ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis:	ANALYZING ARREST RATES IN WASHINGTON D.C. NEIGHBORHOODS WITH EMERGENCY HOMELESS SHELTERS
	Emilia Christina Heintz, Bachelor of Arts, 2025
Thesis Directed By:	Associate Professor, Dr. Wade Jacobsen, Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice

This study aims to examine whether there is a relationship between the presence of emergency homeless shelters (e.g., shelter v. no shelter) and adult (18+) arrest rates. I combine datasets from the city of Washington D.C. to assess my research question, including: 2023 arrest data from the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), location data of emergency shelters from the D.C. Department of Human Services (DHS), and neighborhood data from the U.S. Census. Using multivariable linear regression, I test the relationship between emergency shelters and adult arrest rates controlling for concentrated disadvantage. I find a consistent positive relationship between the presence of an emergency shelter in a neighborhood and the adult arrest rate. These results provide evidence that there is a greater police presence in Washington D.C. neighborhoods with emergency homeless shelters, but additional research must be done to determine if this relationship is spurious or due to the criminalization of homelessness.

ANALYZING ARREST RATES IN WASHINGTON D.C. NEIGHBORHOODS WITH EMERGENCY HOMELESS SHELTERS

by

Emilia Christina Heintz

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts,
Criminology and Criminal
Justice
2025

Acknowledgements

I would like to deeply thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Wade Jacobsen, and teaching assistant Guyu Sun. Their advisement and constant support helped me to create work I am truly proud of and prepare me for the next steps in my professional career. I would also like to extend my deep thanks to Dr. Deb Niemeier, with whom I gained my first research experience, and entrusted me as an undergraduate student to conduct interviews, co-author a research transcript, and present at the 2024 Transportation Research Board Conference. Working with Dr. Niemeier also inspired the topic of this thesis, and housing policy and homelessness are continued interests I hope to pursue further. I want to thank Dr. Robert Stewart for additional research experience understanding the collateral consequences of incarceration, and his continued trust, respect, and support. Lastly, I want to thank my family for their endless support and their late-night edits. Without them this thesis would not be possible.

Table of Contents

This Table of Contents is automatically generated by MS Word, linked to the Heading formats used within the Chapter text.

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

Understanding the relationship between arrest rates and emergency homeless shelters is critical for advancing knowledge on the impact of shelters on neighborhood policing. Research has captured the crime and homelessness relationship through other variables, such as with raw homeless population Point in Time (PIT) counts and crime data (Ee & Zhang, 2022), or the rate of emergency shelter entrants and crime rates (Bartelt et al., 2017), both finding significant positive relationships between emergency shelters and crime. However, arrest rates are an important variable to study because they more accurately measure the amount of police interaction in a neighborhood than crime rates can. Neighborhood police presence is a large piece in understanding how the unhoused population is treated.

There are two potential explanations for why there may be a relationship between arrest rates and emergency homeless shelters. First, it may be a spurious relationship better explained by social disorganization theory, where emergency shelters are a form of disorder, and crime and disorder are outcomes of concentrated disadvantage in a neighborhood (Shaw & McKay, 1942). Second, the relationship may be explained by the criminalization of homelessness, where anti-homelessness laws cause greater police targeting in neighborhoods with shelters (Beckett & Herbert, 2009). This paper will explore these two explanations in the city of Washington D.C.

D.C. ranks 6th in its unhoused population per capita among US cities, with a rate of 733 per 100k residents and 4,922 unhoused people (Kim, 2023; Love & Loh, 2024). If D.C. was a state, it would have the highest per capita rate of homelessness in the country. Seventeen percent of the city's unhoused are also unsheltered, which is defined as those who sleep in places not meant for human habitation, such as on the street or in a tent (Henry et al., 2021). Additionally,

DC is 43% Black and 39% White, making it the largest majority-Black city in the country (Perry & Donoghoe, 2023; DC Office of Planning, 2023). Lastly, the District has a poverty rate of 14%, higher than the national average of 11.1% (DC Office of Planning, 2023, U.S. Census Bureau, 2025). These demographics make D.C. a prime candidate for homelessness research.

After Mayor Muriel Bowser assumed the role in 2015, she initiated Homeward D.C., the city's official homelessness strategic plan. The plan's major goal is to make homelessness a "rare, brief, and non-recurring experience" (DC ICH, 2015). Homeward uses a Housing First model, where housing is prioritized as the initial step in ending homelessness. Housing First programs do not deny applicants because of substance use disorders, a criminal record, or mental illness (Multnomah County Joint Office of Homeless Services, 2024).

Housing First policies also seek to reverse the homelessness-jail cycle. More than 50,000 people enter shelters directly from correctional facilities a year (Department of HUD, 2017), and people who have been incarcerated once are seven times more likely to experience homelessness, with the number increasing to thirteen times for those with multiple incarcerations (Couloute, 2018). While the goal of Housing First is to place individuals in long-term housing, emergency shelters are necessary for individuals in more immediate danger. These shelters provide temporary housing relief and allow people to connect to additional resources like food banks, Medicare assistance, or employment offices and move toward greater stability (USICH, 2022).

One of Homeward's biggest reforms was to restructure the city's emergency shelter system. The D.C. General homeless shelter opened in 2001, housed 1000 people at its peak, and was shut down in 2018 after a legacy of crime and literal broken windows (Jouvenal et al., 2014; Nirappil, 2018). To replace the mega shelter, a network of smaller service-enriched shelters was created. The plan has been successful, reducing family homelessness by 73% from 2015 to 2021

(DC ICH, 2015). This shift to smaller shelters creates an opportunity for neighborhood research. Block groups are the smallest geographical unit used by the U.S. Census to break down neighborhoods, containing between 600 and 3,000 people each, making them the most useful measure to understand neighborhood differences in the District (U.S. Census, 2022).

