, et al. 2021; Medina et al. 2021).

From a methodological standpoint, geospatial statistics have become an increasingly important part of eviction research. The first law of geography is that “everything is usually related to all else but those which are near to each other are more related when compared to those that are further away” (Tobler 1970). A study that treats neighborhoods as isolated observations will miss a significant part of the picture. Even research that does not explicitly incorporate geostatistical methods is usually confined to the local or regional scale, as exemplified by the sources cited above. To some extent, this has been a practical consideration—the collection of nationwide data is notoriously difficult (Desmond et al. 2018). But most researchers have come to recognize the theoretical problems involved in comparing areas with different legal procedures and recordkeeping practices (Nelson, Garboden, et al. 2021). A few have gone further, taking the statistical methods developed by geographers to account for spatial proximity. One method is to adjust for spatial autocorrelation, meaning the clustering of similar *dependent* variables (Raymond et al. 2016; Medina et al. 2020). Another method is to account for spillover effects, or the impact one place’s *independent* variables have on neighboring places (Laniyonu 2019; Lens et al. 2020; Nelson, Gromis, et al. 2021).

Despite these strides that have been made towards modeling eviction, there are still major gaps in our understanding. Different areas will have similar eviction rates for different reasons (Sims 2019). Some attempts have been made to study how the correlates of eviction differ between housing markets, but the process of delineating markets has been manual (Goodspeed et al. 2021). In this paper, I introduce a geostatistical method that can automatically recognize and account for differing local dynamics. Since being created by Brunson, Fotheringham, and Charlton in a 1996 paper, Geographically Weighted Regression (GWR) has been widely and effectively used in the field of housing research (e.g., Bitter, Mulligan, and Dall’erba 2007; Borst and McCluskey 2008; Manganelli et al. 2014). Rather than trying to predict the eviction count in all tracts using a model fitted to the whole study area, GWR predicts each tract’s eviction count with a unique regression equation that has been fitted using only nearby tracts. This makes identifying and accounting for local housing market dynamics substantially easier. For example, in order to understand the differing local importance of median rent vis-a-vis the eviction crisis, researchers could map the coefficients for median rent that GWR generates for each local regression equation. Where the magnitude of the coefficient is larger, median rent plays a bigger role in the regression model. Each localized interaction between eviction and housing markets can be understood on its own terms, without necessarily knowing the size or shape of the relevant housing markets in advance. In theory, this will also lead to far more accurate predictions.

In addition to investigating the effectiveness of this technique when applied to eviction, this study also applies more established techniques in the process of describing and analyzing South Carolina’s eviction landscape. As mentioned, the variation in the factors contributing to the eviction crisis is such that findings from one region may not be applicable to others (Nelson, Garboden, et al. 2021). It is necessary, therefore, to validate the conclusions drawn from analyses of other states by repeating those methodologies here. This will include a Getis-Ord G_i^* Hot Spot analysis and a negative binomial regression model (cf., Sims 2016; Medina et al. 2021; Leung, Hepburn, and

Desmond 2020; Medina et al. 2020; Goodspeed, Benton, and Slugg 2021; Nelson, Gromis, et al. 2021²). My goal in this endeavor is to help researchers, policymakers, and tenant organizers in South Carolina understand the general landscape of eviction in the state and apply that knowledge towards combating the crisis.

South Carolina's Eviction Laws and Eviction Process

In 2016, Princeton's Eviction Lab estimated the eviction rate as almost double that of the next highest state (Desmond et al. 2018). The legal environment around eviction plays a crucial role in explaining why South Carolina has such a high eviction rate overall. Although South Carolina is classified as having a "contradictory" landlord-tenant legal environment in general (that is, having some laws that favor tenants and others that favor landlords), research has shown that it is precisely these states where eviction rates are the highest (Hatch 2017; Merritt and Farnworth 2020). The exact reasons for this remain uncertain, but in South Carolina, it appears to be due to a combination of lack of enforcement of pro-tenant laws and the fact that laws around eviction are almost uniformly pro-landlord (see Table 1; Moore 2020b; Nelson, Garboden, et al. 2021). Lack of enforcement of pro-tenant laws is a common problem stemming from the structure and culture of eviction courts, arising as they did as a way of enforcing the property rights of landlords (Bezdek 1992; Schmidt 2017; Summers 2019). So-called "pro-tenant" laws are usually defensive, because there is no equivalent to eviction for a tenant seeking to enforce their side of the contract. South Carolina also has limited legal resources for tenants who wish to fight in court. South Carolina Legal Services is the only statewide law firm that offers pro bono eviction defense.

² Only used negative binomial regression as a robustness check

| Table 1: Comparison of Eviction Laws in South Carolina and Neighboring States | | | | | |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|--|
| State | Time between notice & filing | Filing fee³ | Cutoff to request hearing | Right to counsel | Time before set-out⁴ |
| South Carolina ⁵ | 5 days (see below) | \$40 | 10 days ⁶ | No | ~6 days |
| North Carolina ⁷ | 10 days | \$96 | Automatic | No | 10 days |
| Georgia ⁸ | Immediate | ~\$50 | 7 days | No | 7 days |
| Tennessee ⁹ | 14 days | ~\$175 | Automatic | No | 10 days |
| Alabama ¹⁰ | 7 days | ~\$297 | Varies | No | 7 days |
| State | Does offering/repaying rent stop the eviction process? | Protection against retaliation | | Minimum total time¹¹ | |
| South Carolina | Up to 5 days after due | Yes | | 26 days | |
| North Carolina | No | Yes | | 32 days | |
| Georgia | Up to 7 days after filing | Yes, as of July 2019 | | ~20 days | |
| Tennessee | Up to 14 days after due | Yes | | 36 days | |
| Alabama | If accepted | Yes | | ~41 days | |

In South Carolina, the eviction process for nonpayment of rent (the most common reason for eviction) begins when the landlord gives a tenant five days’ notice that they are behind (Figure 1). However, a loophole in state law allows this notice to be bypassed if it is included in the lease. After five days, the landlord may file with the local Magistrate Court for \$40. The low filing fee encourages repeat filings against the same tenant, a practice known as “serial” eviction (Garboden and Rosen 2019; Leung, Hepburn, and Desmond 2020; Nelson, Garboden, et al. 2021). The tenant

³ Unlike South Carolina, most states allow filing fees to be set at the local level, so their fees are listed as approximate values (iPropertyManagement 2020)

⁴ The minimum time between the hearing and the tenant being removed (iPropertyManagement 2020)

⁵ S.C. Code Ann. § 27-37 and § 27-40

⁶ There is some local variation. Local eviction lawyers explained that Bluffton, Beaufort, Spartanburg, and some courts in the Pee Dee area all schedule hearings automatically.

⁷ N.C. Gen. Stat. § 42-25

⁸ Ga. Code Ann. §§ 44-7

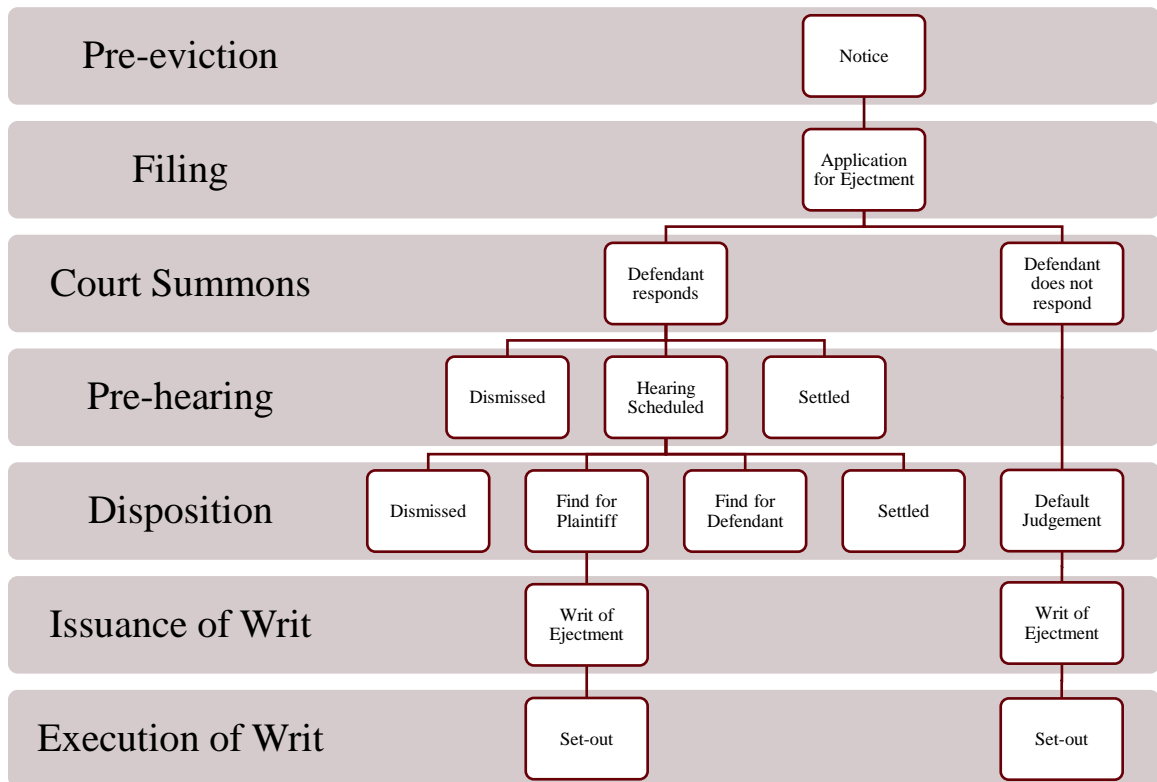
⁹ Tenn. Code Ann. §§ 66-28

¹⁰ Ala. Code § 35-9A

¹¹ iPropertyManagement 2020

then has ten days to vacate or “show cause”, i.e., request the court for a hearing. In most courts, if the tenant does not respond the landlord can simply request a writ of ejectment. A large portion of cases are settled or dismissed before the hearing. The parties often come to some sort of agreement or mutually stop pursuing the case. But landlords in South Carolina will sometimes go to court even if an agreement has been reached, just to keep the option of eviction open (Leung, Hepburn, and Desmond 2020). If both parties appear before the judge, generally the plaintiff is successful. The judge may rule for the defendant if there are extenuating circumstances, dismiss if the plaintiff stops pursuing the case, or sanction a settlement. Any of these recorded outcomes can obscure special conditions, agreements, or other details not in the record of the case (Table 2).

Figure 1: The (Simplified) Eviction Process in South Carolina



South Carolina does not have separate housing courts. Instead, eviction cases are heard in Magistrate Courts, usually as a bench trial. Parties can request a jury trial, but this study found that that was rarely done (less than 200 recorded instances in the past five years). A pro-landlord court

culture is encouraged by the tradition of allowing local power-brokers (state senators) to recommend candidates for Magistrate to the Governor. It is exacerbated by the fact that the Court Bench Book does not require Magistrates to have a law degree or any background in landlord-tenant law. Corruption is rampant, judges are almost never removed for disciplinary infractions (Cranney 2019). For decades, Magistrates routinely set unlawfully high bonds for appeal due to a misinterpretation (whether deliberate or otherwise) of the statute on civil appeals until an order from the South Carolina Supreme Court halted the practice in 2020 (Moore 2020b, 2020c). South Carolina's habitability protections are rarely applied, in part due to their byzantine specifications. Tenants can pay for essential services and deduct the cost from rent if the landlord fails to provide them—but they cannot make *repairs* and deduct (S.C. Code Ann. § 27-40-630). The court requires a level of documentation that is essentially unachievable for most tenants. In recognition of this, eviction lawyers in South Carolina generally advise tenants not to utilize even the limited rights they do have to withhold rent. Overall, the court records show that tenants won less than one out of every ten cases settled by the Magistrate over the last five years.

Data and Descriptive Statistics

Eviction data for the years 2015-2020 was requested from the South Carolina Court Administration, which compiled records from the 319 Magistrate Courts that hear eviction cases around the state. A total of 801,202 records were received. Cases were removed if they lacked both a disposition and filing date or if the case status or disposition was marked as “transferred”, “rescheduled”, “void”, or “clearance”. This totaled to 5,382 cases (0.67% of cases) that were removed. Additional code was used to remove common typos, format the data in a usable way, and generate standardized fields.

The standardized date was either the filing date, or if that was unavailable, the disposition date. Standardized property ownership, ownership type, and property name fields were parsed from the plaintiff’s name. Commonly, the plaintiff column contained the name of the plaintiff “DBA” (“doing business as”) the apartment complex. For Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) properties, public housing, and the largest private managers, an effort was made to identify and associate properties with the correct manager using apartment names and addresses. This was done using the free and open-source software OpenRefine. OpenRefine also helped identify and merge name variations or misspellings (e.g., “Chase E. Furnas, Co” and “Chase Furnas, Co”). The “plaintiff name” column was then split into property name and property owner columns. The Python library “cleanco” was used to help standardize property owner names. Ownership type was determined by first checking if the field “Plaintiff First” (i.e., first name) was filled. If it was, the filer was assumed to have been an individual. Then, any case where the property owner had “authority” in the name was marked as public housing¹², and any case where the property name and property owner fields matched the list of LIHTC properties and owners was marked as such

¹² Units owned by public housing authorities were marked as having been filed by the appropriate authority, even if a professional management company had been used.

(these had been ensured to match by careful manual cleaning in OpenRefine). Finally, the remaining cases were marked as being from corporate filers.

