

Evictions per Filing in Illinois

Racially Disparate Patterns in Eviction Filing Outcomes

Emma Boczek

Teddy Knox

ABSTRACT

Recent research has highlighted the long-term consequences to tenants of receiving an eviction filing — even a filing that does not lead to an eviction. We examine census block group-level data to (a) determine which populations in Illinois are most affected by eviction filings that do not result in evictions, and (b) study the relationship between a census block group’s racial makeup and that its evictions per filing (EPF) rate — a measure of the likelihood that a given filing will result in a legal eviction. We estimate that while African Americans in Illinois from 2000 to 2016 are overall more likely to experience eviction filings *and* eviction judgments, they also experience the lowest EPF rate of any racial group, suggesting that they are the population most likely to have an unjustly marred eviction record. Specifically, we find that controlling for income and other factors, a 10 point increase in a census block group’s percentage of African-American residents is associated with a 4.4 percent decrease in that block group’s EPF rate.

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MISSION STATEMENT

The Paul Douglas Institute is a student-run, public policy think tank based at the University of Chicago. Inspired by the life and work of professor and Senator Paul H. Douglas, we channel public policy interest on campus into solution-oriented research projects that allow students to make an impact on the legislative process. To this end, we use a multidisciplinary approach to produce rigorous, data-driven social science research that is innovative, practical, and free from political affiliation. We often work with legislators and civic organizations, and welcome both research commissions and partnerships.

I. Background

After a landlord files an eviction case, a variety of outcomes are possible: a judgment against the tenant (an eviction order), a mutually agreed-upon settlement between the landlord and the tenant, dismissal by the judge, or a judgment in favor of the tenant, among others.¹ Yet according to a 2018 report by the Lawyers' Committee for Better Housing, "landlords will refuse to rent to someone if they see an eviction filing on their record, regardless of a case's context or outcome."² The tendency for eviction filings to follow tenants irrespective of case outcomes has been a topic of interest in recent years, with some groups proposing to seal evictions until a judgment has been decided against the tenant.³ Little research exists on the specific characteristics of those cases which do not end in legal eviction, but continue to follow the tenant in the public record. Following the work of sociologist Matthew Desmond, who identified race as a key risk factor in exposure to both formal and informal eviction,⁴ we aim to analyze the relationship between racial demographics and evictions per filing (EPF) rates across Illinois.

II. Methods

Our data source was the Eviction Lab, a publicly available collection of nationwide eviction data compiled by a team of researchers led by Desmond at Princeton University.⁵ Researchers compiled eviction data from a variety of sources — directly from courts, as well as from legal data providers. The project "classified a case outcome as an eviction if we could see that it contained a record of either a money or forcible detainer judgment for the plaintiff."⁶

We used an Eviction Lab dataset containing the number of eviction filings and evictions in every census block group in Illinois from 2000 through 2016. A census block group is the smallest geographical area used in U.S. Census data, generally defined as a contiguous area containing between 600 and 3,000 people.⁷

The dataset originally consisted of 9,691 census block groups, each with seventeen years of data. 76 block groups had 0 total eviction filings recorded across all years. Since we were concerned with the undefined ratio of evictions to eviction filings in those groups, we removed them from our analysis. We were left with 9,615 block groups, with records of a total of 1,064,232 eviction filings and 434,477 eviction judgments, yielding an aggregate evictions per filing (EPF) rate of 40.83 percent for the state of Illinois from 2000 to 2016.

¹ LCBH (2018: 6)

² LCBH (2018: 3)

³ Foertsch McKinney (2018), Dukmasova (2018)

⁴ Desmond (2016: 98)

⁵ Desmond *et al.* (2018)

⁶ Desmond *et al.*, Methodology report (2018: 28)

⁷ U.S. Census website (2019)

The dataset also included U.S. Census-sourced demographic information for each of the block groups across all years, including census block group population, median household income, poverty rate, and percentages of racial makeup for several categories (White, African-American, Hispanic, American Indian, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, other, and multiple races). These demographics were averaged over all years. For our regression analysis, we removed two block groups with median household incomes recorded as 0.

