How Race and Class Stereotyping Shapes Attitudes Toward Affordable Housing

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(Received April 2011; revised October 2011)

ABSTRACT The development of affordable housing often involves a contentious siting process. Proposed housing developments frequently trigger concern among neighbors and community groups about potential negative impacts on neighborhood quality of life and property values. Advocates, developers, and researchers have long suspected that these concerns stem in part from racial or class prejudice. Yet, to date, empirical evidence supporting these assumptions is lacking. This study seeks to examine roles that perceptions of race and class play in shaping opinions that underlie public opposition to affordable housing. This study applies a public opinion survey to determine the extent to which stereotypes and perceptions of the poor and minorities relate to attitudes toward affordable housing. The results demonstrate that such perceptions are particularly strong determinants of negative attitudes about affordable housing. These findings provide advocates, planners, developers, and researchers with a more accurate portrayal of affordable housing opposition, thereby allowing the response to be shaped in a more appropriate manner.

KEY WORDS: Low-income housing, discrimination, minorities

Introduction

Affordable housing is an essential component of sustainable and equitable urban development, yet proposed projects often encounter public opposition. This study delves into the factors that produce such opposition, focusing on the role that perceptions of the poor and minority groups play in shaping attitudes about affordable housing. The research approach includes the development and implementation of a national survey of public opinion and a regression analysis using a newly created index of affordable housing attitudes as the outcome variable. The analysis presented here helps demonstrate the extent to which symbolic racism, poverty prejudice, and ideology explain attitudes toward affordable housing. Findings suggest that class and racial stereotypes and prejudice are strong factors influencing attitudes opposed to affordable housing. These results corroborate decades of speculation by advocates, planners, and researchers that racial and
class stereotyping influences ‘Not in My Backyard’ (NIMBY) opposition to affordable housing.

Previous research on NIMBY attitudes indicates that an individual’s ideology, level of trust in government, and the extent to which they agree with the necessity of the proposed development shape a complex response to unwanted local land uses (Dear, 1992; Fort et al., 1993; Wolsink, 1994). In the case of affordable housing siting, an additional factor often comes into play: the perceived character of the future residents. Research on housing attitudes suggests that those who oppose the development of affordable housing often are suspicious of those slated to live in the new units (Belden & Russonello, 2003; Goetz, 2008; Koebel et al., 2004; Pendall, 1999). Often, the extent to which these future residents are perceived as undesirable strongly shapes support or opposition for the project (Takahashi, 1997; Wilton, 2002).

Public opposition, usually more pronounced in nonpoor areas, often thwarts housing policy implementation. Although numerous researchers speculate as to the causes (Dear, 1992; Hartman, 2008; Koebel et al., 2004; Pendall, 1999; Ross, 2001; Wilton, 2002), the existing literature has not successfully examined the underlying reasons for local objections to affordable housing development. As one researcher stated, ‘[p]rimarily, the contest is rooted in several interrelated factors that contribute to the NIMBY reaction: fear of adverse impacts on property values, anti-government sentiment, anti-poor sentiment, and racial prejudice and segregation’ (Koebel et al., 2004, p. 3). Others suggested that concerns regarding property values have become a proxy for racial prejudice (Pendall, 1999; Wilton, 2002) or that ‘Not In My Back Yard has become the symbol for neighborhoods that exclude certain people because they are homeless, poor, disabled, or because of their race or ethnicity’ (Ross, 2001, p. i). Although public support for the ideals of equal opportunity and integration has broadened over time (Erikson & Tedin, 2003), policy-makers and the public appear unwilling to support the implementation of those ideals through policies and private action to plan, finance, and develop affordable housing. It is the intent of this paper to investigate the factors that influence individual attitudes toward affordable housing, concentrating primarily on ideology and stereotyping.

**Research Context**

The political science and sociological literatures present a number of potential frameworks for analyzing attitudes about public policies, as well as why people respond to survey questions in certain ways. The research on how people form opinions suggests that respondents often rely on cognitive shortcuts in order to answer survey questions (Alvarez & Brehm, 2002; Erikson & Tedin, 2003; Page & Shapiro, 1992; Lippmann, 1922; Zaller, 1992). These shortcuts include ideologies, stereotypes, and beliefs about particular aspects of public policies, or perceptions of their target populations (Lippmann, 1922; McConahay, 1982; Sears et al., 1997). Surveys investigating determinants of social policy attitudes strongly suggest that stereotypes and perceptions regarding the worthiness of the beneficiaries of such policies strongly influence social policy attitudes (Alesina et al., 2001; Alvarez & Brehm, 2002; Berinsky, 2002; Gandy et al., 1997; Gilens, 1999; Hunt, 2004; Iversen & Soskice, 2001; Reyna et al., 2005). Furthermore, when negative stereotypes of the target population interact with core values such as individualism or a lack of trust in government, levels of support for policies such as welfare (Alesina et al., 2001; Gilens, 1999), affirmative action (Alvarez & Brehm, 2002; Kluegel, 1986),
or integration (Bobo & Zubrinsky, 1996; Hurwitz & Peffley, 1992; McConahay, 1982) fall precipitously.

In order to fully understand how values and stereotypes contribute to affordable housing attitudes, it is necessary to first review how public opinion and sociological theories centering on the role of ideology and stereotyping have been applied to attitudes about other social policies. The following sections review this body of research as well as discuss existing surveys and literature on attitudes about affordable housing.