The defendant's address was parsed using the Python library "usaddress", and if a street address (as opposed to a PO box) was identified, it became the standardized address. If a street address could not be located or did not exist, the Magistrate court's street address was used. This was done for 8,001 cases (1% of geocoded cases). To ensure that using court addresses for these cases did not distort the geographic distribution of the data, the hotspot analysis was conducted both with and without them, and results were nearly identical. Cases were geocoded using their standardized addresses, and 1,130 (0.14% of the total) were removed because the address was geocoded to a location outside of South Carolina or could not be located on the map. 794,690 cases were correctly geocoded. These cases were then aggregated into census tracts and block groups so that they could be compared with neighborhood characteristics. Tracts and block groups are two ways that the US Census divides the map of the country to efficiently collect and publish demographic data. Tracts are slightly larger, usually composed of about 4,000 people. Block groups are subdivisions of tracts, with populations of between 600 and 3,000 people. The analysis was performed at both levels to check for robustness, and the results were comparable. The final geographically weighted model performed slightly better at the tract level because margins of error for ACS data are lower, and more data (such as data from the Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy) was available. For that reason, this paper presents the tract-level analysis. Of the 1,103 census tracts in South Carolina, six unpopulated tracts were excluded from the analysis.

This paper looks at eviction filings rather than evictions. Court records do not accurately show whether a set-out (i.e., an eviction) has occurred (Table 2). The closest approximation offered is that a "writ of ejectment" has been issued (Porton, Desmond, and Gromis 2020; Raymond et al. 2016). Although all set-outs require a writ of ejectment to be issued first, it is very uncertain what portion of writs are ever executed. Local eviction lawyers and nonprofit representatives have

explained that until recently, many rental assistance programs in Greenville required tenants to show a writ of ejectment before they could qualify. Similar situations may or may not exist in other counties, but journalists have reported that some landlords in South Carolina repeatedly seek writs against the same tenant without executing any of them (Moore 2020a). Filing an eviction is so cheap in South Carolina that landlords seem to find it more profitable to use the extra writs as an arm-twisting tactic, rather than go through the hassle of turning over the unit. This makes the number of writs issued a poor approximation of evictions.

| Result | Definition | Recorded Outcome |
|---|--|---|
| No displacement (or no court-enforced displacement) | The tenant stays in the property (or leaves for some other reason) | Any, or no, recorded outcome is possible |
| Court-enforced displacement | The tenant leaves the property to avoid a hearing, expecting to be set out, or to end harassment in the form of repeated filings | Any recorded outcome is possible. Also includes pre-filing settlements where the tenant agrees to vacate the property |
| Set-out/eviction | The tenant is removed by the sheriff | A variable subset of cases marked “find for plaintiff”, “default judgment”, or “writ of ejectment issued” |

Other factors complicate the issue still further. As scholars have noted, many instances of court-enforced displacement occur without a writ ever being issued (Desmond and Shollenberger 2015; Desmond 2016; Nelson, Garboden, et al. 2021). Although the strictest definitions would not include these as “evictions”, the outcome is essentially the same in terms of harm done to the tenant, especially in a state like South Carolina where all eviction filings are public record. And there is no official process for expungement. For these reasons, the count of eviction filings was deemed the most accurate and meaningful statistic that can be calculated with existing court records.

Figure 2: Eviction Filings in South Carolina (Jan 2015-Oct 2020)

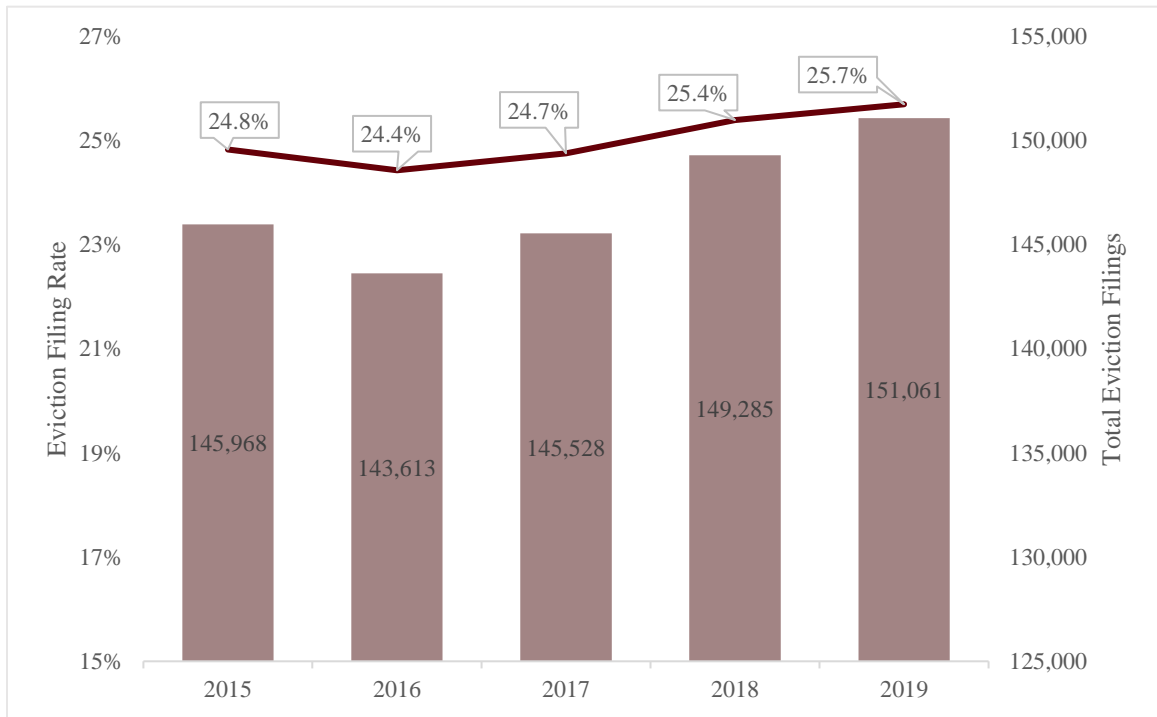
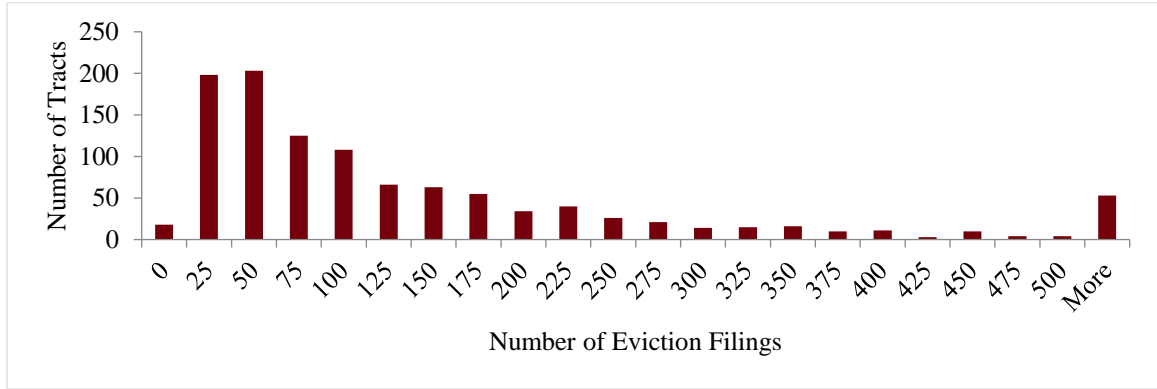


Figure 2 shows that the raw number of eviction filings has increased by around 7,000 over the past 5 years, but the filing rate has remained steady at about 25 percent.¹³ If an upward trend does exist, it is very slight. As previously noted, this analysis will focus on 2019. All following graphs, figures, maps, and charts will refer to 2019 data unless otherwise noted.

¹³ For the years of 2015 and 2016, these figures are inconsistent with those reported by the Princeton Eviction Lab (Desmond et al. 2018). This is due to differences in our data cleaning methods (see limitations for more details).

Figure 3: Histogram of Census Tracts by Filing Count, 2019



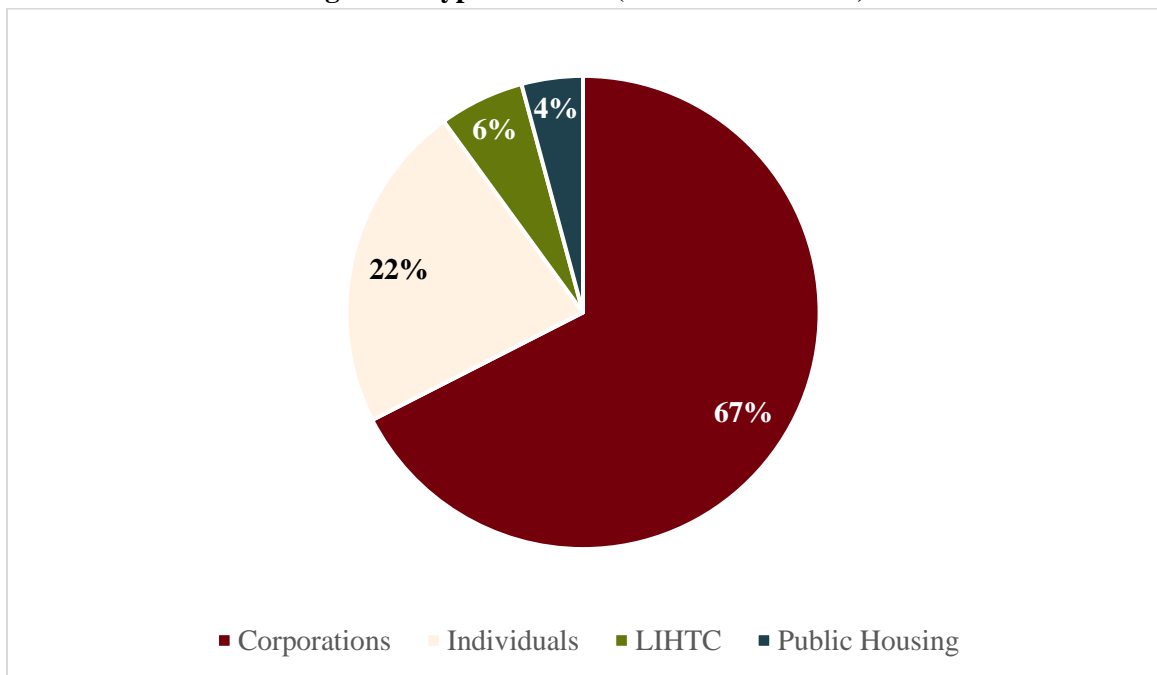
Using the filing count rather than filing rate made it possible to include tracts with very few estimated renter households. Descriptive statistics were calculated using the Data Analysis Toolpak in Excel. The results (Figure 3 and Table 3) indicate that eviction filings are right-skewed (the modal bin is 25-50 and the mean tract has a filing rate of 136.6). Sample variance is very high due to the wide range of possible filing counts. A not insignificant number of tracts contain over 500 filings. This distribution has implications for the regression analyses later in this paper, since many regression models (e.g., ordinary least squares) assume a normally distributed data set.

| Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of the Filing Count by Census Tract, 2019 | |
|--|--------|
| Mean | 136.6 |
| Median | 76 |
| Standard Error | 5.3 |
| Standard Deviation | 175 |
| Sample Variance | 30648 |
| Kurtosis | 11 |
| Skewness | 3 |
| Minimum | 0 |
| Maximum | 1305 |
| Total Eviction Filings | 149849 |

Evictors

The growing importance of state action in displacement, and the influx of investor-owned rental properties following the collapse of the housing bubble in 2008, means that it is important to take a survey of exactly what actors are causing the eviction crisis (Smith 2002; Raymond et al. 2016, 2018). Using the methods described above, plaintiffs were sorted into four broad categories: individuals (i.e., those filing under a person's name), public housing authorities (whether filed under the name of the authority itself, a project, or a contracted management company), and LIHTC properties (carefully cross-referenced with a list provided by the South Carolina Housing Finance Authority).

