Movement Toward High Opportunity and Racial and Ethnic Integration for Hispanics in the Housing Choice Voucher Program

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Abstract

The Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program is the nation's tenant-based rental assistance program, which offers the assisted household choice about where to live. Does that choice translate into movement into neighborhoods of high opportunity and racial or ethnic integration, especially among Hispanic households? Unique data from HUD permit tracking of individual households from 2010 through 2017.

That research finds that Hispanic households participate in the HCV program at a rate comparable to their share of the low-income population. The research also indicates that HCV households—particularly Hispanic households—are concentrated in low-opportunity areas in general. Those households tend to live in tracts where the racial or ethnic group of the household is dominant. HCV households who relocate from one census tract to another while in the program show some movement to higher-opportunity tracts, but the largest group of movers (43 percent) chose tracts at the same opportunity level. About 31 percent of households moved to a higher-opportunity neighborhood, but about 26 percent moved to lower-opportunity tracts. Hispanic households mirrored that pattern.

Movers in the program demonstrated very limited movement toward racial or ethnic integration. The largest group of movers (43 percent) located in tracts where their own racial or ethnic group was dominant, whereas 20 percent relocated to integrated neighborhoods. Hispanic households showed a similar pattern, with 48 percent relocating to Hispanic-dominated tracts and only 15 percent to integrated tracts.

Introduction

The Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program remains the largest demand-side rental assistance program. Through the HCV program, the federal government seeks to achieve the twin goals of poverty deconcentration and racial and ethnic integration in its various housing programs (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD], 1996). The research reported here asks if the HCV program is achieving these goals over time, with a special focus on the outcomes for Hispanic households.

HUD has made available a dataset, the Longitudinal Household Data, that permits tracking of tenant-based HCV households over time as they move from one census tract to another. Those households are identified by race and ethnicity, permitting the opportunity to follow individual households over time rather than look at before and after samples of potentially different sets of assisted households.

Specifically, those data were used to determine if, upon relocation from one census tract to another, HCV recipients moved to census tracts offering higher levels of opportunity and if those moves also served to break down or reinforce patterns of residential segregation by race and ethnicity. In answering these questions, attention is given to the movement of Hispanic households compared with non-Hispanic households in the HCV program.

The diversity of the Hispanic population may complicate their capacity to exercise the choices offered in the HCV program. That diversity reflects, among other things, differences in immigration and citizenship status, fluency in English, racial identity, and country of origin (Arreola, 2009). Language issues may complicate the search for a housing unit, as can differences in familiarity with market search procedures (Cortes et al., 2007). The degree to which Hispanic households reside in ethnic enclaves or are assimilated into the broader population may also influence how they seek and obtain housing. Hispanics households may not have knowledge of resources available to assist in finding housing (Iceland and Nelson, 2008). Hanson and Santas (2014) found that different groups of Hispanic households experienced very different receptions in the housing market depending on their level of assimilation into the population as a whole and, in the case of immigrants, how recently the household arrived in the United States. Findings show that Hispanics often reside in tighter housing markets, making it difficult for them to succeed in securing better housing (Devine et al., 2003; Early, 2011). They may have some advantages over other minorities in that often they confront less crime than other minorities in the markets where they are able to locate (Lens, Ellen, and O'Regan, 2011); however, they may be unable to locate where schools are performing well (Horn, Ellen, and Schwartz, 2014). Previous research has identified a pattern over time indicating that Hispanic segregation is less severe than is Black segregation (Massey and Denton, 1987). That pattern has continued, but over time, Black segregation is lessening, whereas Hispanic segregation remains steady (Logan, 2013). At issue for this research is how that pattern plays out for households participating in the Housing Choice Voucher program.

Literature Review

A key reason for the appeal of rental vouchers is their potential to promote poverty deconcentration and racial integration (Ellen, 2020). Because vouchers enable recipients to rent housing in the private market, regardless of location, as long as the rent does not exceed the maximum allowable amount, they—at least in theory—are not required to live in particular neighborhoods (Sard and Rice, 2016). They are free to move into neighborhoods offering safety, good schools, parks, and other amenities, with easy access to employment opportunities, even if they do not exercise that freedom (Devine et al., 2003; Pendall, 2000; Schwartz, McClure, and Taghavi, 2016).

The research reported here found voucher recipients in 87 percent of U.S. census tracts in 2017. Prior research found that voucher recipients are less likely to live in impoverished, racially segregated neighborhoods than are public housing residents (McClure and Johnson, 2014). Compared with all renters, however, voucher households are underrepresented in more affluent and predominantly White neighborhoods. Black and Hispanic voucher holders are especially underrepresented in those areas (Newman and Schnare, 1997; Schwartz, McClure, and Taghavi, 2016). Moreover, the distribution of voucher recipients across neighborhoods with very high levels of poverty and racial segregation tracks closely with the distribution of units produced under the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit—the largest supply-side program in the nation (McClure, 2006).

The potential for voucher recipients to avoid impoverished, racially segregated neighborhoods is predicated on the assumption that households will exercise that residential choice offered by the voucher (Basolo and Nguyen, 2005). The hope was that given the ability to move to low-poverty, racially integrated neighborhoods, voucher recipients would choose to do so (McClure, 2010). Researchers have identified several factors that shape the residential outcomes of voucher recipients. Overall rental housing market conditions play a big role in determining the extent to which rental units are eligible for the HCV program and in influencing the willingness of landlords to participate in the programs. In "tight" housing markets with low vacancy rates, the rents for the few vacant units, especially in the more desirable neighborhoods, may exceed the maximum amount covered by the program (Finkel and Buron, 2001). Moreover, given the choice between an unsubsidized tenant and one with a voucher, landlords often prefer the former, thereby avoiding the "red tape" of program participation (Garboden et al., 2018). On the other hand, voucher recipients tend to be more successful in obtaining housing in areas with weaker housing markets. Landlords are frequently more amenable to having voucher recipients as tenants, in part because the rental income may be higher and steadier than what can be obtained from unsubsidized tenants (Rosen, 2020). In fact, landlords sometimes actively seek out voucher holders to rent housing in neighborhoods with the weakest housing demand (Garboden et al, 2018; Rosen, 2020).

