EFFECTIVE OR EVICTED: LANDLORD LOBBYING AND HOUSING POLICY OUTCOMES IN THE MIDWEST

By

ROSALIE SWINGLE

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Thesis Approved:

Dr. Joshua Jansa

Thesis Adviser

Dr. Amber Dickinson

Dr. Peter Rudloff

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Abstract: Cycles of evictions and weakened policy responses to tenants in need are undesirable social policy outcomes in the housing policy environment. While previous research shows that the mobilization of bias can affect social policy outcomes, no research has examined the relationship between the lobbying in the housing industry and the level of evictions across the United States. This study asks how does the landlord lobbying within state legislatures influence eviction rates in a community? I study campaign contributions from and hired lobbyists for landlord associations in state legislatures as a measure of the mobilization of bias. I hypothesize that higher expenditures on lobbyists and campaigns will lead to higher rates of eviction for the state. This analysis considers how other demographic factors, such as ethnicity, income, and rent burden, interact with mobilization of bias to create more vulnerability in certain states. I test this relationship in 10 states over sixteen years (2000-2016), using time series cross-sectional analysis on a new dataset that was made available in April 2018. My results illuminate how landlord spending in the housing policy sector can have significant effects on policy outcomes for tenants.

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INTRODUCTION

"Just my soul is messed up," she said. "Sometimes I find my body trembling or shaking. I'm fitting to have a nervous breakdown. My body is trying to shut down." (Desmond 2016, 291) This quote comes from a single mom, Arleen, who lives in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, with her two sons. Her physical stress is caused by the five evictions she has suffered in the last few years. In his popular book, *Evicted*, Desmond (2016) details the story of Arleen, other tenants, and the landlords that were part of the eviction cycle. Time and time again, the narrative shows that evictions are the result of financial difficulties and specific eviction practices used by landlords codified by Wisconsin state law (Desmond 2016). These policies can have a dramatic and devastating effect when it comes to unaffordable rent rates. According to a national housing survey, one out of eight low-income renters admit that the high rate of rent charged by landlords is impossible to pay, which may lead to an eviction (Desmond 2016). The prevalence of unaffordable rent and its destructive impacts leads to the question, how do landlords spend their money and time to influence policy outcomes? I argue that landlords lobby to pursue certain policy goals that disadvantage the unorganized interests of tenants, which increases evictions across the country.

There are many reasons evictions have become a pressing issue for the United States. First, the cost of housing has become overly burdensome for many Americans, and the inability to pay rent ultimately leads to evictions. Research from the last five years shows that the median national rent has increased by 17.4 percent, and few local and state governments have passed laws to offset this rise in cost while wages and inflation have stayed constant (Immergluck, Carpenter, and Lueders 2016). These stagnant wages are an important part of the renting reality in the United States because minimized purchasing power is an important affordability calculation for the average renter. Experts recommend that the average renter should pay no more than 30 percent of his or her income on monthly rent; however, nineteen states report that many older constituents in their geographic bounds are “cost-burdened,” the official term referring to renters who pay more than the recommended amount (Joint Center for Housing Studies 2014). The supply and demand nature of the housing market results in the largest share of rental hikes occurring in urban areas, where landlords have an unending supply of renters looking for affordable housing in higher growth regions (Acolin and Wachter 2017). In some larger cities with employment growth, even middle-income earners, such as teachers or tech workers, struggle to stay afloat the pricey housing market (Wiltz 2015).

Rent burden is the extenuating pressure a household faces as a property’s rent rises and the household incomes stays the same. A study focusing on major cities in the southeast of the United States found that over 80 percent of households making less than $35,000 a year were spending 50 percent of their monthly income on rent (Immergluck, Carpenter, and Lueders 2016). According to the Rent Report of *Yardi Matrix*, the leading data source for real estate market estimates, 84 percent of America’s biggest cities saw a rent increase in a given month (Otet 2017). To make matters worse, the increasing rent burden has a disproportionate effect on one corner of consumers: low-income renters. Low-income renters can be described as people below the poverty line being forced to live beyond their means, and this is because 67 percent of low-income renters who qualify for some amount of rental assistance or public housing receive no aid (Desmond 2016). In fact, public housing assistance in the US has steadily declined as federal programs are cut, and state and local programs fail to meet renters' needs (Pelletiere et.al 2008; Rice and Sar 2009).

This government inaction in the face of rising social demand harms is known as policy drift, and this hurts renters because they are forced to spend most of their small monthly income on rent, leading to a variety of trade-offs when it comes to food, school, or jobs (Hacker 2010; Moffitt 2015). These trade-offs are becoming so severe that low-income renters have no choice but to live in rental properties that they cannot afford, even when they know it will lead to an eviction. In the private market without financial assistance or public aid, some tenants are forced to spend 80 to 90 percent of their monthly income on rent (Desmond 2016). These tight budgetary realities along with increasing rent spikes mean that one emergency expense can lead to a tenant being evicted, and this eviction beleaguers a tenant in many tangible and emotional ways.

A single eviction will place a mark on a tenant's rental record permanently, which will degrade the tenant's credit rating and opportunity to receiving public housing benefits, as was the case with Arleen's five evictions (Greiner et al. 2013). This permanent financial mark introduces tenants to the cycle of evictions: families are forced to settle for lower quality homes, in worse neighborhoods, at higher rates because these are the only properties where landlords will accept their poor financial history (Raghuveer 2017; Desmond 2016). A constant turnover of living circumstances leads to a variety of negative impacts for students. Children fall behind in school because they transfer mid-year, they develop behavioral issues because of poor adjustment strategies, and they suffer psychological distress because they do not have a secure sense of home (Raguheever and Schondelmeyer 2017). As I learn about the increasing stress, trauma, and prevalence of evictions in this country, the discretionary role of landlords in the cyclical crisis of affordable housing becomes more prominent, as well.

How do landlords lobby government officials to provide beneficial policies in a way that may impact the level of evictions in a community? There is not a consensus on state-to-state comparison of housing and eviction policies, other than renting is expensive and landlords evict tenants everywhere. I study the landlord lobbying impact on the state legislature because these state legislative bodies are where solutions are drafted, without much media coverage or attention, that may disproportionately advantage one group at a severe cost for the other. I argue that as landlords make financial contributions to state legislators and hire lobbyists in state legislatures, they cultivate a pro-landlord policy environment, which can lead to more expensive rent and higher rates of eviction. I assess how an unresponsive government during large-scale economic changes has both advantaged landlord associations and disadvantaged tenants with policy examples.

To analyze the cycle of evictions, policy, and landlord actions, my argument is built on solid literature, theory, and methodology. The next section will be my discussion of preliminary findings on the sociological effects of evictions, but I will explain how key political mechanisms are missing from these publications. I will follow this section with my theoretical explanation and methodological plan for testing the relationships between landlord associations, policy drift, policy outcomes, and eviction outcomes. I will conclude the paper with a discussion of these tests and their implications on American policy and politics with recommendations to encourage better legislative initiatives for housing outcomes. Analysis focused on how lobbyists influence housing policy through cultural capture could impact future policy creation and identify key but previously unknown actors in landlord-tenant policy. Landlord-tenant relationships exist in nearly every US city, and the increasing rate of evictions indicates that something may be flawed in this dynamic. Studying landlord lobbying and government inaction will uncover integral features of this prominent yet problematic power structure in American society.

CHAPTER II

UNDERSTANDING EVICTION POLICY AND ITS ACTORS

To assess the relationship between landlord lobbying and evictions, it is critical to understand the limited nature of eviction research, the political environment of housing welfare retrenchment, and the role of landlord organizations in the housing market. When it comes to evictions research in general, there is an over-reliance on sociological explanations of eviction cycles in the United States and a dearth of data sources. Most of the eviction literature explores the sociological and physical poverty factors that lead to a person being evicted as exclusive causal mechanisms; however, a broader analysis including the political factors of the welfare system and housing market may identify other mechanisms. The dependency on social mechanisms could have been caused by the problematic state of eviction datasets across the country, in both distant and recent history. Eviction calculations and reports are captured by only a few national-level databases, and all these repositories still have some missing data points (Desmond et al. 2018). With my research, I would like to explore how certain political environments, such as welfare state retrenchment, and actors, such as lobbyists and legislators, influence the number of evictions occurring in some states. This research could initiate an interdisciplinary interest in measuring and explaining the eviction cycle with better data and mechanisms across the country.

Lacking Eviction Data and Research

The first complication to eviction research is that it is inherently difficult to estimate total evictions because there are two types of eviction: legal and informal. Legal eviction consists of an eviction filing that could ultimately lead to an eviction judgment, which requires a tenant to vacate the premise (Black 2017). Although this form of evictions includes a definitive paper trail, the eviction judgements are recorded in county court systems in a variety of inaccessible and inconvenient ways. For instance, California seals its citizens' eviction records for privacy concerns (Peiffer 2018), but this makes it very difficult for researchers to tally robust counts for all states over an extensive period. Informal eviction is more frequent but more difficult to track because it typically arises out of tenant-landlord buyout agreements, landlord threats, or the illegal displacement of a tenant's belongings (Raghuveer 2017). The sporadic nature of these evictions means it is impossible to estimate the number of informal evictions on a regular basis, which limits the amount of research focusing on evictions.

