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ABOUT THE JOURNAL

The Public Purpose Journal is a peer-reviewed interdisciplinary journal presenting the work of American University graduate students from the Departments of Government, Justice, Law, and Criminology, and Public Administration and Policy. Founded in 2002, The Public Purpose is supported by the SPA Graduate Student Council with the involvement and guidance of the Faculty Review Board, consisting of some of American University's most distinguished professors. In addition to an annual print journal, The Public Purpose also manages an online public affairs publication (thepublicpurpose.com). The journal is entirely student-run and currently has a staff of about 10 students.

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FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Readers,

It is an honor to present the **23rd edition of *The Public Purpose Journal***—an academic journal by and for American University’s School of Public Affairs (SPA) graduate students. We are privileged to build on two decades of excellence in public affairs research in this journal and throughout SPA. As a student-run organization, we are especially grateful to the Graduate Student Council and the Dean’s Office for their continued support.

We are proud of *The Public Purpose Journal* (PPJ) 's sustained presence on campus over the past 20 years, serving as a platform for professional development and a constructive outlet for generations of graduate scholars. This year stands as a testament to the journal’s staying power. We received many wonderful submissions for the 2025 print edition, making the selection process incredibly competitive and rewarding. We appreciate the enthusiasm and engagement from our peers, and we hope this signals even greater success in the years to come.

As we reflect on two decades of public affairs scholarship, we’re struck by the threads that continue to weave through our work- psilocybin legalization, affordable housing, voting disenfranchisement, school safety measures, unemployment, and data centers, that consistently shape our present society.

We believe the work presented in these pages reflects the best of what SPA offers: innovative and rigorous scholarship in public policy, administration, government, law, justice, criminology, and terrorism studies. The topics span a broad spectrum—from environmental remediation and immigration to public benefits and pandemic response—but they are united by thoughtful analysis, robust research, and a shared dedication to answering the guiding question of our field: “What is our public purpose?”

We sincerely thank everyone on the team for their thoughtful, efficient work. We’re also grateful to our executive board members for their behind-the-scenes leadership, especially our Editor-in-Chief, **Ananya Malhotra**. **Samuel Backner**, Communications Director, for his unwavering support, not just confined to communication but coordinating every single detail with the team and authors. We thank our Managing Online Editor **Zan Hussain** for his relentless efforts with editing, formatting and proofreading and **Robert C. Shugart** for his valuable feedback and structuring tips with the editing process.

And finally, thank you, our readers, for your ongoing engagement with *The Public Purpose Journal*.

Warm regards,

Ananya Malhotra, Samuel Backner, Robert C. Shugart and Zan Hussain

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REFRAMING THE AMERICAN PSILOCYBIN LEGALIZATION MOVEMENT FOR POLITICAL SUCCESS

by Micah Allred

Abstract

Psilocybin is a hallucinogenic compound found in over a hundred varieties of psilocybe mushrooms. Commonly referred to as “magic mushrooms,” they are a variety of fungi that thrive naturally in the US (Psilocybin, 2022). The social movement to legalize psilocybin in the US has become more widely accepted over the last decade, but remains on the margins of the national discourse. Decriminalization has occurred in a patchwork of cities, districts, states, and other countries. Yet, the hope of federal legalization, decriminalization, or rescheduling remains distant. To broaden its appeal, the social movement to legalize psilocybin must reframe the issue to the public. Rather than advocating for psilocybin legalization as a social justice or religious rights issue, it should be reframed primarily as a healthcare issue. To achieve this, psilocybin legalization advocates should utilize popular publics (beneficial societal connections to favorable people, groups, and institutions) to mirror the successful medicinal cannabis legalization movement.

Introduction

The psilocybin legalization movement began in 1970 when President Richard Nixon started the “War on Drugs” by signing the Controlled Substances Act (Marlan, 2021)(Controlled Substances Act, 2022b). Nixon and traditional intellectual supporters of the CSA used strategic framing to create a common purpose for the criminalization of psilocybin. During this time, Nixon was facing fierce public backlash for his administration's politically unpopular policies, especially the prolonged war in Vietnam (Garza, 2016). In retaliation, two leading movement actors were targeted as political threats to his administration: African Americans and the anti-war left (Garza, 2016). His administration then began a campaign of astroturfing to amplify inauthentic public hysteria against drug use. Utilizing frame bridging, his administration could discredit perceived political opponents by linking psilocybin to criminal behavior detested by the public. Nixon’s Domestic Policy Advisor John Ehrlichman confirmed this strategy, stating in a 1994 interview later published in Harper’s: “Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of Course we did” (Baum, 2016).

Framing Psilocybin Legalization as a Religious Right

The value amplification of psilocybin legalization as a religious right has been one of the most effective framing devices utilized by the wider social movement until now. The centuries-long use of psilocybin in spiritual practices by some Native American groups helped establish the religious framing that sparked a decades-long legal battle for its legalization in the US (Thorne, 2020). In 1981, Assistant Attorney General Theodore Olson issued the “Olson Memo” to the Drug Enforcement Administration that focused on the Constitution’s First Amendment Free Exercise and Establishment Clause, requiring that legislation’s primary function should neither aid nor inhibit religion and prevent excessive entanglement of church and state (Olson, 1981). While it specifically addressed the Native American churches' usage of peyote, it had broader implications for the limited decriminalization of other mind-altering substances for spiritual practices, including psilocybin.

While religious freedom has proven beneficial for the wider legalization movement, its limitations have proven its unviability for the movement nationally. There is a lack of cultural solidarity between advocates who use hallucinogenic substances for religious purposes and advocates who support psilocybin’s wider legalization on secular grounds. Indeed, many Native Americans who use hallucinogens as part of their historical religious practices view the use of these substances outside of religion as abusive, dangerous, and a cultural appropriation of their heritage (Thorne, 2020). With the legalization of hallucinogens for religious purposes already largely decriminalized, the broader movement to legalize psilocybin now lacks a common purpose with religious freedom advocates. This lack of an effective mobilization trigger now requires the psilocybin legalization movement to lean into newer incentive structures to achieve its goals.

Framing Psilocybin Legalization as Healthcare

The recent frame amplification for the legalization of psilocybin has been based on the emerging scientific understanding of its medical benefits. Consuming psilocybin can lead to an altered perception of yourself and the world around you, often referred to as “ego death” (Marlan, 2021). Studies published by the NIH have shown psilocybin’s promise in treating tobacco and alcohol addiction, mood and anxiety disorders, providing psychiatric relief for cancer patients, and supporting end-of-life care (Griffiths & Johnson, 2017). It’s been shown to be comparatively safe to other drugs used for similar treatments, despite the medically inaccurate counter framing historically espoused by the DEA (Campbell et al., 2025). Psilocybin has been shown in recent studies to be one of the safest drugs known in the CNS class of pharmaceuticals, which primarily affects the central nervous system (Griffiths & Johnson, 2017). With controlled dosages, healthcare professionals present, and treatment environments contained, possible adverse effects can be readily managed.

According to Pew, 90% of Americans believe the country is in a mental healthcare crisis (Insel, 2023). America has the most expensive healthcare system in the world, leading many patients to advocate for cheaper, healthier, and more organic substitutes to traditional Western medicine (PGPF, 2023). The Opioid Crisis has made citizens and healthcare professionals especially desperate for alternatives to dangerous and addictive medications. America’s mental health crisis and the promising results of recent psilocybin studies have presented legalization advocates with a perceived opportunity to use frame bridging to link the social movements of healthcare reform and psilocybin legalization through a common purpose. This framing has already seen national traction: 2018 the FDA issued a breakthrough therapy designation to Compass Pathways for psilocybin research (Cheung, 2018).

The motivational framing of the movement for legalizing psilocybin as a social justice issue is necessary but strategically flawed. Because social justice framing often clashes with conservative values, it’s unlikely to persuade those who originally supported psilocybin’s criminalization as a tool to target left-wing activists. However, frame extensions that combine healthcare and social justice perspectives, such as arguing that criminalization punishes sick Americans seeking relief, can still be powerful.

The Status of Psilocybin Legalization in the United States

Medicinal cannabis is legal to varying degrees in thirty-nine states and the District of Columbia. According to the Pew Research Center, medical marijuana enjoys broad support among 88% of American adults, including 84% of Republicans (Green, 2022). This is significant because conservatives have historically opposed both cannabis and psilocybin reform (Galston & Dionne, 2013). Their gradual support for medical cannabis legalization was a product of the successful framing of its health benefits and the successful counter framing of its grossly exaggerated health and societal risks (Campbell et al., 2025). While most states where cannabis is still illegal are Republican-controlled, the majority of these states allow for its limited legalization for medical use (Crampton & Zhang, 2022).

In 2022, Daniel Pae, a Republican representative from Oklahoma, introduced legislation to legalize psilocybin research in his state, with the intention of helping combat veterans (Oklahoma House of Representatives, 2023). It passed with bipartisan support in part because Oklahoma lawmakers were concerned about their state's comparatively high suicide rate (Suicide mortality, 2023). Similar legislation has been introduced in other politically conservative states such as Florida, Texas, Utah, and Missouri (Crampton & Zhang, 2022). Although federal rescheduling of psilocybin may seem necessary for medical legalization, the example of cannabis—still a Schedule I drug, yet legalized in many states—shows that state-level reform is possible without it (Campbell et al., 2025).