Many recipients do not consider the full range of neighborhood options available to them or simply prefer to live in the neighborhoods with which they are most familiar (Basolo and Nguyen, 2005; Galvez, 2011; Rosen, 2020). Wang (2018), however, surveyed HCV households and found that those households place a high value on residing in a safe neighborhood with good schools but that barriers constrain their choice, often forcing them to locate in a neighborhood that is less desirable than the one they preferred. Black and Hispanic voucher recipients are least likely to reside in

relatively affluent, racially integrated neighborhoods and are subject to clustering (Patterson and Yoo, 2008; Wang and Walter, 2017).

Residential options for voucher holders may also be constrained by real and perceived racial discrimination and by discrimination against voucher holders. Racial housing discrimination has been documented repeatedly over the past several decades (Turner et al., 2013). Although discrimination is less overt and pervasive than in the past, it continues to reduce residential opportunities for minority renters and homebuyers. Discriminatory practices make finding a home in many neighborhoods more difficult and time consuming for Black and Hispanic voucher recipients. In addition, many landlords refuse to rent to voucher recipients, even when state and local laws prohibit "source of income discrimination" (Tighe, Hatch, and Mead, 2017).

Residential choice for voucher holders can also be constrained by the limited time housing authorities give recipients to find a home that qualifies for the program (meets its physical quality standards, does not exceed the maximum allowable rent, and has an owner who is willing to accept a voucher). DeLuca, Wood, and Rosenblatt (2019) and Eva Rosen (2020) have shown that when pressed for time, voucher recipients frequently settle on a house or apartment in or near the communities they know best—usually the community in which they currently reside or the community in which they grew up. When voucher holders do not have access to a car or must juggle work and childcare to find time to look for potential homes, they are less able to explore housing opportunities in more distant locations (Blumenberg and Pierce, 2016; Pendall et al, 2015).

Finally, voucher recipients may prefer to live in the neighborhoods with which they are more familiar, neighborhoods where they have family and friends, where their children may attend school, and where they may attend religious services and participate in social programs (Boyd, 2008). Those preferences may also be shaped by their awareness, impressions, and knowledge of neighborhoods outside their familial and social worlds, however. If they have limited knowledge of other neighborhoods, they are less likely to consider them as potential places to live (DeLuca, Wood, and Rosenblatt, 2019).

In sum, the HCV program gives families the opportunity to reside in housing situated in a wide array of neighborhoods, but the extent of that opportunity is shaped, among other things, by housing market dynamics, discriminatory practices among landlords, and the perceptions and preferences of voucher participants.

Hispanics are the largest minority group in the United States, making up more than 18 percent of the total population in 2019, with considerable variation between the states (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020a). Among the assisted population, Hispanics are more likely to live in urban counties (Din and Helms Garrison, 2021). They form a diverse population that may confront special problems, such as limited language skills, as they attempt to navigate rental housing markets (Iceland and Nelson, 2008).

Previous research suggests that for the HCV program to succeed, both the market and the participating household must respond. Without special assistance, the ability of HCV households to significantly improve their neighborhood locations will likely be minimal, and minorities

will likely fare worse than non-Hispanic Whites. Hispanic segregation among HCV holders may not be as great as the segregation of Blacks, but the level of Hispanic segregation will probably remain steady over time, whereas Black segregation is slowly subsiding. What remains to be seen is whether, at a national scale, the HCV program can help break down the barriers confronting minority renter households, especially Hispanic households, to move to high-opportunity neighborhoods that are integrated or predominantly White.

Data and Analytic Approach

HUD has constructed a longitudinal household database for all households who participated in rental assistance programs under its supervision, including the HCV program. HUD initiated automated tenant reporting in 1995, but the participating public housing authorities and managers of assisted properties took some time to adopt automated reporting. Reliable data thus exist only for years 2001 through 2017, when both the ethnicity (Hispanic or non-Hispanic) of the household head and the race of the household head are available. This study analyzes only tenant-based HCV households because of the mobility inherent in that program. The data are further narrowed to the years 2010 through 2017 to exclude the housing price bubble of the 2000-to-2007 period and its collapse in 2008 and 2009. Beginning in 2010, the market was in recovery, offering a better picture of how assisted households are able to compete with unassisted households for available rental housing units.

The research questions for this study address movement to high-opportunity neighborhoods and movement to either integrated or predominantly White neighborhoods. For that reason, the data were limited to include only those households who moved from one census tract to another during their participation in the HCV program.[1]

To answer the research questions, the locations where households choose to reside must be identified by the level of opportunity offered and by their racial and ethnic composition. To assess opportunity, we developed an index based on census tract-level data made available through the HUD Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing initiative (Mast, 2015). The index is based on three variables: (1). poverty exposure—percentage of the population with income above the poverty line; (2). labor force engagement—employment and labor force participation; and (3). school quality— percentage of students reading and performing math exercises at grade level. The individual indexes range from zero to 99 and center on 50. For each tract, the scores are added, giving equal weight to each index. Census tracts are sorted from low to high and divided into quintiles, with the top two quintiles identifying the high- and very high-opportunity neighborhoods—the top 40 percent of all neighborhoods.[2] This approach follows the work of Schwartz, McClure, and Taghavi (2016).