Another significant reason eviction research is limited in number and disciplines is because there are very limited databases keeping track of evictions across the United States (Kinney 2016). The U.S. Census Bureau began to track evictions using the American Housing Survey starting in 2017, however, this data is still not published (US Census Bureau 2019). There has been a preliminary attempt to develop state-level eviction totals, but this data is expensive and less accessible. The private company, American Information Research Services Inc., has a dataset including nineteen states, but this data set costs approximately $100,000 (AIRS 2017). Local authorities have compiled some eviction counts, such as the Milwaukee Area Renters Study or Raghuveer's Kansas

City dissertation data, but these counts are minimal, unrepresentative, and disparate (Marr 2016). Desmond summarized the severity of this problem when he said, “Eviction is a giant problem…but we had no national eviction database. That’s akin to not knowing how many car accidents or cancer cases there are each year.” (Peiffer 2018) Matthew Desmond and his team at the Evictions Lab digitally published a pioneering, national dataset on legal evictions in early 2018 as a response to this gaping hole in measurement. Unfortunately, even with painstaking hours of on-the-ground data collection, this dataset still has missing years, states, and rates due to the innate complexity of systematically gathering court records. Nonetheless, Desmond and other sociologists have been able to make some headway in unpacking the complexities of eviction in America, and these measurements should be incorporated in political analysis.

Sociologists have demonstrated a variety of sociological and economic factors that influence the likelihood of an eviction. Some of these factors can be measured on an individual-level, such as the number of dependents living in the residence, the income of the tenant, the age of the tenant, or even the race of the tenant (Castro Baker 2014; Desmond and Gershenson 2017; Raghuveer 2017). There are also community-level factors that can influence the likelihood a tenant will be evicted, such as the racial and economic segregation of the neighborhood, the crime rate, unemployment rates, and of course, the challenges of rent burden (Desmond et. al 2015; Desmond and Gershenson 2017: Immergluck, Carpenter, and Lueders 2016). Research has identified the aggregated risk factors of eviction with a concept known as correlated adversity, which is a multidimensional measure that looks at the intersection and aggregation of poverty disadvantages that a low-income renter may experience (Desmond 2015; Alkire and

Foster 2011). This research adequately describes the personal costs of evictions on low-income renters, but other disciplines can contribute to this discussion in a powerful way, especially when it comes to political factors.

Studies have demonstrated that meaningful research in underlying structures can inform better policy, which can decrease the incidence rate of evictions overall (Peiffer 2018). This is the exact contribution I hope to make by focusing on the relationship between landlord lobbying and legislatures in a state's policymaking process. I will use a community-level cause (landlord lobbying) to study individual-level effects aggregated on a community level (eviction rates). My study will further an interdisciplinary understanding of evictions because it will consider powerful, political structures, such as the policy environment as it relates to welfare retrenchment and risk privatization in the housing market.

The Policy Environment of Economic Housing Politics

The housing market and its policies are deeply interconnected to the financial health of the United States and the individual economic health of many consumers. Although the job market has improved in recent years, the real value of wages has retained the same purchasing power of wages since the 1970s (Desilver 2018). With Pew Research Center data, Desilver (2018) explains, "the $4.03-an-hour rate recorded in January 1973 had the same purchasing power that $23.68 would today," meaning basic wages have not adjusted to offset inflation or increased purchasing power for struggling working households. As the cost of rent rises and wages stagnate across the country, more and more working-class households are suffering from circumstances of rent-burdened environments (Joint Center for Housing Studies 2014).

Rent burden occurs when a tenant and his or her household spends over 30 percent of their income on monthly rent payments, a scenario which is more likely to be the case for low-income families as perpetual renters with limited financial resources (Aratani et al 2011). Rent-burdened households are increasing in number and severity across the United States because the cost of rent is increasing across the country (Immergluck, Carpenter, Lueders 2016; Otet 2018). In fact, the median rate of American household rent has doubled from around $400 to over $800 in a timespan of twenty years (Tuttle 2017). On top of rising rent costs, shifts in the welfare state have decreased the mediating role of the government in creating affordable housing for these same households, a process which is known as retrenchment.

Retrenchment is defined as "policy changes that either cut social expenditure, restructure welfare state programs to conform more closely to the residual welfare state model or alter the political environment in ways that enhance the probability of such outcomes in the future." (Pierson 1994, 17). Policy changes have definitively affected the housing welfare system because public housing voucher and funding systems have been significantly reduced at the national level, eliminating previous welfare payments that aided low-income households in affording their rent (Desmond 2016). For instance, between 1998 and 2008, there was more than a 60 percent decrease in housing assistance payments to low-income tenants, through programs such as Section 8 vouchers or a larger public housing voucher system (Aratani et al 2011). Additionally, policy debates have retrenched housing policy because they have reframed the public perception of welfare-receiving constituencies, which makes depletion politically possible. Current social constructions of low-income renters depict this policy target population as dependents or even deviants, which means this group has weak institutional power and even negative social constructions as poor, law-breaking tenants (Schneider and Ingram 1993). As a result, legislators choose not to change housing policy because there are little to no electoral benefits in supporting these target populations (Schneider and Ingram 1993). By policy makers and bureaucratic officials choosing to make no efficient adjustments, the do-nothing strategy constitutes a powerful example of policy drift in housing welfare systems.

As defined by Hacker (2004), policy drift is “changes in the operation or effect of policies that occur without significant changes in those policies’ structures.” (246) The slashing of public housing budgets would be an example of drift because reductions in funding have drastically imperiled the effect of voucher programs, but it left the weakened systems of Section 8 housing sectors and public housing systems in place. As a result, the Housing Choice Voucher, which is a federal rental assistance program, only provides funds to 1 out of 10 eligible families, with fewer and fewer families opting into the welfare program in the Midwest (Bieri and Dawkins 2016). Likewise, families are still allowed to apply for public housing benefits, however, they may remain on an eligibility waiting list for decades (Desmond 2016; Aratani et al 2011). This concept is an important connection between evictions and the political environment because these welfare system changes, or lack thereof, have reduced the efficiency of housing welfare overall, which contributes to the eviction cycle crisis (Dana 2017).

Another tool of housing welfare retrenchment has been policy layering, which is defined as the “creation of new policy without elimination of old.” (Hacker 2004, 248) When it comes to housing policy layering, the successful implementation of rent control preemption across thirty-five states has prevented local governments from creating policies to limit the amount of rent charged for some properties (Brown 2009). These preemptions have a variety of effects on the local housing market and renter incentives, but the prevention of rent regulation usually benefits the wealthier property owners compared to renters with this subset of housing policies (Holcombe 2009). The general aid reduction can leave more households vulnerable to evictions. Other housing policies stay on the books, but tenants receive less aid to afford their rent with an added layer of state preemption.

To illustrate the harmful extent of policy drift in the housing market, it is important to note that not only low-income tenants are at risk for eviction in current housing markets. Heightened requirements for eligibility benefits have also reduced middle-class renters' access to government intervention payments to pay for rising rent (Galante 2017). Large economic disparities such as underemployment (Livingstone 2018) and the unpredictable gig economy leave more and more working-class families at risk of not being able to afford rent if they have one unexpected expense. Hacker (2004) explains with analogous social policy research on employment and retirement benefits that mobilized business interests have successfully pushed for risk privatization when it comes to reducing employer costs. In turn, risk privatization has made families live off smaller discretionary incomes after paying for their own healthcare insurance and retirement savings (Hacker 2004). This concept of risk privatization for interest groups directly relates to the behind-the-scenes players in determining what does and does not become housing policy, which would be landlord association groups. Individual actors within a larger policy environment have yet to be studied in relation to evictions, which is why research needs to account for the role of state realtor associations in housing policy.

Influence of Lobbying Interests on Evictions

Lobbying is a significant aspect of policy formation in the United States because powerful, well-resourced groups use lobbying to advocate for what issues are placed on or taken off the legislative agenda, what policy alternatives are offered in response to an issue, and what financial incentives will be offered to elected officials for the adoption of preferred alternatives (Kingdon 1997). The landlord lobby is the third-party interest heavily vested in housing policy because landlords have an interest in their profits. This concept of active lobbying for or against desired policies is what Schattschneider describes as the mobilization of bias. He says, “All forms of political organization have bias in favor of the exploitation of some kinds of conflict and the suppression of other because organization is the mobilization of bias. Some issues are organized into politics while other are organized out.” (Schattschneider 1960, 71) Landlords can easily mobilize a collective bias at state legislatures because association is a natural part of their job description.

When it comes to owning and renting property in the United States, landlords join established associations to maximize policy benefits, further business education, and network with other property managers or owners (Miller 2017). The number of professional property owners in the United States has quadrupled since 1970, which has led to financial and training association networks for new landlords (Desmond 2017). This pattern of association continued through the 1980s as tenant associations lost prominence, and landlord organizations, such as the National Apartment Association and the National Council of the Multi Housing Industry, joined forces to oppose regulation (Keating and Kahn 2001). Every state has a prominent state realtor association made up of landlords and realtors, who work together to build legislative relationships and exert influence when necessary (Landlord Protection Agency 2017).