**Ideology**

Public opinion theory suggests that core beliefs and ideologies heavily influence policy attitudes (Alvarez & Brehm, 2002; Erikson & Tedin, 2003; Lippmann, 1922; McClosky & Zaller, 1984; Page & Shapiro, 1992; Zaller, 1992). This assertion holds particularly true when dealing with social or anti-poverty policies. Gilens (1999), Alvarez & Brehm (2002), and Bobo (1991) each discuss the role of ideology in driving public opinion on social issues. Public opinion scholars have studied at length the extent to which values shape public attitudes (Hurwitz & Peffley, 1992; Lippmann, 1922; McClosky & Zaller, 1984; Page & Shapiro, 1992). A person’s ideological frame also influences how one perceives government policies and programs. Trust in government, in turn, affects how individuals view policy implementation. If people do not trust the government to act in their interest on a particular issue, they are unlikely to support public policies that seek to remedy a particular social ill (Rahn & Rudolph, 2001).

For Americans, the core values and beliefs typically discussed in the political behavior literature are freedom (or liberty) and equality (Alesina et al., 2001; Bobo, 1991; Hurwitz & Peffley, 1992; O’Connor, 2000). In some cases, “freedom” may more often be referred to as “individualism” and “equality” as “egalitarianism” (Erikson & Tedin, 2003, p. 39). Those with individualistic ideologies tend to view socioeconomic status as justified; material success demonstrates that a person made the most of their opportunities and worked hard. Individualists also view differences in socioeconomic status as necessary to provide incentives to ‘get ahead’. Moreover, individualists tend to view the economic system as working well and justly; they believe that business profits are distributed fairly and according to what has fairly earned (Alvarez & Brehm, 2002; Erikson & Tedin, 2003). Egalitarians tend to view the government as responsible for securing the basic needs of its people, including adequate job opportunities and affordable goods. They believe everyone deserves a dignified existence, regardless of the work effort expended. They also view success as dependent on family background, networking, or nepotism rather than hard work or pulling oneself up by one’s bootstraps (Alvarez & Brehm, 2002; Berinsky, 2002; Bobo, 1991). These core values along with political beliefs such as fiscal conservatism and trust in government combine to create an ideology or ideological frame that is often used as a cognitive shortcut when forming opinions about public policies.

**Stereotypes**

Research on policy preferences demonstrates that attitudes about the beneficiaries of public programs significantly influence support for those policies (Kaufman & Smith, 1999; Schneider & Ingram, 1993). The sociological literature often applies the theory of
social constructionism when discussing public attitudes about social policies and their beneficiaries. Schneider & Ingram (1993) explain that,

the social construction of target populations refers to the cultural characterizations or popular images of the person or groups whose behavior and well-being are affected by public policy. These characterizations are normative and evaluative, portraying groups in positive or negative terms through symbolic language, metaphors, and stories. (p. 334)

One of the most important manifestations of social constructions is the way people view the worthiness of themselves and others (Berinsky, 2002; Checkel, 1999; Schneider & Ingram, 1993). Such social constructions mirror the theme of worthy versus unworthy in social policy debates. Perceptions of worthiness prove particularly salient when discussing public policies that directly benefit minority populations (Branton & Jones, 2005; Clawson & Kegler, 2000; Gandy et al., 1997; Gilens, 1999; Harris, 1999; Hoyt, 1998; Weeks & Lupfer, 2004). Numerous studies corroborate these conclusions, finding that racial stereotyping has a significant influence on public attitudes toward minorities, race-targeted policies, and social welfare policies (Bobo, 1991; Krysan, 2000; Sears et al., 1997; Weeks & Lupfer, 2004).

The political psychology and sociological literature suggest that when studying perceptions and attitudes toward social policies, particularly policies aimed at reducing poverty, such work must incorporate both ideology and stereotyping, as they likely influence respondents’ opinions. Although housing policy generally falls within the purview of social policy, it is unique in its ties to a particular place: a neighborhood, a street, and a community. The construction of affordable housing is promoted as a tool to alleviate concentrated poverty, enhance access to opportunity, and improve affordability for many populations viewed as necessary or desirable to a community (Briggs, 2003; Freeman, 2003; Hartman, 1998; Iglesias, 2007; Musterd & Andersson, 2005; Pendall, 2000; Shlay, 1995). However, some housing policies receive more opposition than others due in part to the way the beneficiaries of such policies are perceived (Belden & Russonello, 2003; Field, 1997; Goetz, 2008; Koebel et al., 2004; Nyden et al., 2003; Wheeler, 1993).

**Attitudes Toward Affordable Housing**

A number of prior national, statewide, and local surveys measure American attitudes toward affordable housing (Pendall, 1999; Realtors, 2006; Stein, 1992). These surveys show that respondents largely support affordable housing as an abstract goal, yet tend to oppose its construction in their cities or neighborhoods (Belden et al., 2004). The disparity found in these surveys may indicate the principle–implementation gap, where support is strongest for vague, value-laden statements, yet fades as policies become more specific, or are proposed closer to home (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, p. 341). It may also be indicative of a NIMBY response, where those closest to a proposed project are less likely to support it.

Although few surveys ask questions specifically relating to the determinants of opposition, those that do find that a variety of triggers cause concern among respondents. One study summarized their findings by stating that opposition to affordable housing is largely based on the following:

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*Stereotypes & Attitudes toward Affordable Housing*
a reputation of poor maintenance; the perception that crime accompanies affordable housing; a sense of housing programs as giveaways; the oft-repeated concern with property values; and that it is unattractive (Belden & Russanelllo, 2003, p. 8).

Many of these concerns—particularly those of property value decline, poor maintenance, and increased crime—are reminiscent of concerns regarding racially integrated neighborhoods (Cashin, 2004; Clark, 1986; Darden, 2003). Such a coincidence leads a number of authors to suggest that NIMBY attitudes toward affordable housing may be shaped by negative attitudes toward minorities (Field, 1997; Hartman, 2008; Pendall, 1999).