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[1] The available data do not indicate street address, only census tract. As such, movers are identified only by movement from one tract to another; movement within a tract is not identified.

[2] The neighborhood opportunity index used here does not include all HUD indicators. Missing from our opportunity index are data on crime, transportation, and environmental hazards. Crime is known to be an important factor in neighborhood choice, but no source exists for tract-level crime data at a national scale (Lens, Ellen, and O'Regan, 2011). Transportation is also difficult to include, as public transport access often is associated with neighborhoods containing low-income populations who cannot afford cars and are dependent on transportation access (Acevedo-Garcia et al., 2016). Although HUD offers an environmental hazard index, it may be unreliable at the tract level.

Exhibit 1 shows that the individual index components track very well with the categories of the combined index. The mean value of the component indexes rises as the tracts move from the lower to the higher opportunity categories.

Exhibit 1

Census Tracts by Opportunity Index Category
Mean Value of Components of Index, 2017

Neighborhood Opportunity Category	'Tract Opportunity Index Category					
	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High	All Tracts
Poverty Exposure	13.5	32.6	50.8	68.1	85.0	50.0
Labor Force Participation	14.5	32.6	50.3	67.5	85.0	50.0
School Quality	20.9	39.3	48.7	59.0	78.7	49.3
Number of Tracts	14,391	14,419	14,340	14,459	14,422	72,031

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH)
Assessment Tool Data Tables, 2015

Locations where households choose to reside also must be identified by the racial and ethnic composition of the census tracts. Data from the American Community Survey (2013 to 2017) are used here to identify the race and ethnicity of the populations residing in the tract (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020b).

We grouped all census tracts into five categories based on their racial and ethnic composition:

1. Predominantly Non-Hispanic White (75 percent or more of all households)

2. Predominantly Non-Hispanic Black (50 percent or more of all households)

3. Predominantly Non-Hispanic Other (50 percent or more of all households)

4. Predominantly Hispanic (50 percent or more of all households)

5. Integrated (all other tracts)

Although predominantly minority census tracts are defined as those where the minority group constitutes at least 50 percent of all households, the threshold for defining predominantly non-Hispanic White tracts is set higher, at 75 percent, because a tract may be more than 50 percent non-Hispanic White population but still have very high minority populations. Such tracts would typically be thought of as integrated. For that reason, tracts with less than 75 percent non-Hispanic White population and less than 50 percent of any one minority category are viewed as integrated. This also follows the work of Schwartz, McClure, and Taghavi (2016).

Analysis

What is the current racial and ethnic composition of the HCV program? Has it changed?

Hispanic households make up about 16 percent of households in the HCV program. That figure has been relatively stable, rising from 15 percent in 2010 to 16 percent in 2017 (see exhibit 2). That share is slightly below the 18 percent that Hispanics form within the U.S. population as a whole and is comparable to their 15-percent share of the HCV program-eligible population, households making less than $20,000 per year (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020b).[3]

Exhibit 2 also lists the share of participating households who moved from one tract to another while in the program. About 47 percent of HCV households moved from one tract to another at some time during their participation in the HCV program or other programs after initial entry into the HCV program;[4] thus, about one-half move and about one-half stay in place. A greater share of Black households moved, at 54 percent, whereas a lesser share of non-Hispanic White households moved, at 38 percent. Again, Hispanic households are between those two groups, at 45 percent.

With those understandings as background, the analysis turns to where HCV recipients reside by level of opportunity and by racial and ethnic composition of the neighborhood.

Exhibit 2

Households in the Housing Choice Voucher Program by Race and Ethnicity, 2010 and 2017

Race/Ethnicity	2010		2017		Moved During Assistance (%)
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	
Non-Hispanic					
White	830,201	36%	799,528	33%	37.7
Black	1,030,794	45%	1,144,792	47%	54.1
Other	95,606	4%	100,958	4%	38.6
Hispanic	358,209	15%	387,919	16%	44.9
Total	2,314,810	100%	2,433,197	100%	46.6

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Longitudinal Household Rental Assistance Data, 1995–2017

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[3] Housing authorities are mandated to provide at least 75 percent of Housing Choice Vouchers to households with incomes at or below 30 percent of Area Median Income (AMI). Those authorities more than meet that requirement because the average household income of HCV households is about $14,000, which is well below 30 percent of AMI. The population making less than $20,000 a year thus is a good proxy for households whose extremely low income makes them eligible for admission to the HCV program.

[4] The data include all households in the HCV program in 2017 with information on their presence in any HUD-administered Rental Assistance Program back to 2010. Movers are identified as any household who moved from one census tract to another in the 8-year period. Note that many households may have moved upon entry to the program. The address of the household at the time of applying for admission to the program is not provided in the data. As such, the moves analyzed in this study only include moves while participating in the HUD programs.

How is the U.S. population distributed by race and ethnicity across census tracts by opportunity level?

The racial and ethnic composition of census tracts follows a predictable pattern. Minorities, including Hispanics, tend to be concentrated in low-opportunity tracts. Exhibit 3 examines the U.S. population by race and ethnicity as they are distributed across all of the tracts, categorized by opportunity level. Non-Hispanic Whites typically make up about 62 percent of the population in each tract, but on average, they make up only 34 percent of the population in very low-opportunity tracts and 76 percent in very high-opportunity tracts. Hispanics average about 16 percent of the population in each tract, but they constitute 28 percent of the population in very low-opportunity tracts and only 8 percent in very high-opportunity tracts.