Although each set of actors plays different roles when it comes to the tenant experience of renting, realtors and landlords have the same interest of profit maximization, typically through higher rental rates. The legislative role of the associations is to accomplish this interest by minimizing unwanted regulation in the housing market. Each landlord wants to maximize her or his own profits, however, each landlord stands to benefit from the collective good of "landlord-friendly policy." Many landlords choose to join their state and even national realtor associations to successfully bargain for the benefits they desire (Olson 1956). Indeed, the National Realtors Association was established in 1908 with "the purpose of effectively exerting a combined influence upon matters affecting real estate interests," including policy decisions (NAR 2018).

Once these groups are organized, they have a variety of direct techniques they can use to influence the housing policy sector, primarily through financial means. To use New York as an example, the largest lobby expenditures of 2016 came from the Rent Stabilization Association of New York City, which spent $3.6 million to protect landlord interests through policies such as property taxation and building safety or water rates (Brenzel 2017). These associations and the money involved can empower a landlord to have social, political, and economic discretion over a tenant-landlord relationship, especially when it comes to low-income renters (Moore 2016). The political and economic control landlords exert over the housing policy area means landlords are in a strategic position to increase rent, and therefore, their wealth, no matter the rent burden or otherwise disadvantaged circumstances of their tenants. Hall and Wayman (1990) studied the influence of business group expenditures on legislative behavior in committees, and their findings about legislative responsiveness reaffirmed the mobilization of bias theory. They found organized business interests were able to better influence legislative responsiveness than unorganized voters (Hall and Wayman 1990), a finding that was also confirmed with Arkansas' Senate Bill 25 on tenant criminalization.

The state of Arkansas is known to have the worst renter rights in the nation (Chumbley and Scialla 2014). Senate Bill 25 was introduced at the beginning of 2017 in the Arkansas Senate to preserve the state practice of criminalizing tenants who are evicted. This criminalization can result in a tenant paying anywhere from $25 to $1,000 in fines, a tenant being sentenced to 90 days in jail, or a tenant being charged with a Class B Misdemeanor (Koon 2015). During the committee assignment stage of the legislative process, the Arkansas Realtors Association lobbied for the bill to be sent to the House Insurance and Commerce Committee (Ramsey 2017). During the elections of the previous year, the Arkansas Realtors Association was the fourth largest group donor to this committee, and it donated a total of $69,166 to the general committee and $61,166 to the legislative sponsors (Follow the Money 2019). The committee received the bill on January 30, 2017, and recommended the House pass the legislation without any changes on February 1, 2017 (Arkansas General Assembly 2017). This bill was signed into law by the governor within two weeks of being introduced to that committee (Arkansas General Assembly 2017). This an example of a successful policy that increases the power of the landlords at the harm of tenants with tracked financial assets at stake. As a result, landlord lobbies may have a prominent role in procuring legislation that follows their preferences.

Landlords and their associations already have a strategic position within the social policy environment due to the nature of the retrenched welfare state and the mechanisms of policy drift. This status quo of power means that a variety of lobbying efforts may occur to prevent severe changes or limit the policy agenda. Baumgartner et al (2009) explains that "public policy disputes are almost always related to existing policies and efforts to change an existing policy orientation usually fail," which describes the role lobbyists can play in policy failures (239). Countless policy debates at the state level have been defeated for this exact reason. In Oregon in 2017, the Senate failed to pass a reform bill to increase tenant protective rights, to which the well-backed More Housing Now landlord association group was strongly opposed (Zielinski 2018). Boston saw a similar, three-year battle between landlord and tenant associations over a bill to track evictions and communicate tenant rights, and when the policy finally made its way to the state legislature, it was sentenced to study by the House Judiciary Committee, where it quickly died (Chakrabarti and Bologna 2018). These legislative anecdotes demonstrate how organized interests very successfully demobilize bias, which can prevent reform measures from making it through the legislative process.

Both the amount of money landlords spend and the nature of their lobbying associations demonstrate why and to what extent landlords may influence evictions. As landlords choose to maximize their profit by lobbying for policies that may criminalize tenants or raise rents, more tenants will be evicted by the financial strain of the system.

State realtor association’s tactics are successful because the nature of the political environment and the unknown severity of the eviction crisis have left many tenants disorganized and unaware around the country. My research is important because it will quantify and describe the landlord interest in legislation in relation to the effect of harsh housing policy on tenants. My analysis of landlord lobbying will provide an important, alternative causal mechanism for understanding eviction rates. Eviction research is characterized by limited data and scope, so a political analysis of policy environments and interest groups can greatly contribute to the extant work. In turn, this powerful explanation could enhance solutions for the rising social concern of affordable housing, evictions, and money interests in the legislative process. In the next section, I will introduce an explanation for how landlord lobbying and the political arena provide a better understanding for eviction outcomes.

CHAPTER III

LANDLORD LOBBYING AND LEGISLATIVE CAPTURE

Landlords spend money and time on legislative outcomes and representation, and they have lobbied for and against many aspects of rental policy across the country. I argue that landlords use lobbying and campaign contributions to cultivate productive relationships with legislators, and therefore, a generally amenable legislature that will pass more pro-landlord policies. To analyze the social impact of this lobbying, I investigate how landlords secure the preferred policy of rent control preemption; and in turn, the eviction data demonstrates the severity of the negative outcomes these policies dole out to some tenants. The primary actor in my study is state-level landlord associations because these groups organize to represent collective needs. This associative tendency will be further explained in the landlord lobbying behavior section in this section, but landlords also understand individual costs and benefits with their property management. It is necessary to understand the rational underpinnings of the decision calculus of an eviction to justify landlord policy preferences. The key assumption to my theory is rationality, as defined by rational choice theory. In this overarching theoretical paradigm, it is assumed that actors are "rational maximizers of interests and utility" and their actions are to a degree predictable based on "deductive accounts of incentives, constraints, and calculations." (Green and Shapiro 1994, 3)

This decision-making paradigm is crucial to understanding landlord lobby action because it explains the motivation for lobbying. Along with rationality, I assume that the landlord association is an unitary actor due to the commonly-held interest of all landlords to maximize their profits. The landlord lobby, as a rational actor, takes risks, alternatives, and complexity into account when choosing how to build productive legislative relationships and which policies to pursue or prevent in the state legislature.

I argue that rationality motivates landlords to join state associations, culturally capture legislative debates, and lobby for preferred policies, which can lead to more evictions. When landlords choose whether to evict a tenant, they think in terms of the high benefits and low costs associated with an eviction. The only cost a landlord typically pays is a small fee to file an eviction request and have it heard in housing court. The primary cost of evictions is born by the tenant (not landlords) through the financial burden of court fees and owed rent, which demonstrates the financial and political control the landlord has over a tenant in terms of threatening or filing an eviction (Moore 2016). The cost a landlord may have to pay upfront to file for an eviction is easily outweighed by the structural likelihood he or she will receive judgment in favor of the eviction.

In general, it is cheaper for a landlord to go through the process of an eviction rather than wait for payments because the tenant and the local sheriff are responsible for the legal costs and the actual execution of an eviction. Similarly, the landlord can make more money off the property by moving in another tenant as soon as the evicted tenant is removed, which means the landlord has additional incentive to move out a tenant as fast as possible when rent is not paid (Desmond 2016). Landlords typically benefit from flexibility in housing policies because lower regulation and lower housing prices allow a landlord to evict problematic or non-paying tenants, which can maximize their profits. For example, Desmond (2017) describes the connections of a landlord to the Milwaukee Real Estate Investors Networking Group (RING), where landlords grouped together as legitimate business owners to discuss the extent to which they could garnish tenants' bank account and earned income when it comes to nonpayment (29). This landlord cost-benefit analysis is an essential, explanatory part of why landlords choose to form lobbies and pursue beneficial policies in a rational manner.

Landlord Lobbying for Specific Housing Policy Outcomes

Lobbying can take many forms in the United States, but it is generally understood as a group of individuals taking a series of political actions (such as hiring a lobbyist or making campaign donations) to demonstrate their interests or needs to an elected official. Although lobbying has been stigmatized as a dirty form of behind-the-scenes politics, it can be regulated and used as a reliable tool for democratic promotion and a genuine source of insight for elected officials (OECD 2014). Landlord lobbies are especially powerful when it comes to housing policy because they mobilize their bias for certain policies in very effective ways. In the previous example of Oregon's landlord lobbying, the landlord lobby outspent all other entities in Portland by spending over $35,000 in the first quarter of the year after a city ordinance required landlords to pay relocation fees after no-cause evictions or 10 percent rent increases (Herron 2017).

For this study, I will consider how landlord associations both hire lobbyists and make contributions to the campaign of an elected official to influence the housing policy culture in state legislatures. Although landlord associations influence policy outcomes across the country in a variety of ways, I will study campaign contributions and direct lobbying because this interest group behavior is likely to have the strongest impact on eviction outcomes. Some extant research on campaign contributions shows there is a direct, positive relationship between industry campaign contributions to certain members of a governing body and support for pro-industry outcomes from those same members (Esterling 2007; Carparelli 2014). This is because industry stakeholders, such as landlords, strategically target the legislators that are most likely to champion their causes through beneficial polices.

