

A map of New York City and its surrounding areas, including parts of New Jersey and Connecticut. The map is overlaid with numerous red dots of varying sizes, representing the locations and relative frequency of evictions. The dots are most densely clustered in the central and southern parts of the city, particularly in the areas around Manhattan and the Bronx. The map is shown in a light gray tone, with the red dots providing a stark contrast.

ADDRESSING THE EVICTION EPIDEMIC

by Oksana Mironova

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ADDRESSING THE EVICTION EPIDEMIC

In 2017, landlords filed 230,000 residential eviction petitions in New York City’s housing court; while City Marshals executed 21,000 evictions.¹ The true number of people displaced from their homes because of eviction proceedings is somewhere in between these numbers. While we can be reasonably certain² that 21,000 households experienced a formal eviction, an unknown number of tenants were pressured to settle with their landlords under unfavorable terms, often staving off their inevitable eviction for just a temporary period of time. An unknown number of tenants moved out after the court issued an eviction warrant, to avoid the trauma and indignity of having a Marshal show up at their door.

An eviction petition kicks off a process that, for some tenants, leads to years of housing instability and uncertainty. Tenant screening for credit and housing court history is nearly universal, and a recent eviction will exclude you from almost all types of housing, including affordable and public housing.³ As a result, tenants are pushed into precarious housing arrangements, including no-lease month-to-month agreements, doubling up with family or friends, or the shelter system. These temporary and unstable living situations exclude households from formal tenant protections and strain familial relationships.

It is well documented that evictions and homelessness are connected. As we wrote in [Tenants on the Edge](#), our recent report that draws on our annual Unheard Third survey, between 2000 and 2016, New York City has experienced rapid growth, about 7 percent, in both population and the number of households. Over the same time period, the number of low-income households has remained fairly stable, while the number of homeless families nearly tripled. Stemming evictions is key to lowering the city’s shelter population.

City and state housing policy decisions impact the rate of evictions in New York City. Landlords use the threat of eviction either as a retaliatory measure against tenants who are organizing, or to force tenants out of rent stabilized apartments, especially in gentrifying neighborhoods. Pro-landlord provisions in the Rent Stabilization Law, like the 20 percent bonus that a landlord can add to the rent upon vacancy, contribute to tenant harassment in neighborhoods with rising rents. The city’s Independent Budget Office’s (IBO) analysis of 2002–2014 data shows that the largest share of family shelter entries (43 percent) were from rent regulated apartments, likely as a result of loophole-related rent hikes or deregulation.⁴ Strengthening rent regulations and assessing the impact of the city’s development policies on rents in low-income neighborhoods—including the city’s housing plan and neighborhood rezonings—is central to stemming evictions.

The city—under pressure from tenant and homeless advocates—has taken positive steps toward mitigating evictions. In 2017, the city launched a groundbreaking Right to Counsel (RTC) program that provides low-income tenants facing an eviction in housing court with an attorney. Eviction proceedings are heavily weighted towards landlords, who are almost universally represented by lawyers in court. Tenant access to attorneys balances the scales.

The program is being rolled out over a five-year period, and is currently active in 10 zip codes. This month, the city will expand the program to cover additional zip codes. In addition, on September 12, 2018, the Right to Counsel Coalition, with councilmembers Levine and Gibson, will introduce a bill to expand RTC to serve a broader range of tenants and case types.

Where is the Greatest Need?

As RTC continues to expand, it is important to understand where tenants face the greatest threat from preventable evictions. Below, we analyze the pattern of evictions across the city by neighborhood,⁵ visualizing the relationship between evictions and severe rent burdens, poverty, race, gender, and rent regulation.

Using the 2017 eviction data, we analyzed the relationship between eviction and demographic factors on a neighborhood scale. When controlling for neighborhood poverty levels and housing type, we found three predictors for high eviction rates: high rates of severe rent burdens; a high share of black tenants; and a high share of Latinx tenants.