Exhibit 3

Census Tracts by Opportunity Index Category
Average Percentage of Population by Race, 2017

Percentage of Population by Race/Ethnicity	Tract Opportunity Index Category					
	Very Low	**Low**	**Moderate**	**High**	**Very High**	**All Tracts**
Non-Hispanic White	33.6	58.5	68.7	73.4	76.3	62.1
Non-Hispanic Black	32.1	14.5	9.4	6.8	4.3	13.4
Non-Hispanic Other Races	6.6	6.9	7.6	8.7	11.3	8.2
Hispanic	27.8	20.1	14.3	11.1	8.0	16.2
Total Population	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.
Sources: American Community Survey, 2013–2017; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Longitudinal Household Data, 1995–2017

How is the population of the United States allocated by race and ethnicity across census tracts by dominant racial or ethnic group?

Minority households are not only concentrated in low-opportunity tracts, but they also tend to be concentrated in tracts where minorities are the dominant population. To illustrate the linkages between minority concentration and opportunity level, exhibit 4 categorizes tracts by the dominant racial or ethnic group and distributes them across opportunity levels.

More than one-half (54 percent) of all predominantly White tracts fall in the high- or very high-opportunity categories. Conversely, more than one-half of Hispanic-dominated tracts are found in the very low-opportunity category, with another 30 percent in the low-opportunity category. A mere 109 of more than 6,800 predominantly Hispanic tracts (1.6 percent) are in the very high-opportunity category. Integrated tracts offer a possible solution to the concentration of minorities in low-opportunity areas, but they are not a sure thing. About 39 percent of integrated tracts are

in the upper two quintiles of tracts by opportunity level, but a comparable 40 percent are in the bottom two quintiles.

Exhibit 4

Census Tracts by Opportunity Index Category
Dominant Racial or Ethnic Population, 2017

	Tract Opportunity Index Category					
Percentage of Population by Race/Ethnicity	**Very Low**	**Low**	**Moderate**	**High**	**Very High**	**Total**
Non-Hispanic White	1,890	5,537	7,456	8,400	9,193	32,476
Greater than 75%	6%	17%	23%	26%	28%	100%
Non-Hispanic Black	4,078	1,160	512	201	57	6,008
Greater than 50%	68%	19%	9%	3%	1%	100%
Non-Hispanic Other Races	210	147	201	243	354	1,155
Greater than 50%	18%	13%	17%	21%	31%	100%
Hispanic	3,553	2,011	841	295	109	6,809
Greater than 50%	52%	30%	12%	4%	2%	100%
Integrated	4,655	5,556	5,325	5,312	4,698	25,546
	18%	22%	21%	21%	18%	100%

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.
Sources: American Community Survey, 2013–2017; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Longitudinal Household Data, 1995–2017

How are HCV households in 2017 distributed by race and ethnicity across tracts by opportunity level?

The analysis now turns to an examination of how HCV households, by racial and ethnic identification, have located in census tracts by opportunity level. Exhibit 5 illustrates the sad reality that HCV households tend to be concentrated in low-opportunity tracts. More than two-thirds (69 percent) of HCV households live in low- or very low-opportunity tracts. Only 15 percent are in high- or very high-opportunity tracts. Non-Hispanic Whites fare only slightly better than the program average, with 53 percent in low- and very low-opportunity tracts, but 76 percent of Hispanics locate in those tracts. Non-Hispanic Blacks are comparable, at 78 percent.

Exhibit 5

Housing Choice Voucher Households, 2017
By Race and Ethnicity and Tract Opportunity Index

Percentage of HCV Households by Race/Ethnicity	Tract Opportunity Index Category					
	Very Low	**Low**	**Moderate**	**High**	**Very High**	**All Tracts**
Non-Hispanic	174,198	190,363	156,370	112,525	55,715	689,171
White	25%	28%	23%	16%	8%	100%
Non-Hispanic	555,640	219,959	113,635	65,002	30,529	984,765
Black	56%	22%	12%	7%	3%	100%
Non-Hispanic	26,921	23,943	17,028	12,915	7,351	88,158
Other Races	31%	27%	19%	15%	8%	100%
Hispanic	165,269	81,641	42,338	26,517	11,237	327,002
Any Race	51%	25%	13%	8%	3%	100%
Total HCV	922,028	515,906	329,371	216,959	104,832	2,089,096
Households	44%	25%	16%	10%	5%	100%

HCV = Housing Choice Voucher.

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Sources: American Community Survey, 2013–2017; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Longitudinal Household Data, 1995–2017

How are HCV households in 2017 distributed by race and ethnicity across census tracts in which theirs is the dominant racial or ethnic group?

Exhibit 6 shifts the analysis to the distribution of HCV households, categorized by race and ethnicity, to the distribution across tracts categorized by dominant racial or ethnic group. The pattern is as expected. The largest share of each racial and ethnic group resides within tracts where the household racial or ethnic group is dominant. Hispanics display this pattern, with 51 percent of Hispanic HCV households located in predominantly Hispanic tracts. About 52 percent of non-Hispanic White HCV households locate in predominantly White tracts, and about 42 percent of Black HCV households locate in predominantly Black tracts. About 38 percent of all HCV households are found in integrated tracts. Hispanic HCV households make the lowest entry, at 34 percent, and Non-Hispanic Other the largest, at 47 percent.

