There Votes the Neighborhood: Gentrification, Residential Mobility, and Political Participation in Atlanta

Kevin Morris, CUNY Graduate Center

February 14, 2022

Gentrification as a State Practice

▶ In recent years, scholars have increasingly noted the role played by the state in both the economic deterioration of American cities in the second half of the 20th century (e.g., Sugrue, 1998) and the inflows of capital and agents of displacement in the 21st (e.g., Stein, 2019).

▶ Fights over rezonings in places like New York City (Haag, 2019), and improved public goods in places like Atlanta (Lartey, 2018) have thrown the consequences of the state's (in)action into stark relief.

▶ Although gentrification is not possible without participation from the state, scholars have not investigated how the experience of gentrification influences citizen identity formation and political participation (Thorpe 2021; but see Knotts and Haspel 2006).

Political Threat

- ▶ On the one hand, sociological and political science theory predicts that gentrification would *increase* political participation.

- ▶ Political threat can lead citizens to participate at higher rates (e.g., Zepeda-Millán, 2016).

- ▶ A growing body of qualitative work explores how local communities form networks capable of resisting displacement through engagement with local government (Betancur, 2002; Martin, 2007).

Social Cohesion

▶ On the other hand, political scientists have long noted that individuals who feel strongly connected to their communities participate at higher rates (Riker and Ordeshook, 1968; Verba, Schlozman and Brady, 1995).

▶ Gentrification can lead to lower levels of social cohesion (Zukin et al., 2009; Holmes, 2020).

Data and Approach

▶ I use multiple geocoded snapshots of the registered voter file in Atlanta between 2010 and 2020 to track individuals' mobility and participation patterns. Atlanta has a very high registration rate (Niesse, 2021) and relatively small noncitizen population.

▶ I start by identifying *gentrifiable* neighborhoods in 2010. I then look at how neighborhoods change over the subsequent decade, and identify the voters who lived in block groups that did in fact gentrify.

▶ I then compare the residential and political outcomes for voters in gentrifiable neighborhoods, relative to those who lived in neighborhoods that did *not* gentrify.

Methods

- ▶ The residential mobility analysis leverages a multinomial logit model, where residents can have four outcomes: no move between 2010 and 2020; a local move (ie, less than 10 miles); a non-local move within Georgia (ie, more than 10 miles); and they can drop out of the administrative data.

- ▶ For the turnout analysis, "treated voters"—that is, those who lived in neighborhoods that gentrified—are matched to controls, who lived in gentrifiable neighborhoods. The matching is done along a host of individual- and neighborhood-level characteristics.

- ▶ After matching, I run a difference-in-differences model.
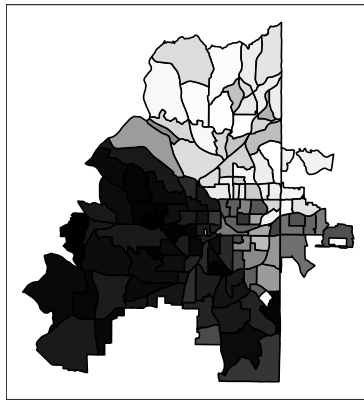
Neighborhood Classification
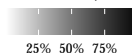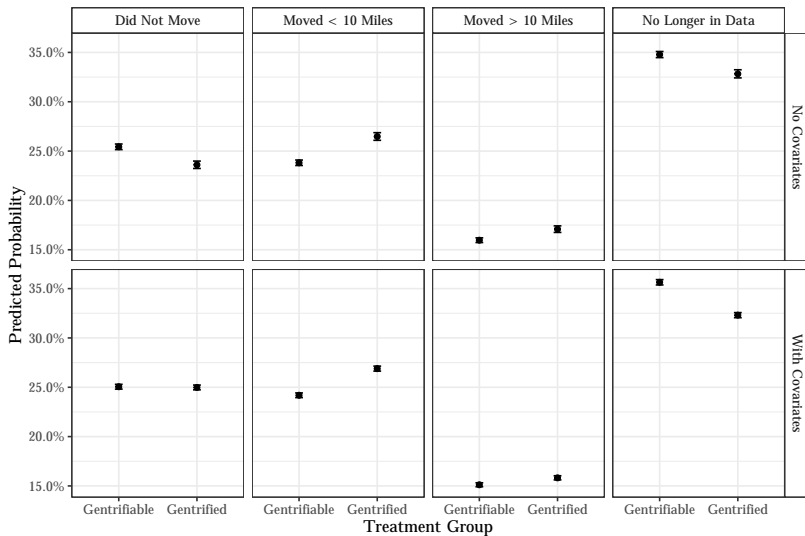