Map 1: Evictions & severe rent burdens

Severe rent burdens, when a renter household pays more than half of their income toward rent, are a top predictor of an eviction. This map illustrates individual 2017 evictions over neighborhood shares of severely rent burdened households. Overall, the Bronx has the highest rates of severely rent burdened tenants in the city. Morris Heights, Bedford Park/Norwood, and Highbridge are all neighborhoods where about 40 percent of tenants are paying more than half of their incomes toward rent. These same neighborhoods are the epicenter of the eviction epidemic in the city.

While the Bronx has the greatest share of severely rent burdened tenants overall, Kensington/Borough Park, Coney Island, and Brownsville (in Brooklyn) and Far Rockaway (in Queens) also have very high rates of heavily rent burdened tenants.

Map 2: Evictions & poverty

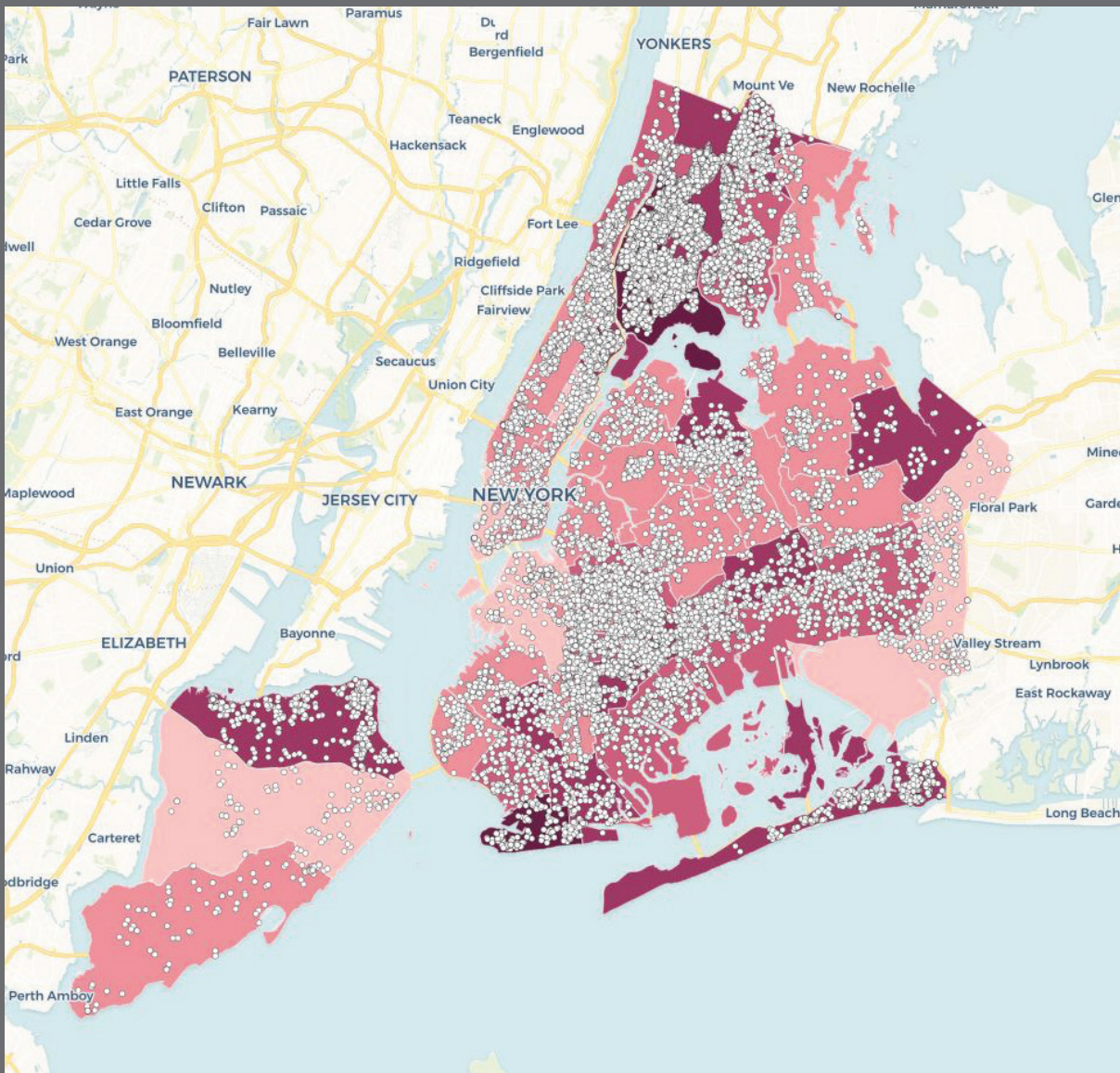
New York City's poorest renter households—the 373,000 that earn below the federal poverty level⁶—bear the brunt of the city's housing crisis. Seventy-eight percent of the city's poor tenants are severely rent burdened, as compared to 27 percent of tenants overall. Removing subsidized tenants from the equation—those that pay a third of their income toward rent because they live in public or other government-assisted housing or receive a section 8 voucher—creates an even starker picture. Eighty-six percent of unassisted poor tenants pay more than half of their income on rent and are incredibly vulnerable to evictions as a result.