Exhibit 6

Housing Choice Voucher Households, 2017
By Race and Ethnicity and Tract Opportunity Index

Percentage of HCV Households by Race/Ethnicity	Tract Predominant Racial/Ethnic Group					
	Non-Hispanic			Hispanic	Integrated	Total, All Tracts
	White	Black	Other			
Non-Hispanic	359,401	19,630	5,471	41,212	266,004	691,718
White	52%	3%	1%	6%	38%	100%
Non-Hispanic	81,773	419,334	4,057	98,990	385,598	989,752
Black	8%	42%	0%	10%	39%	100%
Non-Hispanic	12,873	4,844	14,839	14,418	41,311	88,285
Other Races	15%	5%	17%	16%	47%	100%
Hispanic	24,639	20,573	4,390	166,560	111,934	328,096
Any Race	8%	6%	1%	51%	34%	100%
Total HCV	478,686	464,381	28,757	321,180	804,847	2,097,851
Households	23%	22%	1%	15%	38%	100%

HCV = Housing Choice Voucher.
Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.
Sources: American Community Survey, 2013–2017; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Longitudinal Household Data, 1995–2017

Do HCV households who move experience improvements in tract opportunity levels?

Among the 2.4 million households in the HCV program in 2017, 48 percent moved from one tract to another at some time during the study period, 2010 to 2017. Among those movers, the data detail where they lived initially and where they lived in 2017. That feature of the data enables us to determine the opportunity index scores of the neighborhoods, categorized by quintiles before and after the move. Exhibit 7 tabulates whether those moves resulted in improved, reduced, or the same level of opportunity.

The largest group of movers (43 percent) chose tracts in the same opportunity quintile. About 31 percent moved to a tract offering at least one category higher in opportunity level, but 26 percent moved to a tract at a lower level of opportunity. Hispanics mirrored that pattern. Interestingly, non-Hispanic White HCV households were more likely than minority households to move to a lower level of opportunity. Non-Hispanic White HCV households experienced greater movement (32 percent) to lower opportunity tracts but also a larger movement (35 percent) to higher opportunity tracts. Blacks relocated in a pattern very close to that of Hispanics.

Exhibit 7

Housing Choice Voucher Households in 2017 who Moved
By Household Race and Ethnicity and Change in Tract Opportunity Level

| Race/Ethnicity of HCV Household | Opportunity Category After Move | | | |
	Moved to Higher Opportunity	Same	Moved to Lower Opportunity	Total
Non-Hispanic	69,811	67,322	64,013	201,145
White	35%	33%	32%	100%
Non-Hispanic	143,580	220,850	110,319	474,749
Black	30%	47%	23%	100%
Non-Hispanic	9,161	9,739	8,313	27,212
Other Race	34%	36%	31%	100%
Hispanic	36,185	52,571	29,911	118,666
Any Race	30%	44%	25%	100%
All Racial/Ethnic	258,736	350,481	212,555	821,772
Households	31%	43%	26%	100%

HCV = Housing Choice Voucher.
Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.
Sources: American Community Survey, 2013–2017; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Longitudinal Household Data, 1995–2017

The pattern of movement suggests that some beneficial relocation is made possible by the HCV program, but movement to higher opportunity tracts is experienced by only about 30 percent of the participating households, independent of race. Sadly, movement to lower opportunity tracts is experienced by about one-fourth of the participating households.

Did HCV households move toward greater racial integration or remain in racially concentrated areas?

Exhibit 6 demonstrates that most households locate in a tract where their own racial or ethnic group is dominant. Exhibit 8 looks at movers in the HCV program to determine whether the program facilitates movement to integrated tracts or to other tracts where the racial and ethnic group of the household is dominant.

Overall, the 1.2 million households who moved relocated to tracts similar to that of their initial racial and ethnic distribution, but some moved to integrated tracts. More than one-half million households in the HCV program (43 percent) moved to a tract where their own racial or ethnic group is dominant. About 470,000 (41 percent) moved to integrated tracts, and more than 180,000 households (16 percent) moved to tracts where a different racial or ethnic group is dominant.

Hispanic HCV households showed the least movement to integrated tracts, at 37 percent, and trailed only White HCV households in locating to tracts where their own group is dominant. Only 16 percent of Hispanic movers moved to tracts dominated by a different racial or ethnic group.

Exhibit 8

Housing Choice Voucher Households in 2017 who Moved
By Household Race and Ethnicity and Change in Destination Tract Racial/Ethnic Composition

Race/Ethnicity of HCV Household	Racial/Ethnic Composition of Destination Tract Compared with Race/Ethnicity of Household			
	Same Group Dominant	Integrated	Different Group Dominated	Total
Non-Hispanic	157,880	122,254	29,906	310,040
White	51%	39%	10%	100%
Non-Hispanic	255,425	265,054	113,025	633,504
Black	40%	42%	18%	100%
Non-Hispanic	6,313	19,354	14,282	39,949
Other Race	16%	48%	36%	100%
Hispanic	86,036	65,499	27,620	179,155
Any Race	48%	37%	15%	100%
All Racial/Ethnic	505,654	472,160	184,834	1,162,648
Households	43%	41%	16%	100%

HCV = Housing Choice Voucher.
Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.
Sources: American Community Survey, 2013–2017; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Longitudinal Household Data, 1995–2017

By comparison, non-Hispanic Black HCV households experienced slightly greater movement
to integrated tracts (42 percent compared with 37 percent for Hispanics). About 18 percent of
Black HCV households who moved relocated to tracts where some other racial or ethnic group
dominated, compared with 15 percent for Hispanics.

**Did Hispanic HCV households move toward greater racial integration or move to
higher opportunity?**

Exhibit 9 examines the movement of only Hispanic HCV households over the study period of 2010
to 2017. The table identifies the opportunity level of the tracts where the households lived initially
and where they lived after moving.