Figure 4: Types of Filers (Jan 2015-Oct 2020)



Consistently with previous research, Figure 4 shows that corporate property managers file the vast majority of cases in South Carolina. Individual filers often own fewer properties, cannot afford vacancies, and prefer to reach an extrajudicial settlement rather than file an eviction (Balzarini and Boyd 2020). Large, corporate managers file more evictions because they can afford to handle

vacancies (Garboden and Rosen 2019). These managers claim to avoid out-of-court settlements because they are afraid of discrimination lawsuits, although research has yet to show whether this is a rationalization (Leung, Hepburn, and Desmond 2020). While subsidized housing makes up nearly 20 percent of all occupied rental units, it only accounts for around 10 percent of eviction filings (Grady 2021). Although this might seem to imply that subsidized housing plays reduced role in the crisis, we should be cautious about drawing this conclusion. For one, figures are not available on the number of units managed by other types of landlords, so it may be possible that subsidized housing is only less prolific compared to corporate filers, but more prolific than individuals. Moreover, this does not preclude individual LIHTC properties or public housing authorities from playing an outsized role in the crisis.

| Table 4: Top 15 Evictors (Jan 2015-Oct 2020) | | |
|---|-------------|-------------------------------|
| Property Manager | Type | Total Eviction Filings |
| Powers Properties | Private | 23,192 |
| InterMark Management | Private | 14,621 |
| Asset Management and Consulting Services (AMCS) | Private | 9,786 |
| Yes! Communities | Private | 9,136 |
| Southwood Realty | Private | 8,902 |
| Boyd Management | Private | 7,225 |
| Charleston Housing Authority | Public | 6,496 |
| DBC Real Estate Management | Private | 5,737 |
| First Communities Management | Private | 4,415 |
| Mid-America Apartment Communities | Private | 4,085 |
| Columbia Housing Authority | Public | 4,000 |
| Carroll Companies | Private | 3,861 |
| Roland Management | Private | 3,567 |
| Darby Development | Private | 3,401 |
| Gaffney Housing Authority | Public | 2,924 |
| Burlington Capital | Private | 2,903 |
| Morgan Properties | Private | 2,703 |
| Strategic Management Partners | Private | 2,678 |
| Stonemark Management | Private | 2,640 |
| NHE | Private | 2,604 |

Table 4 shows the entities that have filed the most evictions over the past five years. Three of the top fifteen were public housing authorities (Local Housing Authorities or LHAs), demonstrating that individual LHAs are major contributors to the crisis. In 2019, the Gaffney Housing Authority filed 655 evictions on only 274 units—a rate of 239 percent. Very few of these cases (64) had the outcome “find for plaintiff”, suggesting that the authority is using eviction as a rent collection method, much like private corporations do. Previous researchers working in South Carolina’s upstate have catalogued the class, racial, and gendered tensions between white male LHA officials and black female tenants, which are similar to tensions in the private market (Neary 2011; cf. Desmond 2016; Bezdek 1992). Moreover, LHAs often contract out management of their properties to the same corporations used by private landlords, like NHE management in Greenville (TGHA 2021). The same is true for LIHTC properties: InterMark Management’s webpage boasts that “Low Income Housing Tax Credit apartments [make] up approximately one-half of InterMark’s current portfolio” (InterMark 2021). Neither public or privately owned subsidized units are immune to eviction, and they may even be leaders in producing this crisis.

Some of these prolific evictors, such as Powers Properties, have been made notorious by the efforts of local media (Editorial Board 2020; Moore 2020a; Weissman, Smolcic Larson, and Norkol 2020; Weissman 2020). But most fly under the radar, filing hundreds or thousands of evictions each year without public scrutiny. Policymakers and tenant organizers have an opportunity to make a major impact on the overall crisis by targeting these top fifteen filers, which were responsible for 15.7 percent of all evictions filed over the past five years in South Carolina. The top fifty filed 22.8 percent, more than every individual put together. Local housing authorities and HUD should identify where public housing managers are using eviction as a rent collection tactic, and either change management companies or instruct them to change their practices. The South Carolina Housing Finance Authority can deny future LIHTC funds to property managers who are particularly prone to evicting their tenants and retroactively enact restrictions on current LIHTC

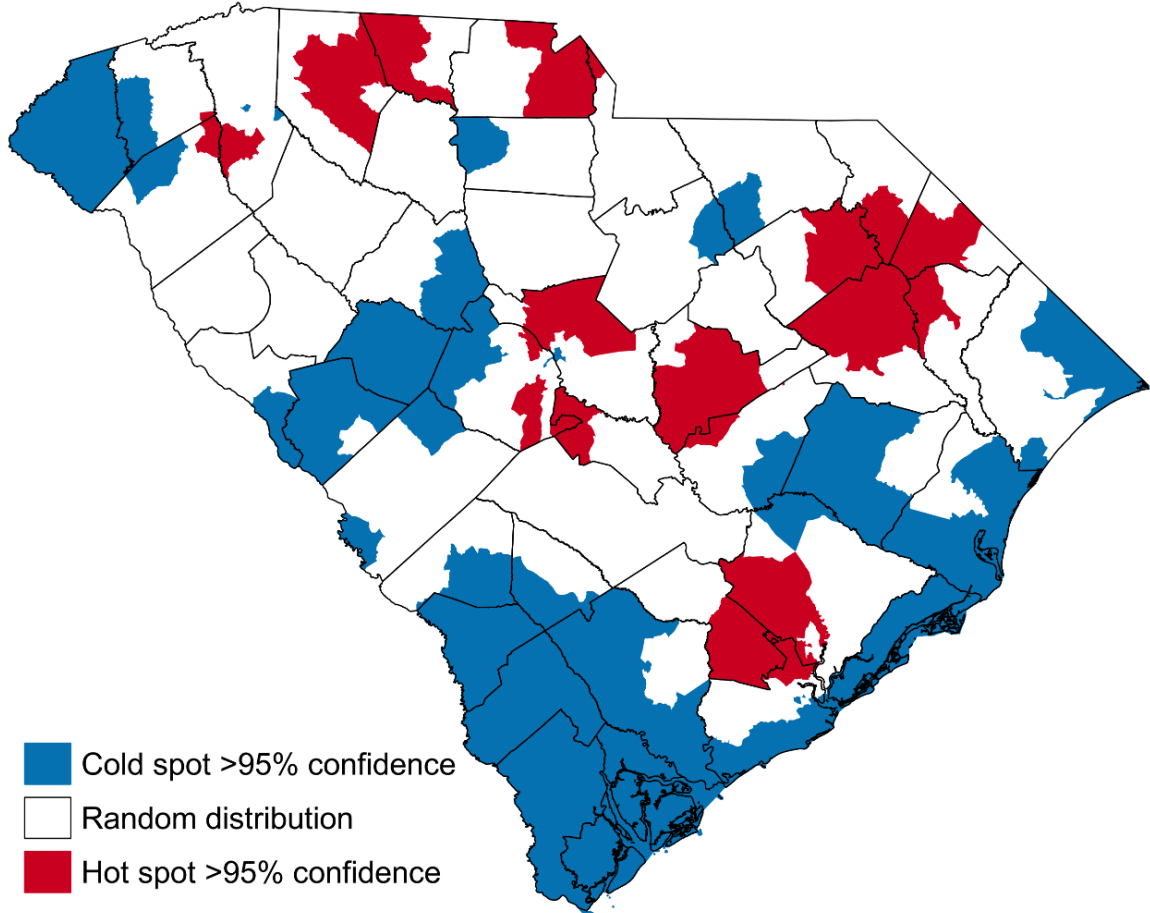
managers to stop excessive use of eviction. For organizers, these companies represent particularly important targets. Not only do they disproportionately afflict the lives of tenants, but residents in their properties might be especially inclined to fight back.

Hot Spot Analysis

To visualize the data, the eviction filing rate (filings per 100 renter households) was calculated. The estimate of renter households came from the ACS 5-year estimates for 2015-2019. If a tract had no rental housing units recorded, the filing rate was considered null. Twenty census tracts had a null filing rate (1.81% of the total). A hot spot analysis was then run using the namesake tool in ArcGIS Pro. A hot spot analysis identifies tracts which are part of clusters: tracts with above- or below-average filing rates surrounded by other tracts with similar rates. The null hypothesis is that high and low filing rates are randomly distributed, but if enough similar tracts are concentrated in a defined area, it will show up as a hot or cold spot (depending on whether the clustered values are low or high). For this map, that defined area was the twenty-three nearest tracts to any given tract. This definition yielded the highest overall Getis-Ord G_i^* statistic, which represents the overall statistical significance of the map. These clusters in Figure 5 are statistically significant and are probably the result of spatial variables.

There are eight distinct hot spot areas and four major cold spot areas. The hot spots are Sumter, Florence, North Charleston, Rock Hill, Gaffney, Spartanburg, south Greenville, and select suburbs of Columbia. The four cold spots are the coastal plain, downtown Columbia, the area west of Lake Murray, and the area around Lake Keowee. Other stray cold spots are scattered throughout the rural areas of the state.

Figure 5: Getis-Ord G_i^* Hot Spot Map of Eviction Filing Rates, 2019



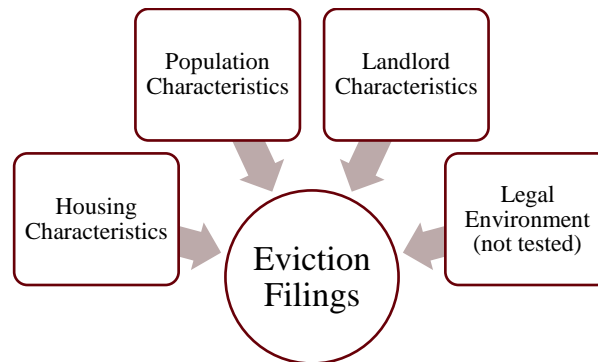
By consulting housing literature, we can begin to guess at the reasons for these clusters. For example, the cold spot along the coast may be related to the high cost of housing, itself the result of geographic constraints on housing (Allen and Lu 2003; Saiz 2010). Working class housing has been pushed inland. While the housing quality there is low, it is mostly single-family homes rented out on a small scale (Cutter, Mitchell, and Scott 2000; Cline 2017). Corporate property managers have only just begun to penetrate the single-family rental market, and it does not appear that the South Carolina inland coastal plain has been a primary target (Raymond et al. 2016, 2018; see Appendix, Figure 21). The possibility of a relationship between eviction and heirs' property—a unique feature of the Lowcountry's housing market—is intriguing but as-of-yet unclear. Heirs' property is the common property of two or more heirs created when the original owner died without

a will. It usually refers to a dwindling set of properties owned by the descendants of slaves who were able to accumulate this land during the decades following abolition. No comprehensive survey of heirs' property exists, so it is difficult to analyze its relationship to eviction at the statewide scale (Finewood 2012; Grabbatin 2016; Kuris 2018). The one hot spot near the coast is in North Charleston. This is where working-class housing in the Charleston metro clusters, and where multifamily and corporate-owned housing is the rule (see Appendix, Figures 16 and 21).

Both Greenville and Columbia have partial "rings" of hot spots formed by high-evicting suburbs. This reflects the extremely suburban-centric growth in South Carolina since the 1960s and the nationwide trend towards the suburbanization of poverty (Allen and Lu 2003; Kneebone and Garr 2010). As a larger percentage of the population has come to reside in suburbs, these areas are no longer the exclusive purview of the upper or middle classes. The working class and poor live in suburbs too, although these are often segregated into separate neighborhoods (Kneebone and Garr 2010). The suburbanization of poverty, it seems, has been followed by the suburbanization of eviction. Elsewhere in the state, it is not immediately clear why some cities are hot spots while others are not. Notably missing from this map are cities like Orangeburg and North Augusta, which share many economic and geographical similarities with Sumter and Rock Hill respectively, both of which are hot spots. While spatial difference in eviction is obviously present, further analysis is required to determine the exact explanations for it.

Independent Variables

Figure 6: Theoretical Model



This paper will test whether it is possible to explain these trends by a combination of three out of the four factor-clusters found in past eviction research (Figure 6). Housing characteristics, population characteristics, and landlord characteristics are all included, but for reasons explained below, the legal environment was not operationalized in this study.

The class struggle between landlord and tenant most often comes to a head over housing characteristics such as rent and habitability (Bezdek 1992; Desmond 2016). Population characteristics, like median income and race, generally indicate areas of concentrated disadvantage where evictions are clustered (Desmond 2016; Soederberg 2018; Desmond and Wilmers 2019; Medina et al. 2020; Merritt and Farnworth 2020; Lens et al. 2020; Nelson, Gromis, et al. 2021). Not only are residents of such neighborhoods more at risk of falling behind or facing discrimination, but eviction itself helps reproduce their systems of poverty and exploitation (Desmond 2012; Rosen 2014; Desmond and Shollenberger 2015; Desmond 2016; Sims 2019; Teresa and Howell 2020). Landlord characteristics refer to features like number of properties owned, ownership structure, or whether the landlord is part of a subsidized housing program. Larger, bureaucratized landlords have the ability and the will to use eviction more often and more universally (Raymond et al. 2016, 2018; Garboden and Rosen 2019; Huq and Harwood 2019; Leung, Hepburn, and Desmond 2020). As discussed, the legal environment can have a huge impact

on whether a landlord thinks it is profitable to file a case, thus influencing the number of filings (Merritt and Farnworth 2020; Nelson, Garboden, et al. 2021).

All four factor-clusters interact internally and with one another. In particular, landlords have the ability to shape housing and population characteristics in the direction that is most profitable to them (Rosen 2014; Teresa and Howell 2020). They set rent, maintain, or neglect the property, and can even influence what sorts of properties are built through their collective demand. In turn, housing characteristics such as age and property value influence what types of landlords want to purchase and operate the property (Smith 1979). Population characteristics (especially those related to housing market strength) influence the kind of landlords who operate in a given area. For example, corporate property managers are more likely to locate in cities and are only a marginal part of rural housing markets (see Appendix, Figure 21). The legal environment is influenced by the relative political power of landlords and renters, which in turn is influenced by population characteristics.

The legal environment was not operationalized in this analysis for theoretical and practical reasons. The theoretical reason is that South Carolina does not have as much eviction policy variation at a local level compared to other states. The filing fee is set by the state legislature and no localities have major eviction diversion programs. From a practical perspective, local differences that do exist are not well-documented and their significance is not yet attested to. Future research will hopefully yield better data on the differences between Magistrates' courts.