This map illustrates 2017 evictions over neighborhood shares of poor households. Neighborhoods in central, western, and south Bronx have the highest share of poor households in the city. For example, Morris Heights and Melrose/Longwood are neighborhoods where more than 40 percent of households are at or below the federal poverty line. There is noticeable overlap between neighborhoods with high rates of severe rent burdens and those with high rates of poverty.

While the Bronx has the greatest share of poor residents overall, about one out of three residents in Brownsville and East New York and one out of four residents in Washington Heights/Inwood and Chinatown are poor.

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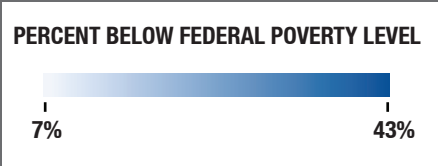
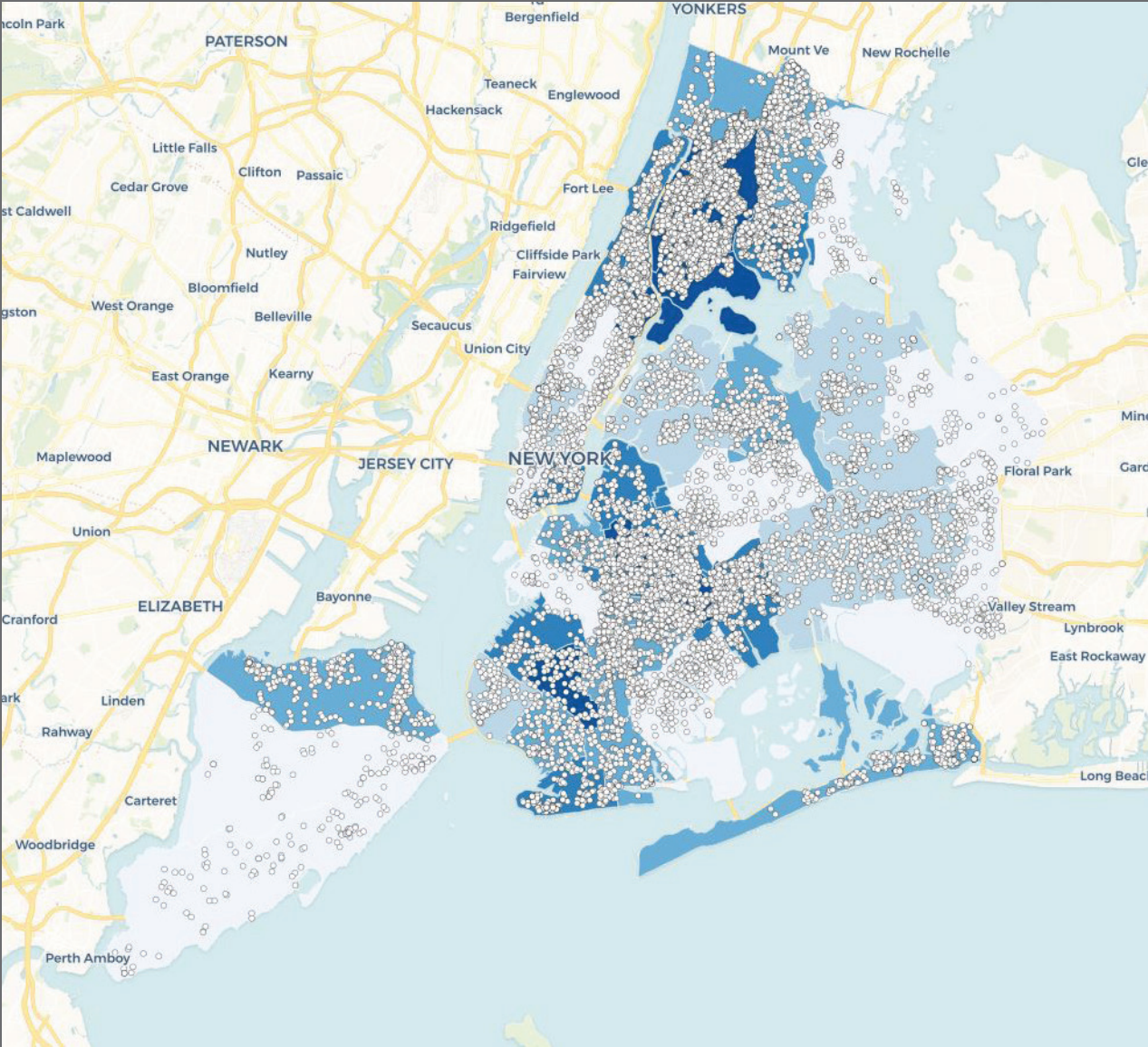
Map 1: Evictions & Severe Rent Burdens