Although other research shows that campaign contributions cannot typically buy legislative votes (Grenzke 1989; Roscoe and Jenkins 2005), other scholars argue that low salience and low controversy policies tend to be exchangeable policies when it comes to campaign support and policy preferences (Hall and Wayman 1990). This under-the-radar policy characterization directly applies to rent control preemption policy because historically, this has been a bipartisan, low-salience issue with easy passage rates in the 1990s (Dukmasova 2017). In fact, the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) published a rent control preemption model law for any state to use in 1995, and identical language was found in five states in between 1988 and 1997 (Dukmasova 2017). Nonetheless, to strengthen the theoretical understanding of how landlord associations secure pro-landlord policies, I include the larger policymaking concept of cultural capture theory.

Scholars have established the importance of an industry's intent and a governing body's perception of public interest when it comes to how effectively a group can capture a policy area, and this is ascribed to cultural capture (Jansa and Gray 2017). Cultural capture occurs when industry officials provide information and financial resources without clear intent to influence a specific policy decision; however, the positive relationship between industry and government convinces elected officials that the public interest on a matter will align with the industry officials' interests (Kwak 2014). Jansa and Gray (2017) study the ongoing relationship between the business sector and pro-business elected officials, and they find that business campaign contributions create a business-friendly culture in the legislature, leading to policy outcomes benefitting businesses (Jansa and Gray 2017).

I argue that as landlord associations choose to hire professional lobbyists and contribute to pro-landlord candidates' campaigns to pursue their preferred policy, these associations are culturally capturing the housing policy environment. Consider the policy example of Arkansas: landlords and their attorneys continue to criminally evict tenants even though a circuit court judgement found the criminal eviction statute of the Arkansas Code unconstitutional (Brantley 2015). In response to the ongoing violation, legal aids and defenders of criminally-evicted tenants tried to propose legislative change and form committees with recommendations; but unfortunately, the Arkansas legislature has made no change because the landlord lobby has captured this policy area through campaign contributions to specific committee members (Koon 2015). This is evidence of cultural capture because as the Arkansas Realtors Association spent nearly $70,000 on the Insurance and Commerce Committee, it is easy to assume the association made relationships with these committee members prior to the passage of Senate Bill 25. Another illustration of this theory could be the Oregon landlord association, Multifamily NW. After the city passed an ordinance that added costs to their landlord practices, they spent $20,000 more than other landlord groups to establish the Multifamily NW for ongoing and future policy debates and build relationships with city officials (Monahan 2017).

The first policy example I will test in this study will be rent control preemption. One of the key policy outcomes that threatens the profit of landlords is rent control, which limits the amount of rent a landlord can charge a tenant, regulates how much a landlord can increase rent, or even prevents landlords from evicting tenants in some cases (La Mort 2016). Currently, there are only four states, and one district, which enforce some form of rent control: California, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and Washington D.C. (Portman and Stewart 2002). Conversely, thirty-two states preempt rent control, which means these states prevent localities within the state from implementing rent control (National Multifamily Housing Council 2017). The strict form of rent control preemption closely follows the interests of landlords because by banning rent control, the landlord can maximize profit by charging the highest rent possible. Therefore, my first hypothesis will be the **rent control preemption hypothesis**: *as a landlord association spends more money on lobbying and campaign contributions, the state is more likely to have rent control preemption policies.*

As landlords capture the housing policy area and pursue their interests, tenants can be disadvantaged in the quality of their homes, the rights they are allowed, and of course, the affordability of their rent (Desmond 2016). For my second and third hypothesis, I argue that policy drift, or the idea that policy slowly loses its effectiveness for policy recipients over time, is a direct result of landlord lobbying and housing policy capture. I will analyze two additional housing policy outcomes as manifestations of policy drift, starting with a concept I refer to as rent drift. Rent drift is the steady increase of rent in a community over time, and similar to the argument for rent control preemption, I theorize that landlords lobby to increase the rate of rent year after year, which demonstrates a manifestation of drift. Therefore, my second hypothesis will be the **rent drift hypothesis**: *as a landlord association spends more money on lobbying and campaign contributions, the state is more likely to experience rent drift increases over time.*

To further examine my policy drift argument, I include a second manifestation of policy drift as housing voucher assistance in my theory. As mentioned earlier in the housing policy arena discussion, landlords can be directly involved in the welfare retrenchment and support decrease for tenants because they are vested stakeholders in the housing market. Housing assistance payment contracts (HAPs) are government-sponsored vouchers provided to landlords on behalf of low-income tenants in order to make up the difference between expected rent and what a tenant can afford (CBPP 2017). These HAPs are guaranteed payments for landlords, and following their preference of profit maximization, landlords will lobby for increases in these payments over time. My third hypothesis will be the **voucher assistance hypothesis**: *as a landlord association spends more money on lobbying and campaign contributions, the state is more likely to increase voucher assistance payments over time.*

As tenants receive less financial and institutional support through the effects of policy drift, they are likely to experience aggregated disadvantages. This tenant disadvantage has pronounced effects on low-income tenants, as shown by no-cause evictions in Oregon, tenant harassment by landlords in New York, and the tenant criminalization of evictions in Arkansas. I argue that the culturally-captured relationship between landlords and legislators may lead elected officials to believe that evictions are a reasonable trade-off for the public interest of a healthy housing market. Furthermore, I believe if my previous hypotheses are supported, this will demonstrate how specific policies can increase the likelihood of eviction trade-offs for tenants. Research has yet to demonstrate the prevalence of evictions as a tenant disadvantage, and that is what I will test with my final hypothesis, **evictions outcome hypothesis:** *as levels of policy drift outcomes increase within a state, the state eviction rate is likely to increase, as well.*

Using the theoretical implications of rationality and cultural capture, I can expect landlords to use their social and economic power to maximize their rent gains by lobbying for rent control preemption and policy drift in the communities where they own property. Due to the market-driven nature of property management and rentals, it is very likely that higher rates of eviction will be an inevitable result from this mobilization of landlord bias in state legislatures. I will assess these theoretical abstractions and their policy implications with my methodology.

CHAPTER IV

TESTING FOR THE MOBILIZATION OF BIAS IN HOUSING POLICY

The purpose of this section will be to layout the methodological choices I have made to reliably and validly test my hypothesized relationship between landlord lobbying, housing policy outcomes, and evictions. In this section, I will describe how I operationalize lobbying, evictions, policy drift, and I will list the sources for the data. Next, I will identify the cases as well as the exact unit of analysis that will be used to test and measure the interactions of the independent and dependent variables in this study. Finally, I will explain the general and specific methodological approaches I use to test the hypotheses laid out in my theory section. This explanation will include the limitations and benefits I can anticipate with each approach as well as my expected outcomes. This section will also reiterate the importance of this research in elucidating the measurement of evictions and landlord lobbying overall.

Unit of Analysis and Case Selection

I will analyze landlord lobbying and evictions at a state-level to accurately capture the theorized relationship between the two variables. As explained in my theory section, I will study landlord lobbying by analyzing the monetary contributions that these groups make to state legislators.

Landlord lobbies associate together at both a state and metropolitan-level, such as the Rent Stabilization Agency of New York or the Apartment Association of Greater Los Angeles South Bay (Landlord Protection Agency 2017). Landlord lobbies amass at a local level because these associations provide proximate power to actors with shared interests; however, the state-level measure of landlord associations is the more reliable measure because each state has a realtor association with reported campaign contributions and lobbying disclosures. Since this measure is comparable across states, I will include eviction rates at a state level to measure the variance at the same level of analysis for each case.

