

**Have Voucher Will Relocate?
Poverty De-concentration in a Large American City**

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Abstract

The epic failure of fixed public housing projects supports the paradigm that poverty concentration makes poverty and the cycle of poverty intractable. Moreover, neoliberal, free-enterprise theorists interrogate the viability of the state as a provider of social goods and services and press the need for market-based schemes such as housing vouchers. However, how do you de-concentrate the poor voluntarily without government dictating residential choice? This article reports the results of the first ten years of a policy experiment leveraging a mobile voucher program to attempt to achieve voluntary dispersion and de-concentration of the poor in Phoenix, Arizona. Using Phoenix's 308 census tracts as of 1998 as units of analysis, and examining the locational choices of the 5,139 families that received mobile housing vouchers between 1998 and 2009, this study finds that, although mobile voucher recipients dispersed somewhat throughout the research period, they were still geographically isolated in the southern poverty belt, housing mostly race and ethnic minority populations at the end of the ten-year period. The data suggest that race/ethnicity and patterns of residential segregation may hold some of the key to de-concentration. Ultimately, the level of de-concentration does not support the broader theory that mobile vouchers hold the key to poverty de-concentration.

Keywords: City of Phoenix, assisted housing, vouchers, poverty, poverty de-concentration, poverty dispersion.

Introduction

President Trump's controversial¹ appointment of Michigan billionaire philanthropist and longtime school choice advocate Betsy DeVos as his Education Secretary is rekindling policy debate about the neoliberal, free-enterprise ideology of using mobile vouchers as a mechanism for poverty mitigation in the United States. While DeVos's confirmation hearing centered primarily on her advocacy of school choice, which can be achieved in a myriad of ways,² the politics of "choice"

¹Her confirmation vote in the Senate was a 50/50 tie. Vice President Pence's tiebreaking vote saved the nomination.

²According to the National Council of State Legislatures, 27 states offered some form of school choice.

during her confirmation hearings degenerated into a euphemism for allowing families to enroll their children in schools of their choice using “mobile” federal funds provided through mobile vouchers (Sard & Rice, 2016). Lianne Mulder (2018: 1) summarizes the theory succinctly: “Neoliberal advocates argue that when schools face market-style pressures, this will force them to compete, leading to improved school effectiveness and efficiency.” The underlying assumption is that mobile vouchers will offer poor families the opportunity to “vote” with their feet (voucher dollars) by shunning failing neighborhood schools and placing their children in better performing schools, thereby providing a ‘market of sorts’ that makes education delivery more competitive and efficient (Sard & Rice, 2016). Thus, “school choice options disconnect one’s address of residence with the public school one must attend, making it possible for a child to attend a public school not in its neighborhood” (Mulder, 2018: 1).

What makes this debate generally striking is that the modality of providing mobile vouchers is not novel to poverty experts in the United States.³ In fact, it has not only featured prominently in the enduring debate (even practical efforts) to remediate poverty and close the cycle of poverty, but some would contend that it has become the last bastion of theorizing about poverty alleviation (Fisher, 2015). Moreover, while the potential consequences of the provision of mobile vouchers for children of poor families have always been under analysis (see Literature covered in Mulder, 2018; Fisher, 2015), theorizing about the specific use of mobile vouchers to remediate educational inequality as part of the genre of poverty alleviation policy instruments is a relatively newer development. It “arose after economist Milton Friedman promoted the free market concept of school choice in 1955 ... (and was) consolidated in federal legislation when the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 promoted and supported charter schools” (Mulder, 2018: 1; see also Jackson May, 2006). Neoliberal theories promoting the free-enterprise, market ideology has dominated debate on poverty alleviation ever since (Mulder, 2018; Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2009). Not to be outdone, as advocacy for the neoliberal view of education has gained in vigor, so has the persistent opposition against it, steered by Civil Rights groups and organizations, teachers, parents, and even students themselves (Mulder, 2018: 1-2; Perlstein, Semel, and Sadovnik, 2004). This opposition anchors on several factors, including the danger of “commoditization” of education by placing it in the hands of unaccountable self-seeking profiteers,