Although not part of their formal duties, police officers in Washington D.C., and across the United States are tasked with managing crises among the unhoused population. Police officers receive limited training and have unclear directives on how to respond to these types of calls (McNamara et al., 2013). For the Metropolitan Police (MPD) specifically, their "Interactions with Homeless Persons" policy prioritizes referring such individuals to services and refraining from initiating contacts that may violate an individual's rights (MPD, 2011). But this is not always possible, and officers are often limited to either an informal response, such as instructing individuals to move to a new location, or a formal response, such as issuing a citation or arrest (Herring, 2019).

Lastly, residents often have a "not in my backyard" mindset when it comes to emergency homeless shelters, where many do not want to harm the unhoused population but do not want a shelter or supportive housing in their neighborhood. Neighbors often hold the belief that shelters will lower property values, hurt local businesses, and increase crime in the neighborhood (Schively, 2007; Wynne-Edwards, 2003). Generally, the public is fearful of the unhoused, perceiving them to be mentally ill and/or violent, and many have a neural response expressing disgust and dehumanization (Harris & Fiske, 2006). Thus, the police must respond to problems with the unhoused with little support and no real solution at their disposal.

This paper will test whether the presence of an emergency homeless shelter is associated with the arrest rate in Washington, D.C. neighborhoods.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Social Disorganization Theory

One potential explanation for a relationship between emergency shelters and arrest rates is spuriousness, or that it is an outcome of other neighborhood factors. This is best understood with social disorganization theory. In their formative study of Chicago's neighborhoods and crime, Shaw and McKay (1942) found that crime is not evenly distributed geographically but tends to cluster in neighborhoods marked by elevated levels of concentrated disadvantage. They defined this concept as a set of factors, such as high poverty rates, ethnic heterogeneity, and residential mobility, among others. Concentrated disadvantage undermines a neighborhood's capacity for social control due to the absence of collective community action (Shaw & McKay, 1942). Homelessness and shelters can serve as indicators of concentrated disadvantage.

Police often view homelessness as a form of disorderly conduct that must be addressed to prevent more serious crime, a perspective shaped by the Broken Windows Theory (Wilson & Kelling, 1982). This theory has influenced several policing strategies targeting visible signs of disorder, such as homelessness. For example, Berk and MacDonald (2010) evaluated Los Angeles's Safer Cities Initiative, an effort to reduce disorder in Skid Row, and found it led to small but meaningful reductions in crime. Similarly, studies in New York City reported that policing disorder was associated with declines in violent crime (Corman & Mocan, 2002; Kelling & Sousa, 2001). In other cities, such as Jersey City, NJ, and Lowell, MA, targeting social and physical disorder in crime hot spots resulted in fewer citizen calls for service and lower levels of violent crime (Braga & Bond, 2008; Braga et al., 1999). However, social disorganization theory offers a different perspective, suggesting that neighborhood disadvantage leads to both disorder

and crime. From this viewpoint, the presence of an emergency shelter, and potentially higher rates of crime and arrests, may be more a consequence of structural disadvantage than a cause.

A spatial analysis of Los Angeles' neighborhoods found that homelessness had a significant and positive effect on person, property, and society crimes when holding social disorganization variables and total population constant (Ee & Zhang, 2022). They concluded that neighborhoods are crucial to the homelessness-crime relationship because homelessness only poses a significant risk factor for the safety of a neighborhood when it is highly concentrated (p. 2211). This is exemplified in Los Angeles County, which contains Hollywood, West Los Angeles, and Venice, and has the highest poverty rate in the state of California at 23% (Bohn et al., 2019). A 10-year longitudinal Los Angeles study had different results, finding that only violent crime and homelessness had a positive association (Artz & Welsch, 2024). The researchers concluded that reducing property crime can reduce homelessness, and reducing homelessness can reduce violent crime (p. 32). These results support the theory that homelessness is a sign of disorder, and that it is an outcome of concentrated disadvantage.

The current housing affordability crisis in the United States also lends itself to a social disorganization explanation. In January of 1980, the median average sale price for new homes nationally was $62,900 (U.S. Census, n.d.). As of March 2025, this number has ballooned to $403,600 (U.S. Census, 2025). The median sale price for a home in DC in 2025 was $642,500, 55% higher than the national average. Additionally, the cost of living in the District is 42% higher than the national average (Redfin, 2025). These increased prices contribute to an estimated one in ten people in DC experiencing housing insecurity (Solari et al., 2023).

Residents of Wards 7 and 8, which compose the Anacostia neighborhood, were 18% more likely to be housing insecure compared to the rest of D.C.'s population (Solari et al., 2023).

The Anacostia neighborhood of D.C. reflects several notable concentrated disadvantage indicators. Anacostia remains over 75% Black, has higher poverty rates, more gun violence, worse health outcomes, and a stagnating population compared to the city at large (Weil, 2021). More emergency shelters or higher arrest rates in Anacostia and across D.C. would represent additional concentrated disadvantage indicators.

Criminalization

Another potential explanation for a relationship between homeless shelters and arrest rates is criminalization. Many US cities utilize anti-vagrancy laws to exclude the unhoused from public spaces, termed by Beckett and Herbert as banishment (2009). Banishment policies blend civil, criminal, and administrative law to make legal challenges more difficult (Beckett & Herbert, 2009). In the 1990s, "civility" codes became popular, where many offenses commonly associated with homelessness, such as panhandling or public camping, were criminalized (p. 5). Since then, innovative banishment laws have been instituted, including Parks Exclusion Orders, Trespass Admonishments, and Off-Limits Orders, severely limiting the movement of unhoused people in cities.

Park Exclusion Orders authorize police to ban individuals suspected of minor offenses from some or all public parks with little recourse (Beckett & Herbert, 2009). Trespass Admonishments are civil violations administered by police for being on a property "without legitimate purpose," which prohibit a person from being on that property or set of properties, typically for a year. If he or she returns, it is considered Criminal Trespass. Trespass laws have been used broadly, like in New York City, where officers have excluded people from all public housing properties. Off-Limits Orders require individuals convicted of certain offenses to stay out of certain areas as a condition of their probation or parole, most commonly seen in "drug-

free" or "prostitution-free" zones, but these zones can make up large swaths of a city. For example, in Seattle, the entire downtown area is considered a "drug-free zone" (Beckett & Herbert, 2009). In effect, banishment policies can contain and cluster unsheltered unhoused individuals in certain neighborhoods, such as near emergency shelters, which can then be patrolled heavily by the police (Chien et. al., 2024).