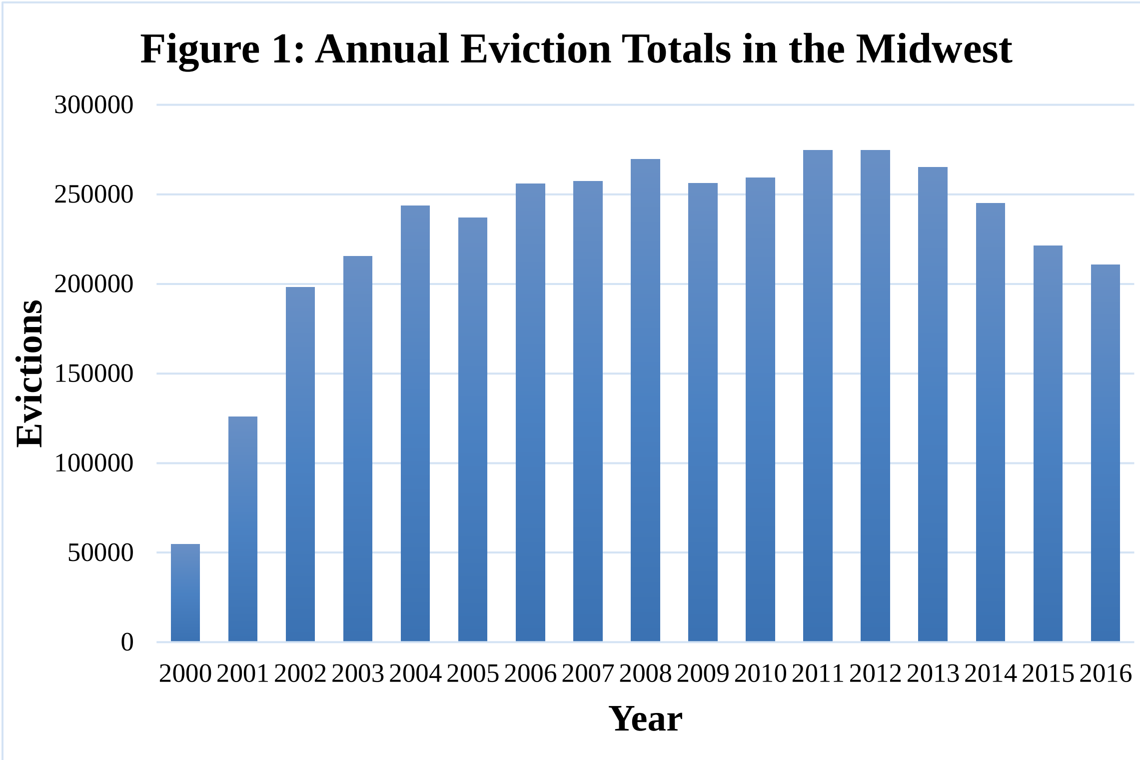
To choose the most appropriate cases to test my hypotheses and measure the results, my unit of analysis will be a state-year, spanning from 2000-2016 as it follows with the independent and dependent variable timeframes. To choose representative yet generalizable cases for my results, my sample will include ten out of the twelve states listed in the Census Bureau's classification of Midwestern states: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, and Wisconsin (US Census 2017). Due to insufficient data reporting on the dependent variable with no alternatives, I will have to exclude the Dakotas from my analysis. I argue that the Midwestern sample is representative because it includes some expensive and some affordable cities in the United States, regarding cost of living. Overall, though, this case selection will be a rigorous test of my theory because the housing market in the Midwest is generally more affordable than coastal regions. By using these states, I will be able to robustly demonstrate the testable relationship between landlord lobbying and evictions because most of these states have average rent rates, better costs-of-living, rent control preemption, and other comparable demographic features. For instance, the average median rent across this selected region is $671, with a range of $470 to $907, and the average rent burden is 27.4 percent, with a range of 23 to 32.9 percent (Desmond et al 2018).

Operationalization

The next section of my research design describes how I measure my variables of interest: the independent variable, landlord lobbying; the dependent variable, legal evictions, and the intervening variables, rent control preemption and policy drift. For landlord lobbying, my primary measure will be a combination of how much money state landlord associations spend on campaign contributions and hired lobbyists. Since landlords are formed at a local level while most housing policy outcomes are established at the state level, this measure reflects the nature of the lobbying relationship. This is a valid measure of landlord mobilization of bias because campaign contributions and lobbyists are a widely-accepted demonstration of interest.

I obtain my campaign contribution data from the National Institute on Money in State Politics (2017) database, which independently collects the name of landlord lobbies, the names of members on each committee, and the total financial contribution made by these groups to certain members. Since the Institute chooses to make its data publicly available, my measure can reliably be replicated by other researchers in the future. Similarly, it is an improvement from the standard Federal Election Commission data because it provides state-specific data for state politicians instead of federal candidates at a state-level. I will track the main state realtor association for all ten states across the timeframe that matches my dependent variable, and I will measure how much each association spent on campaign contributions for election years in the period. State realtor associations are a valid measure of landlord lobbying because while not all landlords own the property they manage, these actors are involved in the same markets and generally pursue legislative preferences together (Desmond 2016; Miller 2017). My methodology for collecting lobbyist disclosure information is a more involved process, as many states report lobbying disclosures through different organizations. Overall, I used the state's lobbying disclosure reports to measure how much money each state's realtor association spent on a lobbyist or lobbying activities per year. The total money per election year spent on campaign contributions will be combined with the total money per year spent on lobbyists for each state realtor association, and this will be the independent variable of landlord lobbying.

For my dependent variable, I will measure evictions specifically as the rate of evictions occurring in a state each year, which is the percentage of renting households within a state population that are annually evicted. This data has been collected and published by Matthew Desmond and his team at the Evictions Lab with Princeton University (Desmond et al 2018), and covers nearly all fifty states from 1996-2016, with county and city breakdowns. The Evictions Lab dataset also includes important demographic features to include in comparing regions or states, such as rent burden, minority population, cost of living, etc. Although there are very few datasets on evictions which to compare the robustness of this measure, the population-based evaluation of this measure will reliably control for some differences between states. Figure 1 represents the average number of evictions in the Midwestern region per year in the selected timeframe of this study.



Additionally, the data team at Princeton has tirelessly collected, disseminated, and updated the data since its publication in early 2018, which emphasizes the validity of this measure.

For my intervening variables of interest, I will measure rent control by observing whether state legislatures have preempted rent control. I will acquire this data from the National Multifamily Housing Council's state totals (Blackwell and Ratliff 2017). This is a valid measure of rent control because it demonstrates which states have legally prevented implementing rent control. This dichotomous measure will test my theorized relationship between landlord lobbying and campaign contributions; this classification may show how states with significant landlord lobby contributions successfully secure rent control preemption. I will connect this policy phenomenon to the impact on tenants by assessing the interplay of rent burden and rent control preemption. I will measure which year each state implemented rent control, and then I will measure how much average rent has increased in that state since rent control preemption. This increased rent burden on state constituents will validly and reliably measure the impact of policy drift because it shows how government inaction overtime aggregates more cost and risk to the general public, which could lead to increased eviction rates.

For policy drift manifestations, I will measure rent burden over time as the aggregated cost of rent per state per year. To compute this measure, which I will refer to as rent drift, I researched what the average rate of rent was when rent control was preempted in each state and added the increased charge of average rent each year to indicate the relative aggregation over time (US Census 2019). For the two states in my sample that do not have rent control preemption, I reported the Census' estimation of average rent per year per state, regardless as to whether cities within that state have implemented rent control (US Census 2019). This is a reliable measure of rent burden because this information is publicly available and regularly updated by the US Census Bureau. It is also a valid measure because it is a monetary representation of rising house prices in some areas where rent control has been preempted.

To measure my second manifestation of policy drift as housing voucher assistance over time, I collected the total amount of money spent on housing assistance payment (HAP) contracts provided by each state per year, starting in 2004 due to limited available data from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (CBPP 2017). Although I would have liked to use a measure that demonstrates the decline of the housing assistance program for tenants in need over time, I was unable to find a measure of this nature on a state level. The HAP voucher payments are a reliable measure because HUD keeps track of the money spent on these vouchers every year for each state (CBPP 2017). It is a valid representation of policy drift and cultural capture theory because the steady increase of voucher payment to landlords over time could demonstrate how landlords successfully maximize their profit.

To operationalize my control variables, I will use US Census data to represent selected demographic features of a state that may affect evictions, such as unemployment rates, minority percentages of the population, and poverty rates. These are important measures to account for in this study because basic household differences in race, earnings, or job security demand could influence the rate of evictions for a community (Desmond 2016). For the poverty rate measure, I took this directly from the Eviction Lab dataset, following the timeframe of my independent and dependent variables (Desmond et al. 2019). I use the same dataset to calculate my total minority percentage per state per year by adding together each of the reported minority percentages to reach a cumulative amount (Desmond et al. 2019). To capture the relevant unemployment rates for this study, I have reported the Bureau of Labor Statistics annual average rate per state per year (BLS 2019).

To account for the ideological variations of state legislatures over time, since this may impact the likelihood of policy drift outputs, I utilized the state government ideology published by Richard C. Fording and his associates (Berry et al. 1998). This control variable runs from a value of 0 to 100, with 0 representing the most conservative state government and 100 representing the most liberal state government. This is a reliable measure of government ideology because it contrasts each state with all the other states each year in its thermometer rankings, and it is a valid measure because it uses the reputable NOMINATE, voting scores to measure ideological makeups (Lewis et al.

2019). All these measures will be included in my quantitative and qualitative methods because they could make a tenant more vulnerable to the cycle of eviction; however, I still expect that landlord lobbying acquisition of rent control preemption policies will have the most significant, direct impact on evictions.

Mixed Methods Approach

The final section of my research design explains how I will use my data and cases to test my theories. An attempt to utilize all effective methodologies in political science, I will utilize both quantitative and qualitative methods to test my model. Using mixed methodology is very beneficial in my research design because of the complementary descriptions it provides my relationship of interest. An in-depth qualitative approach will provide a rich explanation of how rent control on a state level intervenes in the process of lobbying and evictions, which will test my first and second hypotheses. Moreover, rigorous statistical testing will provide a generalizable, easily replicable method of mapping how landlord lobbying affects evictions through a time series analysis, which will test my third hypothesis. Most importantly, using a mixed-models approach will allow me to minimize the weaknesses of solely quantitative or exclusively qualitative analysis. I will be able to generalize results while also providing a compelling, logical story.