Some of the block groups in Illinois were missing eviction data for one or more years (out of a total of 17 years). We imputed missing years using the block groups' available years of data. 95.03 percent of the block groups had complete data for 15 or more years, and 91.95 percent of the block groups had complete data for 16 or more years. 2.03 percent of the block groups were missing 5 or more years of data. To calculate a block group's EPF rate, we divided its total recorded number of evictions by its total recorded number of eviction filings.

III. Analysis

Descriptive data analysis

The aggregated statewide EPF rate was 40.83 percent, meaning that 59.17 percent of eviction cases in Illinois from 2000 to 2016 did not result in judgments against the tenant, according to this dataset. A histogram of EPF rates in all block groups shows a bimodal distribution, with peaks at approximately 25 percent and 75 percent (see Figure 1).

The puzzle of the bimodality of this distribution can be partially solved by segmenting counties by racial makeup. Dividing the data into areas with populations above 50 percent white (6,960 groups) and those below 50 percent white (7,368 groups) yields the histogram in Figure 2, which shows two distributions that appear significantly more unimodal than that in Figure 1. While 79.0 percent of majority non-white areas had an EPF rate below 50 percent — meaning that less than half of these areas' eviction cases resulted in eviction — only 37.4 percent of majority white areas had an EPF rate in the same range.