³See extensive literature covered in Perlstein, Semel, and Sadovnik (2004).

resource diversion from public schools to private charter schools and other educational outfits, and disempowerment of teachers' unions since private school teachers are not unionized.⁴

Provision of housing for the poor is one service domain where the use of mobile vouchers has been prominently debated and applied broadly by the world's industrialized nations (Dodson, 2006). Early assisted housing policies were formulated without regard to locational effects and resulted in concentration of those with the greatest housing needs in the poorest subdivisions of cities (Hays, 1985). Some analysts theorized that such concentration rekindled poverty and made the cycle of poverty intractable (Guhahakurta and Mushkatel, 2002). Unavoidably, it was suggested that dispersion of the poor offered the greatest opportunity for public policy to effectively engage poverty in all of its facets (Park, 2013; Guhahakurta and Mushkatel, 2002; Galster and Zobel, 1998; Holloway, et al. 1998; Utt, 1996; see also literature cited in Galster and Killen, 1995). In 1998, the national mobile voucher system was designed and launched to deconcentrate and decentralize poverty.⁵ However, the question of whether vouchers have been successful in achieving this narrow task of dispersing poverty is still very much an active one. Correspondingly, whether stigmatized populations are still clustered in the poorest neighborhoods is still contested (Sard and Rice, 2016; Park, 2013; Roisman, 2008, 2000; Galster, 2003, 2000).⁶

It is clear that the quality of housing affects the lives of the people that live in the neighborhood—as housing is an important component of a community's overall wellbeing (Sard & Rice 2016; Guhahakurta & Mushkatel, 2002; Roisman, 2000). The quality of a neighborhood also is a significant predictor of resident welfare and community health: the housing quality of the neighborhood improves many in the community benefit (Sard & Rice, 2016; Guhahakurta & Mushkatel, 2002). Housing and its quality or condition is also linked to a larger package of neighborhood and community services, which determines the quality of life for several generations of families (Park, 2013; Hays, 1995). The social stratification of the population—based on class, race and gender—tends to segment the housing markets into sub-markets (Hays, 1995). Understanding the characteristics of the neighborhoods in which voucher users reside is essential,

⁴ Mulder (2018) offers a comprehensive discussion of these opposition arguments, including active actions that have been taken in the courts to challenge the neoliberal arguments.

⁵For the purpose of this paper, we will use the word de-concentration to indicate an attempt to prevent all the vouchers from being concentrated in one or more tracts (Mushkatel, 2000; Galster, 2001).

⁶ There is also the question of what happens in the places the poor and racial minorities relocate to (Duncan and Zuberi, 2006).

as it will elucidate the nature of these submarkets and provide insight into how vouchers are affecting the housing of those utilizing this policy tool. To better understand the effects of this policy tool, it is important to understand how the populations with the least ability to compete for limited resources use the voucher system. Specifically, we need to know if these housing policies are meeting the needs of the target population and accomplishing their intended goals. If they are not meeting the needs and accomplishing their intended goals, the policies can be “sunset” or redesigned based on insights provided by the kind of assessment we report here.