For my quantitative methodology, I will test for the significant correlation between landlord lobbying efforts and rent control preemption (hypothesis 1) through a logit because this is a dichotomous dependent variable. In each state, rent control preemption either exists or does not exist. To test my policy drift hypotheses (2 and 3), I use linear regression analysis to test for a positive, statistically significant relationship between landlord lobbying and either of my policy drift outputs, rent drift or voucher assistance payments. For my final eviction rate hypothesis, I will run an another linear regression model with all the significant housing policy outcomes (rent control preemption, rent drift, and voucher assistance payments) as my independent variables and eviction as my dependent variable, statistically demonstrating the extent intervening policies negatively impact tenants. In both OLS regressions, I will include how policy, drift, and lobbying impact evictions compared to other factors, such as population, income, government ideology, and ethnicity. I will use a regression model to test the statistical relationship between my independent and dependent variables.

To address the causal limitations of my statistical regression, I will use various policy and state examples from the Midwestern region. Looking at fixed policy examples in different states will allow me to study how landlord lobbying in certain circumstances connects to increased rent and higher voucher payments, creating policy drift and perhaps eviction risks in these communities. These policy portrayals of my theorized explanation of what is occurring in these areas will illustrate the potential applicability of my

Figure 2: Eviction Rates

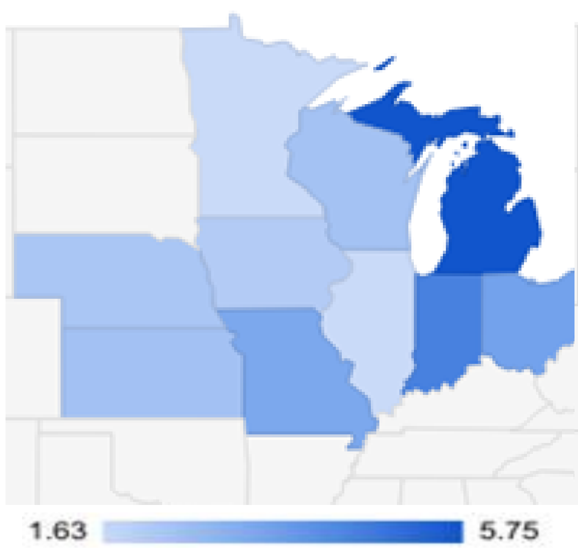
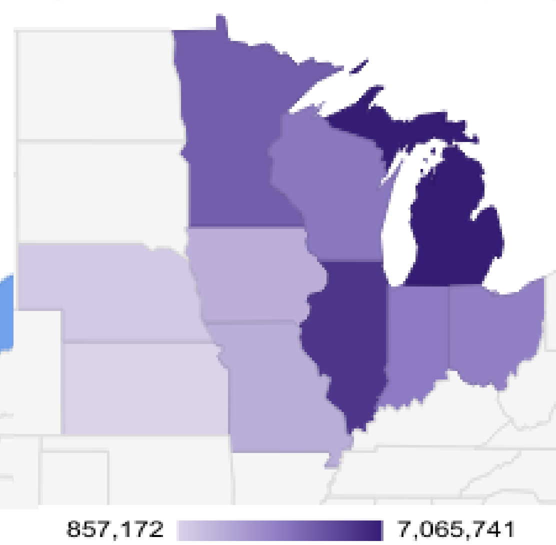


Figure 3: Landlord Lobbying



argument in real, concrete terms. Specifically, I will look at the two states with the highest levels of evictions and landlord lobbying from my sample, which would be Illinois and Michigan (as demonstrated by Figures 2 and 3). Although a limited case study will not be generalizable to all states, its in-depth analysis will add logical inference to either support or challenge my quantitative results while building theories for future research.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

To analyze my data, I used Stata data evaluation to test for significant relationships between variables. I will explain the outcomes of this statistical analysis in order of the hypotheses I introduced in my theory section: the rent control preemption, rent drift, voucher payment assistance, and then the eviction connection. When possible, I utilize policy outcomes as examples from the dataset to illustrate the real-life significance and implications of this research. Altogether, this analysis and its discussion demonstrate that landlord lobbying has a distinct role in some housing policy outcomes.

Rent Control Preemption: Testing Hypothesis One

To test my first hypothesis between landlord lobbying and rent control preemption, the first model I ran was a pooled logit model with robust standard errors clustered on states. I used clustered standard errors because my data was organized per state per year, which creates temporal interaction between measures. Additionally, there are repeated measures per state per year with little variety in the dependent outcome over time, meaning each state either receives a 1 for having rent control preemption or a 0 for no rent control preemption. Therefore, a pooled logit model was the best statistical methodology to analyze this set of variables.

Table 1: Rent Control

Variable	*Coefficient*	*Std. Error*	*P-Value*
Constant	-.70	6.14	0.909
Landlord Lobbying	2.39e-06	2.10e-06	0.256
Poverty Rate	-.46	.44	0.295
Unemployment	.32	.28	0.246
Total Percent Minority	.12	.09	0.222
Government Ideology	.06	.04	0.104

N= 148
Chi-square: 66.16***
***: p<.01 level
**: p<.05 level
*: p<.1 level

As demonstrated by Table 1, there were no significant relationships between the variables despite the model's overall significance. The lack of any significance in the model indicates the limitations of the dichotomous nature and temporal representation of the rent control preemption variable. Each state either has rent control preempted through a statute or it does not, which means there is little variance per state per year. Another unavoidable setback with the data is that rent control preemption policies were implemented in the 1990s in most of the Midwestern region, which occurred before the initial collection of the independent variable. Since the landlord lobbying data used for this study occurs between 2000 and 2016, it is likely that this analysis showed no relationship because rent control preemption policies were successfully lobbied for before the dataset's measurements. To illustrate the timeframe problem in supporting this relationship, I have included an example case of rent control preemption in Illinois.

The Illinois General Assembly passed the Rent Control Preemption Act in 1997, which was a brief piece of legislation amending four sections of the Illinois Compiled Statutes to ensure no local unit of government would "enact, maintain, or enforce an ordinance or resolution that would have the effect of controlling the amount of rent charged for leasing private residential or commercial property." (IGA 2019) According to campaign contribution records from the 1996 election cycle in Illinois, the real estate industry contributed $730,946 to candidates running for state-wide office, compared to $21,525 in 1992 (Follow the Money 2019). While the data in my research cannot explicitly explain this relationship, as I studied state realtor associations beginning a few years after this implementation, the cultural influence of the real estate industry in these campaigns may have created the policy environment leading to rent control preemption. However, there may be a redress to the policy capture environment revolving around rent preemption, and it is known as new economic populism through direct democracy (Franko and Witko 2018).

According to Franko and Witko (2018), new economic populism is the political phenomenon of state-level populaces using direct democracy tools, such as referendums and ballot initiatives, to challenge entrenched financial and economic plans. This concept could apply to the future of rent control preemption in states such as Illinois because average citizens are beginning to challenge rent control preemption in forums and channels outside of the typical political process. Currently, a coalition of concerned renters, including many of the renters in the Chicago metro area, have formed a group called Lift the Ban to urge local authorities and citizens to move for the repeal of the state-wide rent control ban (Rockett 2018). While my research has attempted to analyze how the landlord lobby affected policy outputs such as rent control preemption, further research could study how direct democratic measures such as referendums counteract or challenge these steadfast policy plans. In sum, my first hypothesis was not supported with statistical tests, but rent control preemption has continued to be a significant policy issue in the housing policy area for stakeholders. The ongoing debate of rent control preemption demonstrates that political scientists should further examine how groups influence this contentious policy area.

Policy Drift: Testing Hypotheses Two and Three

To study the relationship between lobbying and other housing policy outcomes, I test my second and third hypothesis with two similar models, one for each manifestation of policy drift in the housing sector. Both hypotheses were assessed with random effects linear regression models clustered on states because the variables are continuous, unlike the dichotomous nature of rent control preemption variable from the first model. As with the first model, the cluster on states comes from the temporal interdependency of multiple measures from the same state, while random effects will generalize least squares to account for the correlation between residuals from the model. To test the rent drift hypothesis, I designed a model to assess the relationship between landlord lobbying and rent drift outcomes, which was the first iteration of policy drift mentioned in my methodology. I am measuring rent drift as the average rate of rent in that state the year rent control was implemented plus the amount that rent has increased per year after rent control has been implemented. Again, this measurement demonstrates how rent has become more and more expensive for tenants in states that do not allow rent control while representing the rate of rent for states without rent control preemption. The results of the model for rent drift are in the table below (Table 2).

Table 2: Rent Drift

Variable	***Coefficient***	***Std. Error***	***P-Value***
Constant	761.32	230.32	0.001**
Landlord Lobbying	.00007	.00	0.067*
Poverty Rate	-64.78	20.57	0.002***
Unemployment	20.15	5.73	0.000***
Total Percent Minority	34.24	4.00	0.000***
Government Ideology	-3.22	1.16	0.006**

N= 114
Chi-square: 342.6***
***: p<.01 level
**: p<.05 level
*: p<.1 level

Although the hypothesized relationship between landlord lobbying and rent drift did not reach the optimal level of statistical significance (p<.05), the positive coefficient and lower statistical threshold (p<.10) indicate that a slight increase in landlord lobbying can lead to a slight increase in rent drift for many Midwestern tenants. Specifically, this model tells us that a $1000 increase in landlord lobbying correlates with a .07 cent average increase in the rental rate for that state, which is an incremental but important effect. Although the effect-size is small, this supports my second hypothesis because as landlords spend more money and time to create pro-landlord policy environments, rent is slowly rising in a variety of communities, which creates a dramatic effect for landlords. To give an example, the Illinois Realtors Association spent $1,065,159 in 2012, which increased the rental rate by approximately $75 according to the findings of Model 2. If a landlord owns 1,000 rental units in Chicago, that landlord would see a $75,000 increase in his or her rent profit in a given year, which is a tremendous return on investment for landlord lobbying. This creates a tangible effect for all renters, even if the small impact may be a result of the slow-changing nature of the housing market costs over time instead of particular amounts of landlord spending. For instance, in Minnesota, the average rent rate has increased by over $280 in the last seventeen years while the average lobbying rate increased from $350,000 to nearly $615,000 over the same timeframe.