Conclusion

With the legalization of hallucinogens for religious purposes already secured on a limited basis, the broader movement to legalize psilocybin now lacks a common cause with religious freedom advocates. Additionally, its social justice framing is politically ineffective among the social conservatives who conceived of psilocybin criminalization as a way of legally targeting groups on the political left. Thankfully, recent breakthroughs in medical research have provided the psilocybin legalization movement with a stronger argument to advocate for its legalization. Paired with

America's mental health crisis, the psilocybin legalization movement has been presented with an opportunity to link the social movements of healthcare reform and psilocybin legalization through a common purpose. To gain more excellent national support, the movement must reframe psilocybin's criminalization as a product of government overreach that impedes a potentially safer healthcare alternative to other costly or addictive treatments, negatively impacting veterans and exacerbating the national mental health crisis.

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ANALYZING THE IMPACT OF MOVING-TO-WORK PROGRAMS ON AFFORDABLE HOUSING

by Ryan Coady, Ryan Doucette, and Pretlow Parrott

Abstract

Affordable housing remains a pressing concern in the United States, particularly for low-income families burdened by rising housing costs. In response, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) launched the Moving to Work (MTW) program in 1996 to grant Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) greater flexibility in using federal funds. This paper evaluates MTW programs' impact on affordable housing quality—measured by physical inspection scores—using synthetic control models and data from HUD's Real Estate Assessment Center (REAC) and the U.S. Census Bureau. Our analysis of 1,189 cities from 2010 to 2023 revealed mixed outcomes. While some cities, such as Pittsburgh and Atlanta, improved public housing quality, others showed no significant change or inconclusive results due to model imperfections and unobserved external variables. Limitations in standardized data collection, varied policy implementation, and exemptions for higher-scoring properties complicate consistent evaluation. These findings highlight the variability of MTW program outcomes and underscore the need for improved data and oversight to assess and enhance the effectiveness of flexible federal housing policies.

An Introduction to the Moving to Work (MTW) Program

Affordable housing continues to be a source of concern for the United States, with 69 percent of Americans reporting that they were “very concerned” about the cost of housing—an increase from 61 percent in April 2023. These concerns are exasperated for low-income families whose incomes are further strained, given continued rises in the cost of housing. Under the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) standard that “no more than 30 percent of household income should go toward housing costs,” over 31.3 percent of American households reported being cost-burdened in 2023 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024).

To address these challenges, in 1996, HUD's Moving to Work (MTW) program was launched to allow Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) to use public funding more flexibly (Urban Institute, 2021). By waiving specific regulations, funding can be used for different services for their residents and housing improvements. However, MTW has represented a significant change in traditional federal housing policies since its inception, shifting responsibility from HUD and the federal government to local authorities.

This paper seeks to answer the question, “What is the impact of moving-to-work programs on the quality of affordable housing as determined by decency, safety, sanitary, and good repair?” By analyzing data provided by HUD on the MTW program and corresponding city-level data from the Census Bureau, we used a synthetic control model to determine whether the program successfully improved the quality of affordable housing.

Legislative Origins and Early Implementation of the MTW Program

Congress authorized the Moving to Work Demonstration Program in the FY1996 omnibus appropriations law (P.L. 104-134). Section 204 of Title II of P.L. 104-134, codified at 42 USC 1437f Note. The language of the bill directs the Secretary of HUD to conduct a demonstration program providing PHAs with the flexibility to design and test approaches for providing housing assistance to low-income families outside of the rules that govern HUD's primary assisted housing programs (the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher and the low-rent housing programs). The bill intended to test ways to achieve three policy objectives: reducing costs and increasing cost-effectiveness in providing assisted housing, encouraging the self-sufficiency of assisted families, and increasing housing choices for low-income families. When the law was implemented, the Secretary of HUD selected 30 PHAs for participation and conducted detailed evaluations for 15 participating agencies to replicate the program models. The original legislation of the program was broad as it did not specify approaches to assisted housing for MTW agencies to develop and measure.

Since MTW's authorizing language gave HUD broad implementation discretion, the program faced criticism for its nonuniform design, which led to policy variation and hindered cross-agency comparisons. HUD's early data collection did not reflect differences in PHA income and rent policies, resulting in missing tenant information (42 U.S.C. § 1437f, n.d.). As a result, HUD struggled to evaluate MTW impacts. In 2008, HUD introduced a standard agreement with uniform language to improve reporting while preserving flexibility (Brick & McCarty, 2012). Still, performance data collection remained inconsistent. By 2012, GAO found HUD had increased compliance monitoring, but key terms like "self-sufficiency" and "housing choice" were undefined, causing data issues (42 U.S.C. § 1437f, n.d.). Agencies were required to define these terms and meet two statutory benchmarks: serving 75% low-income individuals and maintaining service levels. HUD reported 91% of individuals served were low-income, and all but one agency met the family threshold (Brick & McCarty, 2012). GAO acknowledged improved oversight but highlighted the ongoing lack of standard definitions and evaluation systems.

Following the 2000s, HUD and PHAs participating in the program continued to improve the flexibility of their funding and revenue and explored more accessible pathways to implement their strategy. Such innovations undertaken by MTW agencies can be described in five categories: improving cost effectiveness, increasing the quality and quantity of affordable housing, increasing self-sufficiency, promoting residential stability for targeted households, and expanding the geographic scope of assisted housing (Khadduri et al., 2014). The main concern revolved around Public Housing Authorities' ability to pull funds when executing projects. As a result, MTW agencies sought to increase the cost-effectiveness of assisted housing programs by streamlining administrative procedures to reduce the number of staff hours needed and, in many cases, minimize the burden on households (Khadduri et al., 2014). The agency also streamlined its processes for inspecting housing units rented by housing choice voucher households. Ultimately, streamlining activities for MTW agencies reduced the costs of procedures, thereby freeing resources for other uses.

MTW agencies identified increasing the quality and quantity of public housing as a key priority, using MTW funds to modernize older units and revitalize distressed developments. This investment sometimes required shifting resources from the Housing Choice Voucher Program, leading to reduced voucher reserves and increased use of project-based vouchers. MTW flexibility allowed agencies to adopt policies that strategically used vouchers to increase access to low-poverty and transit-rich areas and support intensive services for those needing housing (Levy & Edmonds, 2020). To promote self-sufficiency, agencies implemented "rent reform" policies, such as flat subsidies and time limits. For example, Tacoma introduced a flat subsidy at 50 percent of the payment standard with a 5-year limit, while Lincoln Housing Authority included a minimum earned income amount in rent calculations, generating additional revenue and reducing subsidy costs (Levy & Edmonds, 2020).

MTW agencies have also begun exploring other avenues, such as providing housing subsidies to partner organizations to develop affordable housing units. Finally, MTW has taken a variety of approaches away from the traditional Housing Choice Voucher program, such as changes to payment standards, lifting the gross income cap for households, and increasing landlord recruitment incentives to expand the geographic scope of assisted housing and help facilitate moves to areas deemed "opportunistic," (Levy & Edmonds, 2020). An example of an opportunistic change would be the King County Housing Authority partnering with the Highline school district to pilot a rapid re-housing approach for addressing the growing number of homeless students in the county's public schools.

An Overview of Available MTW Data

To assess whether MTW programs have a higher quality of public housing, we used public housing physical inspection scores to assess housing conditions and overall quality. Specifically, the HUD's Real Estate Assessment Center (REAC) conducts physical inspections of any properties under HUD jurisdiction (US Department of Housing and Urban Development, n.d.). This data is released annually and covers the period from 2001 to 2023.

Physical inspection scores run on a 0 to 100 scale and can be interpreted incrementally: scores below 60 are "troubled performers" with properties having significant issues and requiring immediate attention; 70–79 are "standard performers" with properties having moderate deficiencies but livable; 80–89 are "high performers" with properties having few issues, and 90–100 are

“excellent performers” with properties being well maintained and managed with few issues (HUD Loans, 2023). Those with scores between 80 and 100 are also subjected to fewer inspections than those with scores indicating numerous property issues (HUD Loans, 2023). As we want to observe the impact of the 2016 MTW expansion, we limited our dataset to include only public housing authorities with observations between 2010 and 2023.

To create a more robust analysis of MTW programs, controls to make comparisons across similar cities were included in this analysis. These city-level controls included population data, average household income, the number of individuals below the poverty line, and the amount of total housing available through private real estate and public housing. Population data was collected from the United States Census Bureau’s *State Population Totals and Components of Change: 2010–2019* dataset and their *City and Town Population Totals: 2020–2023* (SimplyAnalytics, 2018a), (SimplyAnalytics, 2018b), and (SimplyAnalytics, 2018c). These included city-state level population data, which we matched with the city-state level inspection score dataset, keeping only the population data for cities with observable public housing authorities from 2010 to 2023.