San Diego, California, has civility codes and Park Exclusion Orders. A study conducted in the city found that for police stops involving unhoused individuals, the proximity to service providers like food banks, homeless shelters, or detox centers impacts the severity of stop outcomes (Brown et al., 2024). The researchers found that when a stop is farther from an emergency housing facility, there is an approximate 22.2% reduction in the odds of a formal outcome, defined as a citation, arrest, or psychiatric hold (Brown et al., 2024). This isolates neighborhoods with emergency homeless shelters as areas of interest that the police may target with more patrolling and punitive outcomes.

Compounding the problems that banishment policies create is Not in My Backyard attitudes, or NIMBYism. Residents often do not want land developments that they deem harmful to their community, such as emergency shelters, affordable housing, and public transit infrastructure (Orr et al., 2024). These often well-connected and affluent townspeople vocally protest these new development proposals and have been largely successful in relegating such facilities to the outskirts of towns or otherwise undesirable areas (Orr et al., 2023).

For example, NIMBY protests in Portland, Maine in 2019 resulted in a shelter being relocated from the gentrifying Bayside neighborhood to a wooded area at the city limits (Ginder, 2025). As of May 2025, there is an ongoing NIMBY protest of a new shelter slated to open in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn (Kliger, 2025). Protesters voiced quality of life and public safety

concerns and filed an injunction challenging the development to be heard in court later this month.

The June 2024 Supreme Court decision *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson* gives further credence to the criminalization explanation. The case originated in Grants Pass, Oregon, where the city's Municipal Code includes several provisions that prohibit sleeping outdoors. These provisions were challenged for violating the Cruel and Unusual Punishment Clause of the 8th Amendment (Oyez, 2024). In the Court's majority opinion, Justice Gorsuch wrote that enforcing public sleeping ordinances does not violate the 8th Amendment, even when alternatives do not exist. As part of its justification, Justice Gorsuch drew a parallel to the *Powell v. Texas* ruling, comparing criminal liability for a drunk in public as like that of an unsheltered individual outside (Zondo, 2024). This decision reversed 2018's *Martin v. City of Boise,* which concluded that the Cruel and Unusual Punishment Clause of the 8th Amendment did prohibit such ordinances (Howe, 2024).

UC Berkeley professors have stated that this decision has effectively criminalized homelessness (Pohl, 2024). The dissenting brief, written by Justice Sotomayor and joined by Justices Kagan and Jackson, argued that the majority's ruling "leaves the most vulnerable in our society with an impossible choice: Either stay awake or be arrested" (Howe, 2024). Two months after the decision, at least 23 municipalities moved to criminalize homelessness by implementing camping bans that can result in fines, arrests, and jail time (Birmingham, 2024). As of January 2025, that number has grown to roughly 150 cities in 32 states (Sequeira, 2025). Anti-homelessness policies continue to build momentum. This was most recently reflected in plans from President Trump to forcibly move unsheltered individuals into large-scale tent cities, and to eliminate funding for Permanent Supportive Housing programs (Bierman, 2024; DeParle, 2025).

Current Study

I hypothesize that the presence of an emergency homeless shelter is associated with higher arrest rates in Washington D.C. neighborhoods. I will not test the two explanations I provided above directly, but social disorganization theory and criminalization inform why I believe there will be a strong positive relationship between emergency shelters and arrest rates. This study is an important contribution to homelessness and criminology research because it uses arrests instead of crime data, measuring neighborhood police presence more accurately than other studies. Additionally, emergency shelter presence could be another variable of interest used in social disorganization theory research. While most research on homelessness is focused on California, specifically Skid Row in Los Angeles (Bittner, 1967; Brown et al., 2024; Chien et al., 2024; Stuart, 2013), this research alone cannot accurately represent the nation's homelessness crisis. This study expands the scope of homelessness research beyond California, examining the homelessness crisis in a majority-minority city with a growing affordable housing problem and a significant unhoused population. Most importantly, I hope this study inspires other researchers to expand on my methods and findings, as homelessness research is a multi-disciplinary, necessary, and rapidly expanding field covering a breadth of academic areas, such as criminology, sociology, and political science, among others.

Chapter 3: Data & Methods

Data

Collection Method

First, data on arrests are taken from the D.C. Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) arrests by year files from 2023. Importantly, this data includes adult arrests only (18+). This data shows the frequency of arrests in a geographic area (block group) within a given year. The MPD Arrest data includes all the arrests in a particular year, as well as the latitude and longitude of where the arrest took place (Metropolitan Police Department, 2023).

Second, the locations of homeless shelters were acquired from the D.C. Department of Human Services through a FOIA request, resulting in 30 unique emergency shelter addresses. These data include the names, police districts, city quadrant, ward, and phone numbers of the shelters, along with the occupant use type, which is further divided into Residential, Clinics/Housing, and Short-Term Family Housing (STFH).

Third, other block group characteristics are taken from data from the US Census Bureau. U.S. Census data was used to determine block group borders and add control variables. Controls were selected to give a broader understanding of a block group's demographics and socioeconomic status.

Analytic Sample

In this study, I use Census block groups to capture neighborhoods in Washington, DC. Block groups are geographic divisions created by the U.S. Census to present data and typically contain a population between 600 and 3000 people. They are a further division of census tracts, the geographic divisions that contain 1200 to 8000 people (U.S. Census, n.d.). Block groups are

used in this study to divide Washington, D.C. into neighborhoods for analysis and focus on areas containing emergency shelters. I dropped block groups because the Census Bureau recommends block groups contain a minimum of 600 people or at least 240 housing units, and a maximum of 3000 people or 1200 housing units, narrowing my sample size from 571 to 550 (Census Bureau, 2018). From there, four block groups were dropped for missing data in the poverty status variable. This left me with a final analytic sample of 546 block groups.