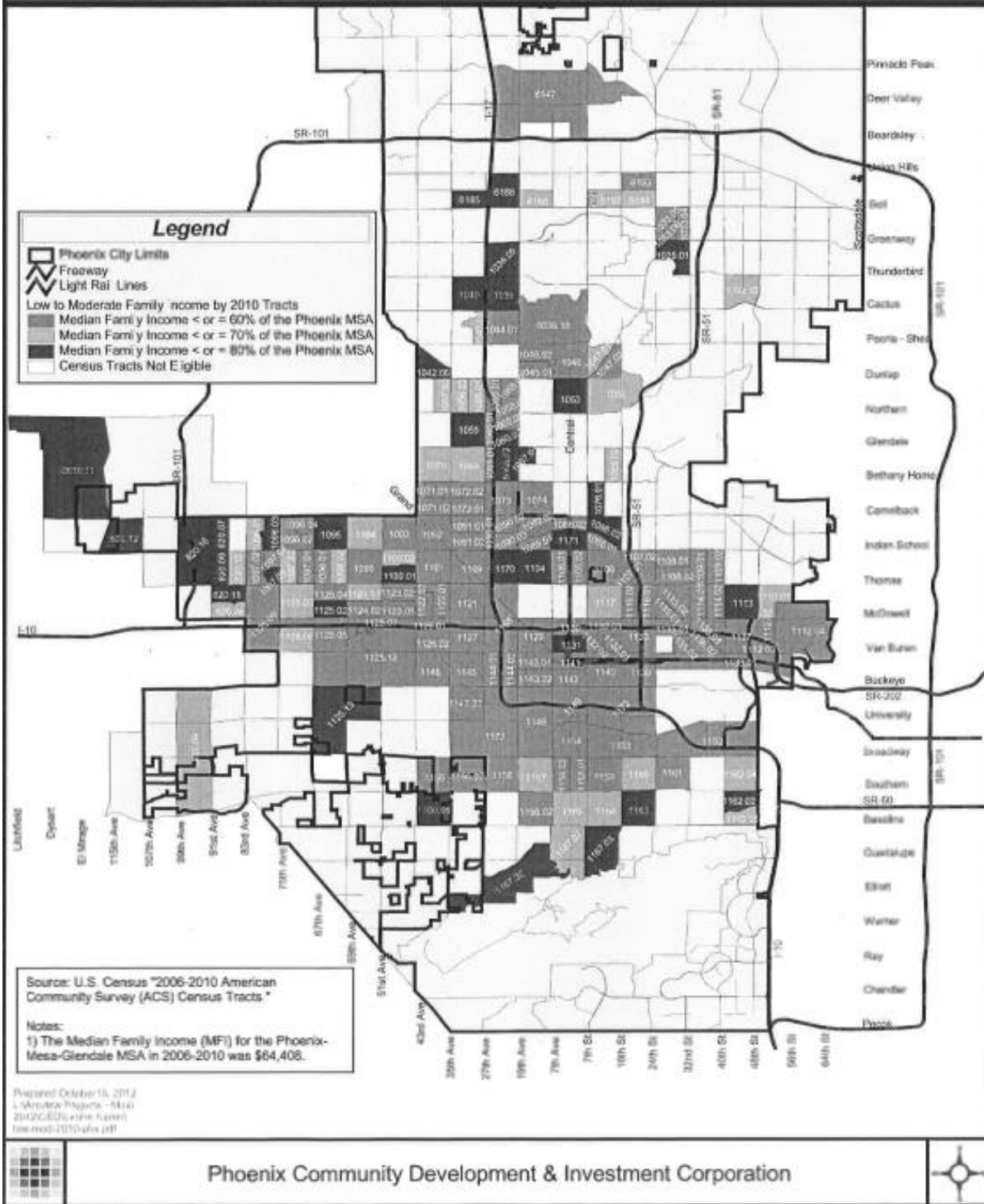
Accordingly, this paper interrogates the outcome of the first ten years of one of the most ambitious and expansive voucher policy initiatives in the United States: the City of Phoenix, Arizona’s Mobile Housing Voucher Program (hereafter, PMHV). We focus on three specific questions with broad theoretical and policy implications: 1) was PMHV successful in deconcentrating poverty in Phoenix between 1998 and 2009? 2) To what extent did minority status (race/ethnicity) impact the propensity to deconcentrate poverty? 3) Finally, what are the implications for future policy aiming to deconcentrate poverty in Phoenix in particular?