Table 5 lists the 26 variables used to operationalize the three other factor clusters. These variables were chosen based on those shown to be significant in previous research. For some concepts, like income, multiple variables were tested to determine the best possible operationalization. Those that were removed before the final analysis are marked. Most are drawn from the American Community Survey (ACS) five year estimates for 2015-2019. The 5-year estimates were used rather than the

1-year estimates because neighborhoods change very slowly, so lower margins of error were deemed more important than temporal precision. The habitability issues variable and the variables related to area median income (AMI) came from the Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy dataset for 2013-2017. A dummy variable for urbanity was generated based on whether a tract intersected with a census-defined city. Landlord characteristics were operationalized using the plaintiff's name field in the court records. This field helped to determine the "ownership type" for each case, classified as either individual, LIHTC, public housing, or corporation. The percentage of all evictions filed by each type of landlord was calculated for each census tract. In general, these variables can be treated as a proxy for the breakup of the rental market, but in exact terms they represent the portion of the eviction crisis that a particular type of landlord is responsible for in that tract.

| Table 5: Independent Variables | | | |
|--|---|---|--|
| Variable | Source | Description | Included in Regression? |
| Urban | Census Bureau's MAF/TIGER geographic database, 2019 | Dummy variable, tracts that intersect with census-defined cities marked as "1" | Excluded from GWR analysis because dummy variables disallowed. |
| Median home value | ACS 2015-2019, B25075 | Median property value | |
| Median rent | ACS 2015-2019, B25064 | Median gross rent | |
| Median year built | ACS 2015-2019, B25037 (B25036 as supplement) | Median year that rental units were built, or all housing units if former unavailable | |
| Percent multifamily units | ACS 2015-2019, B25024 | Multifamily units divided by all occupied units | |
| Percent manufactured units | ACS 2015-2019, B25024 | Mobile home units divided by all occupied units | |
| Percent habitability issues | CHAS 2013-2017, table 11 estimate 46 | Households with at least one of the housing problems recorded by CHAS divided by all occupied units | |
| Vacancy rate | ACS 2015-2019, B25002 | Vacate units divided by all units | |
| Seasonal vacancy rate | ACS 2015-2019, B25004 | Seasonally vacate units divided by all units | |
| Percent evictions filed by corporations | South Carolina Judicial Branch Court Administration (SCJBCA) | Evictions filed by corporations divided by all evictions filed | |
| Percent evictions filed by individuals | SCJBCA | Evictions filed by individuals divided by all evictions filed | Excluded from regression due to multicollinearity |
| Percent evictions by LIHTC | SCJBCA, LIHTC records from the South Carolina housing Finance Authority | Evictions filed by LIHTC properties divided by all evictions filed | |
| Percent evictions filed by public housing | SCJBCA, public housing records from HUD | Evictions filed by public housing divided by all evictions filed | |
| Total renter households | ACS 2015-2019, B25003 | Occupied rental units | |
| Density | ACS 2015-2019, B01003 | Population divided by area | |
| Percent single-mother households | ACS 2015-2019, B11001 | Households with female householder, no husband present divided by all households | |
| Percent population black | ACS 2015-2019, B02009 | Black population divided by total population | |
| Percent population Hispanic | ACS 2015-2019, B03002 | Latino/Hispanic population divided by total population | |
| Percent population under 18 | ACS 2015-2019, B01001 | Individuals under 18 divided by total population | |
| Percent population 25+ with bachelor's degree | ACS 2015-2019, B15003 | Adults over 25 with a bachelor's or higher divided by adults over 25 | |
| Percent population 25+ without high school diploma | ACS 2015-2019, B15003 | Adults over 25 without a high school diploma divided by adults over 25 | Excluded from regression due to multicollinearity |
| Poverty rate | ACS 2015-2019, B17002 | Individuals below the poverty line divided by total population | |
| Percent extremely low income | CHAS 2013-2017, table 7 estimate 134 | Renter households below 30% Area Median Income (AMI) divided by renter households | Excluded from regression due to multicollinearity |
| Percent very low income | CHAS 2013-2017, table 7 estimates 134 and 160 | Renter households below 50% AMI divided by renter households | Excluded from regression due to multicollinearity |
| Percent low income | CHAS 2013-2017, table 7 estimates 134, 160, and 186 | Renter households below 80% AMI divided by renter households | |
| Median income | ACS 2015-2019, B19013 | Median household income in the past 12 months | |

Correlational Analysis

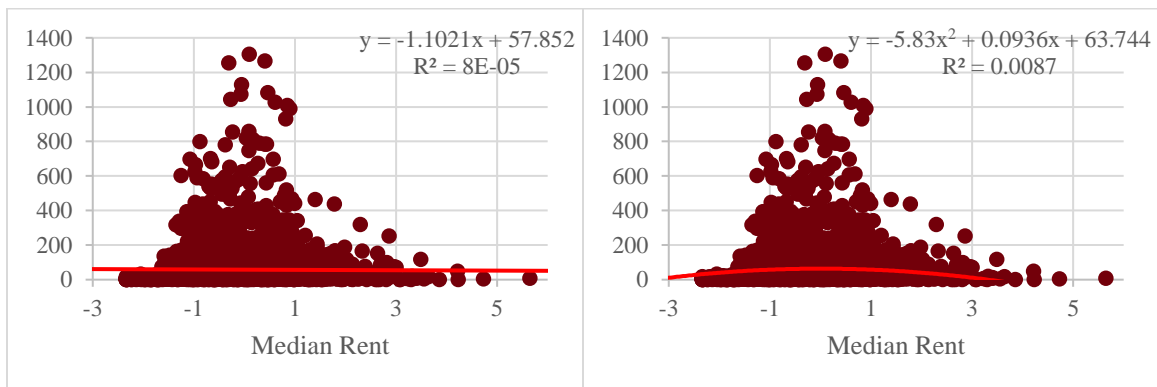
The first round of analysis examined the correlation between each of the 26 variables and the filing count. Correlational analysis is important because it allows us to understand these relationships separately from one another. The independent variables were standardized by z-score to make the outputs easier to interpret.

| Independent Variable | Pearson's Coefficient | Level of Significance |
|--|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Urban | 0.2712 | *** |
| Median home value | — | *** |
| Median rent | — | |
| Median year built | 0.0927 | ** |
| Percent multifamily units | 0.4269 | *** |
| Percent manufactured units | — | *** |
| Percent habitability issues | 0.1370 | *** |
| Vacancy rate | — | *** |
| Seasonal vacancy rate | — | *** |
| Percent evictions filed by corporations | 0.4159 | *** |
| Percent evictions filed by individuals | — | *** |
| Percent evictions filed by LIHTC | 0.1382 | *** |
| Percent evictions filed by public housing | 0.0693 | * |
| Total renter households | 0.7246 | *** |
| Density | 0.2353 | *** |
| Percent single-mother households | 0.3151 | *** |
| Percent population black | 0.3090 | *** |
| Percent population Hispanic | 0.1796 | *** |
| Percent population under 18 | 0.1800 | *** |
| Percent population 25+ without high school diploma | 0.0883 | ** |
| Percent population 25+ with bachelor's degree | — | ** |
| Poverty rate | 0.1905 | *** |
| Percent extremely low income | 0.0314 | |
| Percent very low income | — | ** |
| Percent low income | — | *** |
| Median income | — | *** |

*** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$

Almost all of the variables tested (24 out of 26) were shown to have a statistically significant correlation with eviction filings (Table 6). Of these, 19 were significant at the $p < .001$ level. The correlational analysis confirms the relationships that have been found in previous research, with a few notable exceptions. Important positive factors include the number of renter households, percent black, and urbanity. Important negative factors are fewer in number but include seasonal vacancy and median income. The correlational analysis confirms that landlord characteristics as operationalized are significant correlates of eviction filings—individuals are less likely to evict than corporations. The effect of subsidized housing is smaller, but still positive. It appears that evictions are more common in neighborhoods with a high portion of multifamily housing as opposed to neighborhoods with more manufactured housing. The statistical insignificance of median rent is the result of a nonlinear relationship with eviction filings. As can be seen in Figure 7, the highest number of filings actually occur at middling rents. This is a phenomenon previously observed by Leung, Hepburn, and Desmond (2020) when they examined the relationship between serial filing rate and median rent on a nationwide level. One possible explanation is that tenants in mid-range rental markets are able to struggle on for more months than the poorest renters, who will be removed after a single missed payment (Leung, Hepburn, and Desmond 2020).

Figure 7: Linear vs Polynomial Regression of Median Rent and Eviction Filings



For the other insignificant variable, percent extremely low income, adding another term does not improve the analysis by nearly as much (Figure 8). Visually, it is hard to identify any relationship between extremely low income and filings except among outlying tracts, where it is negative.

Figure 8: Linear vs Polynomial Regression of % Extremely Low Income and Eviction Filings

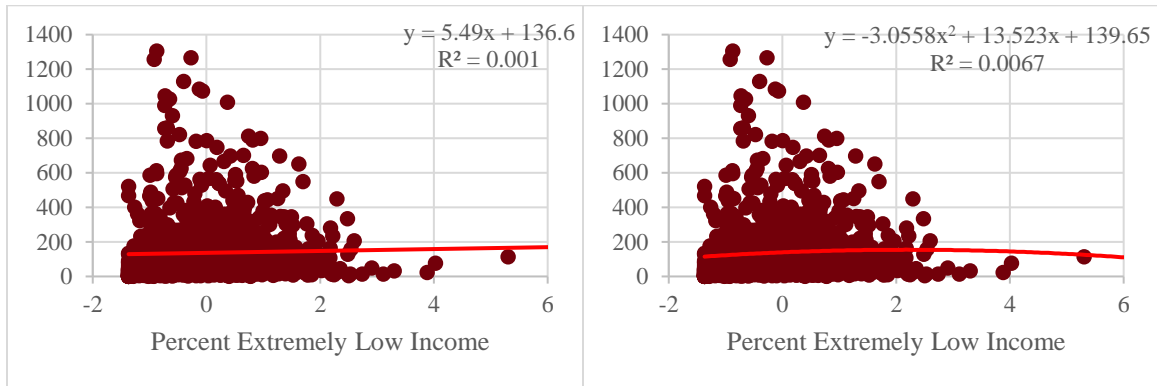


Figure 11 (see Appendix) is a comprehensive list of the other variables graphed against filings. With the exception of median rent and percent of the population 25+ with a bachelor's degree, there was no significant improvement to the model by adding a second term. For this reason, it was not judged important to account for nonlinearity in this paper.

Linear Regression

The second stage of the analysis was to model eviction filings using negative binomial regression (NBNR). The most common linear regression model is Ordinary Least Squares (OLS); however, NBNR is better suited to count data where the variance is greater than the mean, as it is in this dataset. NBNR corrects for this overdispersion in part by taking the log of the dependent variable. As noted, several variables were expected to be collinear with one another. To identify multicollinearity, the R package “car” was used to calculate Variable Inflation Factors (VIF). Multicollinearity occurs when one of the independent variables can be explained with some combination of the other independent variables. If a variable is significantly collinear with other variables, it should be removed for parsimony and to maintain the integrity of the regression model. A VIF greater than 4 is considered marginally or highly collinear (see Table 7). To minimize multicollinearity, the least significant variable of any multicollinear group was eliminated first. For example, the two education variables were collinear, so percent without a high school diploma was removed because it was less significant in the regression analysis. This method led me to remove (in stages) the percent evictions filed by individuals, percent population 25+ without high school diploma, percent extremely low income, percent very low income, and median income. Once these variables had been removed, multicollinearity disappeared.

| Variable | VIF |
|--|--------|
| Percent evictions filed by corporations | 2296.7 |
| Percent evictions filed by individuals | 2175.6 |
| Percent evictions filed by LIHTC | 420.3 |
| Percent evictions filed by public housing | 328.5 |
| Percent very low income | 12.3 |
| Median income | 7.6 |
| Percent extremely low income | 6.3 |
| Percent low income | 6.0 |
| Percent population 25+ with bachelor’s degree | 5.9 |
| Percent population 25+ without high school diploma | 3.8 |
| Percent single-mother households | 3.7 |
| Percent multifamily units | 3.6 |
| Poverty rate | 3.6 |
| Median home value | 3.5 |
| Percent population black | 2.9 |

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| Percent mobile units | 2.9 |
| Median rent | 2.3 |
| Total renter households | 2.2 |
| Density | 2.1 |
| Vacancy rate | 2.1 |
| Percent population under 18 | 2.0 |
| Percent habitability issues | 1.7 |
| Seasonal vacancy rate | 1.7 |
| Percent population Hispanic | 1.6 |
| Urban | 1.4 |
| Median year built | 1.2 |

The R package “MASS” was used to fit the NBNR equation and “MuMIn” was used to calculate the corrected Akaike Information Criterion (AICc); the overall results can be seen in Table 8. It should be noted that NBNR does not create an exact equivalent for the R^2 generated with OLS regression. The closest approximation is the percentage of the null deviance explained by the model, in this case .782 or 78.2 percent. In order to compare with the GWR model, AICc will be used. AICc is a statistic used to compare models’ “efficiency” at predicting the true values. It prefers more accurate models that use fewer variables.

| Table 8: Negative Binomial Regression Overall Results | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| Null deviance | 5453.4 on 1096 degrees of freedom |
| Residual deviance | 1190.3 on 1075 degrees of freedom |
| AICc | 11192 |
| Theta | 3.790 |
| Standard Error | 0.173 |
| 2 x log-likelihood | -11144 |
| Number of observations | 1097 |

