Gentrification and Crime:
Evidence from Rent Deregulation

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• Urban renaissance in 1990s: rising house prices and falling crime

→ $\Delta$ crime $\Rightarrow$ neighborhood change (Ellen, Horn, Reed 2017)

← But does neighborhood change affect crime?

• **Research Question**: Did end of rent control in Cambridge reduce local crime?
Why Would Ending Rent Control Affect Crime?

**Ending rent control could increase crime**

1. Targets more lucrative
2. Breakdown of community cohesion, social distance increases
3. Wider income gap between residents + inequality made salient → more crime
4. Crime to slow down gentrification (e.g., scare away the yuppies)
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Ending rent control could **reduce** crime

1. New residents wealthier, spend more on target-hardening
2. Fewer “broken windows” as properties are upgraded
3. More policing resources due to increased property tax base; greater political influence of wealthy on municipal priorities
4. Income effects? Resident turnover?
Outline

1. Introduction
2. Background
   - Rent Control in Cambridge
   - Crime in Cambridge
3. Data
4. Estimation
5. Counterfactual Estimation
6. Conclusion
Rent Control in Cambridge

- Rent control adopted in Cambridge in 1971
  - Applied to all non-owner-occupied rental housing built before 1969
  - About one third of residential units were controlled circa 1994

- Quantity controls
  - Vacancy control: Extremely difficult to take controlled units out of circulation—either for sale or owner occupancy
Rent Control in Cambridge

How prices set

- Rents set in 1971 with goal of holding landlord real profits to 1967 levels
- Occasional across the board rent increases:
  - About 1/2 rate of inflation 1967 to 1981
  - About rate of inflation 1981 to 1994
- Difficult for landlord to obtain individual permission to raise rent

Net effect on rents

- Abt (1988) RC discount 40%+
- Atlantic Marketing Research (1998) Decontrolled rents jump 40% to 80% between 1994 and 1997 → RC very binding
The End of Rent Control

- Eliminated by state-wide referendum in 1994
  - Years of unsuccessful efforts by SPOA (Small Property Owners’ Association) to eliminate in Cambridge, Boston, Brookline
- Brilliant idea: Bring RC to state-wide ballot
  - Highly controversial referendum; outcome quite uncertain
  - MA state residents voted 51 percent to 49 to end rent regulation
  - Residents from Boston, Brookline, Cambridge voted to keep it (60%+)
- Immediate price decontrols in January 1995 with very few exceptions
Neighborhood Change Induced by Deregulation

- Residential turnover increased by 20%
- Families with kids move out
- Students move in
- Aggregate residential property value increased by additional $2 bn by 2005
- Permitted renovations increased, explain 12% of property value effect
- Fraction black declined, but racial segregation declined (Sims, 2011)
Cambridge Crime Decrease Atypical

→ Cambridge $\%\Delta$crime is @ 12.5th percentile across 224 cities 75k-200k
Crime Microdata

- Source: Cambridge Police archives 1992-2005
- All “Calls for Service” including reported crimes and their date and location
- Geocode crimes to nearest street address
- Categorize crimes using CPD’s classification system (similar to FBI)
### CAMBRIDGE POLICE DEPARTMENT
February 24, 1992

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hit &amp; Run</th>
<th>Reported that on 2-24-92 her Ma. Reg 716-VGY, 1982 Mazda was parked at Cardinal Medeiros Dr. at which time an unknown M/V struck her M/V causing damage to same without making self known.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Off. E. Burke</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed Robbery</td>
<td>Report that on 2-24-92 at 9:45pm he was approached by 2 suspects described in report. One suspect placed a butcher's knife to victim's neck and forced him in the driveway of #20 Trowbridge. Victim was forced to lie on ground at which time they took $8. cash, one franc watch and removed victim's glasses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off. Townes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stolen M/V</td>
<td>Reported that on 2-24-92 his M/V Ma. Reg 349-TZM, 1987 Toyota was stolen from the 99 Restaurant parking lot Concord Ave. T# 209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off. Clarke</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mal. Dest. P.P.</td>
<td>Reported that on 2-24-92 her M/V Ma. reg 615-TT6 was parked at 472 Franklin St at which time unknown persons smashed the rear window. Nothing missing at this time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off. Carter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrest Made</td>
<td>At 11:pm one Wayne M. Capper, DOB 10-7-76, 99 Menotomy St., Arlington was arrested at Mass. Ave and Alewife and charged with Disturbing the Peace and False Fire Alarm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off. Savoli/Valk*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Geographic Distribution of Cambridge Crime