About 61 percent of the Hispanic households who began in very low-opportunity tracts remained
in that category after they moved. Remaining in very low-opportunity neighborhoods is not the
desired outcome, but the results indicate that about 39 percent of Hispanics move up when a
move is possible. Unfortunately, a little more than one-half of the households who move to tracts
offering greater opportunity move up only one level, from very low to low opportunity. Although
that movement is good, it is less than what might be expected or desired. Only 7 percent of the
Hispanic mover households who began in very low-opportunity tracts moved to high- or very
high-opportunity tracts. Additional research must be conducted to determine what contributed to
that result for those households and what barriers prevented other households from achieving the
same outcomes. The housing search patterns of households is not known. Did they attempt to find
housing in neighborhoods offering greater opportunity but encounter barriers? Did they not search

for housing in higher opportunity neighborhoods because they lacked information on housing in those areas? Household surveys could provide valuable information on the type of problems that inhibit movement to opportunity, which could help in the design of remedies.

Hispanic mover households who began in low- but not very low-opportunity tracts followed a different pattern. About 31 percent of the households stayed in low-opportunity tracts, and about 40 percent moved down to very low-opportunity tracts—neither result serving the goal of moving to high-opportunity neighborhoods. A significant share of Hispanic movers (12 percent) beginning in low-opportunity tracts, however, ended up in high- or very high-opportunity tracts.

Exhibit 9

Hispanic Housing Choice Voucher Households Who Moved
By Origin and Destination Tract Opportunity and Race/Ethnicity Categories (1 of 2)

Origin	Destination					Total, All
	Tract Opportunity Category					
Tract Opportunity Category	**Very Low**	**Low**	**Moderate**	**High**	**Very High**	**Tracts**
Very Low	37,616	13,522	5,987	3,361	1,110	61,596
	61%	22%	10%	5%	2%	100%
Low	11,249	8,726	4,641	2,560	874	28,050
	40%	31%	17%	9%	3%	100%
Moderate	4,620	4,291	3,228	2,294	803	15,236
	30%	28%	21%	15%	5%	100%
High	2,389	2,268	2,094	2,090	1,032	9,873
	24%	23%	21%	21%	10%	100%
Very High	695	718	729	857	910	3,909
	18%	18%	19%	22%	23%	100%
Total, All Tracts	56,569	29,525	16,679	11,162	4,729	118,664
	48%	25%	14%	9%	4%	100%

Origin	Destination					
	Tract Predominant					
	Racial/Ethnic Group Non-Hispanic					Total, All
Tract Predominant Racial/Ethnic Group	**White**	**Black**	**Other**	**Hispanic**	**Integrated**	**Tracts**
Non-Hispanic White	3,832	341	20	866	2,838	7,897
	49%	4%	0%	11%	36%	100%
Non-Hispanic Black	387	3,741	34	1,607	957	6,726
	6%	56%	1%	24%	14%	100%
Non-Hispanic Other Races	27	29	566	336	128	1,086
	2%	3%	52%	31%	12%	100%
Hispanic Any Race	1,089	2,059	316	38,987	4,284	46,735
	2%	4%	1%	83%	9%	100%
Integrated Tracts	4,333	2,853	495	11,267	25,221	44,169
	10%	6%	1%	26%	57%	100%
Total, HCV Households	9,668	9,023	1,431	53,063	46,146	119,331
	8%	8%	1%	44%	39%	100%

HCV = Housing Choice Voucher.
Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.
Sources: American Community Survey, 2013–2017; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Longitudinal Household Data, 1995–2017

Finally, in terms of origin and destination movement by opportunity, a very large share of Hispanic movers who began in high- or very high-opportunity tracts relocated to low- or very low-opportunity tracts, and relatively few remained in those tracts—something that the HCV program is designed to avoid. Again, more household-level survey research is needed to fully understand what is driving those relocation decisions.

Exhibit 9 also identifies the movement of Hispanic HCV households in terms of the dominant racial and ethnic population in both the origin and the destination tracts. The table suggests that Hispanic households tend to relocate to a tract with the same dominant group as found in the origin tract. Among those households that began in Hispanic-dominant tracts, more than four out of five remained in such tracts. Among those households that began in tracts with some other racial groups dominant, about one-half remained in tracts dominated by the same group. Households that began in integrated tracts displayed more movement. About one-half of those households remained in integrated tracts, and about 26 percent moved to predominantly Hispanic tracts.

What factors contribute to Hispanic HCV household movement to higher-opportunity tracts and to integrated tracts?

This tabular analysis does not control for the ranges of choice found in the markets where households start their participation in the HCV program or where they are at program end. We developed two logistic models to provide insights on the factors that influence movement of Hispanic and other HCV households into high- or very high-opportunity neighborhoods or into integrated neighborhoods. The first model estimates the influence of several variables on whether the HCV households who moved relocated into tracts with a higher level of opportunity than the tracts in which they started. The second model estimated the influence of several variables on whether the HCV households who moved from a predominantly minority tract ended up in racially or ethnically integrated tracts or predominantly White tracts (for non-Hispanic White HCV households, the analysis estimates their likelihood of moving to integrated tracts).