Should it be demonstrated that racial prejudice toward the potential residents of proposed housing influences opposition to affordable housing, it should affect the current debate regarding NIMBY opposition. If stated concerns about property values and crime are masking negative views about minorities and the poor, then community outreach and education efforts will fail to resonate with the public. Furthermore, by continuing to acquiesce to community opposition to affordable housing, planners and policy-makers may inadvertently legitimize racial and class discrimination. The public opinion methods applied in this study make a substantial contribution to the existing research on NIMBY, as well as provide planners and policy-makers with a better understanding of public attitudes toward affordable housing.

### Study Design

This study seeks to determine whether attitudes toward minorities and the poor, as well as ideology, influence public attitudes toward affordable housing. Previous studies and surveys regarding opposition to affordable housing focused primarily on the ‘what’ of housing attitudes rather than on the ‘why’. Application of public opinion research focusing on the determinants of opinions about affordable housing should prove to be a valuable contribution to this literature. This study includes the creation of a national public opinion survey and statistical analysis to test four main hypotheses:

1. **Racial stereotyping** has a strong, positive relationship with the *NIMBY Index*.
2. **Poverty stereotyping** has a strong, positive relationship with the *NIMBY Index*.
3. **Ideology** is moderately related to the *NIMBY Index*—Specifically,
   a. **egalitarianism** has a negative relationship with the *NIMBY Index*;
   b. **conservatism** has a positive relationship with the *NIMBY Index*; and
   c. **trust in government** has a negative relationship with the *NIMBY Index*.
4. The **self-interest** and **cohort** variables have a weak or no relationship with the *NIMBY Index*.

Prior to survey development, three focus groups were held to vet participants for their responses to various wording styles, terms, and labels. The primary goal of these focus groups was to investigate attitudes toward the development of affordable housing in nonpoor areas, since these areas typically elicit the strongest negative response to such housing. When compared to previous studies, results from these focus groups helped identify the main concerns of NIMBY opposition. The focus groups and extensive literature review served to hone the construction, wording, and order of the questions comprising the dependent variable. Conducting focus groups ensured that the survey construction utilized
clear language that represents the underlying concepts that the questions intend to measure, thus improving the validity of the survey instrument as a whole.

The survey instrument was further tested using cognitive interviewing and a survey pretest. Standard response categories were applied using a four-option Likert scale (strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, and strongly disagree), along with a volunteered ‘don’t know’ response option. The survey was implemented by telephone using a national sample, and received 285 valid responses.

Due to the relatively small size of the sample, the results skewed in certain ways. Table 1 details broad demographic characteristics for the US population (18+), the population who voted in the 2004 election (self-reported), and the sample for this survey. All data for the US population and US voters categories were obtained from a report analyzing voting behavior in the 2004 presidential election by the US Census Bureau (Holder, 2006).4

The sample group is slightly older, more educated, has a higher percentage of women, and a higher percentage of homeowners than the US population. However, when compared with the voting population, the sample matches up more closely. It is the voting population who are most likely to participate in local elections and referenda, and most likely to voice their opinions regarding affordable housing when confronted with actual

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Sample population analysis</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>US population (per cent)</strong></td>
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<td>Age</td>
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<td>Hispanic</td>
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<td>Education</td>
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<td>Unknown</td>
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<td>Tenure</td>
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<td>Owner</td>
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<td>Renter</td>
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*Measure for the lowest income tiers do not match up exactly. Income in the census is measured in slightly different categories than in the study sample (the census bureau categories are <$20K and $20–$50K; mine are <$25K and $25–$50K), so the low end of the income spectrum may match better than the table indicates.*
development (McDonald, 2007). Furthermore, Dear (1992) suggests that those most likely to participate in NIMBY opposition are more likely to be homeowners, as well as exceed the general population in both education and earnings.5

The sample also skews toward individuals with a conservative ideology. The respondents in this study are much more conservative (50 per cent) than liberal (20 per cent).6 This stands in contrast to the most recent National Election Study (2004), in which the population self-identifies as 40 per cent conservative and 29 per cent liberal. These elements should be kept in mind when generalizing the results discussed herein to the broader population at large. However, the close alignment between the sample set and the US voting population indicates that it may be appropriate to generalize to those who regularly vote.

**Defining ‘Affordable Housing’**

As Goetz (2008) demonstrates, the rhetoric used when discussing housing can shape attitudes about policies and projects. This was an issue in many prior studies using survey research, as they did not define what they meant by ‘affordable housing’. In order to strengthen the construct validity of the survey items used in this project, the term was defined for the respondents as ‘affordable housing’ is housing that is developed through some combination of incentives, cost-effective construction techniques, and governmental subsidies that can be rented or purchased by households who cannot afford housing in the community’. This definition was developed by the Pace University Land Use Law Center (2007) and is utilized by many municipal governments to define affordable housing.

**Measures and Modeling**

This study uses a number of indexes—both the dependent variable (NIMBY Index) and three independent variables (RACE Index, POOR Index, and EGAL Index).7 All indexes were constructed by averaging, rather than summing, the items in order to keep as many cases in the final data-set as possible. Before conducting reliability tests, the components in each of the indexes were normalized so that the questions were all coded in the same direction. A number of items were reverse coded to achieve this outcome. Tables 3–6 identify the specific items included in each index.

**Dependent Variable**

This research utilizes a six-item index as the dependent variable. The NIMBY Index more accurately depicts individual opinions about affordable housing than previous studies, as it measures the extent to which people agree with a number of concerns about affordable housing and its residents, rather than simply asking a variant of, ‘do you support affordable housing’. The selection of these questions followed a thorough literature review and focus group research to ensure that both the individual questions and the index as a whole demonstrate high construct validity. The final product is a six-item index (see Table 3) that shows strong internal validity.8

Previous studies demonstrate that neighbors are seldom forthcoming as to the specific reasons they do not want affordable housing developed nearby (Dear, 1991; Field, 1997; Galster et al., 2003; Pendall, 1999; Stover et al., 1994). Even those who are willing to
discuss their concerns about property values or neighborhood decline seldom explain what aspects about the proposed housing prompt them to express such concerns. This survey asked direct questions A009 (would you support the development of affordable housing in your city of town?) and A010 (would you support the development of affordable housing in your neighborhood?) as well as the NIMBY Index to compare responses. Using the more specific questions in the NIMBY Index limits the instance of socially desirable answers and provides a better indication of which elements of affordable housing spur opposition.