In regards to the control variables, each measure was significant in this model, with poverty rate having the largest negative effect on rent drift per state, per year, demonstrating that a 1 percent increase in the poverty rate would decrease rent drift by $64. This means that as the poverty rate decreases in a given state, the rent rate will drift upwards in that state, which would indicate that rent increases as the economic well-being of the state increases, as well. However, unemployment went in the opposite direction than anticipated, which would indicate that rent drift increases as unemployment increases, as well. Unfortunately, this is very plausibly the case because as individuals lose their jobs, they may be unable to pay their rent, forcing an eviction and search for new housing arrangements at potentially higher costs in the eviction cycle. Conversely, this could also mean that rent rates are not calculated or influenced with consideration of the job market. The government ideology variable, though, modeled the directional relationship that was to be expected with traditional political ideology regarding economics. For every unit decrease in the government ideology measure, rent drift would rise by approximately $3. This modeled relationship between the variables may be representing the correlated free market impact of higher rent rates as a state government becomes more conservative, with the opposite being true for liberal government and rent drift decreases.

For the second application of policy drift in the housing sector, I tested my third hypothesis by running another linear regression model to assess the relationship between landlord lobbying and voucher assistance, and the results are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Voucher Assistance

Variable	***Coefficient***	***Std. Error***	***P-Value***
Constant	-4.86e+08	1.36e+08	0.000***
Landlord Lobbying	94.10	8.35	0.001***
Poverty Rate	3.56e+07	1.56e+07	0.022**
Unemployment	1.41e+07	4830322	0.004***
Total Percent Minority	1.34e+07	8334244	0.108
Government Ideology	-236047.3	539202.3	0.662

N= 95
Chi-square: 31.65***
***: p<.01 level
**: p<.05 level
*: p<.1 level

Given my hypothesis that landlords create policy drift and pro-landlord policy environments in the voucher system, I was anticipating a positive relationship between landlord lobbying and the voucher assistance variable, which was supported. Substantive results demonstrate that $1 increase in landlord lobbying spending would lead to a $94 increase in housing assistance payments. This is the strongest evidence of policy drift perpetuated by lobbying in my study, and I will illustrate how it works with a policy example after further explaining the model results.

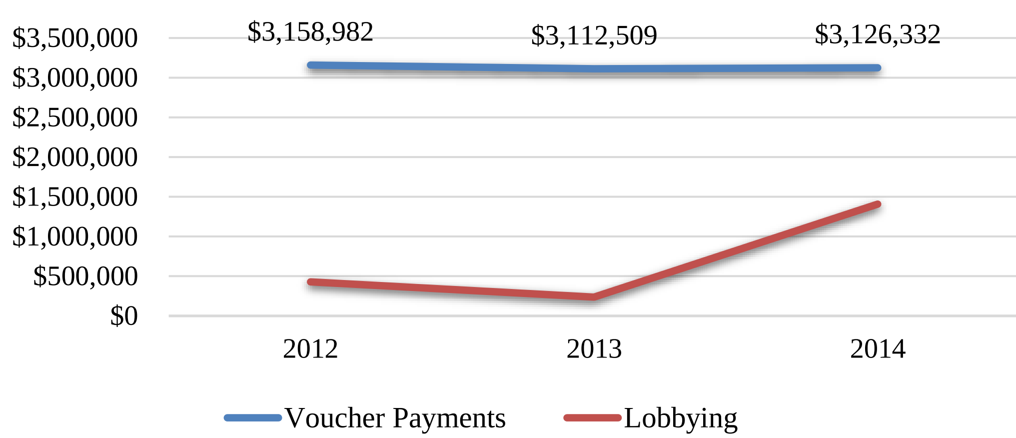
Unemployment and the poverty rate had a significant, positive effect on the voucher variable, which follows the theory that voucher systems may be influenced by other economic problems in a given state. As states continue to see increased rates of unemployment and poverty, they are likely to seek remedial measures like increased housing support, especially if landlord groups stand to benefit from the program solution, as well. Unlike the previous model, the minority percentage and government ideology variables were not significant, perhaps because these measures were redundant or irrelevant in impacting the housing assistance program when compared to economic factors. Nonetheless, both of these variables modeled the same directionality on policy drift that was demonstrated in the first model: higher total percent minority populations lead to more voucher assistance, whereas more conservative governments lead to less voucher assistance. To demonstrate the significance of the relationship between landlord lobbying and voucher payments, though, consider the monetarized landlord benefits resulting from the Housing Choice Voucher Program in Michigan.

The Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) provides a total of 28,000 vouchers to low-income residents and their families in the state with federally-funded HAP contracts (MSHDA 2019). These vouchers and contracts are available for eligible tenants that opt into the program, tenants are asked to pay no more than 40 percent of the monthly rental rate, and the housing authority subunit pays the difference of the reasonable rent rate, as determined by the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Fair Market Rates (FMR) (MSHDA 2019). However, there is a fair amount of discretion and opportunity allotted to the landlord. The federal and state guidelines enable landlords to request and implement rent raises or terminate leases with eligible renters based on a variety of causes, but as long as the contract is steadfast and the tenant is eligible, the HAP money is guaranteed (MSHDA 2019).

To illustrate why these voucher payments would be of great interest to landlords, consider a difficult housing market in Michigan, such as the Detroit metro area. In 2014 and 2015, the FMR for a two-bedroom apartment in this community was between $843 and $846, which demonstrates how little FMRs may change over time (HUD 2019). When it comes to low-income tenants in high-demand markets, landlords act rationally and typically prefer the in-full, guaranteed government payments over the sometimes late or partial payments of a low-income tenant (Desmond 2016). Applying my argument, if the Michigan Realtors Association has successfully built a pro-landlord policy environment in the state legislature through its lobbying, it would want and successfully receive more voucher payments through its efforts.

According to the data in Michigan from this period, this was exactly what happened. In Figure 4, there is a slight uptick in voucher payments of approximately

Figure 4: Lobbying and Voucher Payments in Michigan from 2012-2014



$14,000 in 2014 along with a larger increase in lobbying spending by the Michigan Association of Realtors. The inverse of this relationship between the two variables is observable between 2012 and 2013, as well. The results of Model 3 predicted the average increase of HAP payments correlating with landlord lobbying, but Michigan had the highest lobbying expenditures out of the sample. Therefore, the total amount of HAP payments the model would predict for 2015 after the Michigan Realtors Association spent nearly $1.5 million would be $1,323,271, which is a very large return on investment for lobbying, similar to the effect size of the rent drift model in money terms.

In highlighting Michigan's housing assistance program, the nuances of the housing policy environment become clearer. The Michigan HAP example demonstrates how policy drift can greatly benefit stakeholders with little to no effect on the target population, which would, once again, be the low-income renters in this situation. As explained by Hacker (2010), policy drift is a tricky policy non-phenomenon because it happens routinely, layering on additional voucher payments to landlords and vested interests without considering alternatives or improvements to the voucher system for the voucher users. While my second and third hypotheses was strongly supported in demonstrating a relationship between landlord lobbying and policy drift, my final and fourth hypothesis theorized how these policy relationships may hurt tenants and their communities.

Eviction Outcomes: Testing Hypothesis Four

To test my final hypothesis, I ran a random-effects linear regression model clustered on states with eviction rates, which was the percentage of total renters evicted per state per year, as a dependent variable related to policy drift, with rent drift and housing assistance as independent variables. I used this model to test for a relationship between housing policy outcomes and evictions. With this analysis, I assess whether policy drift outcomes, resulting from landlord lobbying efforts, have any influence on eviction rates in a state per year. My theorized relationship between these variables was that as landlords secure their policy goals, the aid drifting away from tenants in rent affordability and voucher assistance will culminate in higher eviction rates in these areas. However, as shown in Table 4, there are mixed results about the policy connection between rent drift, voucher assistance, and eviction rates in this model. Nonetheless, I maintain that these partial results have a significant effect on the housing policy outcome of evictions, especially in high-demand, urban housing markets or low-income rental areas.