Previous research, highlighted in the literature review, suggests a variety of confounding variables for these models. First, although the focus of study is race and ethnicity of the household, the household type (family, elderly, or disabled) may also influence the ability to move to higher opportunity and to greater integration (Horn, Ellen, and Schwartz, 2014). Second, housing market conditions and location may influence the move. The region of the country may influence movement because of the higher incidence of Hispanic households in some states, especially in the south and the southwest. The states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Florida form a separate region given the high incidence of Hispanics in those states (Iceland and Nelson, 2008). Because states with large Hispanic populations may provide more ability for Hispanic households to access high-opportunity neighborhoods—especially if those neighborhoods are predominantly Hispanic—the logit models include a dummy variable that flags Hispanic HCV households that reside in those five states. Market tightness may influence the ability of HCV households to move freely (Early, 2011). Residing in a metropolitan area, especially a large metropolitan market, may offer more opportunities for movement to opportunity and movement to greater racial and ethnic integration (Din and Helms Garrison, 2021). Finally, the racial and ethnic composition of the

destination census tracts may influence the probability of entering a higher level of opportunity (Turner et al., 2013). Similarly, the opportunity level of the destination census tract may influence the probability of entering an integrated tract.

Exhibit 10 describes the values of the independent variables employed in the estimation of the models. Non-Hispanic Black households make up the largest share of the households, at 58 percent. Hispanic households make up about 15 percent of movers, and about one-half of those movers live in one of the five states with a heavy Hispanic presence. As expected, 32 percent of movers moved to higher opportunity tracts, and 47 percent moved to racially or ethnically integrated tracts.

Exhibit 10

Predictors of Housing Choice Voucher Households Who Relocated Moving Up in Tract Opportunity Level and Moving to Integrated Tract or Predominantly White Tract (1 of 2)

Descriptive Statistics		**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**
	Household moved to–		
Dependent 1	Higher opportunity tract	0.315	0.464
Dependent 2	More racially and/or ethnically integrated tract	0.470	0.499
Independent Variables:			
HCV Household Variables			
Household race/ethnicity (reference is non-Hispanic White)			
	Hispanic	0.148	0.355
	Non-Hispanic Black	0.576	0.494
	Non-Hispanic Other	0.033	0.178
Household type (reference is non-elderly non-disabled)			
	Elderly household	0.163	0.369
	Disabled household	0.272	0.445
Market Controls			
Region (location in Arizona, California, Florida, New Mexico, Texas)		0.254	0.435
Tract is in metropolitan area		0.973	0.161
Tract rental vacancy rate		5.939	5.653
Tract dominant race/ethnicity (reference is non-Hispanic White)			
	Non-Hispanic Black	0.263	0.440
	Non-Hispanic Other	0.010	0.101
	Hispanic	0.134	0.341
	Integrated	0.406	0.491
Tract opportunity level (reference is very low opportunity)			
	Low opportunity	0.244	0.430
	Moderate opportunity	0.156	0.363
	High opportunity	0.105	0.306
	Very high opportunity	0.050	0.219

HCV = Housing Choice Voucher.
Sources: American Community Survey, 2013–2017; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Longitudinal Household Data, 1995–2017

Exhibit 11 provides the estimates for the two models. Neither model performs especially well, as both provide only modest capacity to predict whether a household will move. With nearly 1 million households in the dataset, however, all variables prove to be statistically significant at better than the .001 level, offering insights on the influence of the various independent variables in the context of the other confounding variables.

Exhibit 11

Predictors of Housing Choice Voucher Households Who Relocated
Moving Up in Tract Opportunity Level and Moving to Integrated Tract or Predominantly White Tract

Logistic Models						
Dependent Variable:	Household Moved to Higher Opportunity Tract			Household Moved to More Racially and/or Ethnically Integrated Tract		
	Estimate	Significance	Odds Ratio	Estimate	Significance	Odds Ratio
Independent Variables:						
HCV Household Variables:						
Household race/ethnicity (reference is non-Hispanic White):						
Hispanic	0.512	0.000	1.669	0.686	0.000	1.986
Non-Hispanic Black	0.538	0.000	1.713	0.818	0.000	2.266
Non-Hispanic Other	0.232	0.000	1.262	1.192	0.000	3.292
Household type (reference is non-elderly non-disabled):						
Elderly household	-0.073	0.000	0.930	-0.019	0.006	0.982
Disabled household	-0.129	0.000	0.879	0.074	0.000	1.076
Market Variables						
Region (reference is states other than Arizona, California, Florida, New Mexico, Texas)	0.296	0.000	1.345	-0.056	0.000	0.946
Tract is in a metropolitan area	0.300	0.000	1.350	0.255	0.000	1.291
Tract rental vacancy rate	0.008	0.000	1.008	-0.002	0.000	0.998
Tract dominant race/ethnicity (reference is non-Hispanic White):						
Non-Hispanic Black	-2.058	0.000	0.128			
Non-Hispanic Other	-0.612	0.000	0.542			
Hispanic	-1.995	0.000	0.136			
Integrated	-0.730	0.000	0.482			
Tract opportunity level (reference is very low opportunity):						
Low opportunity				0.907	0.000	2.476
Moderate opportunity				1.439	0.000	4.215
High opportunity				1.670	0.000	5.314
Very high opportunity				1.645	0.000	5.180
Intercept	-0.517	0.000	0.596	-1.682	0.000	0.186
Null model: Accurate prediction without model	68.5%			53.0%		
Model: Accurate prediction with model	69.9%			64.4%		
Model reduction of error:	4.4%			24.3%		

HCV = Housing Choice Voucher.
Sources: American Community Survey, 2013–2017; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Longitudinal Household Data, 1995–2017

The important test variable for each model is the coefficient for Hispanic households who move while in the HCV program. The first model explains the probability that an HCV household will, while in the program, move to a high- or very high-opportunity census tract. About one-third of the participating households made that move. Hispanic households as well as non-Hispanic Black and non-Hispanic Other households are more likely to move to higher opportunity tracts than the reference group, non-Hispanic White households. The second model explains the probability that an HCV household will move to an integrated or predominantly White census tract, supporting the goal of promoting racial or ethnic integration. Hispanic households are more likely to make that move than the reference group of non-Hispanic White households but less so than non-Hispanic Black households.