Comparing the two measures of affordable housing attitudes, the NIMBY Index strongly correlates to the direct questions A009 and A010, which are presented in Table 2. This indicates not only that a strong relationship between the NIMBY Index and professed support for affordable housing exists, but also that the correlation grows stronger as the proposed development grows closer, thus embodying the NIMBY response.

Furthermore, the correlation between the index and question A010 is much stronger than what occurred between question A010 and any of the individual items included in the index. This indicates that the index as a whole provides a stronger measurement of opposition to affordable housing than any single item contained therein. By pairing this index with questions regarding the hypothesized determinants of opposition, the relationship can be analyzed without relying solely upon the respondents’ stated views.

**Independent Variables**

Previous public opinion studies used various ideology measures with demonstrated validity. The Egalitarianism Index (EGAL Index) used in this project has been applied in numerous public opinion studies (Alvarez & Brehm, 2002; Bobo, 1991; Brewer, 2003; Feldman & Steenbergen, 2001), as well as consistently appearing in the National Election Study. Table 4 lists the specific question wording as they appeared in the survey. Because the EGAL Index only measures a specific type of ideological stance, also included are questions that ask respondents to place themselves on a seven-point liberalism-conservatism scale as well as a measure of trust in government (How often can you trust the government to do what is right?). Past studies demonstrate that these three facets of ideology relate to social policy attitudes when applied in surveys. The most demonstrative of these was a 1991 study, which found that ‘both social responsibility and economic individualism influence social welfare policy attitudes’ (Bobo, 1991).

This study measures racial stereotyping by applying the symbolic racism scale (RACE Index) developed by Henry and Sears. This index has been found to influence attitudes...
toward social policies in a number of studies (Green et al., 2006; Henry & Sears, 2002; Sears et al., 1997; Tarman & Sears, 2005). The RACE Index demonstrated high reliability using eight items\textsuperscript{12}, which can be found in Table 5.

This study also applies a newly developed index that measures poverty stereotyping (POOR Index). Although the questions were used individually in many studies reviewed in the literature, this is the first time that these questions were applied as a single measure. As a result, the POOR Index had a lower score of internal reliability than the other indexes.\textsuperscript{13} However, factor analysis failed to provide conclusive evidence that the questions included in the variable should have been organized in a different manner. Furthermore, Cronbach’s $\alpha$ analysis shows that removing any variable would reduce the reliability of the index. Therefore, the final POOR Index consists of eight items, which can be found in Table 6.

Although the ideology and stereotyping variables discussed above comprise the core independent variables of interest, also included are variables that have been discussed in the literature as potentially related to social policy attitudes, neighborhood choice, and housing opposition. This has been done in order to minimize specification error and ensure that no important variables were excluded. The dominant theory in the NIMBY literature (Dear, 1991) proffers that opposition to such housing results primarily from the perception that affordable housing constitutes a threat to self-interest. Thus, it is essential to include individual and neighborhood level variables that may capture self-interest. These include whether the respondent is a homeowner, whether they live in a suburban area, whether they live in a single-family home, whether their neighborhood constitutes only single-family homes, income, and the presence of children under 18 years of age in the household.

The survey also includes a number of demographic variables previously shown to influence policy attitudes. As Erikson and Tedin state, ‘group characteristics can clearly make a difference in how people see the political world. Belonging to a group is part of one’s self-identification’ (2003, p. 205). One of the most influential group identifiers is age. Cohort, or generational effects, demonstrates a significant influence on policy attitudes, particularly opinions toward social policies (Erikson & Tedin, 2003). In order to capture the potential influence of these effects, a dummy variable measuring the retired cohort (age is 65+ years) is included. The public opinion literature also suggests that education is ‘strongly correlated with political tolerance and support for democratic values...[and] college generally has a liberalizing effect on noneconomic political opinions’ (Erikson & Tedin, 2003, p. 127). Thus, education also warrants inclusion. Gender also plays an important role in shaping policy attitudes. For example, women are more likely than men to support public policies aimed toward social justice (Erikson and Tedin, 2003). Since this study measures racial attitudes, the race of the respondents is likely a determinant of policy preferences. A dummy variable for white/Caucasian respondents in the model captures the potential effect that the respondent’s race may have on their attitudes about affordable housing. These self-interest and cohort variables are included to control for their effects regression analysis: no strong hypotheses are connected to their inclusion. In fact, it is expected that few of these variables will prove to be significant predictors of NIMBY attitudes.

\textit{Methodological Limitations}

In recent years, telephone surveys experienced a sharp decline in response rates. This decline results primarily from larger percentages of unlisted phone numbers due to both
increased mobile phone use and avoidance of telemarketing. Furthermore, the public typically does not distinguish between sales calls and survey requests, which has increased survey refusal rates in recent years. There are a number of different ways to calculate the response rate. Three are applied here.