Heat Map of Average Crimes, 1992-2005

Autor Palmer Pathak (MIT and NBER)
Measuring Neighborhood Rent Control Exposure

- RC data enumerate rent controlled units
  - Cambridge RC file (FOIA request + David Sims)
  - Enumeration of non-rent controlled units
- Measure of neighborhood rent control exposure

\[
RCi^\lambda = \frac{\sum_j RC_j \times e^{-\lambda d_{ij}}}{\sum_j e^{-\lambda d_{ij}}}
\]

- \(d_{ij}\): miles between a residential unit at location \(i\) and nearest point of block \(j\)
- \(d_{ij} = 0\) if unit \(i\) is in the block \(j\).
Estimating Equation

• Dependent variable $y_{gt}$
  • Ideally: log crime to capture proportional moves in crime rates, but many zeros
    → Our approach: report crimes per 1,000 m$^2$; also counts using Poisson reg

• Estimating equation:
Estimating Equation

- Dependent variable $y_{gt}$
  - Ideally: log crime to capture proportional moves in crime rates, but many zeros
  - Our approach: report crimes per 1,000 m$^2$; also counts using Poisson reg

- Estimating equation:

$$y_{gt} = \alpha_g + \delta_t + \beta \cdot RCI_g^\lambda \cdot \text{Post}_t + \epsilon_{gt}$$

- $\beta$ measures differential change in crime in high versus low rent control intensity areas after rent control’s elimination
Assumptions

Identification assumes:

- Change in RC status is exogenous (not fully anticipated)
- Exposure variable (RCI) conditional on block effects measures only effects of RC, and not other factors (not due to RC)
- Need only apply in differences (pre/post) not levels

Meaning of Rent Control Intensity (RCI):

- Measure of how much neighborhood affected by rent decontrol
- Potential concerns:
  - High-crime areas reducing crime more than low-crime areas
  - RCI correlated with initial crime → corr w/ downward trend in crime
  - Many strategies to address concern: trends, poisson, local linear regs, direct controls for initial crime
Event Study: Without Tract Trends

- 1 s.d. more rent control $\Rightarrow$ 11% lower crime after end of R.C.
Event Study: Linear Tract Trends

- 1 s.d. more rent control $\Rightarrow$ 7% lower crime after end of R.C.
# Main Estimates: Crime Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RCI x Post</td>
<td>-.194 ***</td>
<td>-.118 ***</td>
<td>-.014 **</td>
<td>-.038 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.070)</td>
<td>(.029)</td>
<td>(.006)</td>
<td>(.015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect of 1 s.d. ΔRCI</td>
<td>-9.37%</td>
<td>-13.25%</td>
<td>-14.17%</td>
<td>-12.02%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## A. Specifications Without Tract Trends

| RCI x Post     | -.107 **          | -.090 ***              | -.006              | -.026 **          |
|                | (.050)             | (.024)                 | (.008)             | (.012)            |
| Effect of 1 s.d. ΔRCI | -5.17% | -10.13%              | -6.33%             | -8.33%            |

## B. Specifications With Linear Tract Trends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean of Dependent Variable</th>
<th>.396</th>
<th>.170</th>
<th>.018</th>
<th>.060</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SD of Dependent Variable</td>
<td>.886</td>
<td>.324</td>
<td>.079</td>
<td>.164</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: N = 11,424, λ = 12. All specifications include year fixed effects and fixed effects for 816 adjusted blocks. Standard errors in parentheses clustered at the block level. The mean of RCI term is 0.392, and the standard deviation of RCI term is 0.218.

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
Proportional reduction in crime in high RCI areas?