Out of twenty-one variables in the model, sixteen were significant at the 95 percent confidence level (see Table 9). Of these, percent of the population 25+ with a bachelor’s degree, poverty rate, percent low income, percent Hispanic, seasonal vacancy rate, and median rent were negatively associated with filings. Urbanity, the median year built, percent manufactured units, percent filed by corporations, percent filed by LIHTC, percent filed by public housing, percent with habitability issues, total renter households, density, and percent under 18 had positive coefficients. The variables have been standardized by z-score, so the coefficients indicate the effect of a one standard

deviation change in the independent variable on the logs of the predicted eviction filing counts, while other variables are held constant. Surprisingly, the coefficient of the percent of evictions filed by corporations was larger than the coefficient for the number of renter households. The latter relationship was still statistically stronger (see z-scores), but this speaks to the importance of landlord characteristics. In fact, considering the strong significance of percent filed by the two forms of subsidized housing as well, landlord characteristics in this study were by far the strongest of the four factor-clusters.

| Variable | | Coefficient | Standard Error | Z value | Significance |
|---|---|--------------------|-----------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Urban | | 0.0899 | 0.0387 | 2.32 | * |
| Median home value | — | 0.0418 | 0.0313 | -1.34 | |
| Median rent | — | 0.0641 | 0.0224 | -2.85 | ** |
| Median year built | | 0.0149 | 0.0017 | 8.80 | *** |
| Percent multifamily units | — | 0.0295 | 0.0295 | -1.00 | |
| Percent manufactured units | | 0.1091 | 0.0269 | 4.07 | *** |
| Percent habitability issues | | 0.1414 | 0.0233 | 6.06 | *** |
| Vacancy rate | | 0.0334 | 0.0246 | 1.36 | |
| Seasonal vacancy rate | — | 0.1254 | 0.0215 | -5.85 | *** |
| Percent filed by corporations | | 0.5671 | 0.0261 | 21.70 | *** |
| Percent filed by LIHTC | | 0.2261 | 0.0184 | 12.30 | *** |
| Percent filed by public housing | | 0.2340 | 0.0189 | 12.35 | *** |
| Total renter households | | 0.5649 | 0.0230 | 24.56 | *** |
| Density | | 0.0498 | 0.0238 | 2.10 | * |
| Percent single-mother households | | 0.0573 | 0.0313 | 1.83 | |
| Percent population black | | 0.0266 | 0.0270 | 0.99 | |
| Percent population Hispanic | — | 0.0445 | 0.0187 | -2.39 | * |
| Percent population under 18 | | 0.1311 | 0.0229 | 5.72 | *** |
| Percent population 25+ with bachelor's degree | — | 0.2759 | 0.0338 | -8.17 | *** |
| Poverty rate | — | 0.1202 | 0.0262 | -4.60 | *** |
| Percent low income | — | 0.0985 | 0.0274 | -3.59 | *** |

*** $p < .001$ ** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$

Discussion

These results can help us understand the hot and cold spots identified above. The concentration of hot spots in cities and suburbs is associated with the comparable concentration of corporate managers there (see Appendix, Figure 21). Corporate managers naturally operate most in the areas with the highest demand for rental housing and thus the largest properties and highest profit margins. Urbanity and density also have independent positive effects, indicating that even non-corporate landlords are more likely to file in cities, where they can expect to fill vacancies more quickly. The other landlord characteristics variables, percent filed by public housing and percent filed by LIHTC, are also significant and positive. As seen in the analysis of evictor types, subsidized housing does not insulate renters from eviction. The overall importance of landlord characteristics emphasizes the importance of landlord choice in filing evictions. It should direct the attention of policymakers to better regulating large corporate filers.

High seasonal vacancy rates (see Appendix, Figure 20), such as in coastal markets or near Lakes Keowee and Murray, are associated with fewer filings. This may be related to the predominance of vacation rentals in those areas, although it is unclear why this would decrease the total number of filings rather than just the filing rate. Potentially, seasonal vacancy is acting as a proxy for an unknown causal variable related to vacation areas. If rental housing is being marketed to vacationers, for example, it may push working-class renters to commute in from elsewhere. In the Charleston metro, the hot spot in North Charleston appears to justify this explanation. In other coastal areas, commuters may live in more rural areas, where eviction filings may be suppressed for other reasons (like less concentrated demand). That said, these are still hypotheses that require more research to investigate.

One surprising result was the lack of significance of percent black. At first glance, this appears to fly in the face of a decade of research on this topic (e.g., Huk and Harwood 2019; Immergluck et al. 2019; Medina et al. 2020; Merritt and Farnworth 2020; Taylor 2020; Lens et al. 2020; Nelson,

Gromis, et al. 2021). This is not completely unprecedented: other studies on eviction have failed or had ambiguous results in establishing a link to race (Greenberg, Gershenson, and Desmond 2016; Desmond and Gershenson 2017; Goodspeed et al. 2021). And it should be noted that this study does not attempt to look at individual causes for eviction, only factors on a neighborhood scale. But if race is truly not a strong neighbor-level factor in South Carolina once other variables are accounted for, what are the implications? Racial disparities in eviction are a fact (Desmond 2012), validated by the correlational analysis. Perhaps the racialization of housing in South Carolina is more systemic and generational than personal and immediate. Percent black did not exhibit as high levels of multicollinearity as observed elsewhere, but this may manifest at the neighborhood level in disproportionate poverty, poor-quality housing, and other forms of concentrated disadvantage. (Goodspeed et al. 2021). Black tenants may face less individualized bigotry because they are more likely to have a landlord of the same race compared to Hispanic tenants (Greenberg, Gershenson, and Desmond 2016). In majority-minority neighborhoods, which are common in South Carolina, racist landlords might be less motivated to evict black tenants, since they will expect black tenants to replace them (Desmond and Gershenson 2017). These explanations, or others, require further testing and elaboration before any can be accepted as fact. And if shown to be accurate for South Carolina, they will not immediately be applicable to other states or regions without duplicating the results there as well. As the following geographically weighted regression model confirms, the explanations for eviction are highly variable across space.

Geographically Weighted Regression

Eviction filing rates are a spatial phenomenon. The next part of this paper tries to improve our understanding of eviction with a geographically weighted regression model (GWR). Because “there is currently no consensus on how to assess confidence in the coefficients from a GWR model” (Esri), I only used the variables found to be significant in the linear regression stage. The urban dummy variable was excluded because dummy variables are not allowed in GWR. Using ArcGIS Pro, static parameters were set as the Poisson distribution model (the same as for NBNR) and the Gaussian definition of the kernel (i.e., the area used to optimize each local regression model). Using a Gaussian kernel means that even tracts outside of the defined neighborhood will be given a *slight* weight when optimizing the regression equation. This allows the model to look at small neighborhood sizes (e.g., 20 tracts) while avoiding overfitting. The other parameters used to define the size of the kernel were tweaked to minimize the AICc and multicollinearity, with the nearest 20 census tracts used in the final analysis.

In addition to generating the coefficient rasters, I wanted to test the hypothesis that the magnitude of variables’ effects on the predicted eviction filing counts will vary spatially, the null hypothesis being that these magnitudes will be constant or random. If the null is true, we should expect to see the GWR be no more effective than linear regression at explaining the null deviance. If the GWR model efficiently explains a significantly greater portion of the null deviance, the null hypothesis will have to be rejected.

Comparing the GWR and non-spatial models, the results are somewhat ambiguous (Table 10, cf. Table 8). On one hand, GWR is able to predict significantly more of the deviance, in fact, over 92 percent. But the AICc of the spatial model was more than three higher than that of the linear model, indicating that these improvements were inefficient. Thus, we cannot reject the null hypothesis. It remains to be shown whether a GWR model can efficiently improve on a global model.

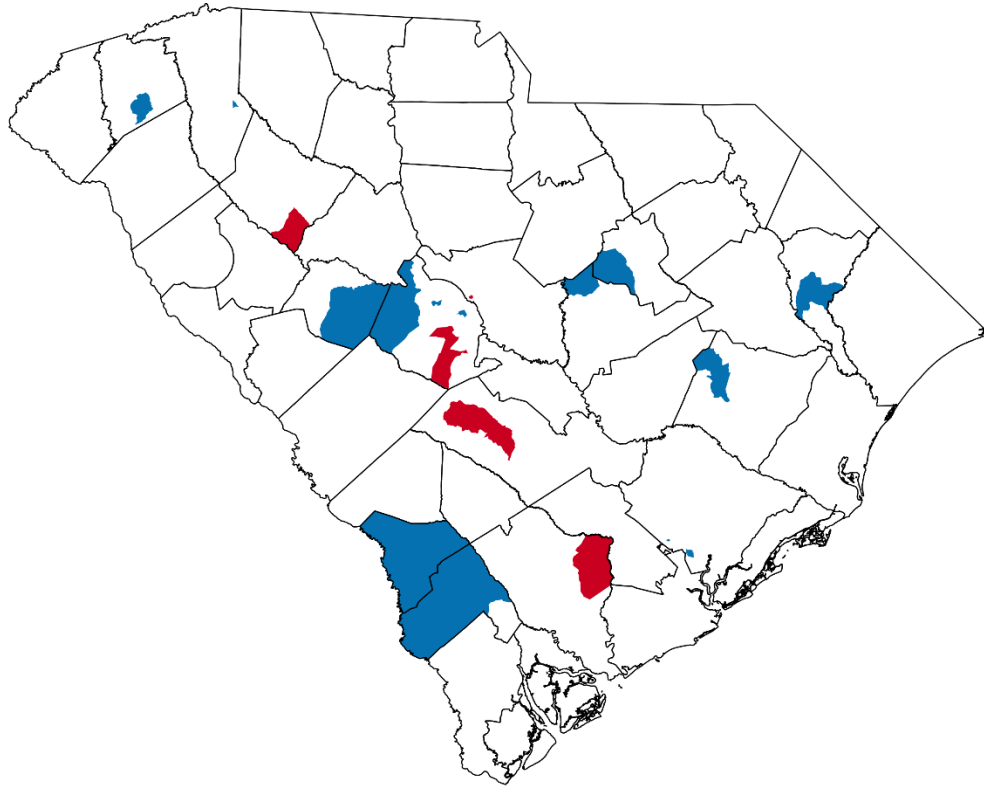
| Table 10: Geographically Weighted Regression Model Results | |
|---|----------------------|
| Number of features | 1097 |
| Deviance explained by the non-spatial model | 79.01% ¹⁴ |
| Deviance explained by the spatial model | 92.27% |
| Deviance explained by the spatial vs non-spatial model | 0.6315 |
| AICc | 14229 |
| S ² | 4606 |
| S ² MLE | 47816 |
| Effective degrees of freedom | 11388 |

To test whether any major spatial variables had been missed by this model, a hot spot analysis and spatial autocorrelation test were run on the residuals. The hot and cold spots visible in Figure 9 represent areas where the GWR model either over- or under-predicted the actual number of filings. To improve the model, future research may want to examine these areas and the factors that may have been missed there. But the low z score of the global Moran's i means that the possibility that these remaining clusters are due to spatial randomness cannot be ruled out (Table 11).

| Table 11: Spatial Autocorrelation Report | |
|---|---------|
| Moran's i | -0.0121 |
| Z Score | -1.2779 |
| P Value | 0.2012 |

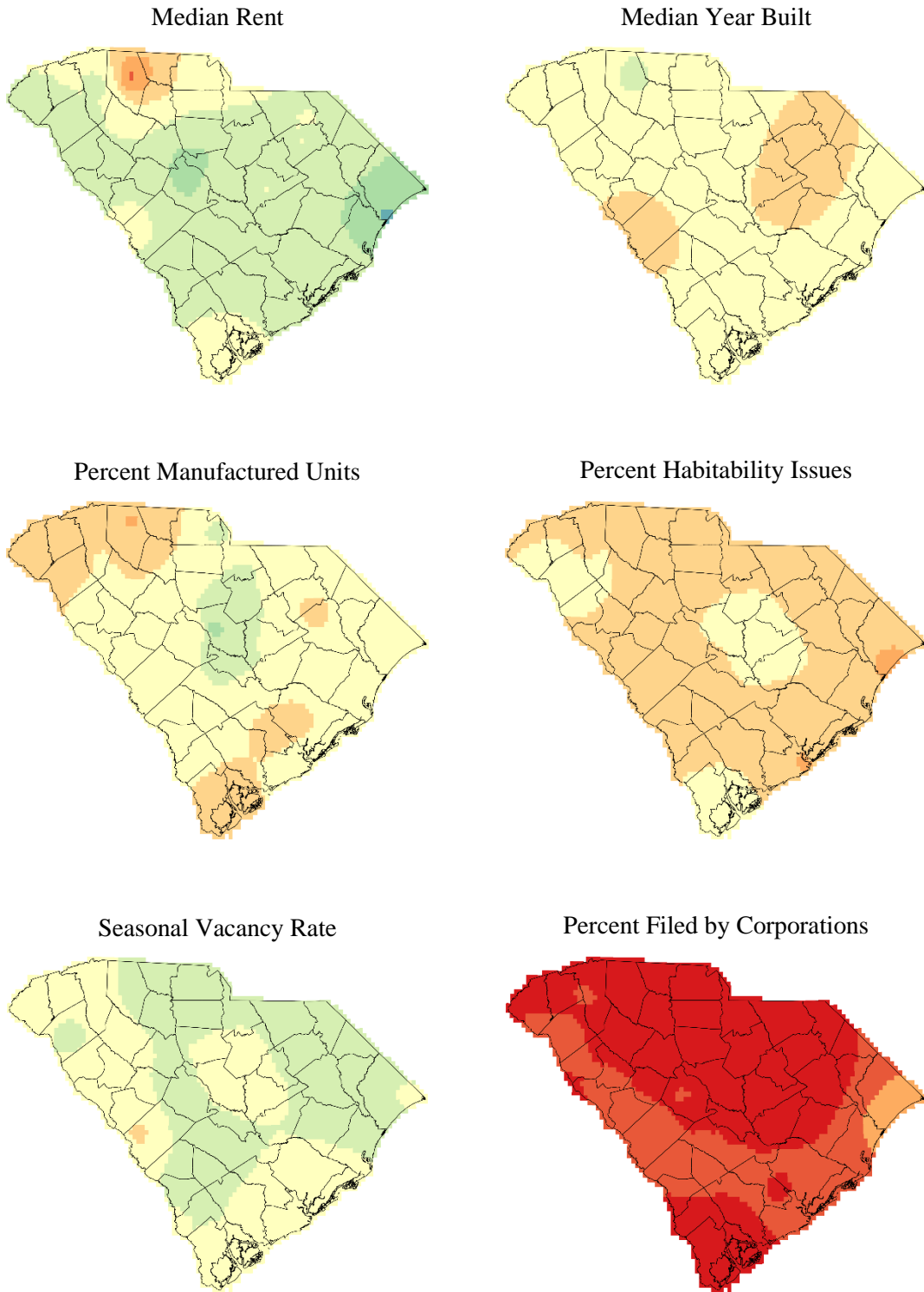
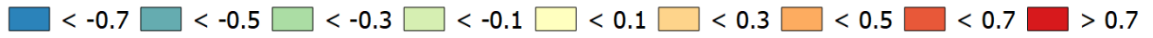
¹⁴ This is the value generated by ArcGIS. There is a slight discrepancy between it and the value reported for NBNR in the previous section, probably due to slight differences in the ways R and ArcGIS fit the model.