Poverty, housing, and income data were collected from the United States Census Bureau’s *American Community Survey (ACS)* (SimplyAnalytics, 2018a), (SimplyAnalytics, 2018b), and (SimplyAnalytics, 2018c). Using the source SimplyAnalytics, we manually gathered poverty, housing, and income data for all the cities within our merged inspection score and population dataset. Income was estimated at the median household level within each city. Housing was measured as the total number of units within each city, and poverty was estimated as the number of individuals living below the federal poverty line. These variables and city population data were chosen as they inform us of the overall city dynamic and demographics. Income, poverty, population, and housing allow us to compare cities like Chicago with other cities of similar size and civilian characteristics. After merging this data into our dataset, we now had a balanced dataset with 1,189 cities total, and when formatted to a long data form, our total dataset contained 5,997 observations.

Synthetic Control Model Results

Oakland, Charlotte, Baltimore, and Atlanta indicate that post-treatment MTW programs have some impact on the quality of public housing in these cities. Oakland, Charlotte, and Baltimore show that MTW programs succeeded in 2018, two years after each city’s PHA was accepted into the program. While these results indicate a small positive impact of the program, our output indicates that these are imperfect models. Oakland, Baltimore, and Charlotte show that our treatment and synthetic control groups diverged prior to our treatment year. As each of these cities diverged in 2015, this may mean that these cities faced similar shocks during this time period. In general, this output indicates that additional control variables should be included to account for this unobserved factor prior to treatment. New Haven and Chicago are two cities where we see no post-treatment effect of being an MTW program.

From the seven synthetic control models analyzed within this study, our results vary (see Figure 1), with some cities showing no post-treatment effect, some positive post-treatment effects but blurred by uncontrolled variables, and one city indicating a negative post-treatment effect (Pittsburgh). Chicago and Atlanta offer two different results; they are our study’s best-fitting models. While Atlanta shows a positive effect in our original model, when we run a placebo-year test, using 2015 as a placebo treatment year, we now see that our treatment and control group do not follow similar trends in our post-placebo treatment year. A similar result was found in Chicago, where after our placebo treatment year, Chicago saw a drop in physical inspection scores, while synthetic Chicago remained consistent over time. This divergence among our placebo tests may indicate that our model did not account for external factors that occurred in either our treatment cities or among those within our donor groups. Further, our model lacked data for the years 2011 and 2012, meaning our models, especially during our placebo tests, lacked sufficient data to complete robust tests.

Pittsburgh is the only city maintaining similar directional trends in the pre- and post-placebo year tests (see Figure 3). If we extend our analysis of Pittsburgh to 2019 (see Figure 2), we see that the MTW program in Pittsburgh showed a successful outcome, with physical inspection scores being in the 70s as compared to below 60 if they were not an MTW program. In terms of quality, this is going from a troubled performer with many issues on a property to a standard and livable property. This outcome tells us that MTW programs can positively affect a PHA’s public housing. As

Pittsburgh is the sole city to indicate a positive effect of being an MTW program, it is a testament to its variability. As each PHA can use funding flexibility under this program differently, we should expect different results among PHAs, depending on how they prioritize their funding.

Conclusion

Affordable housing remains a pressing concern in the United States. As discussed, the MTW program, introduced in 1996, sought to improve the quality of affordable housing by providing PHAs greater flexibility in using federal funds.

Through this analysis of the impact of MTW programs on housing quality, our findings determined mixed success, depending on the PHA. While some MTW programs, such as those in Atlanta and Pittsburgh in specific years, demonstrated improvements in physical inspection scores, the overall results were inconsistent. In several cities, MTW programs either underperformed compared to synthetic controls or were affected by external factors not accounted for in the analysis. Furthermore, the relaxed inspection protocols for higher-performing programs may have been biased toward a more accurate housing quality assessment. These challenges, at large, suggest that flexibility may not exclusively derive consistent improvements in housing standards.

These findings are significant for the future of housing policies, as over 31 percent of households remain burdened by housing costs. For the MTW program to better serve those utilizing PHA facilities, policymakers should minimize gaps in data collection and ensure standardization in such efforts. More robust oversight measures and more precise performance benchmarks are critical to ensure the program's flexibility leads to better living conditions for residents. While the MTW program holds promise as an innovative approach to affordable housing, its outcomes have yet to be consistently observed. As housing costs continue to rise, refining and strengthening MTW program policies is important to ensure affordable housing in the United States.

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Appendix

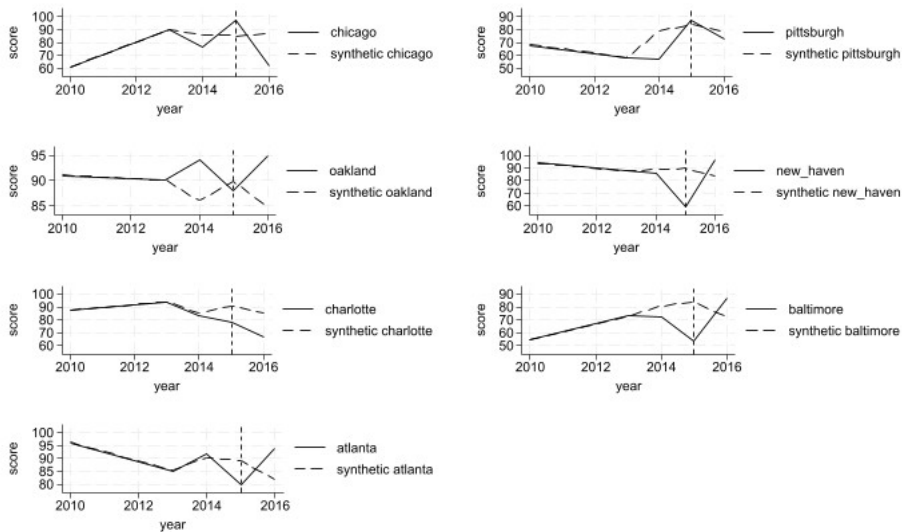


Figure 1: Effect of the MTW Treatment.

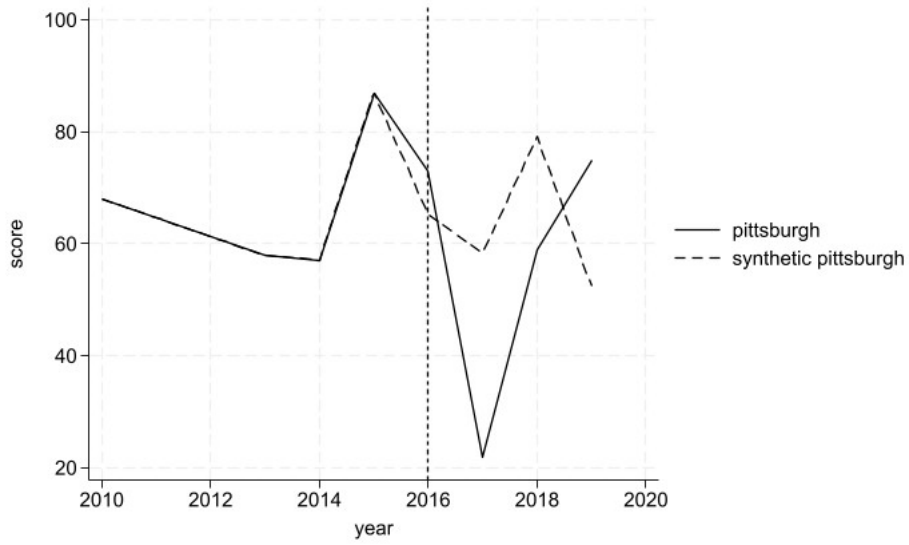


Figure 2: Effect in Pittsburgh.

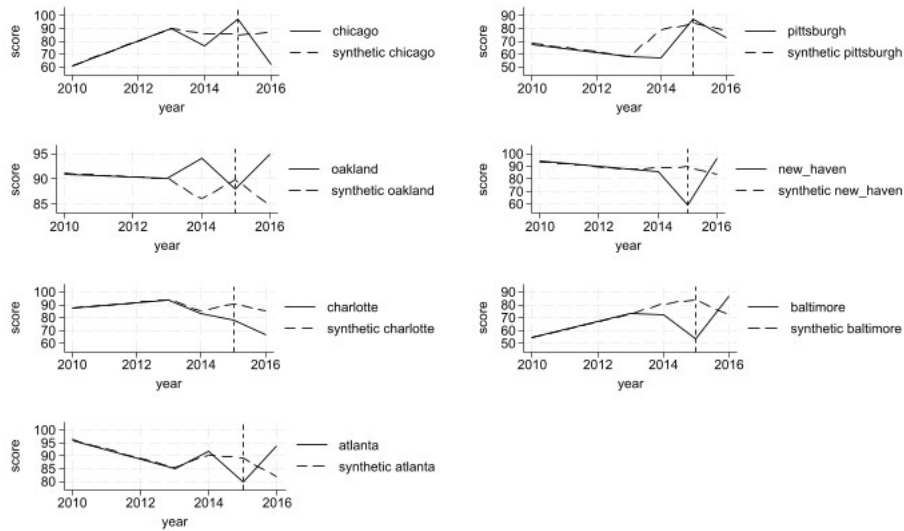


Figure 3: Placebo Effect of the Treatment.