1. **Response rate.** The response rates are the proportion of completed interviews in the total number of eligible respondents (includes no answers, calls going to voicemail, and answering machines). *Rate: 15 per cent.*

2. **Contact rate.** The number of eligible persons contacted, out of all eligible cases. *Rate: 60 per cent.*

3. **Refusal rate.** The proportion of all cases in which a housing unit or the respondent refuses to be interviewed, or breaks-off an interview, of all potentially eligible cases. *Rate: 50 per cent.*

These rates are low, but in line with what is expected from academic telephone surveys (Keeter *et al.*, 2006). Furthermore, studies comparing surveys with high and low response rates demonstrate little difference in validity or accuracy with lower response rates (Keeter *et al.*, 2000). Keeter *et al.* (2000) find that, ‘very few significant differences were found on attention to media and engagement in politics, social trust and connectedness, and most social and political attitudes’ (p. 125). Therefore, measurements of attitudes regarding affordable housing, poverty, and race are not likely to be severely affected by a low response rate. Furthermore, despite this low response rate, the sample does parallel closely the voting population of the USA. Thus, it is fairly representative of people expected to join the housing debate and impact the potential development of affordable housing.

**Results**

The respondents to this survey are relatively affluent and well-educated homeowners. Eighty-two per cent own their homes, and 46 per cent have lived in those homes for more than 10 years. Most respondents (60 per cent) live in metropolitan areas (large city, small city, or suburb) and the overwhelming majority (80.4 per cent) resides in a single-family home in a predominantly single-family neighborhood (65.8 per cent). Not surprisingly, almost all of the respondents consider themselves ‘middle class’ (84 per cent), and nearly all of the respondents think that their neighborhood is a great (42.3 per cent) or good (44 per cent) place to live. More than half (53.7 per cent) say that they live in a ‘somewhat’ (35.2 per cent) or ‘very’ (18.5 per cent) racially diverse neighborhood. They also live in neighborhoods that consist of a mix of ages, and 35 per cent have children under 18 years of age living in their home. The survey results discussed below explain how these predominantly middle-class Americans view various aspects of affordable housing.

**Attitudes Toward Affordable Housing**

Table 2 details the extent to which respondents state that they would support the development of affordable housing, even if it were proposed nearby. These findings are consistent with previous research on NIMBY (Chong *et al.*, 2001; Dear, 1992; Fischel, 2001; Fort *et al.*, 1993; Lober & Green, 1994; Wolsink, 1994), particularly since opposition increases as the proposal moves from the respondent’s ‘city or town’ to
‘neighborhood’. As expected, concerns or perceptions of risk will grow stronger as the unwanted land use moves closer.

The survey data also indicate that the respondents have strong concerns about both the proposed housing type and its residents. Respondents indicate concern about the effect affordable housing may have on property values, crime, and local schools. Thus, despite widespread support for developing affordable housing nearby, when looking at specific questions regarding the potential negative externalities affordable housing may bring, it is clear that support decreases (Table 3).

Despite these numerous concerns, the public certainly does not universally oppose affordable housing, and do acknowledge some benefits to its development. Respondents feel that residents would typically make good neighbors, and most feel that it improves the appearance of neighborhoods. Nearly, two-thirds agree that building affordable housing would have a positive impact on the local economy. Although these results are similar to what has been shown in previous studies on housing attitudes, this study also provides an indication as to what specific factors may shape the concern neighbors have about affordable housing.

Potential Determinants of Housing Attitudes

Although the finding that the public is quite supportive of affordable housing and willing to include housing priced affordably nearby is heartening, the crux of this study is to determine why those who feel less inclined to support affordable housing come to that conclusion, focusing on the roles of ideology and stereotyping.

Table 3. Questions comprising the NIMBY Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly or somewhat agree (per cent)</th>
<th>Strongly or somewhat disagree (per cent)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building affordable housing in my neighborhood would lower property values</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building affordable housing in my neighborhood would increase crime</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordable housing makes communities more attractive</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People who live in affordable housing make good neighbors</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building affordable housing in my neighborhood would negatively affect the community’s character</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building affordable housing in my neighborhood would increase traffic</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building affordable housing in my neighborhood would have a positive impact on the local economy</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building affordable housing in my neighborhood would have a negative impact on local schools</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a Item was re-coded to achieve index uni-directionality.

b Item was not included in the index due to a low correlation with the remaining items.
Ideology. Respondents’ ideology, including egalitarian values and willingness to support government intervention to achieve equality, indicates the degree to which they value access to opportunity, which likely influences affordable housing attitudes. The responses indicate that attitudes in favor of egalitarianism are not particularly widespread, and there is even less support for the government enabling or guaranteeing equality of outcomes.

These responses also suggest that the sample represents a fairly conservative ideology, as most respondents identified themselves as ‘4’ or higher (mean = 4.55) on the liberal–conservative continuum (1 = ‘very liberal’; 7 = ‘very conservative’). That such a high instance of respondents in this survey self-identifies as conservatives indicates that the sample is skewed toward a more conservative ideology than the population as a whole. Despite this lean toward conservatism, there is significant support for improving access to opportunity through government action. As is seen in Table 4, many respondents support government intervention to promote economic equality, but those receiving the highest levels of support specify a ‘worthy’ recipient of help—children or the temporarily unemployed. Thus, support for social policies and programs likely depends on how worthy the recipients of assistance are perceived.

The survey results also indicate that the public remains cautious in their trust of government. Forty per cent of respondents state that they can ‘almost never’ trust the government to do what is right, with only 4 per cent agreeing that they can ‘almost always’ do so. Respondents also feel that the government does not spend tax dollars efficiently or effectively. Seventy-six per cent of respondents believe that the government wastes ‘a lot’ of their tax dollars, with only 2 per cent saying ‘not very much’. Eighty per cent of respondents also feel that special interests have too much influence over government. These responses indicate that while the public may support egalitarian ideals, their suspicion of government may impede the implementation of these ideals through social policies.