- **Threat:** Possible that there is a larger proportional reduction in crime in high RCI areas, independent of RCI – a common issue in DiD specifications
  - Only three pre-years to check for parallel trends

- **Multiple alternative robustness approaches:**
  - Linear tract trends specs provide some comfort
  - Specifications of RCI by tercile
  - Poisson models, effectively a proportional estimator
  - Control directly for initial crime, initial RCI, and their interaction
  - Estimate nonparametrically to learn about higher-order complementarity
  - Falsification exercise with correlates of RCI x Post (red-line proximity, poverty rate, public housing)
  - Exclude Cambridgeside Galleria
Mechanisms / Displacement

- City-level evidence suggestive of aggregate crime decline
- Conversations with CPD highlight several plausible channels
  - Differential security investments in gentrifying areas (both private efforts and demand for public services)
  - Pricing out of juvenile delinquents (Census: % teenagers ↓ in gentrifying g)
  - Broken windows (Renovation boom in formerly RC units)

- Is this displacement?
  - If so, state less interested (though residents, developer, local gov’t still will be)
  - Aliprantis & Hartley (2014) aggregate effects from public housing demolitions
  - Using city-level FBI data, we can bound displacement < 50%
Little evidence of within-Boston MSA Displacement
## Counterfactuals

## Estimates of the Economic Cost of Crime

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crime Category</th>
<th>Victimization Cost (1)</th>
<th>Criminal Justice Cost (2)</th>
<th>Offender Productivity Cost (3)</th>
<th>Total Direct Cost (4)</th>
<th>WTP Cost (5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Property Crime</td>
<td>$1,291</td>
<td>$1,962</td>
<td>$811</td>
<td>$4,064</td>
<td>$12,291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Disturbance</td>
<td>$2,006</td>
<td>$2,457</td>
<td>$549</td>
<td>$5,012</td>
<td>$8,926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs &amp; Alcohol</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>$520</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>$520</td>
<td>$1,040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent Crime</td>
<td>$47,218</td>
<td>$13,772</td>
<td>$6,804</td>
<td>$67,794</td>
<td>$150,003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighted Average</td>
<td>$5,400</td>
<td>$3,061</td>
<td>$1,250</td>
<td>$9,711</td>
<td>$23,170</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Table reports the weighted costs per crime in 2008 dollars. Cost estimates for the most common offenses from Cohen and Piquero (2009) are weighted their relative within-category frequency in Cambridge.
Monetizing the Value of Averted Crimes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crime Category</th>
<th>Averted Crimes</th>
<th>Total Direct Cost ($1,000s)</th>
<th>Total Direct Cost PDV ($1,000s)</th>
<th>WTP Cost ($1,000s)</th>
<th>WTP Cost PDV ($1,000s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Property Crime</td>
<td>501</td>
<td>2,036</td>
<td>40,727</td>
<td>6,159</td>
<td>123,183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Disturbance</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>2,474</td>
<td>49,471</td>
<td>4,405</td>
<td>88,110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs &amp; Alcohol</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1,207</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>2,414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent Crime</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>5,215</td>
<td>104,291</td>
<td>11,538</td>
<td>230,758</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,188</td>
<td>9,785</td>
<td>195,696</td>
<td>22,223</td>
<td>444,464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(547)</td>
<td>(8,237)</td>
<td>(164,731)</td>
<td>(18,519)</td>
<td>(370,372)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Table reports estimates of the annual reduction in reported crimes attributable to rent decontrol from 1995-2005 in thousands of 2008 dollars using the specification with $\lambda = 12$. Estimates of the economic cost per crime come from Cohen and Piquero (2009) and are in 2008 dollars. The present discount value of averted crimes assumes a discount rate of 5%. Standard errors in parentheses underneath Total figures clustered at the block level.
Decontrol led Cambridge residential property to appreciate by $2B, renovation boom, neighborhood turnover, demographic change (Sims 2011, APP 2014)

Rent decontrol lowered Cambridge crime by $\approx 1,200$ crimes/year (16%)

Economic cost: $10m$ annual benefit to would-be victims (in $2008$)
  - PV of $200M \rightarrow 10\%$ of appreciation due to decontrol
  - Similar magnitude as effect of residential investment ($247$ million)

Takeaway: neighborhood change important component of RC effects