Disenfranchisement by Design: The Impact of Arizona’s Documentary Proof of Citizenship Laws

by Katelynn Contreras

Abstract

Arizona's documentary proof of citizenship (DPOC) laws, including House Bill 2492, were introduced to address concerns about non-citizen voting but have sparked significant criticism for disenfranchising eligible voters, particularly marginalized groups such as students, low-income individuals, and racial minorities. While proponents argue these laws are necessary for election security, evidence of widespread non-citizen voting remains limited. Legal rulings and administrative errors have further complicated the implementation, causing voter confusion and undermining trust in the system. To ensure security and accessibility, Arizona should consider alternatives such as an affidavit-based system, utilize existing databases for verification, and adopt more inclusive registration practices.

Background on Arizona’s Documentary Proof of Citizenship: Aiming for Security, Risking Disenfranchisement

In Arizona, laws requiring voters to provide documentary proof of citizenship (DPOC) during voter registration aim to enhance election security by preventing non-citizen voting. However, these laws have faced legal challenges and are criticized for disenfranchising eligible voters, especially marginalized groups like students and low-income individuals, who struggle to meet strict documentation requirements. Critics argue that, despite the intent to protect election integrity, these laws disproportionately affect vulnerable communities, adding burdens that hinder voter participation.

House Bill 2492 (HB2492), introduced by State Representative Jake Hoffman (R-12), mandated strict DPOC requirements for Arizona voters (H.B 2492, 2022). This bill mandated more stringent proof of residency. It required all voters to verify their citizenship, which went beyond the national standard of simply signing a mail-in ballot under penalty of perjury. HB2492 also penalized election officials who failed to comply with the new verification requirements, increasing the stakes for election administrators. The bill granted the AZ Attorney General the authority to prosecute individuals who were not U.S. citizens (H.B. 2492, 2022). Critics argue that this provision could lead to overzealous enforcement and the unjust prosecution of individuals mistakenly flagged as non-citizens. Concerns about non-citizen voting fueled this shift in Arizona’s approach to voter eligibility, though evidence of widespread such activity remains scarce.

On the national stage, the Safeguard American Voter Eligible Act (SAVE Act), or H.R. 22, was introduced with similar intentions. The SAVE Act sought to impose documentary proof of citizenship requirements for voter registration nationwide (H.R. 22, 2025). Proponents of the bill argued that addressing the potential for non-citizens casting votes in U.S. elections was necessary, echoing concerns raised by HB2492 in Arizona. However, the SAVE Act faced considerable opposition, as its new DPOC requirements were seen as a barrier that could disenfranchise eligible voters who struggled to prove their citizenship status, such as married individuals who changed their last names or transgender individuals who changed their name and now do not match their birth certificate and/or passport. Lempert, Orey, and Weil noted that while you must be a citizen to vote, proving citizenship is not always simple or straightforward (Lempert et al., 2024). This difficulty is not merely theoretical - Arizona’s experience illustrates the real-world complications of enforcing such laws. During the 2024 presidential election, a coding glitch in the state’s Motor Vehicle Department led to over 218,000 voters mistakenly marked as ineligible due to missing DPOC documentation that the MVD did not collect (Hupka, 2024). This incident, combined with the rollout of new DPOC requirements, caused significant confusion and disenfranchisement, especially among voters who believed they were already adequately registered.

These challenges are not unprecedented. The controversy surrounding Arizona’s DPOC laws reflects a broader pattern of voter mistrust in the United States' electoral system. Technical failures and administrative mistakes have historically undermined confidence in election integrity, as seen during the 2000 presidential election with the “hanging chads”, malfunctioning voting machines,

police presence at polling sites, and voter purges. Carol Anderson has observed that such breakdowns “put great stress on the public’s faith in electoral integrity,” a pattern that continues in Arizona’s recent electoral administrative errors (Anderson, 2019).

The claims of non-citizen voting that prompted both the SAVE Act and HB2492 are based on the assumption that non-citizens are illegally casting ballots in large numbers. The penalties for non-citizen voting—ranging from prison sentences to deportation—are so severe that it is unlikely any non-citizen would risk such consequences, further undermining the claims of widespread non-citizen voting. Further, the Arizona Constitution explicitly prohibits non-citizen voting under Article 7, Section 2 and studies have shown that instances of non-citizen voting are exceedingly rare. Research has found only 77 cases of non-citizens attempting to vote in the state over the past 24 years (Brown et al., 2024). Despite the lack of evidence supporting these claims and outright disinformation, the narrative of non-citizen voting has remained a powerful justification for the introduction of stricter DPOC laws, both in Arizona and across the country (Joffe-Block, 2024; Morgan & Goudsward, 2024; Waldman, 2024). The lingering narrative of non-citizen voting has become a potent political tool, justifying increasingly stringent laws that complicate voter registration and undermine political trust -- particularly when implemented without adequate infrastructure or safeguards.

Barriers to the Ballot: Legal Conflicts, Administrative Failures, and the Unequal Impact of DPOC Laws

Legal Context

A recent Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruling upheld Arizona’s requirement for DPOC (HB2492) for state-specific voter registrations while blocking the state from applying similar verification requirements to federal voter registration forms (Republican National Committee v. Mi Familia Vota, 2024; Pearson, n.d.). This decision raised concerns about the law’s effectiveness in preventing voter fraud while simultaneously creating significant barriers for eligible voters. The ruling highlighted the tension between the state's efforts to secure elections and the potential for disenfranchisement, particularly among those who may face difficulties proving their citizenship status. In contrast, the courts struck down a similar law in Kansas after it was determined to violate both the National Voter Registration Act and the U.S. Constitution. The court found that Kansas’ DPOC law had disenfranchised thousands of eligible voters, with only 18 cases of noncitizen voter registration (Cheng, 2023). This underscores the legal risks of implementing such laws without compelling evidence of widespread voter fraud.

Administrative Errors

In Arizona, the implementation of DPOC laws has been marred by administrative errors that have caused confusion and misinformation for voters. For example, in Pinal County, nearly 900 longtime voters were mistakenly informed that they needed to provide proof of citizenship to register to vote or to have their ballot verified and counted, highlighting significant flaws in the state’s law implementation (Fifield, 2024b). Another troubling error occurred in Maricopa County when nearly 2,000 long-time voters were incorrectly flagged as needing to submit a DPOC to vote in the 2024 presidential election (Fifield, 2024a). These errors are not isolated incidents but reflect a broader pattern of confusion and administrative missteps that undermine the integrity of the voting process. Such mistakes raise serious concerns about the efficiency and fairness of the state’s voter verification systems, mainly when new laws are introduced without adequate resources or training to ensure proper implementation.

Voter Access

The implementation of DPOC laws further complicates voter access, particularly for marginalized groups. Over 21 million Americans lack readily available documentation to prove their citizenship, making it difficult for many eligible voters to participate in elections (Morris & Henry, 2024). The issue disproportionately affects low-income individuals, racial and ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities--groups that are already underrepresented in the electorate. This lack of access suppresses individuals' voices at the ballot box, skews political representation and policy outcomes, reinforces systemic inequalities. When large segments of the population cannot vote, their communities lose political power and access to resources, deepening existing social and economic

disparities. As a result, the electorate becomes less reflective of the general population, and political outcomes tend to favor more ideologically extreme candidates on both ends of the spectrum, further polarizing the political landscape. Introducing new requirements, such as DPOC laws, places additional burdens on these populations, who may struggle to obtain the necessary documentation. This has led to concerns that such laws are less about protecting election integrity and more about suppressing the vote, particularly among vulnerable groups who may not have access to the required documentation or the resources to navigate the complex bureaucracy of meeting the new standards.

Toward a More Equitable System: Policy Solutions to Modernize Voter Verification and Expand Access

Reassess DPOC Implementation

Given the evidence suggesting that DPOC laws disproportionately affect eligible voters, Arizona should consider adopting more inclusive voter registration practices. The current system, which requires citizens to submit documentation proving their citizenship status, places undue and unconstitutional burdens on many voters, particularly those in marginalized communities (Cheng, 2023). These barriers not only disenfranchise eligible voters but also contribute to confusion and administrative errors that undermine the integrity of the voting process. A reassessment of these laws would ensure that Arizona's voter registration system is more accessible and equitable while maintaining safeguards to prevent voter fraud.

Affidavit System

One potential solution to the challenges posed by DPOC laws is the return of the affidavit system, where voters simply sign an affidavit affirming their citizenship status under penalty of perjury when registering to vote or casting a ballot. This system would reduce the burdens placed on voters by DPOC laws while maintaining accountability. Instead of requiring individuals to submit physical documents, the state could leverage existing databases--such as IRS records, immigration data, Social Security, and driver's license databases--to verify citizenship. These databases are already accessible to state authorities and provide a more efficient and accurate means of verifying voter eligibility. By relying on these systems, states can ensure that only eligible citizens vote, moving the burden of proof back to the state rather than placing undue barriers on voter participation. Returning to an affidavit-based system would streamline the process and restore trust in the electoral system while allowing states to maintain oversight through modern verification methods.