Racial Attitudes. More than half of the respondents state that they live in racially diverse areas (54.7 per cent), yet as can be seen in Table 5, significant numbers hold negative

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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly or somewhat agree (per cent)</th>
<th>Strongly or somewhat disagree (per cent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is the responsibility of the government to reduce the differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The government should provide more chances for children for poor families to go to college</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The government should provide a job for everyone who wants one</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The government should provide everyone with a guaranteed basic income</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The government should provide temporary assistance for the unemployeda</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The government should spend less on benefits for the poorb</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Item was not included in the index due to a low correlation with the remaining items.
b Item was re-coded to achieve index uni-directionality.
views toward racial minorities. These results may be unreliable because neighborhood diversity is self-reported (A006: ‘Would you say that your neighborhood is racially diverse?’). Thus, respondents may perceive their neighborhood to be racially diverse, when it may not truly be; individual perceptions of what ‘diversity’ means may vary; or they could be answering in what they believe is a socially desirable manner. It would be necessary to compare such results with census data to determine the extent to which contact with minorities really influences attitudes, which cannot be done with the existing data-set due to the lack of location data. Regardless of the actual racial make-up of the neighborhood where respondents live, respondents appear to hold quite negative perceptions of minority individuals and groups.

Respondents also cleave regarding the perception of structural and institutional racism, with the sample split nearly evenly on the role of individual effort and responsibility in determining racial minorities’ status in society. Furthermore, a considerable percentage of respondents expresses frustration with the behavior and/or rhetoric of minorities regarding the economic and social situation. Nearly, three-quarters of respondents state that minorities complain more than they should ‘about their situation in society’. This indicates frustration with the current dialog about and around race in this country as well as a sense that minority groups feel entitled to aid or help they do not deserve.

Despite the high incidence of negative stereotyping, the vast majority of respondents agree that racial discrimination exists. However, their responses to the other questions on the symbolic racism index indicate that they do not view it as an insurmountable barrier to achieving equality through hard work. Such responses indicate an adherence to a common ‘American Ideology’ in which one may agree that access to opportunity might not be perfectly equal, but that those who strive to achieve will overcome obstacles (Alvarez &
Brehm, 2002; Bobo, 1991; McClosky & Zaller, 1984; Zucker, 1993). These responses suggest that, although many Americans recognize the presence of racial discrimination, they also feel that minorities spend too much time in criticizing society and their place in it, and too little time working to achieve their goals.

Poverty Attitudes. Since previous research demonstrated that the public tends to associate racial status with poverty status\(^1\) (Clawson & Kegler, 2000; Gilens, 1996; Hunt, 2004; Weeks & Lupfer, 2004), it is important to measure poverty stereotypes as well as racial stereotypes in order to control for separate effects poverty stereotyping may have on public opinion toward affordable housing. These results are presented in Table 6.

For the most part, it seems that respondents have stronger negative attitudes toward racial minorities than toward the poor. Unlike the high instance of agreement with negative perceptions and stereotypes toward racial minorities, questions regarding the poor receive much more positive responses. There are, however, some concerns about the poor and their behavior, particularly around criminal activity and family planning. Given the low instance of poverty stereotyping found in this study, along with the high instance of racial stereotyping, it is possible that the classist rhetoric used to explain opposition to affordable housing may actually be obscuring racially driven concerns.

In sum, whether the race or the class of the target population constitutes the main perceived threat inherent in affordable housing, these results suggest that perceptions about the type of person who may reside in affordable housing certainly shape attitudes about its development nearby.

Multivariate Analysis

The regression results in Table 7 present a test of what factors might influence opposition to affordable housing, measured using the NIMBY Index. The specific explanatory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly or somewhat agree (per cent)</th>
<th>Strongly or somewhat disagree (per cent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People who do not make much money are generally unmotivated</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor people commit fewer crimes than wealthy people(^{a})</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor people should not have children until they can afford to take care of them</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wealthy people are generally smarter than poor people</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most poor people cannot manage their money</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People living in poverty would rather commit crimes for financial gain than work for a living</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In general, poor people have the same moral values as other Americans(^{b})</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor people do not supervise their children enough</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{a}\) Item was re-coded to achieve index uni-directionality.

\(^{b}\) Item was not included in the index due to a low correlation with the remaining items.
variables of interest include the RACE Index, POOR Index, and the three facets of ideology (EGAL Index, Trust in Government, and Liberalism-Conservation Scale). It is hypothesized that each of these factors will be an important determinant of housing attitudes, and that the remaining explanatory variables lack a significant relationship to the outcome variable.

This model produces an $R^2$ of 0.358 (adjusted $R^2 = 0.320$), indicating that the independent variables predict a fair amount of the change in the dependent variable. Looking individually at the variables of interest, the hypotheses are largely confirmed. All of the primary variables of interest are statistically significant in the expected direction, with the exception of the EGAL Index. By far, the most powerful predictor of NIMBY attitudes in this model is racial stereotyping. Respondents who agree with stereotypes about racial minorities also largely agree with negative perceptions of affordable housing. This is also the case for poverty stereotyping, albeit to a lesser extent. Thus, racial prejudice is a stronger predictor of NIMBY attitudes than poverty prejudice. The survey results in this study suggest that racial prejudice may underlie opposition to a much greater extent than previously proven through academic research.