PERCENT SEVERELY RENT BURDENED



Map 1: Evictions & Poverty



Map 3: Evictions, Race, & Gender

Grassroots tenant organizing groups across the country, like the Right to Counsel Coalition in New York City and City Life/Vida Urbana in Boston have identified evictions as a major contributor to instability in neighborhoods of color. This has been corroborated by sociologist Matthew Desmond's widely-covered research, which makes a strong case that evictions perpetuate poverty, especially among black households, and particularly those headed by women. Our analysis of 2017 eviction data shows a relationship between neighborhoods with a high share of black or Latinx renters and evictions, when controlling for poverty levels. Further, according to our 2017 Unheard Third survey, the share of black respondents who have been threatened with an eviction was twice as high as the share of white respondents.

This map visualizes 2017 evictions over three layers of demographic data on a neighborhood level: the share of black residents, the share of Latinx residents,⁷ and the share of women under the federal poverty level. The prominence of central, northwest, and south Bronx across the map's layers point to an intersectional experience of the eviction crisis.⁸

Given the relationship between race and evictions, it is not surprising that homelessness disproportionately impacts black and Latinx New Yorkers, women with children in particular: 58 percent of New York City homeless shelter residents are black, 31 percent are Latinx, 7 percent are white, and less than 1 percent are Asian.⁹

Map 4: Evictions & Rent Regulation

Tenants living in rent regulated apartments may face the threat of unjust evictions as a result of various forms of harassment by landlords. The 20 percent vacancy bonus applied to new rent regulated leases and vacancy decontrol both make high tenant turnover in rent regulated buildings profitable for landlords. Analysis of 2017 Unheard Third survey data shows that 43 percent of low-income, rent regulated New Yorkers reported one or more types of harassment, as compared to 36 percent of low-income New Yorkers residing in unregulated apartments. This could indicate that landlords of rent regulated buildings are using harassment as a strategy to push out rent regulated tenants.