How Other Countries Vote

Looking to other countries for solutions may provide helpful insights for improving the U.S. voter registration system. For instance, in Germany, voters are typically required to present a "voter's notice", similar to a U.S. voter registration card. If a voter's notice is missing, they must provide identification to cast a ballot. This system is straightforward and ensures that only eligible voters participate, without creating unnecessary barriers to voting. In Arizona, the voter ID laws mandate that an individual must present identification to enter a polling booth - this is in addition to being assigned a voter registration card. Similarly, the standard practice for mail-in voting in Germany is to submit a signed affidavit, which affirms the voter's eligibility and citizenship status. This system helps streamline the voting process while maintaining security. The U.S. could benefit from adopting similar practices to ensure voter registration and voting procedures are more accessible without sacrificing election integrity.

Leverage HAVA Funding

According to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) provides a significant opportunity for states to modernize their voter registration systems and improve election processes without imposing burdensome DPOC requirements (2023). Leveraging HAVA funds can help Secretaries of State, County Records, and County Election Directors modernize their election systems (Anderson, 2019) so that the burden to DPOC effectively shifts back to the government rather than placing undue burdens on voters, or potential voters, HAVA, which the Carter-Ford Commission primarily shaped, created provisions for the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) to help states standardize and modernize their voting systems. However, HAVA

also includes provisions that have contributed to the chaos and disinformation surrounding voter fraud claims, particularly the requirement for voter identification nationwide. In 1986, former U.S. Senator Kid Bond (R-MI) pushed for language mandating voter identification, which was initially meant to apply to only those who registered by mail (Anderson, 2019). This requirement has since expanded, leading to the nationwide controversial push for voter ID laws.

While the original intent of these provisions was to ensure voter integrity, they have been used to justify overly restrictive identification laws that disproportionately affect marginalized voters. To mitigate these issues, states should leverage HAVA funding to implement more inclusive voter registration systems, ensuring that the process remains accessible to all eligible citizens while addressing concerns about election security. By using HAVA resources to improve election infrastructure, states can reduce the reliance on restrictive DPOC laws and create a more equitable voting system.

Conclusion

Arizona's DPOC laws, particularly HB2492, aim to prevent non-citizen voting but have created significant barriers for eligible voters, especially marginalized groups. Despite minimal evidence of widespread voter fraud, these laws disenfranchise those struggling to meet strict documentation requirements. Administrative errors further fuel confusion and mistrust. To improve accessibility while protecting election integrity, Arizona could consider reinstating an affidavit system, leveraging federal databases like HAVA, and exploring international models such as Germany's. A more inclusive, efficient voter registration process would ensure all eligible citizens can participate without unnecessary obstacles.

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The Failures of Chicago Public School Safety Measures Under Rahm Emanuel

by Zan Hussain

Abstract

A prominent policy failure under Rahm is the school safety measures initiated to ensure higher well-being for students and teachers. The policy failure under Rahm will be critically examined for its shortcomings in the Chicago Public Schools system. Although these measures were intended to promote student and teacher well-being, they often failed to meet their objectives and, in some cases, contributed to further issues. The analysis focuses on how the Whole School Safety Plan was structured and executed, revealing gaps in implementation, a lack of accountability, and the disconnection between policy intent and field-level implementation. An evaluation of the policy's background, outcomes, and limitations will offer insights into how these safety strategies fell short and present recommendations for more effective and equitable approaches to school safety. An in-depth analysis is necessary to understand the policy's shortcomings and where many issues have arisen.

Background of CPS Safety Measures

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) developed a Whole School Safety Program that safeguards students through several holistic measures. The program addresses students' physical, psychological, social-emotional, and behavioral well-being. The policy is broken down into three distinctive processes, each addressed separately: physical safety, emotional safety, and relational trust. Notably, this policy takes place on school grounds, and its applicability is only affiliated with school events and functions (Whole School Safety Plans, 2024).

The Whole School Safety lays out specific guidelines that all faculty must abide by to guarantee the safety of students in school, regardless of age, grade level, or school governance. The policy stipulates the need for a Behavioral Health Team (BHT) composed of Administrator(s), School Counselor(s), and Social Worker(s) when they are available. This includes, but is not limited to, a Nurse, School Psychologist, SEL Coordinator, School Disciplinarian, Case Manager, other relevant stakeholders, and community-based organizations or clinicians. Additionally, the policy requires recruiting staff for behavioral health and wellness, a cross-departmental whole school safety committee, and culturally responsive roles. These prerequisites are integrated into the policy and establish the implemented holistic measures (Whole School Safety Plans, 2024).

Furthermore, the components of school safety are delineated into two distinctive parts. Each part is then defined into proactive and reactive measures, including a climate development process and a safety response. The Whole School Safety Plan (WSSP) is summarized through a physical safety, emotional safety, and relational trust plan (Whole School Safety Plans, 2024).

Through its climate development, the physical safety plan aims to safeguard the entrance of individuals through the school, ensuring students have safe passageways through the building. Regarding the safety response, the school enforces measures to respond to threats within the building. Accordingly, the policy establishes a preemptive measure to create a physically safe environment for students and implement a contingency plan for a threat at the school. Both the principal and ancillary measures are hallmarks of robust policy. Concerning the emotional safety component of WWSP, the climate development plan seeks to create an inclusive, calming environment conducive to student learning. This is a preemptive measure for the school environment, and the school has established a reactive safety response to this. Disciplinary systems are in place to support students and teachers and mitigate any distractions or threats that may risk students' well-being. Lastly, relational trust is the primary component of the WSSP policy. For the proactive measure, teachers and students are entrusted with individuals in the building who can speak about their concerns. Following this proactive measure, the contingency or reaction measure must execute mandates reporting for shared or discovered issues. This ensures that crises or threats are prevented before they occur (Amin, 2024).

A diverse committee of principals, students, teachers, and representatives from community-based organizations (CBOs) cooperated to establish this framework. The stakeholders behind this policy come from various backgrounds and carry influence in the policy's implementation. The

Whole School Safety Plan operates through physical, emotional/behavioral safety, and relational trust. The CPS recognizes the necessity of a safe environment for student welfare. When each of these is effectively interwoven, it creates a robust policy that maximizes student safety and mitigates potential student threats. Moreover, the CPS explicitly stated that the usage of School Resource Officers will effectively end by the start of the 2024-2025 school year—a decision made to make students feel connected with teachers and school administrators (Masterson, 2024).

Analysis of CPS Safety Measures

This decision was evaluated through data and empirical examination of its impact on student safety. Consequently, a few outcomes correlated with this policy decision. Firstly, a study conducted by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research discovered that removing uniformed police officers had little effect on the perception of safety among students and teachers. Interestingly, the study determined that the removal of uniformed police officers *did* result in fewer extreme disciplinary incidents, including violent, drug-related offenses and behavioral issues requiring police intervention. There has been a marginal success rate in community-building among schools that have allocated resources towards methods outside of funding school resource officers (Arneson, A., Hinze-Pifer, R., Franklin, K., & Johnson, D.W., 2024).

The University of Chicago Consortium on School Research presented its findings on its website with noticeable implications. High schools that retained SROs had higher suspension rates, were smaller, and served fewer socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The data from the findings present a consistent rate of school resource officers with special education status children and schools with predominantly black children. The main issue with this policy is that it did not have the desired outcome. Instead of providing a more inclusive learning environment, the SROs correlated with the school's racial patterns (Arneson, A., Hinze-Pifer, R., Franklin, K., & Johnson, D.W., 2024).

There were distinguishable patterns in high schools, with more reported behavioral infractions and higher suspension rates among schools that retained one or more SROs. The report states, “Specifically, of the 29 high schools with the lowest suspension rates in 2022-2023, eight had an SRO presence (1-2 SRO). For the 29 high schools with the highest suspension rate, 22 had an SRO presence” (Arneson, A., Hinze-Pifer, R., Franklin, K., & Johnson, D.W., 2024). The weaknesses of this policy derive from the racial and economic implications associated with the SRO retention. Furthermore, “Of the 29 high schools serving the highest proportion of free or reduced-price lunch eligible students (92% or higher), only nine had no SROs” (*UChicago*, 2024). These findings display a strong correlation between economically disadvantaged and black children and higher retention of SROs. High schools that retained SROs had a significantly higher percentage of suspension rates and routinely disregarded socioeconomically underprivileged students. Therefore, the findings indicate race was factored into the decision to maintain SROs by Local School Councils (Arneson, A., Hinze-Pifer, R., Franklin, K., & Johnson, D.W., 2024).