Table 4: Eviction Rate

Variable	***Coefficient***	***Std. Error***	***P-Value***
Constant	4.77	1.30	0.000***
Rent Drift	.002	.00	0.000***
Voucher Assistance	-1.87e-09	1.61e-09	0.252
Unemployment	.13	.08	0.093*
Poverty Rate	.24	.05	0.000***
Total Percent Minority	.08	.07	0.280
Government Ideology	.00	.01	0.912

N= 80
Chi-square: 31.65***
***: p<.01 level
**: p<.05 level
*: p<.1 level

Altogether, this final policy-evictions model was statistically significant but did not reflect a full connection between all the variables. Rent drift has a small but significant effect on eviction rates, while voucher housing assistance has a very large but insignificant negative effect on eviction rates. According to the substantive results and these significance levels, rent drift increasing by $10 in a given year will correlate with a 2 percent increase in the state's eviction rate. This is an expected relationship because even the smallest increase in rent for an already-rent-burdened household can lead to a higher risk of eviction. On the macro-level of state rental and eviction rates, the average 2 percent increase has a demonstrable impact on human life, as well. Below is Table 5, which shows the predicted impact of rent drift on the total number of evictions in 2016 for each state from my Midwestern sample.

Table 5: The Effect of Rent Drift on Eviction Totals

State	2016 Evictions	% Increase	Eviction Increase
Iowa	14520	0.0184	**267**
Illinois	56948	0.0223	**1269**
Indiana	66544	0.0179	**1191**
Kansas	12972	0.0182	**236**
Michigan	138169	0.0181	**2500**
Minnesota	13622	0.0198	**269**
Missouri	35106	0.0182	**638**
Nebraska	7325	0.0154	**112**
Ohio	103027	0.0152	**1566**
Wisconsin	26508	0.0165	**437**

Again, the results of this model paired with the results from Model 2 demonstrate a lobbying-policy-outcome connection between landlord lobbying, rent increases, and tenant evictions, especially in states with large metropolitan areas such as Michigan and Illinois. There was no connection between the voucher assistance variable and the eviction rate, but the results of Table 5 show that increasingly expensive housing markets with larger eviction totals will see thousands more tenants evicted due to higher rent rates.

Similar to the policy drift models with rent drift and voucher assistance outcomes, the model also demonstrated that unemployment and poverty seem to have significant, positive impacts on the eviction rate in a state. The substantive results show that a percentage increase in unemployment increases the state eviction rate by 13 percent, and 1 percent increase in the poverty rate would nearly double that effect, increasing the eviction rate by 24 percent. As discussed with tenant correlated disadvantages and the increased cost of living, jobs and poverty are a huge part of why a tenant may not make rent that month and face an eviction notice. The significance and effect-size differences between my policy drift and economic variables seem to indicate that economic factors have a larger impact on tenants than policy outcomes. Again, similar to the voucher assistance model, total minority percentages of the population and the ideological makeup of government legislatures do not seem to have a measurable effect on eviction rates. I conclude that this is because the economic factors have tremendous effects that preclude the political and demographic factors of the final two control variables.

Since the policy-evictions model only showed partial support for my policy drift argument, the model does not provide sufficient evidence to claim full support for my fourth hypothesis. The strictest interpretation of these results would be that only some state-level policy influences eviction rates, which could easily be the case due to myriad issues, such as the listed economic factors of unemployment and poverty rate. Another explanation for the lack of support for my final hypothesis may be a spurious relationship for which my dataset does not account, such as national party control of HUD guidelines for eviction, the steady decrease of tenant rights' groups over time, or larger economic trends that fall outside unemployment and rent drift. Nonetheless, the partial support in my model illustrated that landlords lobby for higher rent, and that these rent increases will lead to more evictions in the future. In the highest landlord lobbying expenditure state of Michigan, this paid policy pipeline could lead to 2,500 additional families being removed from their homes in one given year. My study is one of the very first studies to analyze housing policy outcomes and landlord lobbying in relation to evictions; therefore, I am confident that future research could expound on this relationship to explain what other political factors may be a part of this system.

Conclusion

I have set out to answer whether or not landlord lobbying has a significant effect on evictions due to policy outputs, such as rent control preemption, rent drift, or housing assistance vouchers. I found mixed support in answer to this question, with strong evidence for increased housing assistance payments and higher rent drifts in the Midwestern region occurring alongside larger amounts of landlord lobbying. This means that for families such as Arleen and her two sons living in Milwaukee, her rent becomes more and more expensive while landlords are receiving larger and larger voucher payments from the government due to policy drift in a pro-housing policy environment. The results from my final model also intuitively but powerfully predict that the average increased rent rates in the Midwest could lead to an average of 850 more families like Arleen's being evicted every year. There was not overwhelming support for all the elements of my argument in this study, but the evidence of policy drift and landlord lobbying in the housing sector has major implications for both future research and legislation.

Based on my research, there is strong support of policy drift affecting the housing policy environment due to the landlord lobbying efforts spent on rent drift and housing voucher assistance. The support for my argument shows that landlords routinely contribute to campaigns and hire professional lobbyists to increase the rent they can charge and the rent the government subsidizes. While my results did not connect both policy drift outputs to evictions, there are still meaningful implications to how secure, pro-landlord policy environments could disadvantage tenants, albeit short of an eviction. As landlords increase their profits through spiked rent or increased HAP totals, rent-burdened or low-income tenants may be asked to pay more without receiving higher quality housing assistance.

Future research should improve on this measure by finding a housing assistance variable that represents the assistance that tenants directly receive, not merely how the landlord benefits from the voucher system. This would be an important extension on my policy drift analysis because it would demonstrate the direct harm to the target population that may exist in the housing sector. Additionally, future research could include more states in the sample to test the veracity of the policy drift claim on a national level, which would overcome the problem of potential regional biases. I suspect that larger sums of landlord contributions and more expensive rental rates, unfortunately, could lead to more extreme policy drift and eviction rate outcomes in places such as the West or East Coast in the United States. More evictions and rent control preemption data would also provide better leverage for future researchers in mapping out the housing policy environment on a national scale, which would allow my theories to be tested and perhaps generalized at a higher level of analysis.

The analysis does not provide support for a connection between the enactment of rent control preemption and landlord lobbying. However, there is evidence that landlords have continued to spend an average of half a million dollars in Illinois since rent control was preempted in 1997, totaling to over $6.2 million in the 17-year period of this study. Likewise, while there was no discernable statistical relationship between rent control preemption and evictions, the number of total legal evictions has quadrupled in that same timeframe in Illinois, from 6,425 in 2000 to 26,453 in 2016 (Desmond et al 2019). Additionally, the substantive results for my policy drift hypotheses outline how lucrative the return on investment can be for landlords willing to spend money on campaigns and lobbyists for increasing rent and voucher payments. My theorized analysis may not describe everything happening within the housing policy environment, but the results indicate that cultural capture in a state legislature benefits the policy area of stakeholders, such as landlords, instead of renters.

Altogether, the results of this research emphasize the power of state-level lobbying when it comes to impacting policy areas. In the United States, the American policymaking systems tends to be glorified or vilified based on decisions being made in Washington, DC. However, this study demonstrates that local money and power may be guiding day-to-day policies that impact hundreds of thousands of constituents, literally, in their homes. All state citizens and members of state legislatures should consider what money is coming into their policy system and how these well-meaning contributions could be drastically narrowing a reform conversation. Extending on the work of Franko and Witko (2018), future research should study how direct democratic measures, such as the Lift the Ban coalition in Illinois, are challenging the ramifications of culturally-captured legislatures in the policy areas in a manner that goes beyond economics. Voting mechanisms, such as a referendum or ballot initiative, may be an excellent counter-measure to the money and resources that smaller organizations cannot rival in certain policy areas. The power differential favoring landlord policies over tenant policies observed in the housing sector may be replicable in other policy arenas, as well. Future research should measure the potential policy drift in other areas such as healthcare, food insecurity, veteran benefits, or drug regulation, where invested actors may push policy boundaries to their benefits, whether it benefits target populations or not.

When all is said and done, policy outcomes such as evictions are the worst-case scenario of a system that is failing some of its people. Arleen and her young children struggle to find a home, and in turn, it creates a cycle of distress and uncertainty for years to come with a limitless ripple effect on all their futures. In the state of Wisconsin where Arleen is raising her children, landlords have recorded spending over $4 million on their lobbying efforts, but they have also filed nearly half a million evictions in the last seventeen years alone. Lobbying money and information is an essential and admirable part of the policymaking process that can incorporate citizen feedback into the legislative system; however, this only works when all groups are represented by those interests. Future policymaking in the housing sector, especially at the state level, should seek out information and testimonies from the renting population when considering how to make the solution effective for families like Arleen. After all, if a policy system is failing hundreds of thousands of deserving, tax-paying people like Arleen, the current policy system is clearly not effective at all. Continued evaluation of the policymaking process and ongoing oversight of the effects of lobbying at all levels can help ensure that good governance is creating the best policy outcomes for all.

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VITA

Rosalie Anne Swingle

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: EFFECTIVE OR EVICTED: LANDLORD LOBBYING AND HOUSING POLICY OUTCOMES IN THE MIDWEST

Major Field: Political Science

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts in Political Science at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2019.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and English at Truman State University, Kirksville, Missouri in 2016.

Experience:

OSU Graduate Teaching and Research Assistant, Fall 2017 – Present

Ranson Campaign Field Coordinator, June 2018 – Present

Kansas City Urban Leader Research Fellow, Summer 2017

Kansas City City Year AmeriCorps Team Member, July 2016 – June 2017

Professional Memberships:

Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society
Pi Sigma Alpha Honor Society
Southern Political Science Association
Midwest Political Science Association