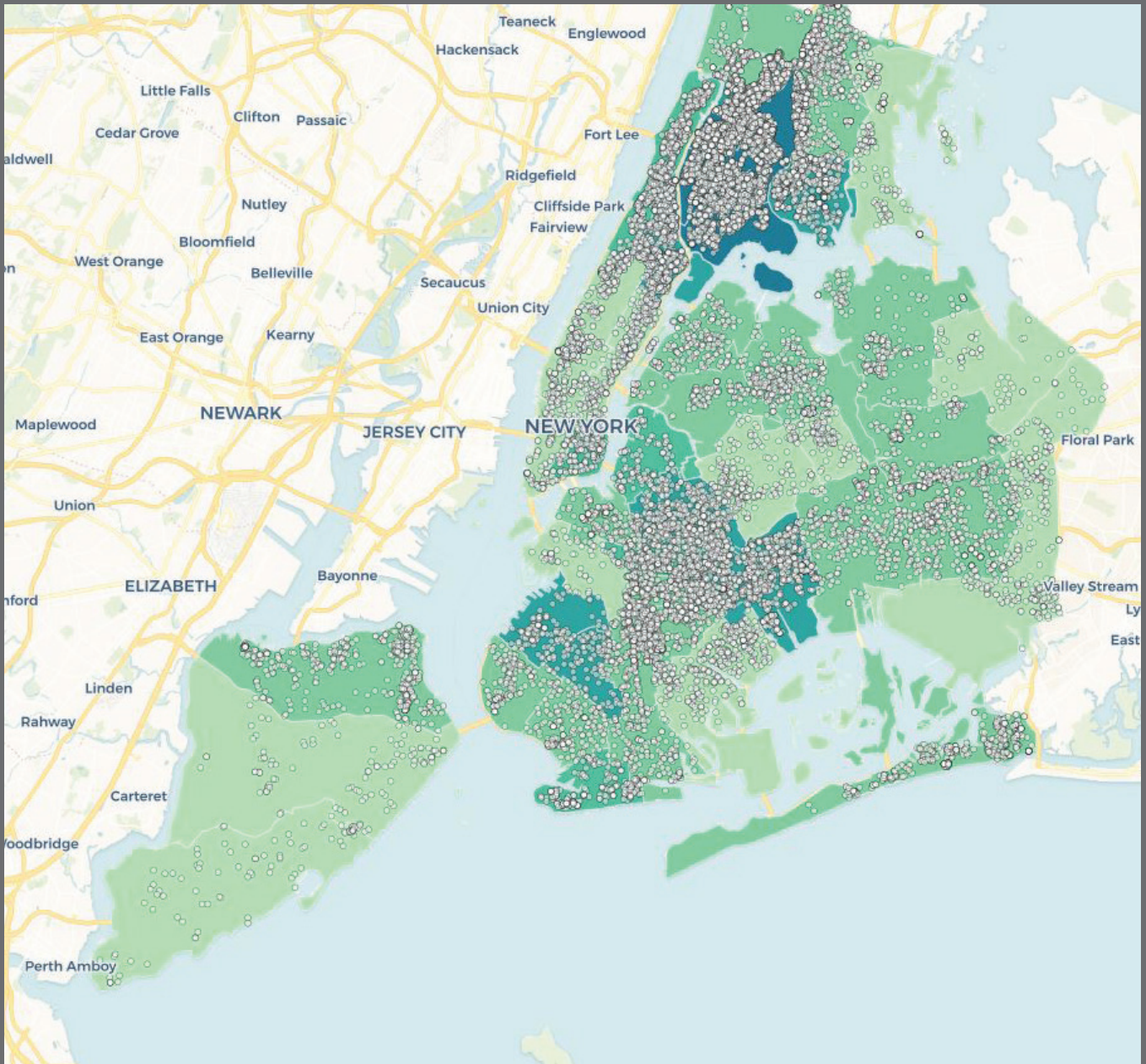
Stabilized tenants living in neighborhoods where property values and unregulated rents are rising quickly are under the greatest pressure.

This map illustrates 2017 evictions over the share of rent regulated units by neighborhood. The vast majority of rental housing stock in Bedford Park/Norwood, Highbridge, and Morris Heights is rent regulated. These are also the city's poorest neighborhoods with a high number of severely rent burdened households and high rates of evictions. In these neighborhoods, tenants face multiple vulnerabilities, within the context of a weakened rent law system that incentivizes landlord harassment.

Neighborhoods like Washington Heights/Inwood and Crown Heights also have a high share of rent stabilized stock and a moderately high rate of evictions. In both neighborhoods, severe rent burdens are slightly less prevalent. However, both neighborhoods have seen rent prices skyrocket in recent years, creating an increased incentive for landlords to use unjust evictions as a tool to churn tenants.