The study results show a significant reduction in high-level school infractions for 2018-2019 and 2022-2023. Figure 9 of the study found 165-180 high-level infractions for schools retaining between partial and complete SROs. These findings are an unreliable school safety gauge because of reported incidents. Conversely, schools that removed actual or expected SROs were under 130. However, despite these numbers, the report found that the removal of SRO did not significantly correlate with the suspension changes. Also, removing SRO did not lead to perceived notions of safety among students or teachers (*UChicago*, 2024). Consequently, the school's intentions to achieve trust were not realized through this policy. The perceived discrimination and racial patterns demonstrate the drawbacks associated with the policy's implementation. Moreover, the SRO removal did not elicit student-teacher trust. The findings reveal that police notifications were lower with the removal of SRO, but that decline was not a significant difference (*UChicago*, 2024). Although the analysis indicated marginal success rates in particular areas, there was no substantive impact on physical and emotional safety and student-teacher trust. Accordingly, this policy resulted in limitations from the empirical outcomes (*UChicago*, 2024).

A former Chicago Board of Education member, Dwayne Truss, says officer removal is too narrow. Other issues, such as literacy and academic matters, are often overlooked. He believes schools should consider multiple solutions (Morrow, 2024). A multifaceted approach to school safety frequently reflects wisdom in leadership. In "Organizational Ethics—Acting Wisely While Facing

Ethical Dilemmas in Leadership”, authors Conger, Jay, and Robert Hooijberg discuss how an environment full of safe actions promotes wisdom. Wise leaders must be objective and critical of their decisions, ensuring they lead to a holistic product and promote a common good for short-term and long-term outcomes. Wisdom in leadership must be versatile and adaptable; when one solution is inefficient, leaders must dispel biases and establish the most effective outcome for their stakeholders (Conger, Jay, Hooijberg, 2008).

Recommendation/Conclusion

A suitable solution would be to consider the school environment. The policy implemented by CPS is not necessarily about fostering inclusion but rather conducting surveillance of students. This can lead to a heightened sense of stress among students. Instead, schools should consider a policy that promotes a more vigorous environment for students to feel welcomed and safe. This policy would incorporate violence prevention programs, mental health interventions, and social-emotional well-being. The policy would instill crisis-prevention methods that prevent school violence and student harm. This method can be achieved through positive connections students make with adults and teachers (*Ten Essential Actions To Improve School Safety*, 2020).

This policy, initiated by the Chicago Public Schools, resulted in several negative consequences that merit evaluation: the data obtained indicates that the number of school resource officers at schools statistically correlates with more black students and students of economic disadvantages. As aforementioned, a heightened sense of apprehension can ensue when students feel as if they are under constant surveillance, thus making them less likely to form healthy connections with adults. Students don't feel safer physically or emotionally, and lack trust in teachers. The policy did not directly increase student welfare or community-building, nor did the policy's implementation instill feelings of confidence or safety among students. There is excessive police surveillance in schools, leaving other issues like literacy and education to be relegated. A stronger emphasis on community-based practices should be established to prevent deficiencies of trust and safety in schools (Karp & Issa, 2024).

The Washington Law Committee proposes applying the School Safety Enhancement Act of 2023 to establish procedures to enhance student welfare. A core tenet of this policy is that there should be more mental health services and violence de-escalation instead of a more significant police presence. The manifestation of police officers is often attributed to escalating altercations, tensions, and a hostile environment, all of which are detrimental to the well-being of the school community. Implementing this policy will decrease students' paranoia and discrimination in their schools and communities. Furthermore, the School Safety Committee, the School Safety Director, and the School Safety Teams, a part of the School Safety Director are key parts that will foster a safer learning environment for students. The School Safety Committee gives families, educators, students, and agency leaders greater say in developing solutions to maximize school safety. This would be collaborative and would mean tailoring solutions from diverse backgrounds. The subsequent component provides the resources and framework to hire and train School Safety Directors and School Safety Teams. These staff members would then work with community stakeholders to cultivate positive relationships and implement practical, evidence-based solutions to achieve positive outcomes in student learning, safety, and well-being. This policy would assign a director to each school, assembling a team of supporters to design and execute plans tailored to each school, ensuring a customized safety approach. The Council would require \$26 million to facilitate this initiative. Although ostensibly astronomical, it is undoubtedly feasible; the District has spent even more funds on hiring school security guards and resource officers, nearly \$40 million on school security and MPD officers alone. In the 2024 fiscal year, the Council would need to appropriate \$4.5 million for school safety measures, ensuring that every high school has a designated safety director for the academic year (Committee, W. L., 2023, April 21). This proposal is pertinent to the Chicago Public Schools as it accentuates specific safety measures while considering their impacts on surrounding communities.

By integrating this proposal into the Chicago Public Schools, students, teachers, and parents will feel safer and be regarded in their school community. A well-established policy considering external safety factors is paramount to integrating positive connections between students and adults. The School Safety Enhancement Act is a good start when considering the most effective safety policy under this policy. Schools can implement holistic safety measures considering diverse backgrounds

and perspectives from adults, teachers, and safety professionals. Additionally, this policy will likely stem students' fears of being surveilled and targeted based on race or economic background. A policy like the School Safety Enhancement Act demonstrates an all-inclusive approach to student safety and well-being.

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EXPLORING THE ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN UNEMPLOYMENT, MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME, EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT, UNION MEMBERSHIP RATE, AND ESL

Ananya Malhotra, Samuel Backner, and Serena Zhou

Abstract

This study examines the relationship between educational attainment, median household income, unionization rates, and native English-speaking status on unemployment in the United States in 2022. Drawing on data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the American Community Survey, the analysis builds upon labor market disparities intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic. Multivariate regression results indicate that higher educational attainment and greater household income are associated with significant reductions in unemployment, with bachelor's degrees and income exerting the strongest effects. In contrast, union membership and non-native English-speaking status are positively associated with unemployment, though their effects are modest. Notably, English-speaking status emerges as a statistically significant predictor of higher unemployment rates when controlling for other factors. These findings contribute to the broader discourse on labor market inequality and suggest implications for policies aimed at reducing structural barriers to employment.

Introduction

The pandemic of 2020 inflicted a significant shock on the U.S. labor market, with the unemployment rate peaking at 8.65% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, [BLS], 2020). Certain groups carried a heavier burden of unemployment than others; for example, the unemployment gap between those with high school diplomas and those with bachelor's degrees or higher increased to 8.8% (BLS, 2020). Unionization rates also surged by more than 46.5% in 2020, with unionized workers proving less susceptible to job loss (EPI, 2021). Additionally, the economic downturn exacerbated disparities among American families, with median household income dropping by 2.1% during the pandemic compared to pre-COVID levels due to widespread unemployment (Hokayem et al., 2021). However, the labor market began to recover in 2022, with the unemployment rate returning to 3.61% (BLS, 2022).

This memorandum aims to investigate whether these factors continue to play significant roles, and to what extent, in U.S. unemployment in 2022, utilizing data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the American Community Survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. Additionally, native English-speaking status will be included in the assessment, as language skills are related to employment outcomes. English is the language associated with the most significant reduction in unemployment (Bleakley & Chin, 2004; Gomez, 2017). Therefore, the research question is: "What is the effect of median household income, educational attainment, workforce unionization rate, and native English-speaking status on the unemployment rate in the United States in 2022?" Despite the copious amount of research that has explored the association of these variables, most relevant studies focus on their relationship with employment outcomes. Expanding the scope of research on unemployment could provide crucial insights for improving policies related to education, income inequality, and unionization.

The research reveals that educational attainment (bachelor's degrees) and median household income significantly decrease unemployment. A one percentage point change in these two factors can bring down unemployment by 29% and 1.7%. Conversely, union membership rates and non-native English speakers have fewer advantages in maintaining job security. Each unit change in these variables increases the chance of unemployment by 0.01 and 0.04, respectively. Furthermore, a regression analysis of median household income on unemployment and three other variables was conducted to ensure the model's internal validity. However, only English-speaking status showed a statistically significant result, increasing unemployment by 0.039. This memo will proceed to the literature review section, followed by a summary of descriptive data, a discussion of the results, and conclude with the analysis's limitations and policy implications.

Literature Review

As unemployment is a crucial theme in labor economics, several literatures have explored its connections with the variables in this memo (bachelor's degree attainment, median household income, union membership rate, and ESL speakers). DePrince et al. (2008) argued that higher education attainment is associated with lower expected value of unemployment at any given time, while encouraging more active labor force participation, with the involvement increased from an average of 42.92% for those with no high school degree and 79.63% with college degrees. Riddle and Song (2011) suggested that higher education not only reduces the incidence of unemployment but also raises the probability of full-time reemployment by 6% to 7% with each additional year of schooling, increasing after completing high school, demonstrating long-term effects of education on individuals who are out of the workforce. While the previous studies tend to focus on the impact of wages on unemployment, this paper will use the relevant research as the reference for the median household income variable, since wages are the main component of the factor. High wages are less correlated to unemployment rate, since workers with higher income are more likely to move between positions and avoid the negative influence of the labor market conditions on them (Wiczer and Edubanks, 2014). The reverse effect of unemployment on income also deters unemployed individuals from reclaiming their financial security, even when they find new opportunities. The willingness of workers to negotiate for higher wages would decrease as the duration of unemployment increased, which restrains the normal wage growth (Pacitti, 2021).