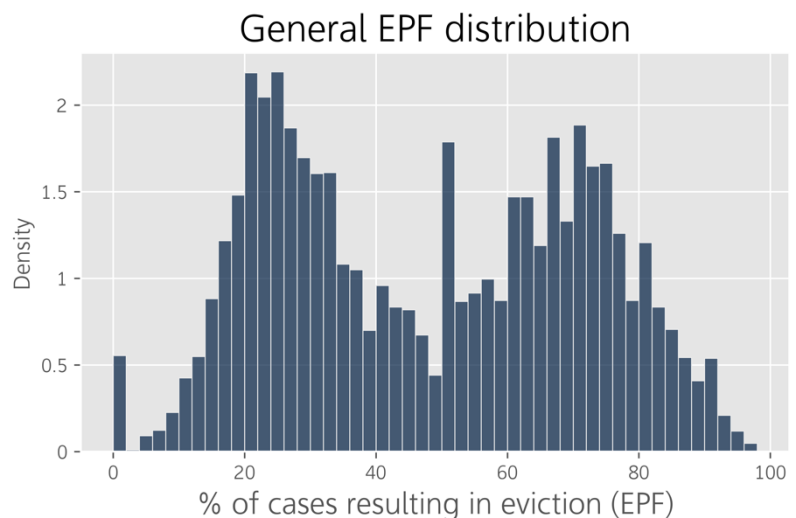


Figure 1

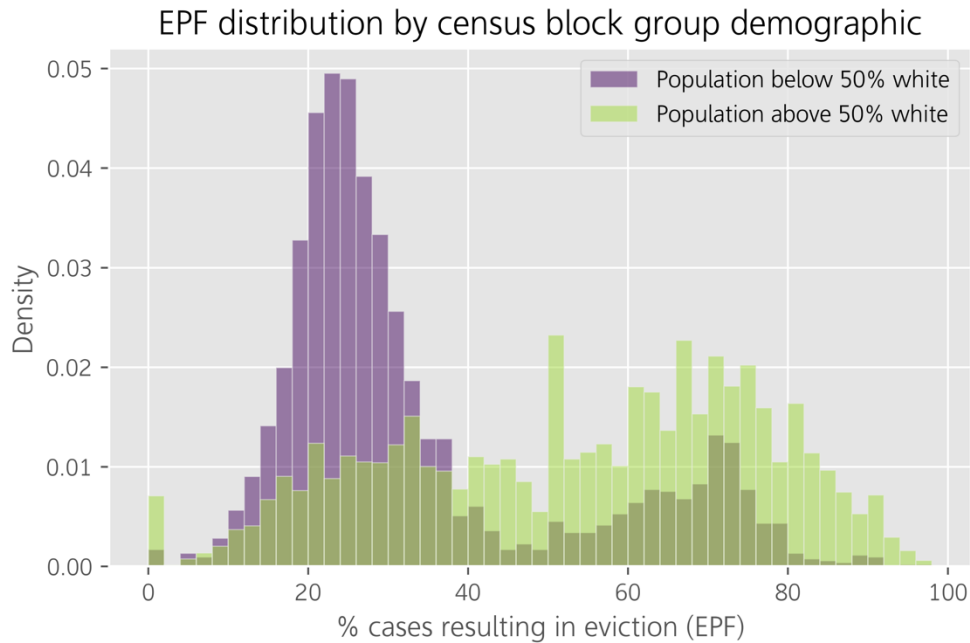


Figure 2

Notably, among majority African-American census block groups in our analysis (1,192), the median EPF rate was 24.77 percent, while among the remainder of the groups (8,423), the median EPF rate was 54.55 percent.

Figure 3 plots EPF rates against poverty rate, where each dot represents a census block group. No correlation is obvious, but the bimodal distribution of EPF appears again. Figure 4 adds the variable of race (specifically “percent white”), showing that many low-EPF areas are also highly non-white, with many low-EPF areas also having relatively high poverty rates. Qualitatively, it is clear that almost the entire cluster of low-EPF and high-poverty blocks are highly non-white.

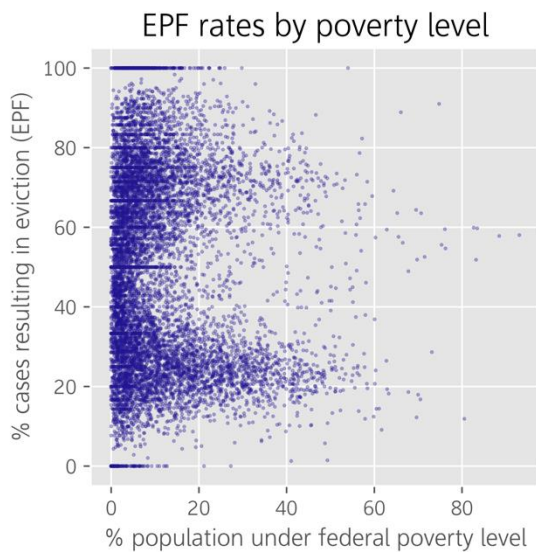


Figure 3

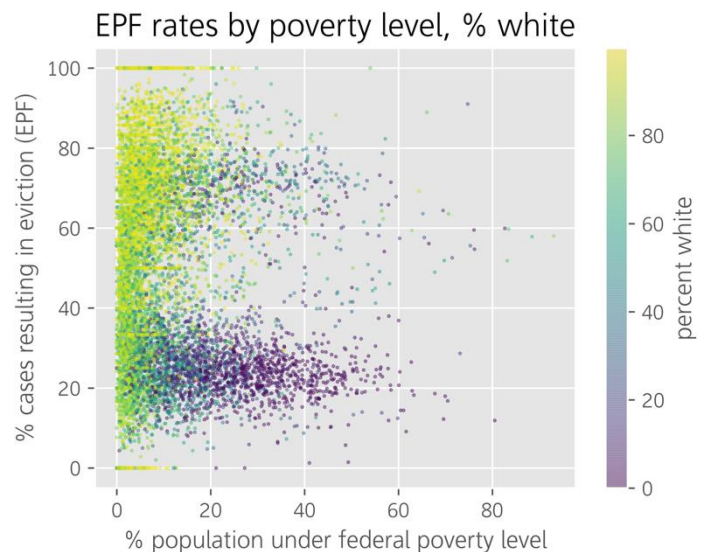


Figure 4

Finally, Figure 5 includes a block group's percentage of African-American residents, each dot again representing a census block group. The figure demonstrates that within a given income bracket — shown in blue in the figure as a standard deviation below median household income, a bracket where we might expect to see evictions — EPF decreases as a block group's percentage of African-American residents increases.