The various control variables provide mixed information. All parameter estimates are significant due to the very large sample size; however, although statistically significant, some of the parameters are very weak, but some make sizable contributions to the explanatory power of the models. For example, in both models, the elderly non-disabled households are less likely to move to higher opportunity and toward greater integration than are the non-elderly.

HCV households who move in the heavily Hispanic states are more likely to move to a higher opportunity census tract than HCV households in other states, with an odds ratio of 1.3. They are, however, less likely to move to a more racially or ethnically integrated tract, but with an odds ratio of .946, which is weak because it is so close to 1.0. If the HCV recipient lives in a metropolitan area, it seems to be beneficial to serving program goals. In both models, location in a metropolitan area is directly associated with beneficial movement of the household, with odds ratios of approximately 1.3. Market tightness provides mixed results. The rental vacancy rate is directly related to movement to higher opportunity, but with an odds ratio very close to 1.0, suggesting weakly that softer markets offer more opportunity to move to higher opportunity. The rental vacancy rate is inversely related to movement toward integration, opposite the expectation, but the odds ratio, although significant, is effectively 1.0.

The control variables provide interesting insights on movement to higher opportunity and movement toward integration. If the destination tract is predominantly minority of any type, the HCV household is less likely to move to higher opportunity, as would be expected given the very small numbers of minority-dominated tracts offering high- or very high-opportunity levels. In terms of moving toward integration, the higher the opportunity level of the tract, the higher the odds of making the move toward integration because the odds ratios grow as the destination tract offers increasingly higher opportunity levels.

Conclusions

This research examined the ability of the HCV program to help participating households move to tracts offering higher levels of opportunity and greater racial and ethnic integration, with special attention to Hispanic households.

Hispanics command a share of HCV resources that has been stable and proportionate to their share of the nation's households eligible for the HCV program, and Hispanic households are only slightly more likely than other households to move while in the program.

HCV households tend to be concentrated in low- or very low-opportunity tracts (69 percent), but Hispanic households are more concentrated, at 76 percent, a level comparable to that of Blacks, at 78 percent. HCV households also tend to be concentrated by race and ethnicity. The largest share of each racial and ethnic group is found within census tracts where that household group is dominant. Hispanics display this pattern more than any other minority group, with 51 percent of Hispanic HCV households living in predominantly Hispanic tracts. Hispanic HCV households are also the least likely to reside in integrated tracts.

When HCV households moved, a plurality (43 percent) remained in tracts of the same opportunity level. About 31 percent moved to a higher opportunity level, but 26 percent moved to a lower level. Relatively few movers ended up in high- or very high-opportunity tracts. Hispanics mirrored that pattern.

Just as the largest group of movers remained in census tracts within the same opportunity level, a plurality (43 percent) relocated to census tracts in which their race or ethnicity was dominant. A slightly smaller proportion (41 percent) moved to integrated tracts. Hispanics, however, showed the least movement to integrated tracts.

These results suggest that the HCV program has the capacity to help eligible low-income renter households move to neighborhoods offering higher levels of opportunity for better education, gainful employment, and reduced poverty exposure. Similarly, the HCV program has the capacity to help Black and Hispanic households locate in integrated neighborhoods. The program is not achieving those goals at particularly high levels, however. To the extent it achieves those goals at all, it does so without any specific mechanisms to promote such movement. The opportunity to lease housing virtually anywhere in the private market enables HCV households to reside in high-opportunity and integrated neighborhoods, but more often than not, that opportunity is not sufficient to achieve the desired outcomes.

If the HCV program is to better serve the goals of movement to opportunity and to affirmatively further fair housing, relying on the program as now administered seems insufficient. The HCV program offers the means for households to relocate, but the full potential of the program remains unachieved. HCV households would benefit from greater assistance in finding rental housing in neighborhoods that serve program goals, and they would benefit from greater initiatives to attract landlords offering high-quality housing into the program. Specifically, the HCV program would benefit from the expansion of the supply of rental units qualifying for participation in the program in high-opportunity, integrated areas. Efforts such as the Small Area Fair Market Rents serve this purpose (McClure and Schwartz, 2019). In addition, the program likely would better serve the goals of movement to opportunity and affirmatively furthering fair housing if the participating households were assisted in their search for housing. Housing counseling is needed to help all participating households, but especially Hispanic households for whom English is a second language. Skilled housing counselors can help the households learn of alternative housing options

in the market and assist the household in navigating the negotiations of a lease. Finally, the twin goals of movement to opportunity and furthering fair housing will be better served with more participating landlords. HCV program administrators need the resources to actively seek out and entice more landlords to participate in the program. Those resources are also needed to protect landlords against the perceived risk of accepting voucher households.

Limitations of the Study

The neighborhood opportunity index does not include components indicating the level of crime in the neighborhood or the presence of environmental hazards, although these problems are known to correlate with poverty, unemployment, and educational attainment which are captured in the index. The data do not indicate whether households searching for units found willing or uncooperative landlords, nor do they indicate whether the households confronted any discrimination because of race, ethnicity, or use of a voucher. Data cannot indicate with certainty whether the final locations of the movers represent their true preference for a location, or a choice made among imperfect alternatives. Finally, the data on HCV participants do not distinguish between important differences within the Hispanic population, such as English proficiency, immigration status, and country of origin. Those limitations constrain what can be concluded from this analysis, and more research is needed to clarify those issues. Future studies should survey households engaged in their housing searches so as to uncover possible impediments to movement to opportunity and to affirmatively furthering fair housing.

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