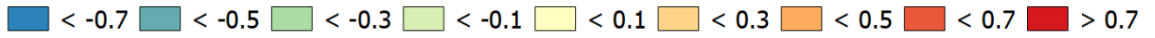
Figure 9: Hotspot Map of the GWR Deviance Residuals at 20 Nearest Neighbors



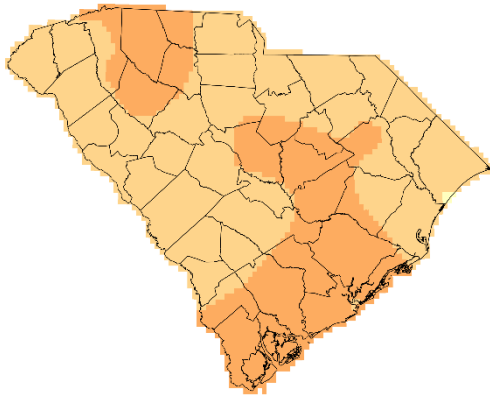
Although it cannot be proven to be the optimal model, GWR's coefficient rasters still offer a unique way to analyze how the causes of the eviction crisis vary between similarly vulnerable locations (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Geographically Weighted Regression Coefficient Raster Maps

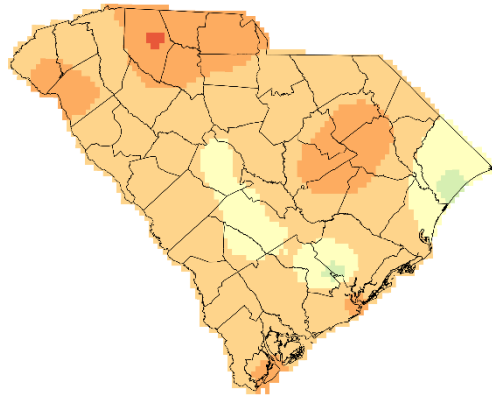




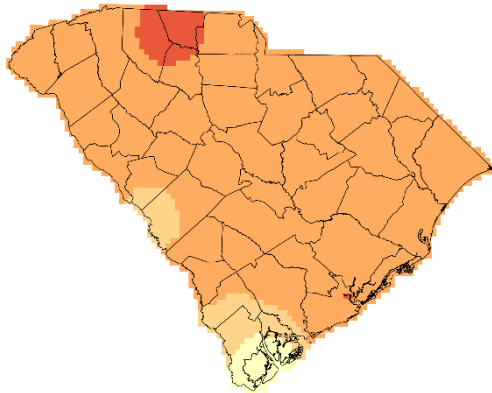
Percent Filed by LIHTC



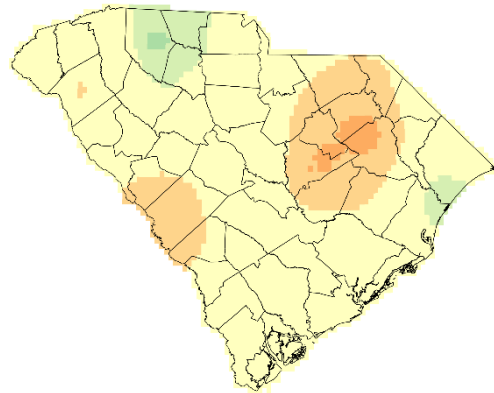
Percent Filed by Public Housing



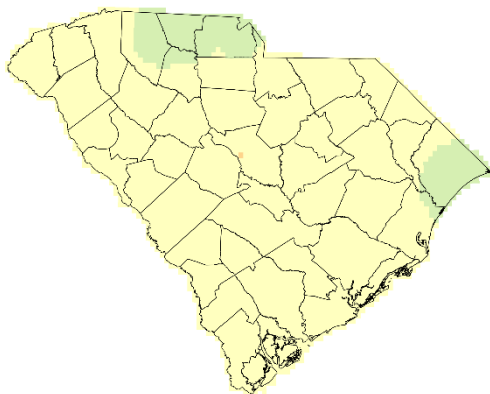
Total Renter Households



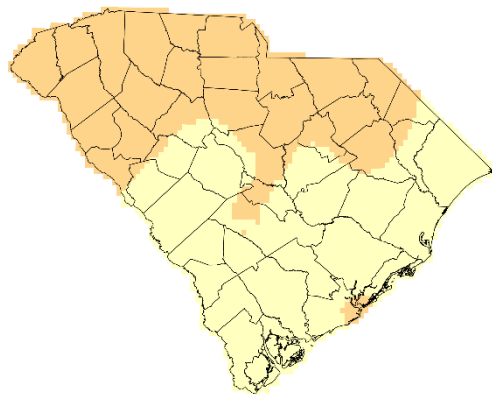
Density

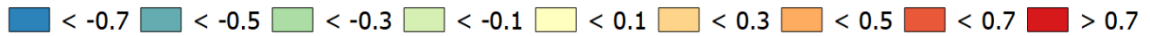


Percent Population Hispanic

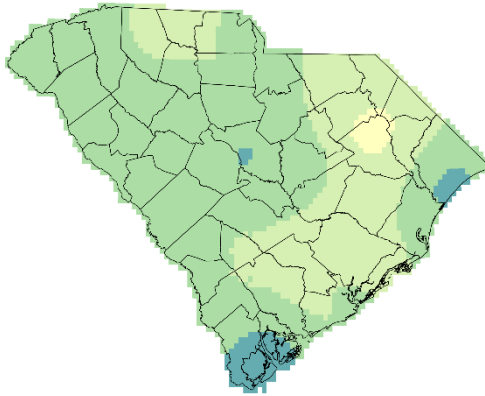


Percent Population Under 18

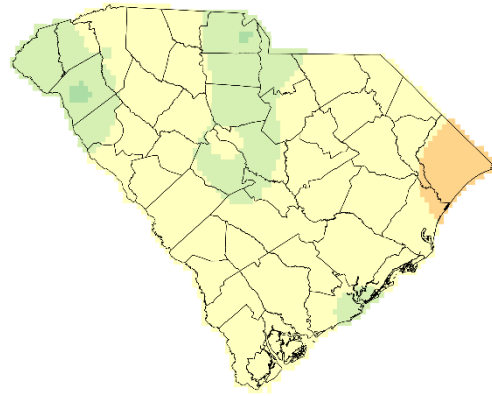




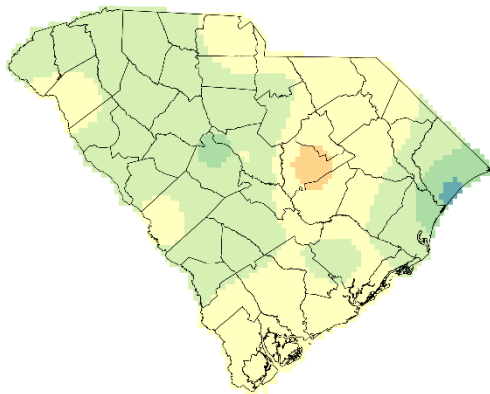
Percent Population 25+ with bachelor's



Poverty Rate



Percent Low Income



Discussion

Some of the rasters simply confirm what was shown in the global model. Variables such as percent population under 18 and total renter households had very consistent effects across the map. Other rasters reveal patterns not visible in the global model but identified in other sections of this paper. For example, the nonlinearity of median rent manifests spatially: in an area where rents are lower, such as Spartanburg/Gaffney, rents are positively related to filings. In areas with higher rents, like Myrtle Beach, the relationship is reversed. Cherokee County (home to Gaffney) stands out for the

strong relationship between evictions by public housing and more filings overall, consistent with the LHA's startling proclivity to evict.

But the most important rasters are those that demonstrate unexpected or novel relationships. These GWR coefficient rasters allow us to understand how housing markets are distinguished in terms of what underlies their local eviction crises. For example, in contrast with Gaffney and Spartanburg, the percent of evictions filed by public housing was actually negatively associated with overall filings in North Charleston and Myrtle Beach. This suggests that housing authorities in these locations may actually be sheltering their residents from eviction in the way that would be hoped (or at least, they are less eviction prone than other forms of housing). LHA managers in Gaffney, Spartanburg, or Florence might benefit from using the policies of North Charleston or Myrtle Beach as a model for reforming their own.

Density is a more important positive factor in the Pee Dee than it is in other areas, suggesting a sharper contrast between the crisis in cities and in rural areas. Given the downtown cold spots and suburban hot spots observed in the hot spot analysis, one might expect the major metros to see this relationship reversed. But in most of them, the effect of density is small. Only in Spartanburg and Myrtle Beach is the relationship between density and filings clearly negative. The reasons for this become clearer when examining a population density map of the major metros. Rather than a clear peak in the downtown, these metros have population concentrations in the suburbs just as often, centered around suburban apartments.

When compared with more general analyses of a local housing market, GWR rasters allow us to fit eviction into that larger picture. For example, Beaufort County is clearly distinct from its surroundings. Here, manufactured housing and subsidized housing are more strongly related to filings than they are elsewhere. Educational attainment has an unusually high negative effect on filings, while the number of renter households had shockingly little effect. These findings

harmonize with what scholars have learned about the local housing market. Historically, the predominantly black working-class has lived in low-density rural areas, often on heirs' property, and the affordable rental units that do exist are mostly manufactured housing or LIHTC (Finewood 2012; Dubose 2018; Grady 2019). Geographic isolation has historically made formal education a particularly strong marker of class (DuBose 2018). Since the 1950s and 60s, development has largely been oriented towards tourists and retirees seeking high levels of amenities, and many wealthy neighborhoods have been built physically distant from working-class communities (Finewood 2012; Dubose 2018). This, combined with high construction costs, has meant that any affordable or subsidized housing is excluded from these census tracts (Grady 2019). Eviction is less common in Beaufort (compared to the rest of the state) because the reproduction of the working poor as a labor source is no longer as essential as it once was (Soederberg 2018; Finewood 2012). Instead, capital seeks to use other tools of state power—rezoning, highway construction, and appropriation of heirs' property—to repurpose the land they live on (Finewood 2012).

This descriptive analysis shows how GWR rasters help us fit eviction into the local dynamics of a housing market. By comparing GWR rasters to descriptions of the local housing market, researchers, policymakers, and organizers can create similar analyses for any given geography.

Limitations and Potential Improvements

As noted in the discussion of the GWR results, this study was not able to show this method to be more efficient than nonspatial regression in terms of AICc. However, the amount of deviance explained by the GWR model suggests that this is still a worthwhile area of exploration for future research. By choosing slightly better independent variables, taking more aggressive measures to reduce multicollinearity, and tweaking the definition of spatial relationships, I believe it will be possible for future researchers to establish GWR as a superior method of accounting for spatial variation in the model. As it stands, researchers can still utilize coefficient mapping to better understand eviction within local housing markets.

There are also some important caveats regarding this study's methodology. Researchers have recently become more aware of the challenges caused by unreliable eviction data, and this study was not immune to them (Porton, Desmond, and Gromis 2020). Court records limited me to using eviction filings rather than counts of actual set-outs or involuntary displacement generally. Moreover, I was not able to account for commercial or serial evictions because the court data received did not contain defendant names. Ideally, because commercial evictions are not part of the housing crisis, they should not be included in an analysis of residential evictions. Thankfully, they make up less than 2 percent of eviction filings and therefore will have had little impact on the overall findings (Porton, Desmond, and Gromis 2020; Desmond et al. 2016). The inclusion of serial evictions is a more serious problem, because research has shown just how common that type of eviction is in South Carolina (Porton, Desmond, and Gromis 2020). The final major limitation was the inability to account for changes in property ownership. There were some apartments that changed management during the study period (2015-2020), and this report did not attempt to separate filings by earlier managers during the cleaning of property owner names. In future studies, it would be ideal to develop a methodology that can consistently determine when property management changes. However, the obvious source, deeds, usually only indicate ownership, not

management. Newspaper records and apartment websites can offer details about management, but these are less reliable, not universally available, and generally require painstaking manual searches to find the desired information.