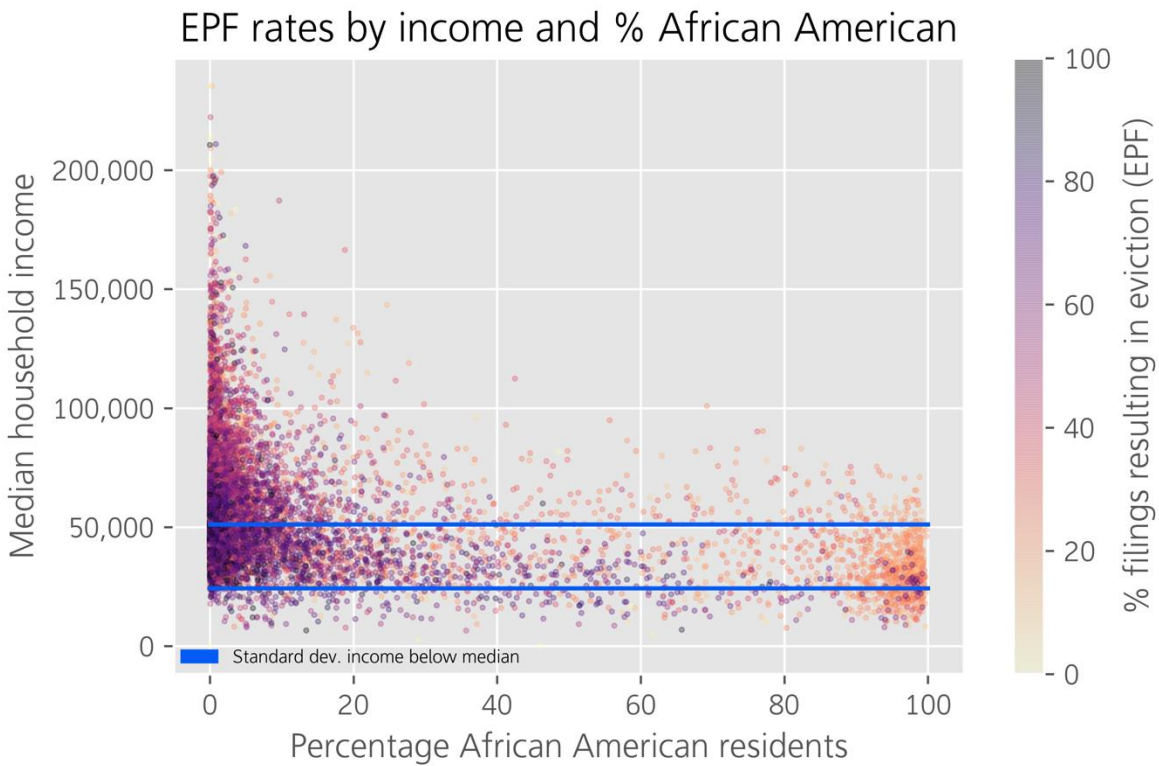


Figure 5

EPF estimates by race

The following analysis is an estimation of EPF rates in Illinois within individual racial groups. This analysis is not based on either observed or self-recorded racial identity of the defendants in eviction courts over this time period, as that information is not available in our data; instead, the analysis uses the racial makeup of a defendant's census block group as a proxy for the defendant's race. We recognize the inference involved in such an assumption and present our analysis as our best estimate of actual EPF rates.

To find a race’s filing and eviction rates, we used a census block group’s racial makeup to split its estimated annual number of filings and evictions (calculated by averaging across all available years) into its indicated racial groups, then aggregated across all block groups. A race’s EPF was then calculated by dividing its eviction rate by its filing rate.

The rate of filings and evictions we estimated within various racial groups — per 1,000 people of the indicated population, per year — is shown in Figure 6. Our analysis aligns with what has been well-established in recent literature on eviction— that African Americans experience eviction at a far greater rate than other populations.⁸ We estimate that African American Illinoisans had a rate of eviction filings 2.5 times that of the state overall, and a rate of eviction judgments at 1.9 times that of the state overall.

Yet African Americans experienced the lowest likelihood of a given eviction case becoming an eviction of any race, with an estimated EPF rate of 32.28 percent, compared with a white rate of 49.88 percent and a statewide rate of 40.83 percent. Figure 7 compares each racial group’s estimated EPF rate. We estimate that Hispanic and Asian tenants also experienced lower EPF rates than the statewide rate, at 38.99 percent and 37.89 percent, respectively.