The Setting: Phoenix, Poverty, and Poverty De-concentration

Located in Maricopa County with a projected population of 1.1 million in 1995, Phoenix is Arizona’s largest city. Its over one million population places Phoenix within the category of large American cities. Minorities constituted 40 percent of the population, with Hispanics at 35 percent being the largest minority group. The median family income was \$47,326, with 23.1 percent living below the poverty line. Figure 1 suggests that Phoenix has important attributes that may set it apart from some other major cities. In particular, it has a high level of residential segregation, where poor African American and Hispanic populations live apart from whites, concentrated toward the

Figure 1. Phoenix Census Tracts Highlighting the Poverty Belt, 2010

City of Phoenix New Market Tax Credit Eligibility Low to Moderate Income Census Tracts



Source: www.phoenixnewmarkets.org/sites/default/files/uploaded-files/pdf/nmtcs%202000%20cenus%20tract.pdf

south central to southern part that we label as the poverty belt in this research.⁷ For Phoenix, then, the question is not just whether or not housing voucher holders become mobile with their vouchers, but whether they venture out of the poverty belt and, in so doing, de-concentrate poverty.

Goal, History, and Ideology of Assisted Housing Policy

As enunciated by successive administrations, the ideology and goal of the government assisted housing program is and has been since the 1930's, to provide "safe, decent, and sanitary housing, for all Americans" (HUD, 2004). Assisted housing is designed to meet the needs of the very poor in communities. The poor may be the disabled, elderly, women with children, those with mental illness or families unable to earn a living wage. The recipients also need assistance obtaining food, health care or other services that are necessary to meet their daily needs (HUD, 2004). Governmental programs have applied a three-pronged approach to meeting the stated goal of providing housing to the poor: they have provided low cost mortgages, public housing, and incentives to the private sector to construct affordable housing. The history is complex. There is a record of continuous struggle between site selection, the target population, funding, administration and project design. In each of these areas, the political balance of forces created contradictory pressures, making it difficult for the program to meet its objectives (Hays, 1985). To many, the need for providing housing assistance and public housing to at risk populations is still as clear today as it was in the mid 1800's. The conditions today are certainly better than they were one hundred and fifty years ago. However, the basic goal that was set with the first housing legislations from the early 1930's has not been met, as many still lack safe, decent, sanitary housing (Hays, 1985). However, more choices than ever are being offered. Beneficiaries select the communities in which they would like to reside, providing them the opportunity to select a home in the areas that will provide them and their families with the resources necessary for a better life.

Current Policies including Housing Choice Vouchers

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Rental Assistance (n.d.), the Federal rental assistance programs operate in three basic ways currently:

- Public housing. These units are owned by local public agencies.

⁷ It is important to note that as the legend in for Figure 1 shows, this area noted as the poverty belt is not some abstract concept originated by the authors. These areas are identified by the Arizona office of economic opportunity.

- Project-based assisted housing. These programs support the construction and rehabilitation of rental units.
- Tenant-based assisted housing- Section 8 certificate. These programs provide direct rental assistance to households to enable them to find their own housing on the open market.

In all three housing programs, assisted households pay rents that are a percentage of their adjusted gross income—usually 30 percent. The subsidies are designed so that the poorest households can live in assisted housing (HUD, 2009).

Housing Choice Vouchers

Housing policies initially directed the poor into project-based homes. President Kennedy signed the Fair Housing Act of 1968; Executive Order 11063 in response to research that found that assisted housing was contributing to residential segregation (Galster, 1999; Massey & Denton, 1993; Massey & Kanaiaupuni, 1993; Rohe & Freeman, 2001). Several court rulings underscored the importance of dispersing race and ethnic minority populations through all neighborhoods. A significant policy reversal came when the courts mandated in *Gautreaux et al. v. Chicago Housing Authority et al.* (1967) that the Chicago Housing Authority had to end its policy of concentrating public housing in minority and poor neighborhoods (Goetz, 1998). Another significant case was *Shannon et al. V. United States Department of Housing and Urban Development* (1970), in which the court ruled that the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and local public housing authorities could no longer locate subsidized housing in only non-white areas (Goetz, 1998). In other words, the long practice of keeping those with the greatest needs concentrated in the worst parts of the cities had to end. Minorities were clearly being segregated into the worst neighborhoods and the courts recognized the problem.