Measures

Dependent Variable

To test my hypothesis, I use one dependent variable: block group arrest rate. First, I geocoded the arrest locations into GIS. Using D.C.'s block group borders and the geocoded arrests, I calculated the arrest rate, where the number of arrests in a block group was divided by the adult (18+) population and multiplied by 1,000. This multiplier was chosen based on the average size of block groups (600-3000) to be as close to the normal population. Higher arrest rates in a block group indicate a larger police presence in a given area or a large number of resident complaints to the police. Low arrest rates do not necessarily indicate that there is less crime in a given block group, but that there is less police presence in the area.

Independent Variable

I geocoded the emergency shelter addresses to add them to my GIS map. The independent variable in this study is emergency shelter presence, where 1 = an emergency homeless shelter located in the block group and 0 = no emergency homeless shelter present. In my sample, 30 block groups had an emergency shelter and were marked with a 1. The other 516 block groups were marked as 0s.

Control Variables

The first controls included are the adult Black and Hispanic populations in block groups, which I converted into proportions based on the total block group adult population. Race could be an influential variable given D.C.'s large Black population, especially due to 81% of the city's unhoused population identifying as Black (Cuccia, 2024). Also, I took the number of vacant homes in a block group and turned it into a percentage, where the number of vacant homes were divided by total housing units and multiplied by 100. Many vacant homes indicate a less desirable and often poorer neighborhood. These three controls were included in the DC block groups shapefile (U.S. Census, 2021). Median Age was taken from the American Community Survey median age table, using the total across both sexes (United States, 2023). Age and crime are tightly related in terms of crime, so it is important to control. Poverty Status was taken from the American Community Survey poverty status in the past year table, which I converted into a percentage where the number of householders in poverty was divided by total households and multiplied by 100 (2020). Poverty status percent is the most direct measure of socioeconomic status, which could be associated with shelter presence.

Methods

Using my final analytic sample of 546 block groups, I created a descriptive table of all variables below for reference (Table 1). To answer my research question, I conducted a multivariable linear regression analysis, modeling the degree to which emergency shelter presence impacts the rate of arrest within D.C.'s block groups (Table 2). Before a linear regression was conducted in Stata, I created a map in GIS containing D.C. block group borders, 2023 arrests, and emergency shelter locations to more fully understand the distribution of shelters and arrests in the city. Since block group arrest rate is a continuous outcome variable, a

linear regression was used, and several control variables were added to eliminate alternative explanations.

Chapter 4: Results

Descriptive Analysis

In Washington D.C., 5.1% of the final analytic sample of 546 block groups contain an emergency homeless shelter. The mean arrest rate across all block groups was 26.99 arrests per 1000 residents. This varied significantly with a standard deviation of 34.33, indicating significant neighborhood differences. The average percentage of households in poverty across all block groups was 13.54% with a high standard deviation of 13.20. The average proportion of Black adults across all block groups was 0.41, but the Black population proportion is varied, with block groups being as little as 0.01 Black to as much as 0.97. The average adult Hispanic proportion is much smaller at 0.10, but it is similarly varied with a standard deviation of 0.08. The average percentage of vacant homes in a block group is 10.43%, with the max reaching to nearly 60% of all households. Lastly, the median age across all block groups is 37.49 years old. In all, these descriptive results indicate that there is a varied block group arrest rate, and concentrated disadvantage indicators like ethnic heterogeneity and poverty are not evenly distributed in Washington D.C.'s neighborhoods.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics Table

	Observations	Mean	Std Deviation	Min	Max
Block Group (BG) Arrest Rate	550	26.99	34.33	0	365.27
Shelter Presence	550	0.051	–	0	1
Avg. BG Household Poverty Status %	546	13.54	13.20	0	63.14
Adult Black Proportion	550	0.41	0.33	0.01	0.97
Adult Hispanic Proportion	550	0.10	0.08	0.00	0.49
Avg. BG Vacant House %	550	10.43	7.36	0	59.83
Median Age	550	37.49	9.27	12	88

Washington D.C. Maps

I created two distinct maps, the first being a choropleth map displaying 2023 arrests, where darker, more red colors display more arrests in a block group. The second map shows the locations of D.C.'s emergency shelters and other designated housing sites used under Homeward D.C.

When looking at Figure 1, there are more arrests on the East side of the city, in the Northeast and Southeast quadrants. The least arrests occurred in the Northwest quadrant of the city. There are more

arrests in the Petworth, Mount Pleasant, and Columbia Heights neighborhoods of central D.C., the Brentwood and Stadium-Armory neighborhoods of Northeast D.C., and Anacostia of Southeast D.C. The most consistently dark portions of the city are in Anacostia and Brentwood.

In Figure 2, the emergency shelter locations largely align with the darker sections of Figure 1. Shelters are highly concentrated in Anacostia, and then largely fall in central and Northeast D.C. There is only one emergency homeless shelter in Northwest D.C.