Unions are discovered to play an affirmative role in employment, compared to the complex dynamics between wages and unemployment. Union members were 2.1 times more likely to maintain their jobs under the COVID-19 pandemic than those who are not; in other words, individuals with no affiliations with unions have a greater risk of unemployment, especially during economic downturns (Kim, 2023). The monopolistic nature of unions enables them to effectively coordinate between their members and employers, thus safeguarding the interests of workers in achieving improved wages and job security while also amplifying their bargaining power (Naeim & Rahimzadeh, 2020). Similarly, the relationship between language speaking and unemployment is quite positive. Strong language skills are considered a valuable asset in the labor market (Bleakley & Chin, 2004).

Additionally, speaking one foreign language is shown to decrease the probability of unemployment by at least 3.4% (Gomez, 2017). Interestingly, English appears to be the dominant language in significantly reducing unemployment among the six countries in the study (Gomez, 2017). All the preceding research on the main variables discussed in this paper provides meaningful reference for interpreting the results of this study.

Descriptive Statistics

Unemployment rates are the key economic indicator that measures the percentage of people actively seeking employment but currently unemployed (BLS, 2022). *Educational attainment* is the highest level of education an individual has completed, measured in bachelor's degree attainment (ACS, 2022). *Median Household income rates* are defined as the median of the pre-tax cash income of all household members combined (ACS, 2022). The median household income is logged to mitigate outliers. It also allows us to see the effect of income on unemployment in percentage form. Logging dollar amounts is a common practice because of the size of the numbers involved. *Union rates* are defined as the union membership rate—the percent of wage and salary workers who were members of unions (BLS, 2022). *The state* determines ESL rates as the share of the U.S. population speaking a language besides English at home. All data was collected in 2022, except for ESL in 2021. The estimated regression for these variables is as follows -

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{householdmedianincomerates} + \beta_2 \text{educationalattainment} + \beta_3 \text{unionrates} + \beta_4 \text{englishspeakinglevelrates} + u$$

The null hypothesis for this analysis is that the variables Median household income rates, Educational attainment, Union rates, and English-speaking levels do not affect unemployment ($\beta_1 = \beta_2 = \beta_3 = \beta_4 = 0$). The alternative hypothesis is that the variables Median household income rates,

Educational attainment, English-speaking levels, and Union rates affect unemployment ($(\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4 \neq 0)$).

These data sets were taken from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and American Community Survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, with 51 observations present for each state in the United States and the District of Columbia. There were no significant outliers, only a large variety, and the results were spread out for each state. States in the South and Midwest tended to have lower income, union, educational attainment, and non-English speaking rates than those in the Northeast and West. The Midwestern United States tends to have more rural communities with less access to educational opportunities and big industries, and the cost of living is also lower than on the coasts.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Variables	Average	Max	Min
Unemployment Rates	3.4%	5.4% (Nevada)	2.1% (North Dakota)
Educational Attainment	21.3%	28.8% (Colorado)	15% (West Virginia)
MedianHousehold Income Rates	\$73,581	\$101,027 (D.C.)	\$52,719 (Mississippi)
ESL	14.9%	43.9% (California)	2.3% (West Virginia)
Union Rates	29.9%	65.9% (New York)	3.8% (South Dakota)

Econometric Model/Estimation

The estimated coefficient for educational attainment is - 0.017. On average, as the education rate changes by one percentage point, the unemployment rate decreases by 0.017 percentage points, *ceteris paribus*. Such a result is aligned with the previous relevant studies, reaffirming a positive connection between college education and employment. A bachelor's degree could benefit workers by reducing the risk of unemployment. Furthermore, higher median household income is continually found to reduce unemployment. The regression shows that employment can decrease by 29% as the median household income increases by one unit, holding other factors constant. Interestingly, the union membership rate shows a different picture of its relations with unemployment. The bargaining power of unions exacerbates unemployment, with its estimated coefficient of 0.016, indicating that unemployment increases by 0.016 percentage points, accompanied by a one percentage point change in union rate, *ceteris paribus*. This finding is different from the previous theories on the positive role of unions in maintaining job security for workers. One potential explanation for this is that employers are found to be more likely to engage in unfair labor practices to intimidate and fire employees and prevent them from engaging in union activities (Ferguson, 2016). The estimated coefficient for the rate of non-English speakers is 0.044. The unemployment rate can increase by 0.04, with the speaking population increasing by one per cent, *ceteris paribus*. The result here validates the previous research on the workers' advantages in employment with speaking English; however, knowing foreign languages does not seem to help prevent workers from being pushed out of the workforce in the U.S. (Gomez, 2017). All four variables are statistically significant at the 90% confidence level, with the overall p-value of the F test (joint hypothesis of all variables) being 0.00, which manifests the statistical significance of the model.

The regression analysis thus rejects the null hypothesis that the variables Median household income rates, Educational attainment, English speaking levels, and Union rates do not affect

unemployment. Instead, we accept the alternative hypothesis that the variables of interest in our analysis affect unemployment.

The adjusted R² of our overall regression model is 47%, suggesting around 47% variations in unemployment (dependent variables) which can be explained by the regressors chosen in the model. Moreover, the economic significance of our models varied based on the variables. A 29% decrease in unemployment due to increased median income is impactful, as this is a large magnitude. The education and union coefficients are less marginally significant as their magnitudes are 0.017 and 0.016, respectively. The sign for the education rate coefficient is negative, confirming that unemployment would decrease with additional education. It is surprising that higher unionization can increase unemployment, regardless of the size of the margins, as opposed to past studies. The magnitude of the non-native English speaker variable remains small, as it shows that one is 0.04 times more likely to be unemployed if one does not speak English as one's first native language.

$$\text{unemp} = 3.547 - 0.29 \text{ lmedinc_n} - 0.017 \text{ educ_n} + 0.016 \text{ union} + 0.04 \text{ esl} \quad (0.28) \quad (0.15) \quad (0.009) \quad (0.005) \quad (0.01)$$

An alternative regression was run to check the accuracy of the regression analysis. As shown in Table 4, the median income was the dependent variable, whereas unemployment, education, English speaking levels, and union rates were the regressors. Upon running the regression, it was found that most of the regressors were not statistically significant at the 95% confidence interval. The English speaking level variable was the only statistically significant at the 95% confidence interval, with a p-value of 0.013. This shows that the original regression has higher significance and validity as the variables are jointly significant. Even at the 90% confidence interval, only the English speaking levels were statistically significant, as the p-value was 0.013. Although the model was jointly significant, with the F-stat being 0.00, compared to the original model, the individual variables did not display the same level of statistical significance. Thus, the original regression is more accurate and a relatively more reliable analysis.

Table 2: Level-Log form of first coefficient and uses an F-stat (0.000) to show the statistical significance of the joint hypotheses of all the regressors in the equation.

H ₀	(1)	(2)	(3)
VARIABLES	linear	linear	linear
medinc_n	-0.010 (0.016)		
educ_n	-0.020 (0.016)	-0.017* (0.010)	-0.017* (0.010)
union	0.016*** (0.005)	0.016*** (0.005)	0.016*** (0.005)
esl	0.042*** (0.013)	0.044*** (0.011)	0.044*** (0.011)
lmedinc_n		-0.292* (0.134)	-0.292* (0.134)
Constant	3.051*** (0.173)	3.547*** (0.280)	3.547*** (0.280)
Observations	51	51	51
R-squared	0.426	0.479	0.479

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 3: Regression Result of Unemployment on Median Household Income, Education Attainment, Union Membership, and English Speaking

```
. regress unemp lmedinc_n educ_n union esl, r
```

Linear regression

Number of obs	=	51
F(4, 46)	=	10.07
Prob > F	=	0.0000
R-squared	=	0.4791
Root MSE	=	.57322

	Coefficient	Robust std. err.	t	P> t	[95% conf. interval]	
lmedinc_n	-.2917169	.1544631	-1.89	0.065	-.6026351	.0192013
educ_n	-.0174945	.0098599	-1.77	0.083	-.0373415	.0023525
union	.0163764	.0053567	3.06	0.004	.0055939	.0271589
esl	.0442784	.0105704	4.19	0.000	.0230012	.0655555
_cons	3.547368	.2803351	12.65	0.000	2.983083	4.111653

Table 4: Regression Result of Median Household Income on Unemployment, Education Attainment, Union Membership and ESL.

Conclusion

Despite the unemployment rate returning to normal levels, the factors influencing unemployment in 2020 continued to exert impacts in 2022. Our findings indicated that education rates, union rates, median household income rates, and native English speaking status all had varying but generally essential effects on the unemployment rate in the United States in 2022. Higher degrees of educational attainment and income protect workers from unemployment, while unions and non-native speakers might put them at a less advantageous position in the labor market. All four variables explored in this paper were statistically significant at the 90% confidence interval (when income was logged), with varying economically substantial magnitudes.