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Map 3: Evictions, Race, & Gender



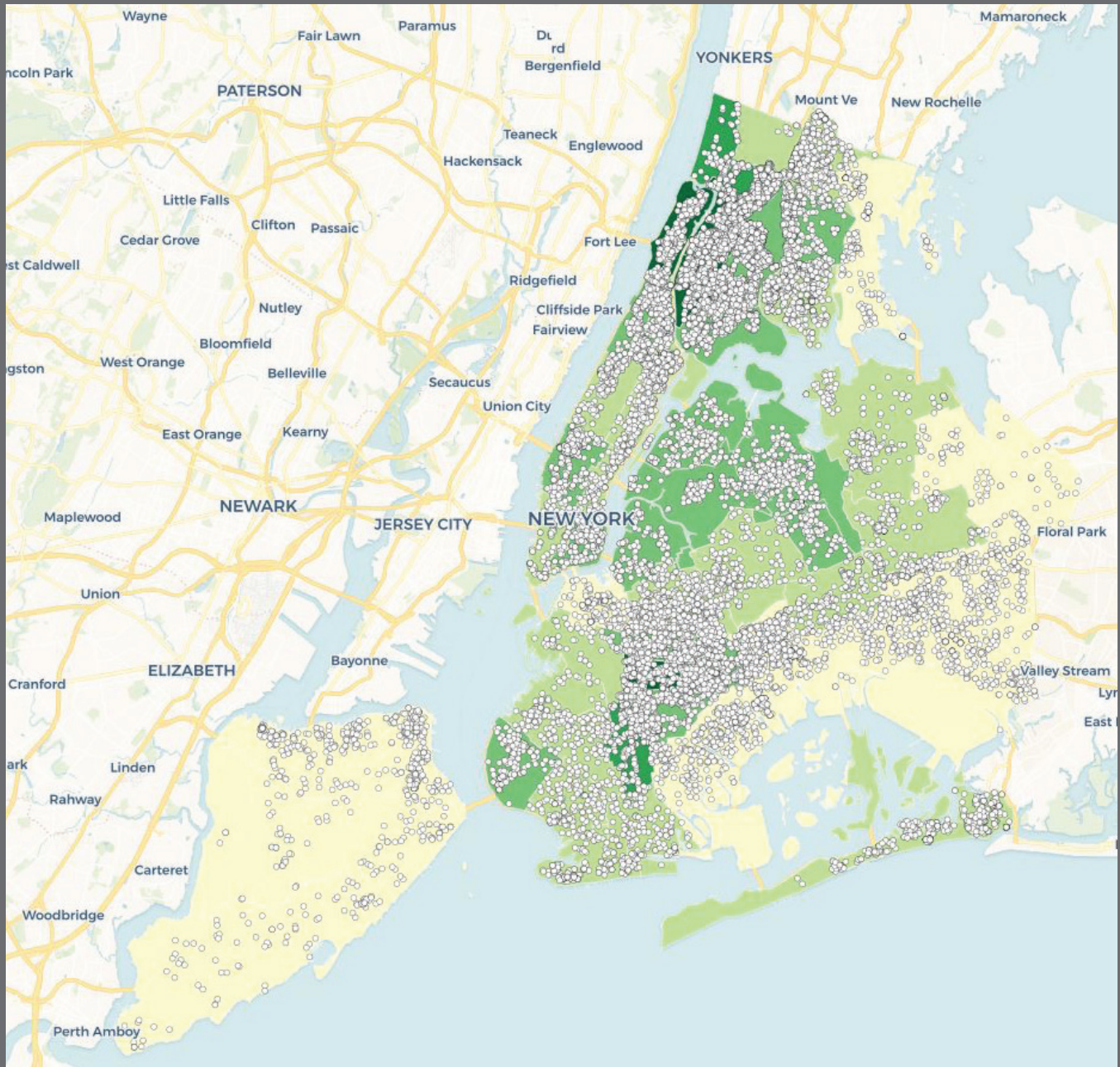
PERCENT WOMEN UNDER FEDERAL
POVERTY LEVEL



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Map 4: Evictions & rent regulation



PERCENT RENT REGULATED



Map 5: Evictions & zip codes for legal services

This map includes the demographic and housing data described above, with an additional layer of zip codes where tenants are able to access eviction-prevention services, including the Right to Counsel law.