Figure 1: Washington D.C. 2023 Arrests Choropleth Map

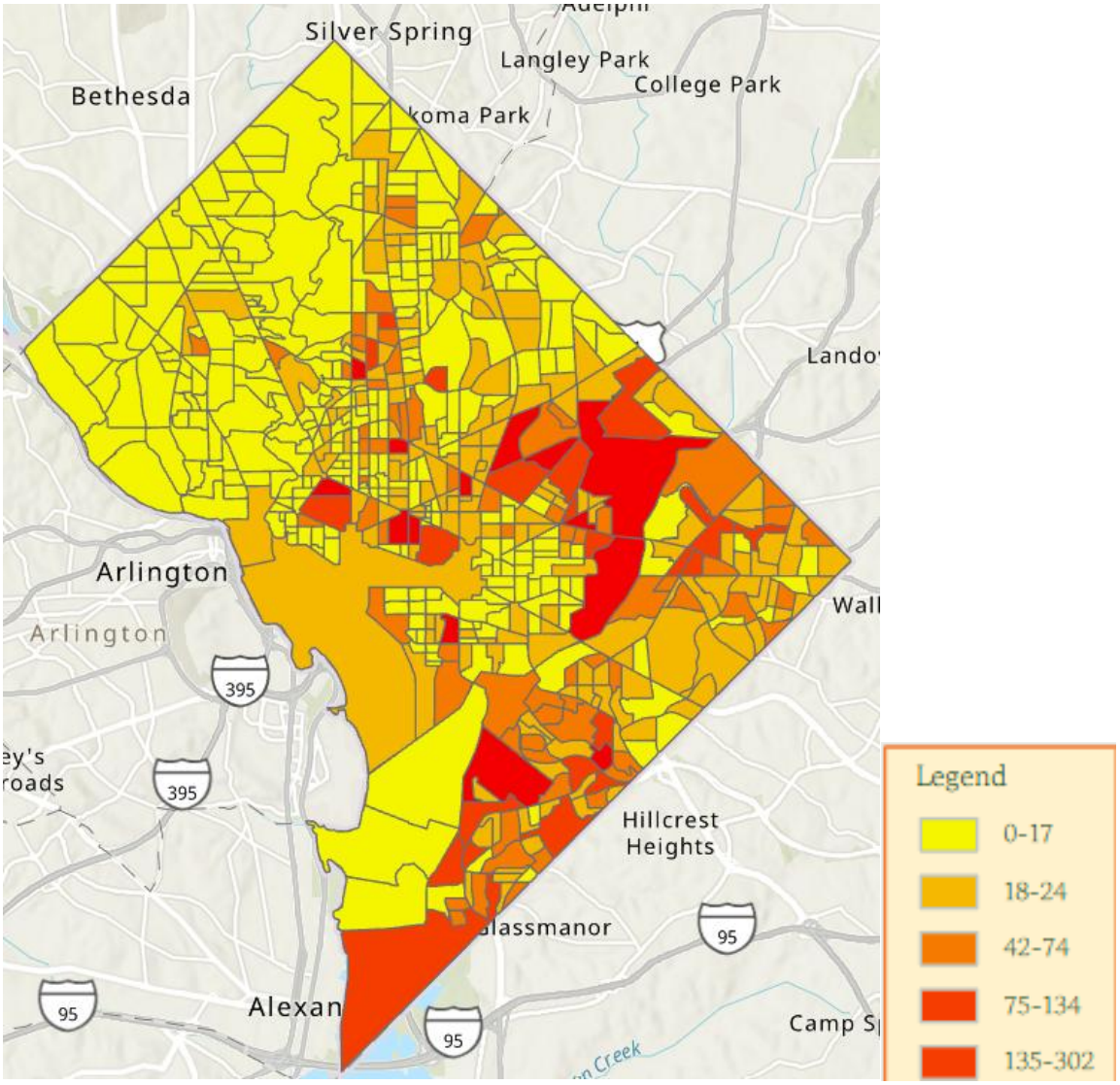
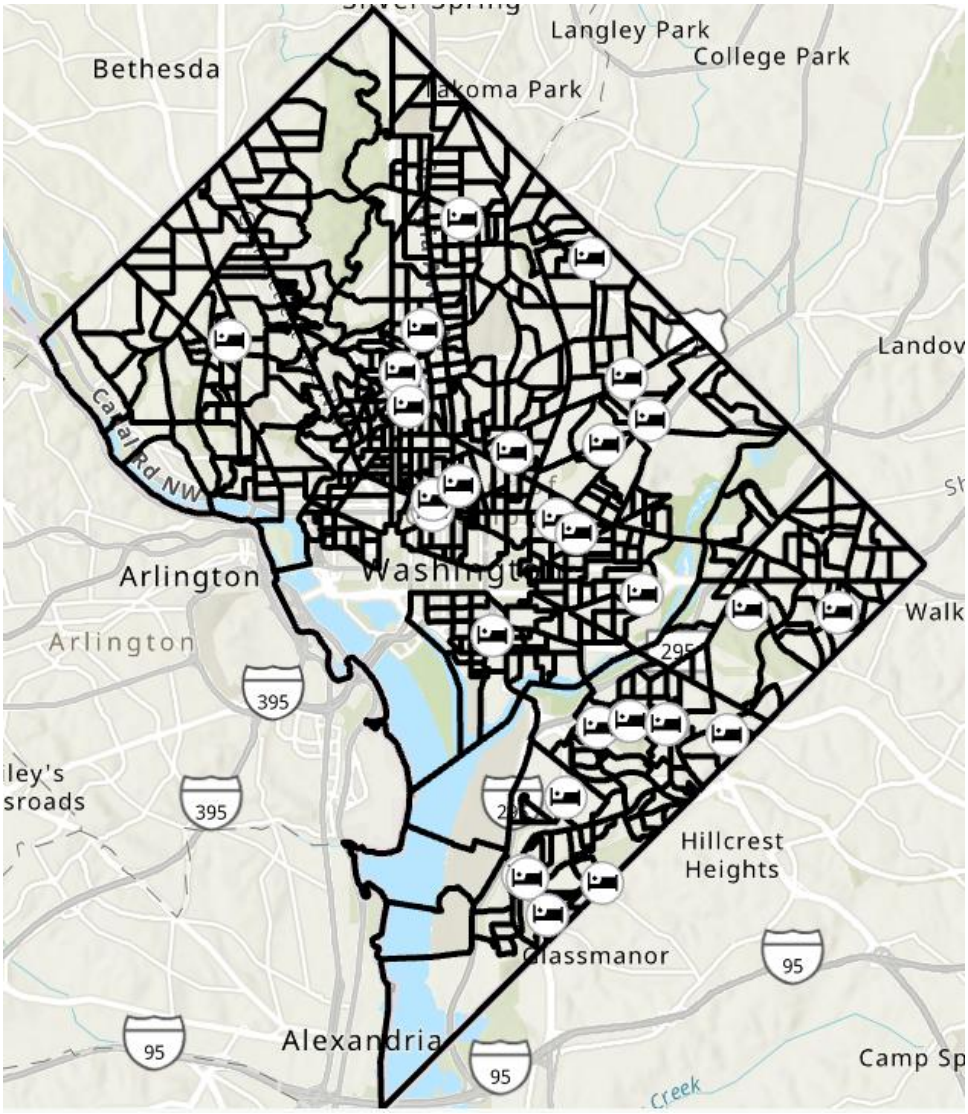


Figure 2: Washington D.C. Block Groups with Shelter Locations



Multivariable Regression Analysis

Block Group Arrest Rate and Emergency Shelter Presence

The regression model reveals a consistent positive relationship between the presence of an emergency shelter in a neighborhood and the adult arrest rate. In block groups with an

emergency shelter, there are 24.4 more arrests per 1000 adult residents on average (Table 2). This is a 90% increase in arrests if a shelter is present compared to the mean block group arrest rate of 27 per 1000 adult residents (Table 1). Block groups composed of more poverty, Black populations, and youth are associated with more arrests.