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Data Centers, AI, and Their Demand on the Electric Grid

by Robert C. Shugart

Abstract

*Artificial intelligence (AI) and data centers have risen to the surface of public discussion because they are big-time energy consumers. The International Energy Agency (IEA)—a Paris-based intergovernmental organization that provides policy recommendations for the energy sector—projected in its *Electricity 2024* report that global data center electricity demand could double by 2026 (IEA, 2024). In the same report, IEA highlights that OpenAI’s ChatGPT consumes nearly ten times the amount of electricity (2.9 watt-hours (Wh) per request) when compared to a typical Google search (0.3 Wh) (de Vries, 2023). This raises serious questions about how the nation’s electrical grid can adequately meet the rising demand from data centers and AI. For instance, how should those facilities be powered and operated as part of the larger bulk power system in the United States? And what does this mean for the clean energy transition? In this piece, I discuss the current state of data center development in the U.S., its economic benefits, its environmental implications, and how the public and private sectors have chosen to guide its development.*

Here in the United States

The United States is home to most of the world's data centers. As of March 2025, there were a reported 5,426 data centers in the U.S. Northern Virginia is the country's most active data center market, processing a remarkable 70 percent of the world’s data, much of which can be attributed to its proximity to the federal government (Taylor, 2025; Hafner, 2024). Massive data centers, often referred to as ‘hyperscalers,’ have also quickly spread throughout Northern Virginia and other fast-growing markets in the U.S. These facilities are frequently operated by large companies that provide cloud computing and AI services, including Amazon, Microsoft, Meta, Nvidia, OpenAI, and Google.

Increasing Energy Demand

On September 12, 2024, the Biden White House hosted a roundtable meeting that brought together tech leaders from several companies, along with utility companies like Exelon and AES, to discuss the pressing issue. At the event, the White House made several announcements, including the creation of a new task force on AI data center infrastructure, accelerated permitting for data center facilities, and repurposing closed coal sites for use in renewable energy projects (Biden, 2024). Since 2021, the Biden Administration has worked to advance clean energy projects nationwide while ensuring energy reliability and affordability for American ratepayers. This means maintaining a healthy balance of renewable resources, such as solar and wind, alongside the necessary ‘baseload’ resources (facilities that operate 24/7), including natural gas and nuclear power plants. Federal and state officials work to maintain this balance amidst the increasing risk of extreme weather impacts on an aging grid (FERC, NERC & Regional Entities, 2021). On October 31st, 2023, the Biden-Harris administration approved the largest planned offshore wind facility off the east coast of the U.S. to date (BOEM, 2023). The Coastal Virginia Offshore Wind project, expected to have a capacity of about 2,600 megawatts, is another addition to Dominion Energy’s generation fleet, designed to meet the rising energy demand caused by data centers in Virginia.

Since the second Trump administration began, the federal government has sought ways to expedite the permitting and construction of energy infrastructure, which includes an Executive Order that declares a national energy emergency (Trump, 2025). In January 2025, President Trump also announced “Stargate,” a \$500 billion joint venture between OpenAI, Oracle and SoftBank that aims to construct a network of hyperscale data centers across the country (Boak & Miller, 2025). The earliest phase of construction is expected to begin in Texas. However, even the Trump administration faces regulatory roadblocks as Texas Republicans have introduced legislation that would prolong the review process for new data center facilities in the state (Lowell, 2025). Since the 2021 power crisis caused by a series of extreme winter storms, Texas politicians have become increasingly concerned about the strain that high-energy-consuming facilities could put on the electric grid. In addition,

ERCOT, the state's grid operator, has forecasted that electricity demand from large customers such as data centers and cryptocurrency miners will increase by almost 60 percent in 2025 (EIA, 2024).

The Bright Side

Despite the concerns surrounding energy consumption, the data center industry brings considerable economic benefits to local communities (CBRE, 2024). According to the commercial real estate firm CBRE, data-center-related jobs have increased by 20 percent nationwide between 2017 and 2021. Each direct job helps create 7.4 ancillary jobs on average throughout the U.S. economy. Data center development tends to drive growth in high-tech markets, attracting businesses seeking data management services. The traditional (or primary) markets for data centers include Northern Virginia, California's Silicon Valley, and the Dallas-Fort Worth area in Texas. However, other ('emerging') markets are experiencing rapid growth, such as Central Ohio, Iowa, and Nashville, Tennessee.

Policymakers are eager to support the development of data centers. After all, why should their constituencies not benefit from the promises of future job growth? Most states have recognized these economic benefits and established tax incentives to draw data centers to their cities and communities. Virginia provides a data center retail sales and use tax exemption on qualifying computer equipment (VEDP, n.d.). Texas offers a 6.25 percent state sales and use tax on "certain items necessary and essential to the operation of a qualified data center" (Texas Comptroller, n.d.). Georgia offers "sales tax abatement with the investment of \$15 million or more" (Chernicoff, 2016). These are just a few examples. Of course, each of these incentives comes with conditions attached, including a minimum required investment and job opportunities for residents.

Of course, policymakers are mindful of the national security implications. Data centers constructed on U.S. soil are viewed as more secure for housing critical systems important to federal and state governments. Both the previous and current administrations have been aware of this fact and have stressed the importance of not relying on foreign powers for cloud infrastructure (Weissert & Ortutay, 2024; Trump, 2019). As AI gains more significance in various applications, U.S. lawmakers are eager to compete with China in the new information ecosystem.

The Method of 'Co-Location'

As was mentioned previously, the electricity issue weighs heavily on the minds of policymakers and other public officials. Their question is this: How might we encourage data center companies to set up shop in our communities while also ensuring that their immense energy consumption does not drive up costs for our ratepayers?

A similar question arose when a company sought to co-locate its data center with a nuclear power generation facility. Talen Energy, an independent power producer (IPP), sold a data center campus to Amazon Web Services (AWS) in March 2024 (Howland, 2024). Talen planned on the power of sale to AWS from its stake in the nearby Susquehanna nuclear power plant in Pennsylvania. To facilitate this deal, Talen and PJM—the region's grid operator—sought approval from the federal government through an interconnection service agreement or 'ISA.'

These terms can quickly become confusing for those unfamiliar with the electricity sector. In short, the central worry is how co-location arrangements (convenient as they are for tech companies) may adversely affect grid reliability and residents' electricity bills. In other words, is the data center responsible for paying its fair share of grid transmission fees, despite being directly connected to the generation facility and not the grid network? Regarding Talen and PJM, local utilities believe data centers should pay their fair share. "The co-located load should not be allowed to operate as a free rider, making use of, and receiving the benefits of, a transmission system paid for by transmission ratepayers," American Electric Power (AEP) and Exelon said (AEP & Exelon, 2024).

Yet, many data center companies want to co-locate their facilities near baseload resources (predominantly nuclear to achieve their aspired clean energy goals. On November 1, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC)—the U.S. agency responsible for regulating interstate electricity transmission—held a technical conference regarding co-locating generation facilities with large loads, such as data centers or crypto-mining operations (FERC, 2024). Several state officials

attended the conference and voiced growing concern about what co-location might mean for their ratepayers.

“They [PJM] found that removing 1,000 megawatts of power from Calvert Cliffs, which was their approximation for a co-located data center, would increase the cost to Maryland in the 2025/26 [capacity auction] by 332 million dollars,” Maryland State Senator Katie Fry Hester said. “I mean, that is a shocking number. And when the companies sit up here and say they’re paying their fair share, they may be paying for their immediate energies. Still, they’re not taking into account what it will cost us to build the transmission for everybody else who’s no longer served by this power.”

Water Consumption

Aside from concerns about electricity demand, data centers have also been scrutinized for their water consumption in cooling their servers. Google’s water use in one Oregon town has nearly tripled in the past five years (Rogoway, 2022). Remember that data center companies are unlikely to disclose this information publicly. Only through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request did the Financial Times discover the cumulative amount of water consumption by data centers in Northern Virginia (Hint: It was a lot) (Hodgson, 2024). This secrecy is primarily meant to maintain a positive public relations image for the companies involved. For instance, in communities that devote much of their water supplies to agricultural purposes, such as Los Lunas in New Mexico, any mass water use by corporate entities receives considerable public backlash (Davis, 2021).

Some tech companies have tried to ease these concerns through technological innovation. Google consistently advertises its approach to water management at its data center in Douglas County, just outside Atlanta (Google Sustainability, 2012). At the facility, the company recycles local municipal wastewater that would otherwise be deposited into the Chattahoochee River. Microsoft has even floated the idea of deploying data centers under the ocean’s surface. In the spring of 2018, the company deployed a data center 117 feet deep to the seafloor off Scotland’s Orkney Islands as part of its Project Natick. Microsoft was eager to show that data centers can be operated and kept cool without tapping freshwater resources. Whether innovations such as these can be replicated soon enough and on a large scale remains to be seen.

Conclusion

The issue of meeting energy demand for energy-intensive data centers remains a policy priority, regardless of who oversees the federal government. The industry is undergoing a massive spike in growth while policymakers are desperately trying to keep up. Since Northern Virginia leads the country in data center construction, expect to see more pushback from local environmental groups there as they seek suitable policy responses. The challenge of encouraging job growth in the information sector, while also maintaining stability, will require regulatory solutions that draw input from a wide range of stakeholders. Going forward, the Trump administration should continue with the previous administration’s efforts to foster cross-sector and cross-governmental collaboration that supports the sustainable development of the data center economy. This includes investments in clean energy projects and the repurposing of fossil-fuel facilities, which can provide job opportunities for local communities.

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