Estimated filings and evictions by race

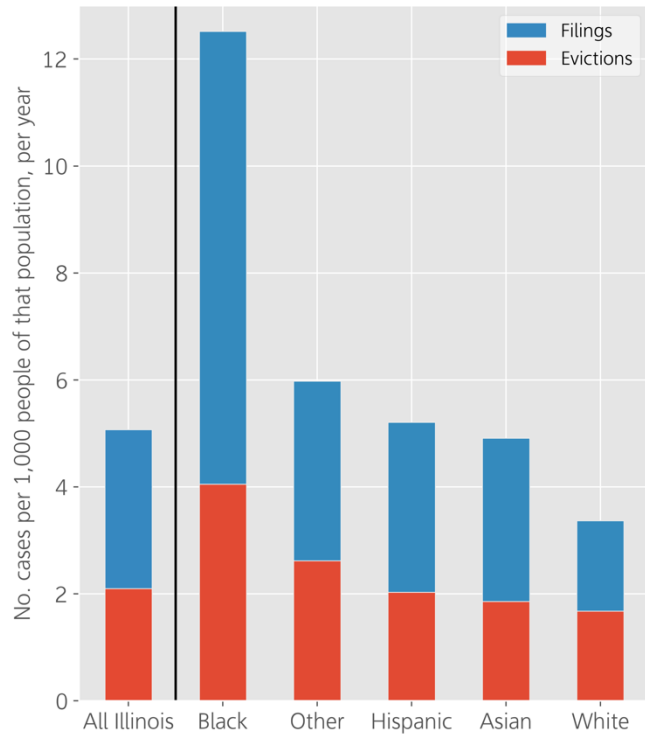


Figure 6

Estimated EPF within racial groups

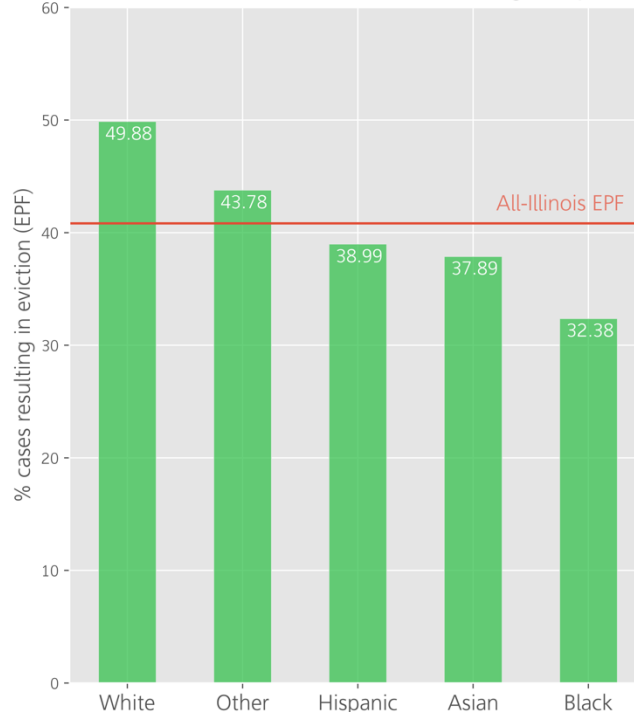


Figure 7

⁸ Desmond (2016: 98)

Regression analysis

The summary statistics and graphics presented above suggest disparate patterns of evictions, filings, and evictions per filing (EPF) among different racial groups — particularly the appearance that African American Illinoisans seem to be filed against and evicted at higher rates than other racial groups, while also having the lowest EPF rate of any race. However, such methods are unable to study the interactions between race, income, and other factors that determine a block group’s (or an individual’s) EPF. In this section, to more precisely estimate the relationships between race, income, and eviction patterns, we run linear regressions on observations of those values grouped by census block group.

Figure 8 summarizes the findings of three linear models:

$$\begin{aligned} (1) \text{ EPF} &= \beta_0 + \beta_1 a + \epsilon \\ (2) \text{ EPF} &= \beta_0 + \beta_1 a + \beta_2 \ln(Y) + \epsilon \\ (3) \text{ EPF} &= \beta_0 + \beta_1 a + \beta_2 \ln(Y) + R\beta_3 + \epsilon \end{aligned}$$

where a is % African American, Y is median household income, and R contains the race shares for all races other than white and African-American, as well as the total number of eviction filings.