The effects of project-based housing were problematic for the country. Those with the greatest needs had been isolated in the poorest segments of our cities (Roisman, 2000). The racial implications were clear and not acceptable. Administrators needed a way to provide assisted housing that would disperse the poor throughout the cities. The Housing Choice Vouchers were a direct response to this requirement. The first Housing Choice Vouchers -Section—8 were complex to use because they required that the apartment managers be approved for acceptance into the program. Once the units were approved for Section 8, those with the certificates could apply for the units. The number of complexes that wished to be recognized as accepting Section 8 certificates was limited. However, families with vouchers could choose to live anywhere in the city. The amount that they would be required to pay for housing was set based solely on their

income. The price that they would need to pay for housing would not vary depending on location. Vouchers offered fewer geographic restrictions. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the Housing Choice Voucher Program, has become the dominant form of federal housing assistance (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2009). Vouchers do not have fixed unit sizes and can be matched to the size of the family. However, the vouchers are not available to all families that need assistance. Housing vouchers increased ten-fold since the 1970's (Duncan, 2000)—as section 8 certificate, then as vouchers.

The Theory of Mobile Vouchers: Sociology Meets Neoliberalism and Public Choice

Just like education, delivery of social housing since the 1970s has anchored on assumptions embedded in neoliberalism theories—holding “as its most tenet that the most efficient means of achieving an efficient distribution of social goods and services is through operation of markets (Dodson, 2006: 1). As Dodson further notes, “this belief in the allocation superiority of markets is accompanied by a skeptical assessment of government’s abilities to achieve social or collective goods” (p.1). This has culminated in the general call for “rolling back” the role of the state. Correspondingly, proponents of the mobile housing voucher program anchor their narrative on public choice, making assumptions about both voucher recipients and the nature of the voucher program itself. Specifically, voucher recipients are supposed to be rational actors who will act in their own best interests when presented with the opportunity to better themselves and their families. They will seek to maximize their benefits when presented with an opportunity to act on their own behalf. In turn, the voucher program allows the recipients to rely on the private market rather than the government to provide housing services (Duncan, 2000), as families choose their own units on the open market (Goetz, 1998). Expectedly, voucher holders are anticipated to “vote” with their mobile voucher dollars that offer them freedom in locational choice and cost less than project-based programs. Ultimately, recipients are expected to locate in better neighborhoods, and by way of Adam Smith’s ‘invisible hand’, disperse poverty, and eliminate the potential of artificially concentrating poor families in areas of high poverty density (Shroder, 2002).

Opposition to voucher and its accompanying neoliberal economic theory has come from several quarters (Civil Rights groups, teachers, parents, students, elected officials), rejecting the strict constructionism of economic determinism and injecting broader sociological imperatives. Applying the group identity theory, for instance, some analysts have suggested that low-income

individuals may prefer to live in neighborhoods that have others of similar economic and racial background even though there may be increased employment opportunities and better educational opportunities elsewhere (Hartung & Henig, 1997; Rosenbaum & Popkin, 1991; Popkin, Rosenbaum & Meaden, 1993). The poor will opt to stay because they obtain much of their social identity within such settings—to the extent that class modalities differ. In other words, there are more factors involved in the cost-benefit calculation of the poor than mere economics. Other researchers worry that simply moving the family to a new neighborhood does not vitiate their worldview or modus operandi—codified in some circles as the “culture of poverty”. The belief is that someone nurtured within the culture of poverty will inculcate that culture and convey it to the new neighborhood (Rosenbaum, 2002). From the neighborhoods themselves, middle class communities fear that there will be an increase in social problems in their neighborhoods, lower property values, and an eroding of the overall quality of life (Galster, 1998; Guhathakurta & Mushkatel, 2000; Galster, 1998; Holloway, 1998).