While conducting this analysis, I became aware that while my understanding of eviction was grounded in the radical tradition, the methodology of my research itself was not consistent with that worldview. While this thesis may contribute to the academic world's understanding of the geography of eviction, it is limited in its immediate usefulness to the tenants' movement. It shares more in common with research aimed towards policymakers, not activists. If we as researchers are convinced that eviction is worth stopping, we must reorient ourselves away from birds-eye-views like the one presented here and involve ourselves in the world of tenant organizing (Howell and Teresa 2020). The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project is an inspiring example of the role that researchers can play if they choose to do so (Maharawal and McElroy 2017). There is no shortage of research to be done on landlords' evolving eviction tactics and what tenants are doing to resist them (Huq and Harwood 2019). In the latter respect, there is much that tenant organizers in the United States could learn from those in the Global South (Miraftab 2006; Chiumbu 2012; Dekel 2020). Spreading the word about aggressive new strategies, embedding themselves within existing tenants' movements, and focusing as much on praxis as on theory—this is where the future of eviction research must lie.

Conclusion and the Path Forward

To conclude, I want to reflect on how the eviction crisis can be addressed. This thesis gives examples of how an understanding of the eviction landscape in South Carolina can justify certain policy interventions, but these are very limited in scope. Humanitarian reforms coming from policymakers cannot eliminate eviction because landlords would not allow it. The interests of landlords and the interests of tenants are not divergent, they are in fact oppositional (Marx 1976; Brenner 1977). Landlords have a monopoly on land, meaning that as a group they have a right to control who has access to land or housing (Marx 1976; Smith 1979). This gives them an incentive to charge rent to anyone who wants to access land that the landlord is not currently using themselves (Engels 2009; Soederberg 2018). But tenants, who lack land but still require shelter to survive, have an interest in retaining as much of their income as possible. Each dollar the landlord manages to extract in rent is a dollar they lose, and vice versa. Landlords are only able to enforce their monopoly on land through coercive means, namely, eviction.

If eviction is not acceptable as a means, perhaps we need to evaluate rent extraction as an end. What would the world look like without rent extraction? First of all, without the coercive power to perpetuate the exploitation of tenants by landlords means that landlords will cease to exist (Kropotkin 1906). Without the *ability* to extract rent, landlords will lose their *right* to extract rent. With landlords and evictions gone, there would be three main challenges: maintaining housing, building new housing, and securing individuals' private access to their homes (Kropotkin 1906; Ferreri and Vidal 2021). The question of maintenance is easy enough for detached dwellings—with no more need to pay their landlords' salaries, tenants will find it much easier to pay for the upkeep of their own homes. For larger buildings, where many maintenance problems are shared, the problem becomes trickier. Co-operatives and state subsidies are both possibilities, each with their own issues (Horlitz 2013; Ferreri and Vidal 2021). Experimentation will ultimately be the best way to find the right solution. In regards to who will finance new construction, the state is the most

obvious candidate. At our current historical moment, it seems that only the state has the financial power to build housing on the necessary scale (Ferrerri and Vidal 2021). But this will run into issues such as NIMBYism, resource segregation, and the domination of local governments by corporate regimes. Here, we can turn the decades of literature on radical and participatory planning to show us a path to a true democratization of housing (e.g., Arnstein 1969).

This radical solution to the eviction crisis is obviously not novel, but it is important to repeat it here. Much of the recent wave of eviction literature—whether radical or not—has been primarily aimed at policymakers or other researchers (cf., Sims 2016; Schmidt 2017; Soederberg 2018; Summers 2019; Leung, Hepburn, and Desmond 2020). The former is subject to the many practical constraints of public administration (Svara 1985), while the latter is already fully aware of what the radical critique is. When solutions have been proposed, they are mostly limited in scope and underwhelming in their objectives. If we desire to shift the scholarly focus towards explicitly serving the tenants' movement, it is necessary for our research to continually articulate an end goal. We risk our credibility when we advocate changes that we know will not fix the problem.

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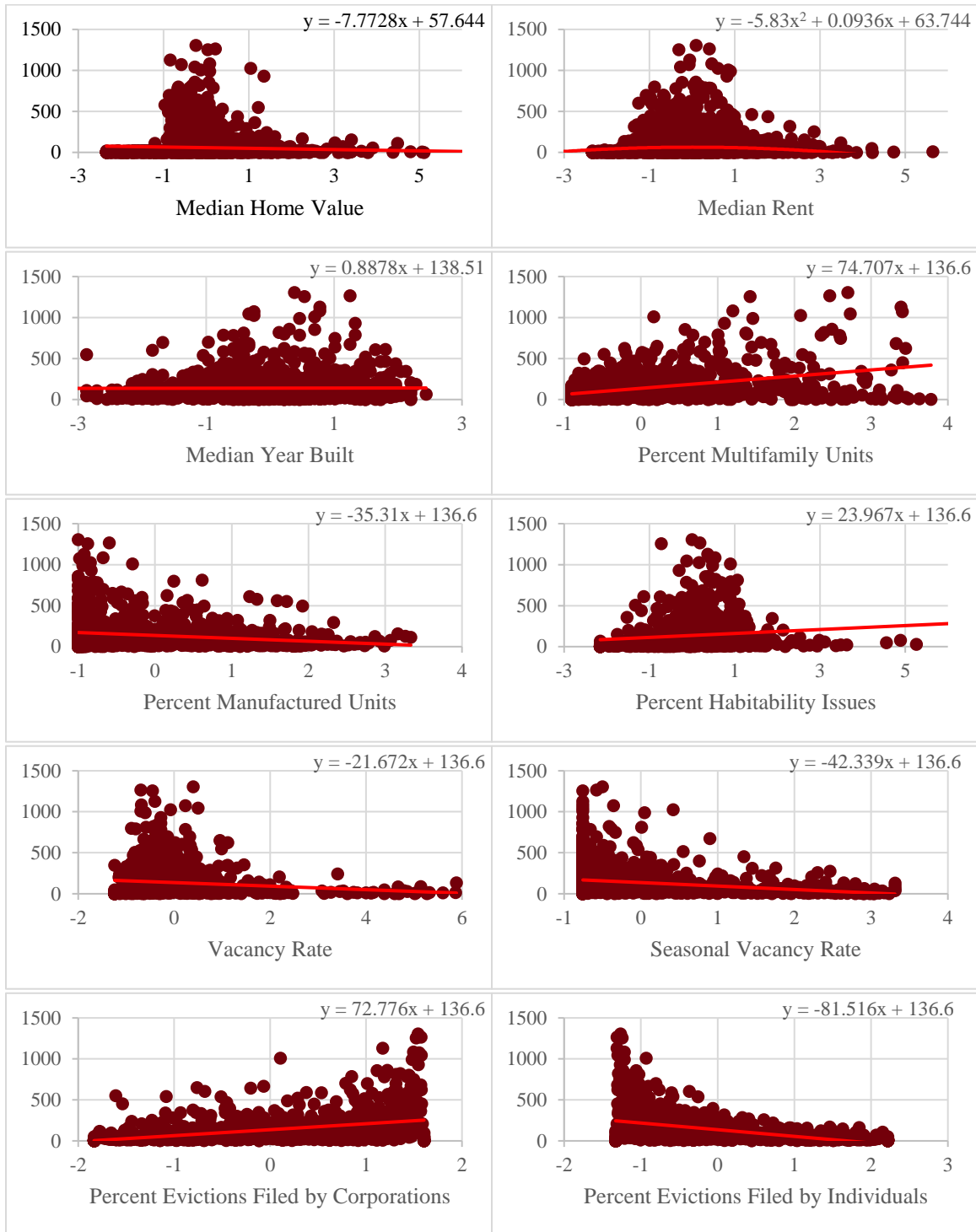
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Appendix