Potential Impact of “RTC 2.0”

New York was the first city in the United States to pass a Right to Counsel (RTC) law. Since 2017, San Francisco and Newark have both introduced similar programs in response to each city’s unique conditions that are fueling their eviction crises. The San Francisco program is poised to reach further than New York City’s, because it is not income tested.

Drawing on the early successes of NYC’s RTC, councilmembers Levine and Gibson, together with the Right to Counsel NYC Coalition, are introducing a bill that would expand New York City’s program. The new bill would:

- Increase the income threshold to 400 percent of the federal poverty line;¹⁰
- Expand RTC outside of housing court to include special cases: administrative hearings for Mitchell-Lama residents; certain supreme court ejectment cases; and Housing Development Fund Corporation (HDFC) cases;
- Fund tenant organizing to connect tenants to attorneys before they arrive at court.

While potential impact of the expansion is difficult to measure, there are about 785,000 renter households that are under the 200 percent of the poverty line, or 37 percent of all renters. There are about 528,000 renter households in the

200–400 percent cohort, making up 25 percent of the total share of households.

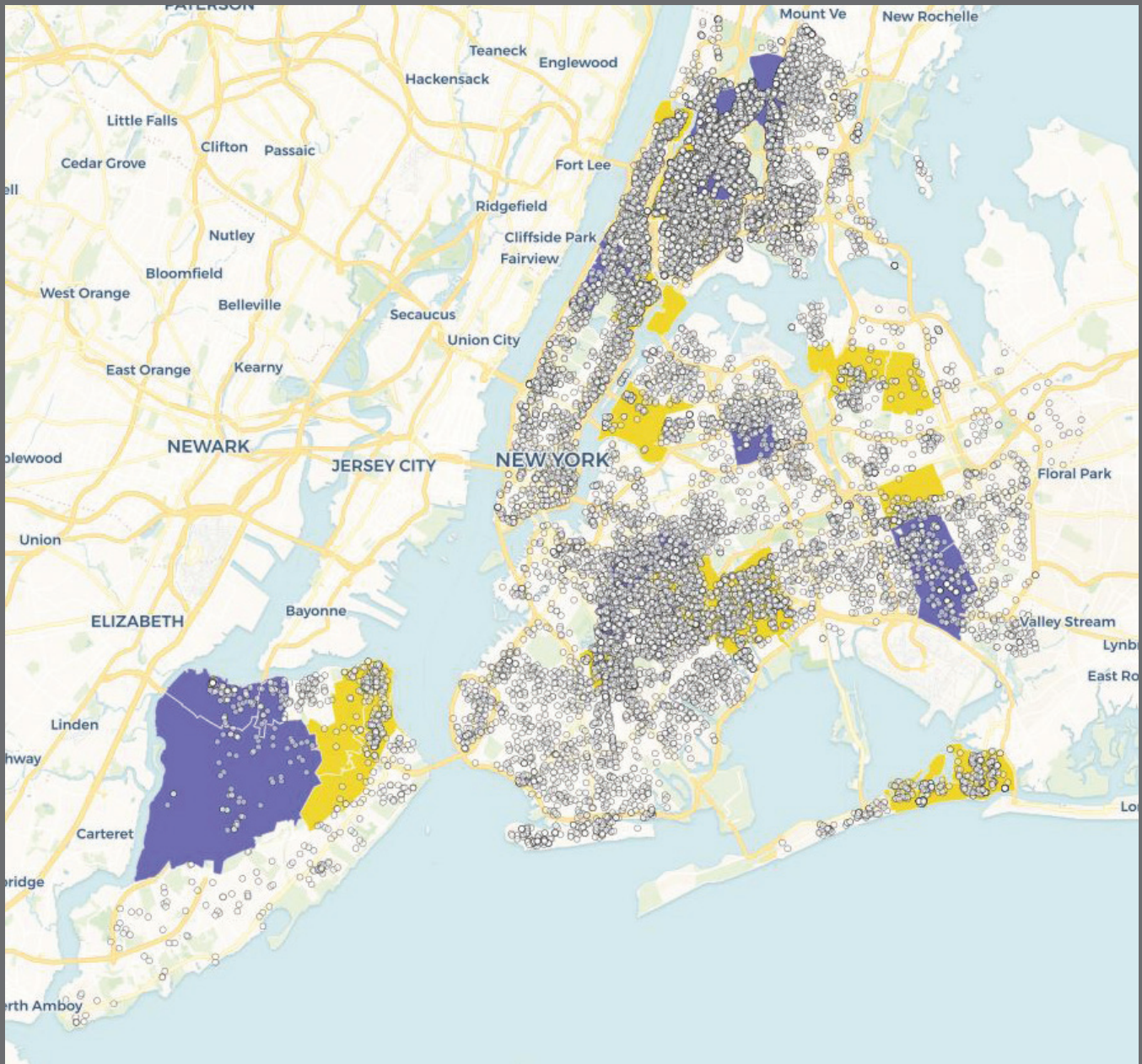
The vast majority of severely rent burdened households, 85 percent, earn under 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Only 13 percent of severely rent burdened households fall in the 200–400 percent cohort.