Control Variables

For poverty status, a 1 percentage point increase is associated with a 0.29 increase in the arrest rate per 1000 residents ($p < 0.05$). A 1 percentage point increase in the proportion of adults who were Black is associated with a 0.31 increase in arrest rate ($p < 0.001$). A 1 percentage point increase in the proportion of Hispanic adults in a block group decreased the arrest rate by 0.21, but this association was not statistically significant. With vacant homes, a 1 percentage point increase was associated with a 0.34 increase in arrest rate, but this was not statistically significant. For median age, every additional year older in median age was associated with a 0.38 decrease in arrest rate ($p < 0.01$).

Table 2. Multivariable Linear Regression Table

Arrest Rate	Coefficient	Standard Error	P-Values
Shelter Presence	24.43	5.99	0.000
Poverty Status %	0.29	0.12	0.016
Black 18+ Proportion	31.07	4.81	0.000
Hispanic 18+ Proportion	-20.55	18.03	0.255
Vacant House %	0.34	0.19	0.074
Median Age	-0.38	0.15	0.010

Chapter 5: Discussion, Limitations, & Future Directions

Discussion

Referring to my hypothesis, the presence of an emergency homeless shelter is associated with higher arrest rates in Washington D.C. neighborhoods, and this association is statistically significant when controlling for neighborhood indicators of disadvantage. When an emergency homeless shelter is present in a block group, there are 26.99 more arrests per 1000 residents, indicating that there is a larger police presence in these neighborhoods. This aligns with previous research that found that police stops that occur closer to homeless shelters are associated with more formal outcomes, such as a citation or arrest (Brown et al., 2024). Two studies also found significant associations between homelessness and crime, with one measuring point in time (PIT) homelessness data and the other tracking the rate of shelter entrants (Bartelt et al., 2017; Ee & Zhang, 2022). Previous research corroborates my findings.

In terms of my two explanations for my hypothesis, that 1) arrest rates and homelessness are outcomes of concentrated disadvantage and therefore the relationship is spurious, and 2) homelessness is associated with arrests because of police targeting and anti-homelessness laws, I cannot make a conclusion as to which better explains my findings. My results call attention to the need for more research to tease out which explanation is better supported by data. However, the relationship between homeless shelter presence and the arrest rate still held up when accounting for several indicators of concentrated disadvantage, suggesting that something else, such as criminalization, may be at play.

While I cannot parse between my two explanations, I can make four main conclusions. First, an emergency shelter in a neighborhood is associated with a higher arrest rate. Second, there is a larger police presence in poorer neighborhoods that have emergency shelters. Third,

Black neighborhoods have higher arrest rates. Lastly, my median age findings, where as a neighborhood becomes older, the arrest rate decreases, is consistent with the age-crime curve.

These findings are significant because it warrants further examination of the impact of policing and Homeward D.C. on the city's unhoused population. Despite the city's Housing First goals, arrest rates are 90 percent higher in neighborhoods with shelters. Some of this is likely due to the unhoused population committing more crime, but it also signals that there is a disproportionate police presence in these neighborhoods. D.C. policymakers might use these results to evaluate how Homeward and Metro Police policies may be informing of this relationship, and how they can continue to divert unhoused people, especially the unsheltered, into services like temporary housing and substance treatment. Touching on Anacostia specifically, there is a breadth of history on its greater Black population struggling with concentrated disadvantage, and I found a disproportionate number of shelters, arrests, and higher arrest rates compared to the rest of the city. More work needs to be done to rectify the vast inequality in this portion of the city that has existed for decades, if not centuries.

Limitations

There are several important limitations to note for my study. First, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request that I made to the D.C. Department of Human Services only provided me with a list of currently open emergency shelters, limiting my data to analyze only 2023. I had nine additional years of arrest data from 2013 to 2023, but due to my inability to track which shelters were open in which years, I had to limit my sample size significantly and create only one GIS map. If I had more years of shelter data, I would have more evidence of the

relationship between shelter presence and the arrest rate, providing stronger conclusions across several years.

Second, I could not evaluate policy in any way. In earlier versions of this study, I intended to evaluate Homeward D.C. for its effectiveness, and perhaps the degree of alignment between Homeward policies and Metro Police actions, but my limited method of multivariable linear regression could not capture this level of detail. A policy evaluation would require several more years of data, and most likely a qualitative analysis of key players in the homelessness crisis in the city.

Third, I cannot make conclusions on the unhoused population specifically because the DC arrest data did not provide enough specificity. While the data did include what the arrest was for, and a charge description, after parsing through the data, I could not identify any signifiers that an arrest involved an unhoused person, even if the arrest was for common crimes associated with homelessness like trespassing. My inability to narrow my arrest sample to arrests involving the unhoused population makes it difficult to understand this population's interactions with the police, and the frequency of police interactions, fully.

Lastly, my study does not account for on-the-ground experiences from the MPD, Homeward DC government employees, or the unhoused population. By not accounting for their voices, it is hard to understand how the relationship between shelter presence and the arrest rate operates, especially incorporating the level of fear from the community, or any degree of NIMBYism that may be contributing to greater interactions in a neighborhood.

Future Directions

Next, qualitative research is needed to understand policing the D.C. unhoused population, and the level of synergy the MPD has with Homeward D.C. If researchers and policymakers can

communicate more and understand how policies are working in conjunction with each other and how they are impacting the unhoused population themselves, the District can make better policy decisions that can aid more vulnerable individuals. This research should primarily consist of interviews with key players (MPD, city employees, unhoused pop.) to find ways to make homelessness policies more effective for all citizens of the city. It also might be interesting to survey D.C. citizens to gain a greater understanding of how fearful they are of the unhoused population, and how strong NIMBY attitudes may be in certain communities that may be fueling higher arrest rates.