It is also likely that ideological attitudes shape affordable housing attitudes. While there are indications that egalitarianism and liberalism may lead to greater support for affordable housing, these variables are either not statistically significant (EGAL Index) or are significant at the 0.1 level, but with a low coefficient (Liberalism-Conservation). Furthermore, these values may be trumped by a lack of trust in government, which inspires more confidence in its relationship to the dependent variable than the other ideology variables. Regardless, although poverty stereotyping, and to a lesser extent, views regarding inequality, play a role, attitudes toward minorities demonstrate far stronger

### Table 7. Regression results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model $R^2$: 0.358; adjusted $R^2$: 0.320; $F = 9.343$ (significance = 0.000)</th>
<th>Unstandardized coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized coefficients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>Standard error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.768</td>
<td>0.230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RACE Index</td>
<td>0.356***</td>
<td>0.071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POOR Index</td>
<td>0.222***</td>
<td>0.078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EGAL Index</td>
<td>0.093</td>
<td>0.060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in Government</td>
<td>−0.138***</td>
<td>0.049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberalism-Conservation Scale</td>
<td>0.036*</td>
<td>0.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age is over 65 years</td>
<td>−0.049</td>
<td>0.077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>−0.008</td>
<td>0.057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>0.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race is White</td>
<td>−0.091</td>
<td>0.071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NH Not Diverse</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td>0.056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>0.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lives in SF Home</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lives in SF Neighborhood</td>
<td>0.119*</td>
<td>0.068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeowner</td>
<td>−0.049</td>
<td>0.089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children under 18 years at home</td>
<td>0.019</td>
<td>0.063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburb</td>
<td>0.145*</td>
<td>0.068</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***Variable is significant at the 0.01 level; *variable is significant at the 0.1 level.
predictive value. These results confirm the hypotheses set forth at the beginning of this analysis: race stereotyping, trust in government, and poverty stereotyping all serve as important predictors of NIMBY opposition to affordable housing.

As expected, most of the cohort and self-interest variables present weak coefficients, and most lack statistical significance. It should be noted that although few of the cohort or demographic variables appear significant in the model, given the small sample size analyzed, demographic variables should be included in future studies. The most notable relationship can be found with the variables ‘Suburb’ and ‘Lives in Single-Family (SF) neighborhood’. ‘Suburb’ is a dummy variable indicating that the respondent lives in an area considered a suburb. Interestingly, neither housing type (Lives in SF Home) nor housing tenure (Homeowner) is significant, thus the type of community one lives in proves a more important predictor of NIMBY attitudes than whether one owns that home, or in what type of home one lives. These results suggest that the type of community in which one lives can affect attitudes, but that homeownership, income, and other ‘self-interest’ measures do little to explain opposition to affordable housing. This in and of itself is an interesting finding that counters many of the assumptions about NIMBY commonly voiced by practitioners. Although demographic and self-interest variables do trend in the expected direction, they are not statistically significant. Thus, respondents living in homogeneous areas may feel that they have more to lose when it comes to developing affordable housing nearby, but the threats they perceive appear to be shaped by negative perceptions and stereotypes of the poor and minority groups.

However, it is important to remember that the higher margin of error resulting from the small sample makes it difficult to interpret variables that are significant only at the 0.1 level. Thus, no conclusions about the relationship between such variables (such as living in a suburb, living in a single-family home, or conservatism) should be based upon these results alone. Those variables that are significant at the 0.001 level (RACE Index, POOR Index, and Trust in Government) should inspire much greater confidence, as their relationship to the dependent variable is unlikely to disappear even with a much larger sample size.

Discussion

The predominant questions guiding this study are whether racial and class stereotyping influence the public’s views about affordable housing. Past research on NIMBY attitudes nearly always suggests that racism and classism shape opposition to nearby development (Stein, 1996; Pendall, 1999). However, such theories have not been empirically tested. The analysis provided in this study illustrates a clear relational pattern between stereotypes about the potential residents of affordable housing and concern about its construction nearby. Although this study also shows that socioeconomic factors and neighborhood characteristics play a role in shaping how respondents view affordable housing and the potential impacts it might have on their neighborhoods, few of these variables hold statistical significance.

This research demonstrates that fears about the people who might reside in affordable housing is a primary factor driving concerns about or opposition to affordable housing projects. It also supports the suspicions of planners and advocates that NIMBY opposition to affordable housing contains some element of racial prejudice. These results have some clear implications for both housing policy and fair housing law. Allowing affordable housing opposition to thwart its development hinders the government’s ability to successfully implement the goals of our national housing policies and gives neighbors the
power to exclude the poor and minorities from their neighborhoods. This exclusion directly conflicts with the professed ideals of our society, as well as with the legal framework established by the Civil Rights Act and Fair Housing Act, which protects minority groups from discrimination. Allowing such opposition to impede inclusionary housing efforts undermines 50 years of progress toward residential racial integration. This is not to say that every NIMBY battle represents opposition to racial integration. It does, however, indicate that planners should carefully consider how much power to cede to neighborhood residents or interest groups that oppose affordable housing.

The findings detailed in this study suggest that planners and policy-makers must take a stronger proactive stance in the siting and development of affordable housing. This may include providing planners and housing advocates with greater flexibility regarding local residential zoning codes that limit multi-family development, or the establishment of inclusionary housing policies at the local, state, or even national level. However, such changes require time and political power, neither of which are things planners have in abundance.

More minor and localized efforts might include shifting the focus education and marketing efforts currently underway in many municipalities to promote affordable housing. The survey results discussed here indicate that respondents do see much value in affordable housing. Shaping the marketing and education outreach mechanisms to emphasize the things that respondents see as positive aspects of affordable housing has on communities—namely the economic impact and the potential effects that new housing has on the appearance of communities—may go far to counter the negative perceptions of affordable housing development.

There are also lessons to be learned regarding how affordable housing can be framed to be more consistent with the ideological stance of many Americans. Although planners and researchers understand that affordable housing provides greater access for the poor to improve educational and economic opportunities, such positive outcomes doubtfully influence the opinions of potential neighbors. Instead, planners should frame affordable housing as an integral component of the local economy that provides resources for many important community members including first responders and educators. In order to do so, the concept of opportunity must be stressed. If Americans can begin to see affordable housing as a means to equal access to opportunity, their attitudes may shift more in favor of its development. Studies show that the stigma of public housing still permeates public attitudes about affordable housing (Belden & Russonello, 2003; Belden et al., 2004; Goetz, 2008; Koebel et al., 2004; Nyden et al., 2003; Stover et al., 1994). Although public housing was viewed as an entitlement program, promoting equality of outcomes, intelligent and consistent framing of affordable housing as promoting equality of opportunity may eventually allow such programs and developments to shake free of the stigma of the ‘projects’.

