

Dissertation Abstract: Estimating the Spatial Relationships between Subsidized Housing
and Crime

by

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In recent years, housing policymakers have substantially altered subsidized housing policy with the hopes of locating such housing in less distressed neighborhoods, exemplified by the growth of the Housing Choice Voucher and Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) programs. Once more, some localities – most notably New York City – have substantially expanded affordable housing supply. Perhaps related, cities have recently experienced substantial declines in crime and concentrated poverty. In this dissertation, I analyze whether some of these crime improvements can be attributed to changes in subsidized housing policies.

First, I estimate the neighborhood crime conditions faced by voucher households, using census tract-level crime and subsidized housing data on 91 cities in 2000. I find that voucher households lived in neighborhoods with much lower crime rates than LIHTC and public housing households, despite living in neighborhoods that contained similar proportions of poor and minorities as LIHTC households.

Next, I use the case study of New York City to identify whether subsidized housing affects neighborhood crime. Using point-specific crime and housing data from 2004 to 2008, I find evidence that affordable housing investments led to decreased felony crimes on New York City blocks. However, these effects differ by the type of housing, the specification, and neighborhood income and crime characteristics.

Finally, I examine how the LIHTC, HOPE VI, and vouchers affected crime and poverty concentration in urban areas in the 1990s and 2000s. For poverty concentration, the evidence is largely inconclusive. The results are much stronger for crime – higher voucher numbers appear to lead to less violent crime in both MSAs and cities. Public

housing and LIHTC units, on the other hand, may have led to increased crime in both cities and MSAs.

These findings suggest further reliance on vouchers to allow recipient households access to safer neighborhoods and to make cities safer. However, in cities with tight housing markets, such as New York, supply-side efforts may be a viable and important strategy.