References

Artz, B., & Welsch, D. (2024). Homelessness and Crime: An Examination of California. *SSRN Electronic Journal*, *17086*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4875517

Bartelt, D., Eyrich-Garg, K. M., & Lockwood, B. (2017). The relationships between community context and entry into a homeless shelter system. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, *39*(5), 675–690. https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2016.1271616

Beckett, K., & Herbert, S. (2009). *Banished*. Oxford University Press.

Berk, R., & MacDonald, J. (2010). Policing the homeless: An evaluation of efforts to reduce homeless-related crime. *Criminology & Public Policy*, *9*(4), 813–840. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9133.2010.00673.x

Bierman, N. (2024, November 20). *Trump takes a hard line on homelessness. Why L.A. Mayor Karen Bass hopes to find common ground*. Los Angeles Times. https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2024-11-20/trump-homelessness-tent-cities

Birmingham, T. (2024, August 27). *Cities Rush to Criminalize Homelessness After Supreme Court Ruling*. Theappeal.org. https://theappeal.org/supreme-court-homelessness-grants-pass-ruling-camping-bans/

Bittner, E. (1967). Police Discretion in Emergency Apprehension of Mentally Ill Persons. *Social Problems*, *14*(3), 278–292. https://doi.org/10.2307/799150

Bohn, S., Danielson, C., & Thorman, T. (2019). *Poverty in California*. https://inequality.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/PovertyinCA19.pdf

Braga, A. A., & Bond, B. J. (2008). Policing crime and disorder hot spots: A randomized controlled trial. *Criminology*, *46*(3), 577–607. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.2008.00124.x

Braga, A. A., Weisburd, D. L., Waring, E. J., Mazerolle, L. G., Spelman, W., & Gajewski, F. (1999). Problem-Oriented Policing in Violent Crime Places: A Randomized Controlled Experiment. *Criminology*, *37*(3), 541–580. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-9125.1999.tb00496.x

Brown, K. L., Watts, S., Turner, P. R., & Wallace, D. (2024). Does proximity to service providers impact punitivity in stop outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness? *Journal of Crime and Justice*, 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/0735648x.2024.2375371

Census Bureau. (2018, November 13). *Block Groups for the 2020 Census-Final Criteria*. Federal Register. https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/11/13/2018-24570/block-groups-for-the-2020-census-final-criteria

Chien, J., Henwood, B. F., Patricia St. Clair, Kwack, S., & Kuhn, R. (2024). Predicting hotspots of unsheltered homelessness using geospatial administrative data and volunteered geographic information. *Health and Place/Health & Place (Online)*, *88*, 103267–103267. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2024.103267

Corman, H., & Mocan, N. (2002, July 1). *Carrots, Sticks and Broken Windows*. National Bureau of Economic Research. https://www.nber.org/papers/w9061

Couloute, L. (2018, August). *Nowhere to Go: Homelessness among formerly incarcerated people*. Prison Policy Initiative. https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/housing.html

Cuccia, A. (2024, January 17). *How homelessness in DC compares nationally*. Street Sense Media. https://streetsensemedia.org/article/how-homelessness-in-dc-compares-nationally/

DC Office of Planning. (2023). *OP Demographic Data HUB*. Opdatahub.dc.gov. https://opdatahub.dc.gov/

DeParle, J. (2025, May 2). Trump Seeks to End Permanent Supportive Housing for the

Chronically Homeless. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/02/us/politics/trump-homelessness-programs-housing-cuts.html

Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2017). *2017 AHAR: Part 2 - Estimates of Homelessness in the U.S. - HUD Exchange*. Hudexchange.info. https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/5769/2017-ahar-part-2-estimates-of-homelessness-in-the-us/

District of Columbia Interagency Council on Homelessness. (2015). *Homeward DC 2015-2020*. https://ich.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ich/page_content/attachments/ICH-StratPlan2.11%20web.pdf

Ee, M., & Zhang, Y. (2022). Homelessness and Crime in Neighborhoods. *Crime & Delinquency*, *70*(8). https://doi.org/10.1177/00111287221140835

Fenit Nirappil. (2018, October 30). *D.C. General, the city's troubled megashelter for homeless families, finally closes*. The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-politics/dc-general-the-citys-troubled-megashelter-for-homeless-families-finally-closes/2018/10/30/0db5dc4c-dbbc-11e8-b732-3c72cbf131f2_story.html

Ginder, E. (2025). *Understanding How NIMBY-ism Shapes Portland, Maine's Homeless Policies: A Qualitative Study*. USM Digital Commons. https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/thinking-matters-symposium/2021/poster-sessions/15?utm_source=digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu%2Fthinking-matters-symposium%2F2021%2Fposter-sessions%2F15&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages

Harris, L. T., & Fiske, S. T. (2006). Dehumanizing the Lowest of the Low. *Psychological*

Science, *17*(10), 847–853. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2006.01793.x

Henry, M., de Sousa, T., Roddey, C., Gayen, S., & Bednar, T. J. (2021). *The 2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress*. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2020-AHAR-Part-1.pdf

Herring, C. (2019). Complaint-oriented policing: Regulating homelessness in public space. *American Sociological Review*, *84*(5). https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122419872671

Howe, A. (2024, June 28). *Justices uphold laws targeting homelessness with criminal penalties*. SCOTUSblog. https://www.scotusblog.com/2024/06/justices-uphold-laws-targeting-homelessness-with-criminal-penalties/

Jouvenal, J., Samuels, R., & Brown, D. L. (2014, July 12). *D.C. family homeless shelter beset by dysfunction, decay*. The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-family-homeless-shelter-beset-by-dysfunction-decay/2014/07/12/3bbb7f50-f739-11e3-a3a5-42be35962a52_story.html