Model (1) is a simple univariate regression of a block’s percentage of African American residents onto its EPF rate. It finds that a 10 point increase in percentage African American is associated with a 2.8 percent decrease in EPF; this agrees with examination of Figure 5, which shows visually the smaller EPF rate experienced by largely African American census block groups.

Model (2) includes a control for (logged) median household income in each block group. After fixing income, the measured effect of percent African American becomes larger; model (2) finds a 10 percent increase is associated with a 3.8 percent decrease in EPF. Interestingly, the coefficient on $\ln(MHI)$ is negative, suggesting that a (for example) 10 percent increase in MHI is associated with a 1.36 percent *decrease* in EPF. This effect may arise because having more income allows an individual to more effectively dispute an eviction filing, and therefore lower her chances of the filing becoming an eviction.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Evictions per Filing (EPF)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
% Black	-0.279*** (0.009)	-0.383*** (0.009)	-0.443*** (0.009)
log(MHI)		-14.282*** (0.562)	-17.796*** (0.528)
eviction filings			-0.015*** (0.002)
% Hispanic			-0.445*** (0.011)
% Asian			-0.900*** (0.033)
% All Other			0.102 (0.142)
Constant	54.193*** (0.276)	210.603*** (6.166)	260.330*** (5.840)
Observations	9,613	9,613	9,613
R ²	0.100	0.156	0.354
Adjusted R ²	0.100	0.156	0.354
Residual Std. Error	23.667	22.912	20.052
F Statistic	1,063.592***	889.731***	877.368***
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01		

Figure 8

Finally, model (3) includes controls for all the other race shares in the dataset, except for percent white. In model (3), the coefficient on percent African American implies that a 10 point increase is associated with a 4.4 percent decrease in EPF. This can be interpreted as the effects of increasing a block's concentration of African Americans relative to its concentration of whites, whereas model (2)'s coefficient represents concentration of African Americans relative to concentration of all other races. Model (3) also controls for a block's number of eviction filings, which we theorize may affect EPF through caseload; courts with more eviction filings to deal with annually may have their eviction court resources stretched more thinly, and may therefore be more likely to throw out or dismiss a case. We find such a relationship confirmed modestly; each additional eviction filing (over 17 years) is associated with a 0.015 percent reduction in EPF.

It is worth noting that model (3) has the greatest explanatory power of the three models, explaining 35 percent of the variance in EPF, where (1) and (2) explain only 10 percent and 16 percent, respectively.

IV. Conclusions

We estimate based on Eviction Lab data that African Americans experience the lowest evictions per filing (EPF) rate of any race in Illinois — 32.38 percent, compared to 40.83 percent for all Illinoisans and 49.88 percent for white Illinoisans. Controlling for median household income, rate of eviction filings, and shares of all other non-white races, we find that a 10 point increase in an area's percentage African American population is associated with a 4.4 percent decrease in EPF rate.

At first glance, having a lower EPF rate may seem desirable; wouldn't a tenant with an eviction filing want a lower chance of being evicted? However, such a perspective ignores the mathematical reality that EPF can be lowered simply by raising the number of filings that do not result in evictions, and that such filings appear on background checks and therefore have significant negative impacts on their holders. So in some situations, it is possible that a lower EPF rate does not mean “an easier time in court,” it rather means “a greater number of baseless – but still harmful – filings.”

Thus, we emphasize that African-American Illinoisans' lower EPF rate does not mean that they are better off in the eviction court context; recall that an African American tenant is both much more likely to experience both an eviction filing *and* an eviction than a tenant of any other race. Our results show that in addition to these previously-established disparities, African American tenants in Illinois are the racial group most susceptible to experiencing eviction filings that do not end in legal eviction, but that remain in the public record and may prevent tenants from finding future housing. Though this study does not investigate the reasons for racially disparate EPF rates, the data may reflect a discriminatory pattern in which landlords are more willing to turn to legally punitive measures in areas with more non-white (and particularly, African American) tenants.

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The Paul Douglas Institute
5801 S Ellis Ave
Chicago, IL 60637

www.pauldouglasinstitute.org