The people who would most benefit from the expansion of Right to Counsel to include a wider range of incomes would most likely be rent stabilized renters in neighborhoods that are quickly gentrifying and see a moderate number of evictions (5 to 13 evictions per 1000 renters).

Approximately 25 to 30 percent of renters in Central Harlem, Washington Heights/Inwood, and Crown Heights fall in the 200–400 percent cohort. All four neighborhoods have significant numbers of rent stabilized units, meaning that landlords have an incentive to push tenants out. The expansion of RTC would not only protect the individual tenants, but help mitigate unjust rent increases that help push units out of rent stabilization.

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Map 5: Evictions & zip codes for legal services



 RIGHT TO COUNSEL ZIP CODES
 LEGAL SERVICES ZIP CODES

Note on data and methodology:

The 2017 Eviction data was obtained from the NYC Department of Investigation's website and is now available through the New York City Open Data portal. The data was cleaned by the Eviction Data Working Group of the Housing Data Coalition.

In addition, the maps and analysis rely on the following data sets: 2017 NYC Housing Vacancy Survey (rent burdens and rent regulated housing stock); US Census's 5-year 2016 American Community Survey (demographics and poverty); CSS's 2017 Unheard Third Survey.

For any additional methodology questions, please contact us at omironova@cssny.org

Endnotes

- 1 NYC Office of Civil Justice. 2017. Annual Report and Strategic Plan, p 18. See https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/hra/downloads/pdf/services/civiljustice/OCJ_Annual_Report_2017.pdf
- 2 When the Eviction Data Working Group of the Housing Data Coalition cleaned the raw 2017 eviction data, there were about 4,000 incorrect/duplicate addresses.
- 3 See NYC HPD Marketing Handbook, Eviction/Landlord-Tenant Action, p. 63. <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/hpd/downloads/pdf/developers/marketing-handbook.pdf>
- 4 New York Independent Budget Office, "The Rising Number of Homeless Families in NYC, 2002–2012: A Look at Why Families Were Granted Shelter, the Housing They Had Lived in & Where They Came From," Fiscal Brief, November 2014.
- 5 For the purposes of this analysis we are conflating neighborhood with Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs). For a map of NYC PUMAs, see http://faculty.baruch.cuny.edu/geoportal/resources/nyc_geog/pumas_2010_nyc.pdf
- 6 In 2017, the federal poverty level was \$19,730 for a family of three.
- 7 There is a long history of the politics of the US Census and Latinx classification. Currently, the U.S. Census asks respondents two questions: whether they are "Hispanic or Latino"; and their race: "American Indian and Alaska Native," "Asian," "Black or African American," "Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander," "White," or "some other race." Many activists have criticized this format for its limitations including Afro-Latinx exclusion. See <https://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/book/afro-latin-america-numbers-politics-census> and <http://remezcla.com/features/culture/census-us-afro-latinos-groundbreaking/>
- 8 See Dr. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw's Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color for context. <https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/mapping-margins.pdf>
- 9 Coalition for the Homeless, citywide homelessness statistics, July 2018.
- 10 Households that fall within the 200 to 400 percent of the Federal Poverty Line earn between \$39,400 to \$78,900 for a family of three.

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