Figure 11: Filing Count by Independent Variable





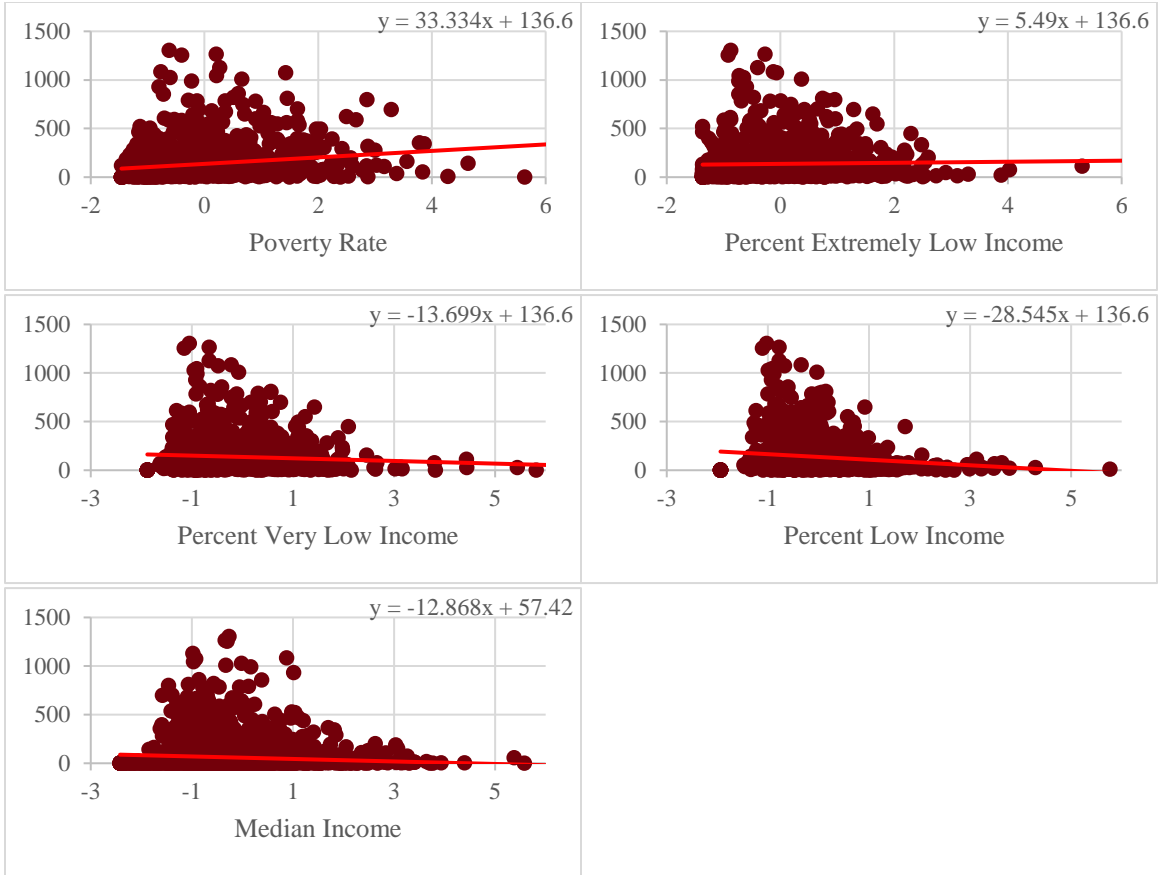


Fig 12: Urban or Rural

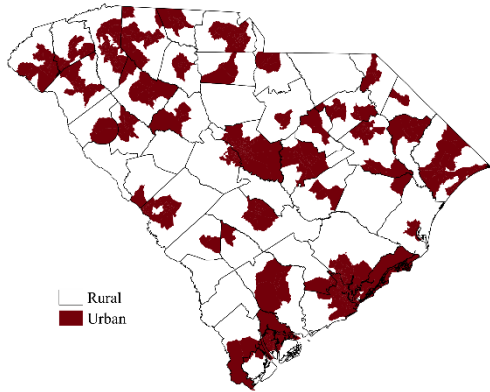


Fig 13: Median Home Value

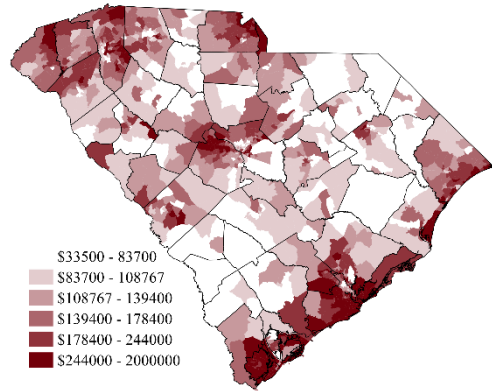


Fig 14: Median Rent

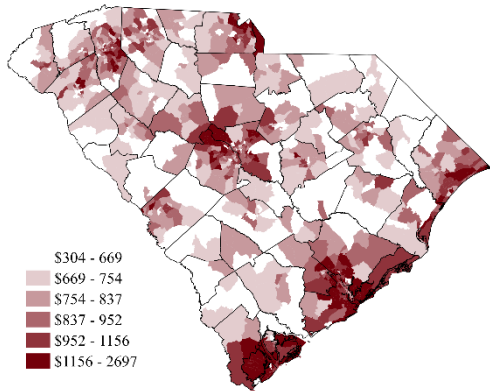


Fig 15: Median Year Built

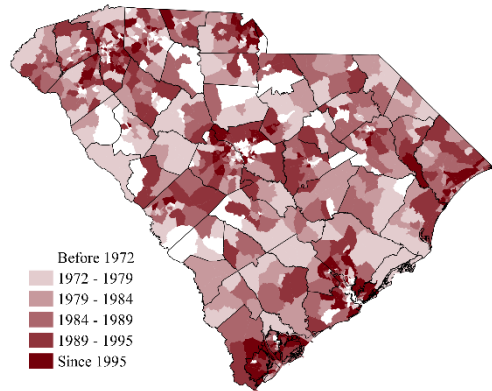


Fig 16: Percent Multifamily Units

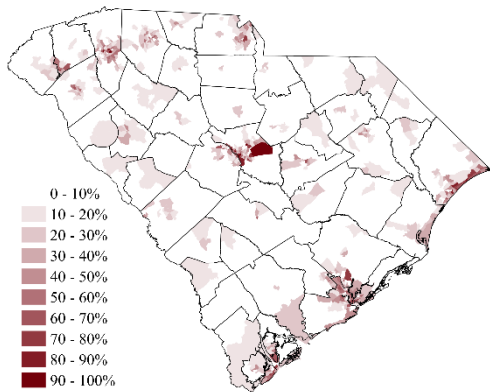


Fig 17: Percent Manufactured Units

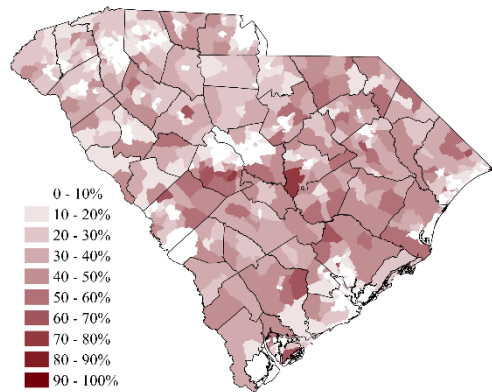


Fig 18: Percent Habitability Issues

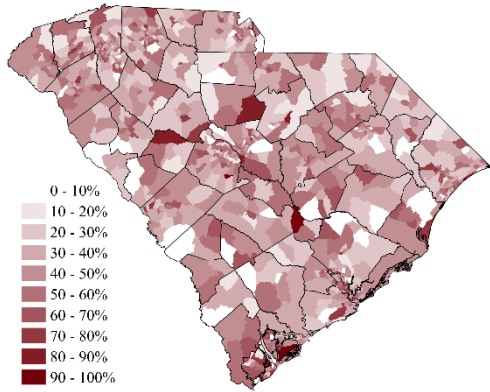


Fig 19: Vacancy Rate

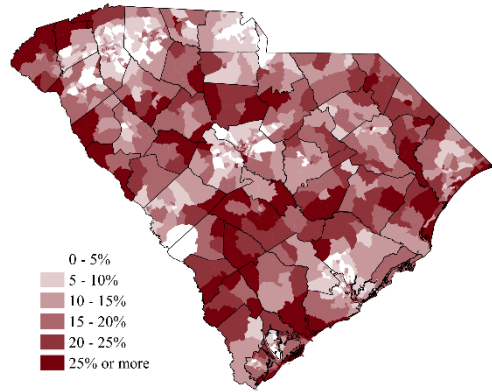


Fig 20: Seasonal Vacancy Rate

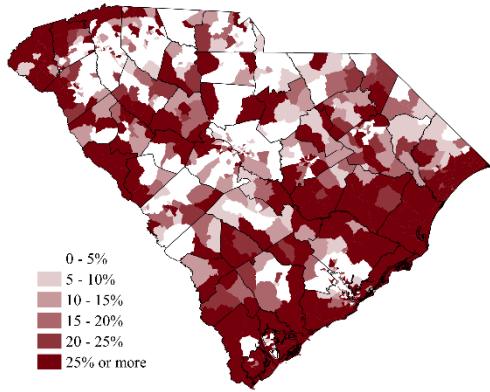


Fig 21: Percent Filed by Corporations

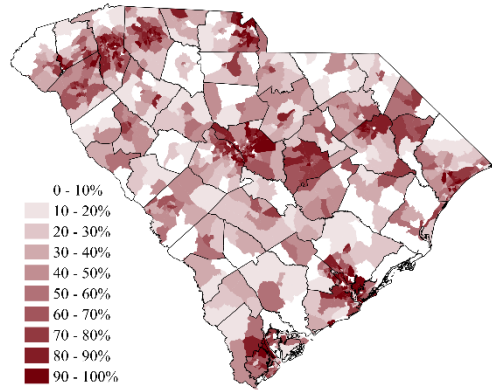


Fig 22: Percent Filed by Individuals

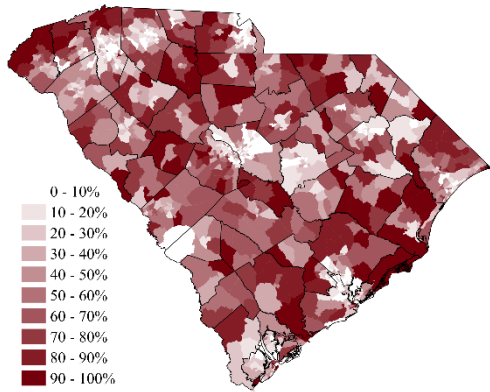


Fig 23: Percent Filed by LIHTC

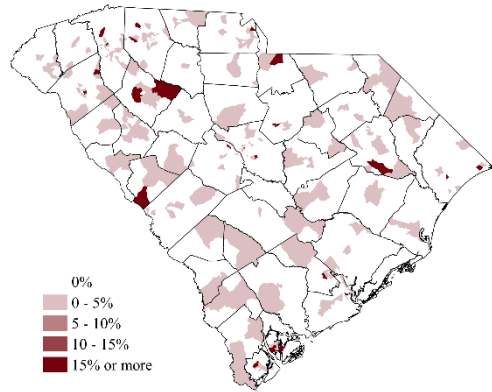


Fig 24: Percent Filed by Public Housing

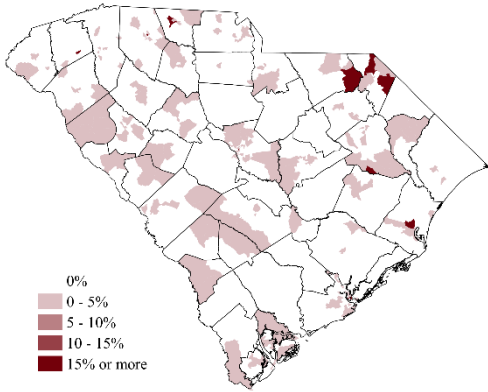


Fig 25: Total Renter Households

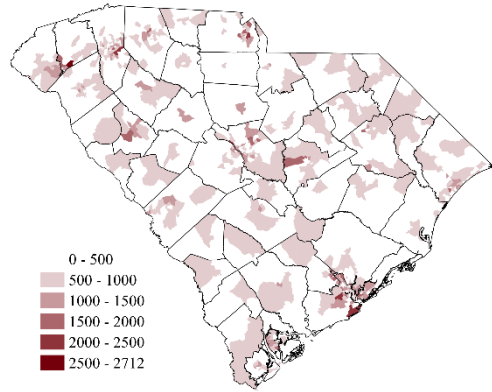


Fig 26: Percent Single-Mother Households

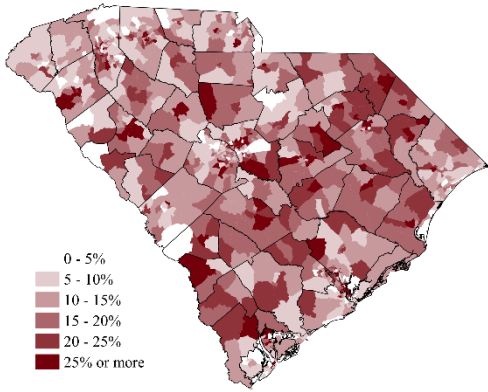


Fig 27: Percent Black

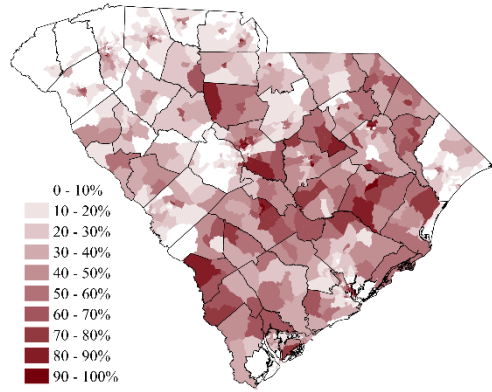


Fig 28: Percent Hispanic

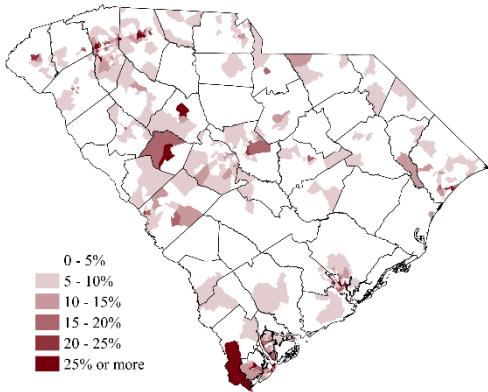


Fig 29: Percent Under 18

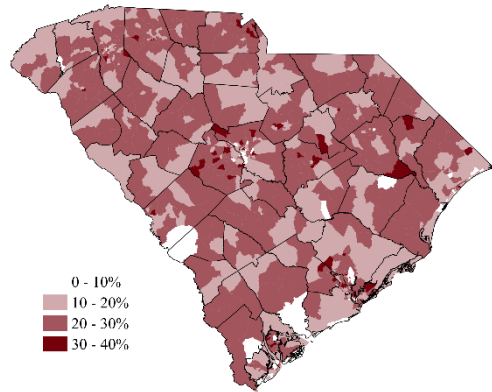


Fig 30: Percent 25+ With Bachelor's

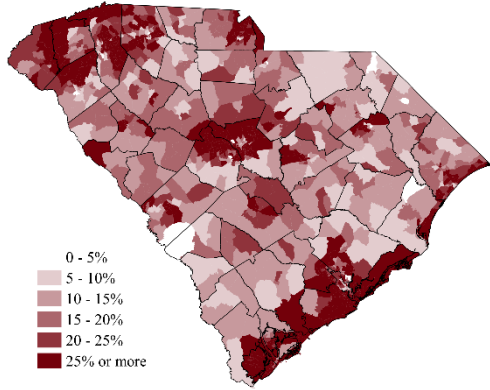


Fig 31: Percent 25+ Without HS Diploma

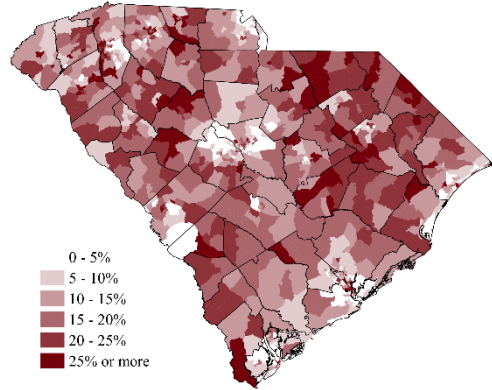


Fig 32: Poverty Rate

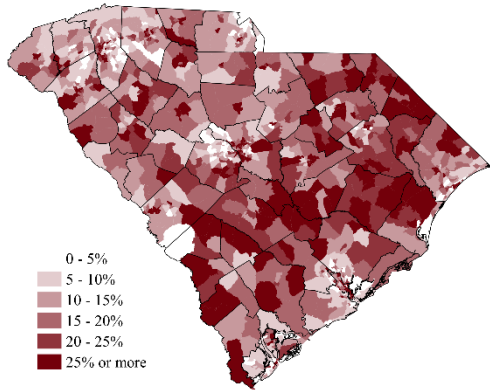


Fig 33: Percent Extremely Low Income

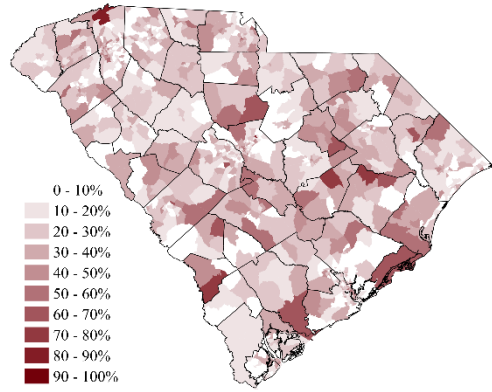


Fig 34: Percent Very Low Income

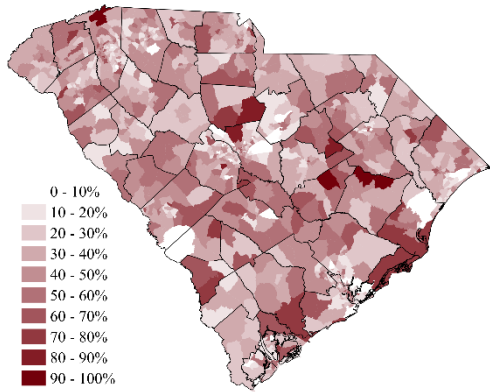


Fig 35: Percent Low Income

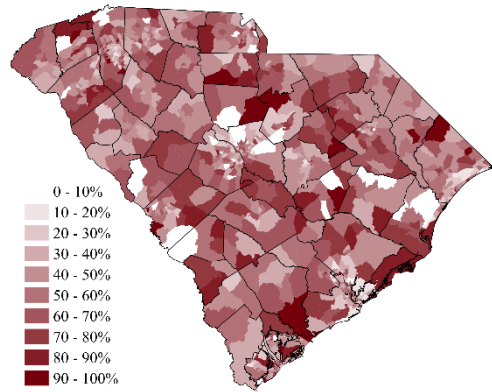


Fig 36: Median Income