(a) Neighborhood Classification

(b) Share Black in 2010

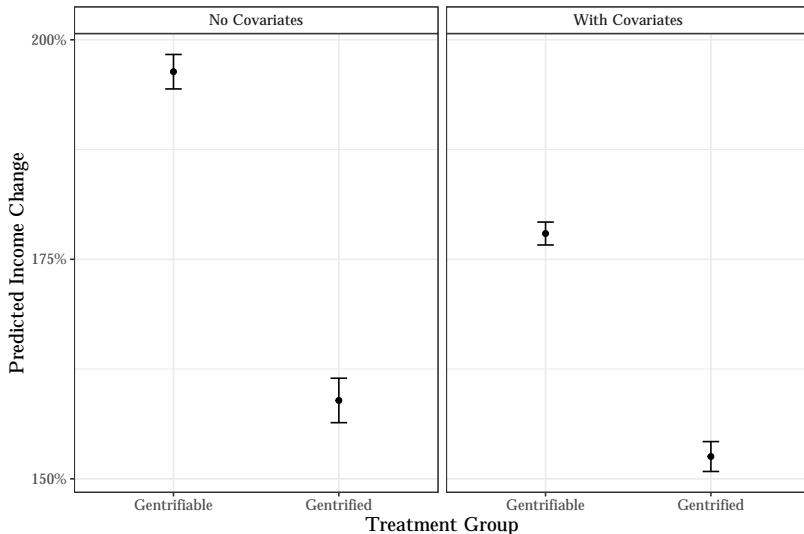Group

☐ Not Gentrifiable   ▨ Potential   ■ Gentrified
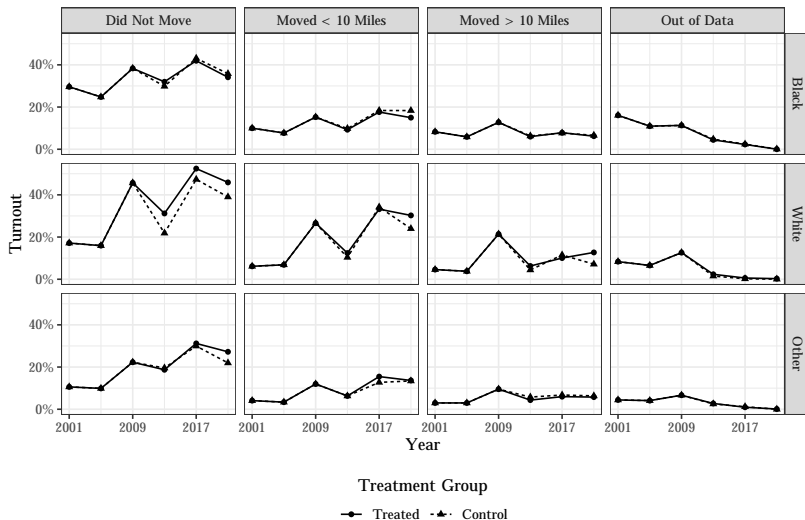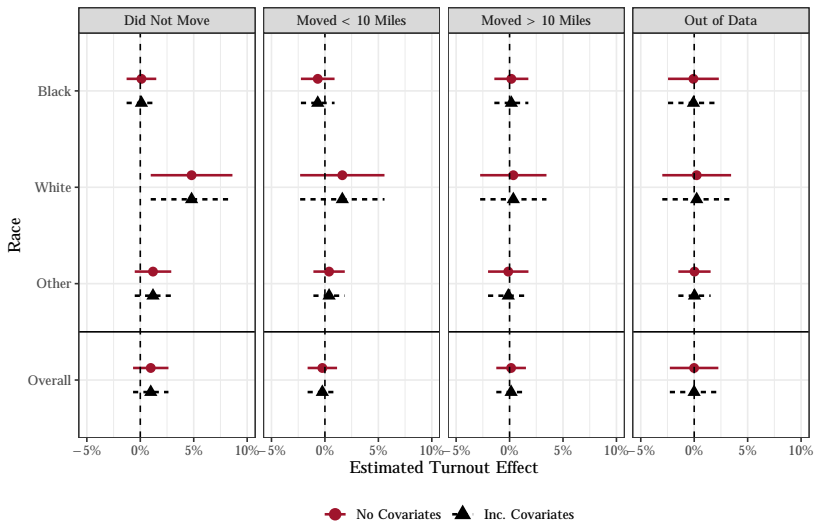
Share Black, 2010