However, none of these efforts is likely to overcome the issue that respondents simply do not trust the government to do what is right. Highlighting the current housing policy paradigm of government subsidy of private construction may alleviate some of the public’s concerns about government involvement, but the perception that affordable equals government or public housing will be difficult to overcome. Only time and numerous examples of successful affordable housing developments will chip away at such deep and long-standing beliefs.

Whether via concrete inclusionary housing ordinances or through targeted marketing techniques, municipal government must promote regional housing needs even if that means overruling local public opinion. As Pendall (1999) states,
racist and classist antihousing action—still a common occurrence—must be
distinguished from other opposition to housing, if only because policy responses to
prejudice-based opposition will differ markedly from those based on the real
impacts of new housing on neighborhood quality. (p. 115)

The findings from this study provide a framework for policymakers and planners to begin
to distinguish between legitimate opposition to affordable housing and that based on
misperceptions or fear. Future research on housing attitudes must continue to incorporate
perceptions of race and class into their studies in order to move toward a more complete
and sophisticated understanding of the NIMBY response to affordable housing.

Acknowledgements

This research was conducted with the support of a US Department of Housing and Urban Development Doctoral
Dissertation Research Grant and support from the University of Texas Graduate School and the School of
Architecture. Special thanks to Elizabeth Mueller for overseeing the research and to Andrew Stackhouse for
reading many early drafts.

Notes

1 Ordinary least squares linear regression was used since the dependent variable is a mean index, and
thus a continuous variable (albeit bounded). Each of the independent variables is normally distributed,
and the data do not indicate a nonlinear relationship between any of the independent variables and the
dependent variable. Bivariate correlations between every explanatory variable were also applied to test
for multicollinearity, and the results indicate no issues with multicollinearity between the explanatory
variables.

2 Survey researchers differ on the subject of providing a neutral response category. On the one hand,
providing a neutral category allows respondents who do not have concrete opinions about the question
to accurately describe those views. On the other hand, a neutral response category can lead to
satisficing, or taking cognitive shortcuts to answer a survey question, leading to a biased response
(Groves et al., 2004, p. 208). This can seriously undermine the validity of the survey instrument as a
result of response error. Therefore, a neutral option was not provided but rather a volunteered 'don't
know' and 'refused' option allowed the interviewers to appropriately code such responses.

3 The sample for this survey was purchased from Survey Sampling International (SSI) and utilizes SSI’s
‘Random B’ sampling technique. SSI takes their sample from a database of all ‘directory listed’
households, but does not provide data on the geographic location of respondents. The University of
Texas Office of Survey Research (OSR) implemented the survey using Computer-Aided Telephone
Interviewing facilities. OSR used within-household sampling once a call is successful to obtain a more
appropriate population sample rather than the household-level sample obtained through random digit
dialing. Although such methods may result in lower response rates, using this technique increases
the representativeness of the final sample. All interviews were conducted in English only, and no
incentives were provided. No households who were contacted were unable to take the survey due to
language barriers, so it is unlikely that there is any bias emanating from language exclusion.

4 Low response rates can result in nonresponse bias, although a number of articles suggest that changes
in nonresponse rates do not necessarily alter survey estimates (Curtin et al., 2000; Keeter et al., 2000;
Merkle and Edelman, 2002). As suggested by Groves (2006), post-data collection weighting was
explored on potentially biased variables, but no significant changes in estimates were found, thus the
nonweighted estimates were used in the analysis.

5 Income in the census is measured in slightly different categories than in the study sample (the census
bureau categories are < $20K and $20–50K; mine are < $25K and $25–50K), so the low end of the
income spectrum may match better than the table indicates.

6 Measured using a liberal–conservative scale which delineates ‘1’ as ‘very liberal’ and ‘7’ as ‘very
conservative’. Twenty per cent of the respondents identified themselves at 1–3 on the scale; 30 per
cent at 4; and 50 per cent at 5–7.
For missing data, the mean was imputed in order to maintain as many recorded responses as possible.

The index shows very high internal reliability with a Cronbach’s $\alpha$ score of 0.846.

Correlation between the index and question A009 is 0.652, and correlation between the index and question A010 is 0.697.

Correlations ranging from 0.471 to 0.557.

The five-item index demonstrated strong reliability, with a Cronbach’s $\alpha$ score of 0.818.

The eight-question index proves reliable with an $\alpha$ score of 0.801.

The eight-question index demonstrates an acceptable internal reliability with a Cronbach’s $\alpha$ score of 0.703.

The sample size used in this study is comparable to other small-scale studies. As discussed by Wimmer & Dominick (2010), Groves et al., (2004), and Dillman et al., (2009), one would ideally have 800+ responses in a national survey in order to reduce the margin of error to under 3 per cent. With a sample of 300, the margin of error is around 6 per cent. Most survey researchers recognize that in all but large-research centers, getting 800+ respondents is often cost-prohibitive. Thus, they state that as long as the sample is randomly drawn (which this is) and representative (which this is), sample size should not adversely affect the results.

In this study, the RACE Index and POOR Index present only a moderate correlation (0.447).

The residual plot demonstrates normality; collinearity statistics (Variance inflation factor and Tolerance) show nothing of concern regarding collinearity (VIF $<2$; Tolerance $>0.5$) for all variables.

Future research may wish to consider structural equation modeling to determine the extent to which ideology influences housing attitudes both directly and indirectly via how stereotypes are framed.

For a history of the Fair Housing Act in the USA, see Carr (1999), HUD (2006), and Kennedy (1999).

References