Kelling, G. L., & Wilson, J. Q. (1982). *Broken Windows: The Police and Neighborhood Safety*. The Atlantic. https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1982/03/broken-windows/304465/

Kelling, G., & Sousa, W. (2001). *Civic Report Do Police Matter? An Analysis of the Impact of New York City's Police Reforms*. https://media4.manhattan-institute.org/pdf/cr_22.pdf

Kim, S. (2023, May 5). *Homelessness In D.C. Increases For The First Time In Years*. DCist. https://dcist.com/story/23/05/05/dc-homelessness-increase-2023-pit-count/

Kliger, H. (2025, April 30). *Demonstrators arrested as fight against Brooklyn homeless shelter escalates*. Cbsnews.com; CBS New York.

https://www.cbsnews.com/newyork/news/brooklyn-homeless-shelter-protest-arrests/

Love, H., & Hadden Loh, T. (2024, February 5). *Despite a national spike in homelessness, some US regions are finding solutions*. Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/despite-a-national-spike-in-homelessness-some-us-regions-are-finding-solutions/

McNamara, R., Crawford, C., & Burns, R. (2013). Policing the homeless: policy, practice, and perceptions. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management*, *36*(2), 357–374. https://doi.org/10.1108/13639511311329741

Metropolitan Police. (2011). *General Order: Interactions with Homeless Persons*. https://go.mpdconline.com/GO/GO-OPS-308-14.pdf

Metropolitan Police Department. (2023). *MPD Adult Arrests (2013-2023) | mpdc*. Dc.gov. https://mpdc.dc.gov/publication/mpd-adult-arrests-2013-2023

Multnomah County Joint Office of Homeless Services. (2024). *Housing First*. Pdx.edu. https://omeka.pdx.edu/housingfirst

Orr, J. N., Németh, J., Rigolon, A., Granja, L. S., & Slabaugh, D. (2023). Beyond revanchism? Learning from sanctioned homeless encampments in the U.S. *Urban Geography*, 1–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2023.2196141

Orr, J. N., Németh, J., Rigolon, A., Santos Granja, L., & Slabaugh, D. (2024). NIMBY Attitudes, Homelessness, and Sanctioned Encampments: A Longitudinal Study in Denver. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*. https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456x241265499

Oyez. (2024). *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson*. Oyez. https://www.oyez.org/cases/2023/23-175

Perry, A., & Donoghoe, M. (2023, January 26). *Recognizing Black and Latino-majority cities is the first step to finding a real world Wakanda*. Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/recognizing-black-and-latino-majority-cities-is-the-

first-step-to-finding-a-real-world-wakanda/

Pohl, J. (2024, June 28). *Supreme Court has "greenlighted the criminalization of homelessness," Berkeley experts say*. Berkeley News. https://news.berkeley.edu/2024/06/28/supreme-court-has-greenlighted-the-criminalization-of-homelessness-berkeley-experts-say/

Redfin. (2025, February). *Washington, DC Housing Market: House Prices & Trends | Redfin*. Redfin.com. https://www.redfin.com/city/12839/DC/Washington-DC/housing-market

Schively, C. (2007). Understanding the NIMBY and LULU Phenomena: Reassessing Our Knowledge Base and Informing Future Research. *Journal of Planning Literature*, *21*(3), 255–266. https://doi.org/10.1177/0885412206295845

Sequeira, R. (2025, January 27). *Many more cities ban sleeping outside despite a lack of shelter space.* Stateline. https://stateline.org/2025/01/27/many-more-cities-ban-sleeping-outside-despite-a-lack-of-shelter-space/

Shaw, C. R., & McKay, H. D. (1942). Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas. *Harvard Law Review*, *56*(4), 681. https://doi.org/10.2307/1334446

Solari, C., Lo, L., Rashid, A., & Bond, L. (2023). *Housing Insecurity in the District of Columbia Results from a Representative Survey*. https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/Housing%20Insecurity%20in%20the%20District%20of%20Columbia_0.pdf

Stuart, F. (2013). From 'Rabble Management' to 'Recovery Management': Policing Homelessness in Marginal Urban Space. *Urban Studies*, *51*(9), 1909–1925. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098013499798

U.S. Census. (n.d.). *Median and Average Sales Prices of New Homes Sold in United States*. https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/nrs/tables/time-series/historical-nrs/uspricemon.pdf

U.S. Census. (2021). *Census Block Groups in 2020*. Opendata.dc.gov. https://opendata.dc.gov/datasets/DCGIS::census-block-groups-in-2020/about

U.S. Census Bureau. (2022, April 11). *Glossary*. The United States Census Bureau. https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/about/glossary.html

U.S. Census Bureau. (2025, April 23). *New Residential Sales Press Release*. Www.census.gov. https://www.census.gov/construction/nrs/current/index.html

U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness. (2022, December 19). *After Halting Rapid Rise in Homelessness, Biden-Harris Administration Announces Plan to Reduce Homelessness 25% by 2025*. Www.usich.gov. https://www.usich.gov/news-events/news/after-halting-rapid-rise-homelessness-biden-harris-administration-announces-plan

United States. (2025). *Explore Census Data*. Census.gov. https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT5Y2023.B01002?t=Age+and+Sex&g=040XX00US11

United States Census Bureau. (2025, January). *National poverty in America awareness month: January 2025*. Census.gov; United States Census Bureau. https://www.census.gov/newsroom/stories/poverty-awareness-month.html

Wandile Brian Zondo. (2024). *Indirect Criminalisation of Homelessness: Justice Sotomayor's dissenting opinion in City of Grants Pass v. Johnson | OHRH*. Ox.ac.uk. https://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/indirect-criminalisation-of-homelessness-justice-sotomayors-dissenting-opinion-in-city-of-grants-pass-v-johnson/

Weil, J. (2021, November 3). Wards 7 and 8 have long represented poor, Black D.C. neighborhoods. What does it mean to redistrict them? *Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2021/11/03/dc-redistricting-wards-anacostia-

river/

Wynne-Edwards, J. (2003). *Overcoming Community Opposition to Homelessness Sheltering Projects under the National Homelessness Initiative.* https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=cc8f9807ad715351ace83a1795ec9092c210359c