25% 50% 75%
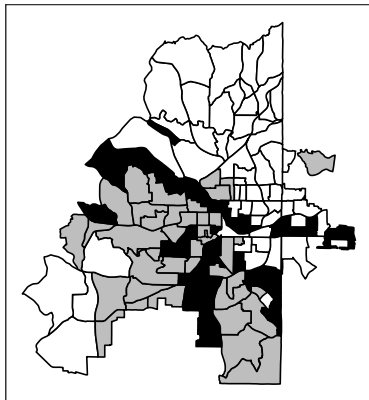
Residential Moves

Neighborhood Income Outcomes (Conditional on In-State Move)

Turnout in Local Elections by Race, Move Status

Turnout in Local Elections by Race, Move Status

Open Questions

- ▶ Treatment is currently binary. Should I incorporate heterogeneity in treatment timing into these models?

- ▶ Turnout outcomes are forcibly dependent on move status—should I move to a two-step model or something else?

Thank you!

kevin.morris[at]nyu.edu

www.kevintmorris.com

Betancur, John. 2002. "The Politics of Gentrification: The Case of West Town in Chicago." *Urban Affairs Review* 37(6):780–814.

Haag, Matthew. 2019. "It's Manhattan's Last Affordable Neighborhood. But for How Long?" *The New York Times* .

Holmes, Kristin E. 2020. Religious Agency in the Dynamics of Gentrification: Moving in, Moving out, and Staying Put in Philadelphia. In *The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Cities*. Routledge.

Knotts, H. Gibbs and Moshe Haspel. 2006. "The Impact of Gentrification on Voter Turnout." *Social Science Quarterly* 87(1):110–121.

Lartey, Jamiles. 2018. "Nowhere for People to Go: Who Will Survive the Gentrification of Atlanta?" *The Guardian* .

Martin, Leslie. 2007. "Fighting for Control: Political Displacement in Atlanta's Gentrifying Neighborhoods." *Urban Affairs Review* 42(5):603–628.

Niesse, Mark. 2021. "Almost All Eligible Georgians Are Registered to Vote, Data Show." *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* .

Riker, William H. and Peter C. Ordeshook. 1968. "A Theory of the Calculus of Voting." *The American Political Science Review* 62(1):25–42.

Stein, Samuel. 2019. *Capital City: Gentrification and the Real Estate State*. Jacobin Series London ; Brooklyn, NY: Verso.

Sugrue, Thomas J. 1998. *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. Princeton Studies in American Politics 1st paperback ed ed. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.

Thorpe, Amelia. 2021. "Regulatory Gentrification: Documents, Displacement and the Loss of Low-Income Housing." *Urban Studies* 58(13):2623–2639.

Verba, Sidney, Kay Lehman Schlozman and Henry E. Brady. 1995. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Harvard University Press.

Zepeda-Millán, Chris. 2016. "Weapons of the (Not So) Weak: Immigrant Mass Mobilization in the US South." *Critical Sociology* 42(2):269–287.

Zukin, Sharon, Valerie Trujillo, Peter Frase, Danielle Jackson, Tim
   Recuber and Abraham Walker. 2009. "New Retail Capital and
   Neighborhood Change: Boutiques and Gentrification in New
   York City." *City & Community* 8(1):47–64.