Viewing things from the completely practical reality of the poor, Shroder (2002) found that assisted housing families had trouble using the vouchers and may not even understand the housing opportunities that are available to them. Some families do not have the confidence needed to approach agencies in the most established areas. The vouchers require the families to enter into a lease agreement. The private owner may not feel comfortable renting the unit to the family (Shroder, 2002), or the family may not meet the credit worthiness necessary to qualify for the lease. Some believe that the use of Section 8 certificates and vouchers has reduced the racial and economic impacts of assisted housing (Goering et al., 1995; Goering, Kanelly & Richardson, 1997; Judd, 1997). However, others are convinced that residential segregation of the poor is still prevalent in some areas (Roisman, 2000). They believe that vouchers create “horizontal poverty,” and are still clustering the voucher recipients in low-income neighborhoods in conditions that are similar to public housing (Roisman, 2000).

Identifying Those in Greatest Need of Housing Assistance

The association between the location of public housing and poor neighborhoods has been widely studied (Taeuber & Taeuber, 1965; Goering, Kamely & Ridson, 1994; Wilson, 1987; Massey & Denton, 1993; Massey & Kanaiaupuni, 1993; Galster, 2002; Mushkatel & Guhahakurta, 2000). Gramlich (1992) found that neighborhoods in poor areas have many problems associated with

them. The poor neighborhoods often lack employment opportunities and have schools that perform marginally. The employment that are available in such neighborhoods often are found to be in limited supply and offer low wages. There is also the perception (substantiated or not) that the neighborhoods are unsafe resulting in the residents being less willing to take late-night employment or work the evening shift. Assisted housing recipients that are integrated into the community are able to obtain better jobs due to increased opportunities and may be able move to self-sufficiency (Rosenbaum, 1990). Gramlich (1992) also notes that the neighborhood schools in these areas frequently perform marginally and the children receive poor education. Teachers are often paid more in the suburban areas and their students have better achievement and fewer dropouts (Rosenbaum, 1990). Children from suburban areas are also more likely to attend college, be on college tracks in high school, and have higher college entrance scores. These low educational levels contribute to low social mobility and entrench the cycle of poverty. In response, federal housing policy has focused on dispersing subsidized families in order to break this cycle of poverty (Goetz, 2003).

Housing constitutes the largest expense item on families' budgets each month (Miller, 2002). Approximately 20 percent of middle to low-income households in the United States live in substandard housing and pay more than half of their income in housing costs (Miller, 2002). With such a significant portion of income allocated to housing, the need for low cost, affordable housing is well known (Miller, 2002). The meager wages earned by the working poor make it difficult for them to afford most of the available housing—at the same time that affordable housing is seldom available that meets the needs of the working family. In fact, housing is now considered an important part of work support programs such as food stamps, childcare, Medicaid, child support enforcement, Earned Income Tax Credit, and the child tax credit (Miller, 2002). Over time we have developed a better understanding of the complexities of providing assisted housing. We now understand that coordinating several social services can be necessary in providing housing. There is a long history of struggles between site selection, the target population, funding, administration and project design. In each of these areas, the political balance of forces created contradictory pressures, making it difficult for the program to meet its objectives (Hays, 1985). While these programs work to assist low income families in obtaining housing, waiting lists are a chronic problem. Five to ten-year waiting lists for housing assistance are not unusual (Miller,

2002). Waiting lists this long act as a barrier to families, which struggle constantly to make ends meet and cannot wait five to ten years for answers.

Based on the foregoing, our data analysis is anchored around two broad questions: 1) was PMHV successful in deconcentrating poverty in Phoenix between 1998 and 2009 2) To what extent did minority status (race/ethnicity) impact the propensity to deconcentrate poverty in Phoenix between 1998 and 2009 using PMHV?

Data and Methodology

The information and data used in this analysis were provided by the City of Phoenix's Housing Department. The Department provided the full data files for all recipients of housing voucher from the initiation of the program in 1998 to 2009, marking the 10-year anniversary of the program. These data files contained information about the number of family members, race, ethnicity and gender of the head of household. We wanted to evaluate the program in its first full decade. Ten years allows all mobile voucher users enough time to settle and resettle in places of their choice several times across the city.

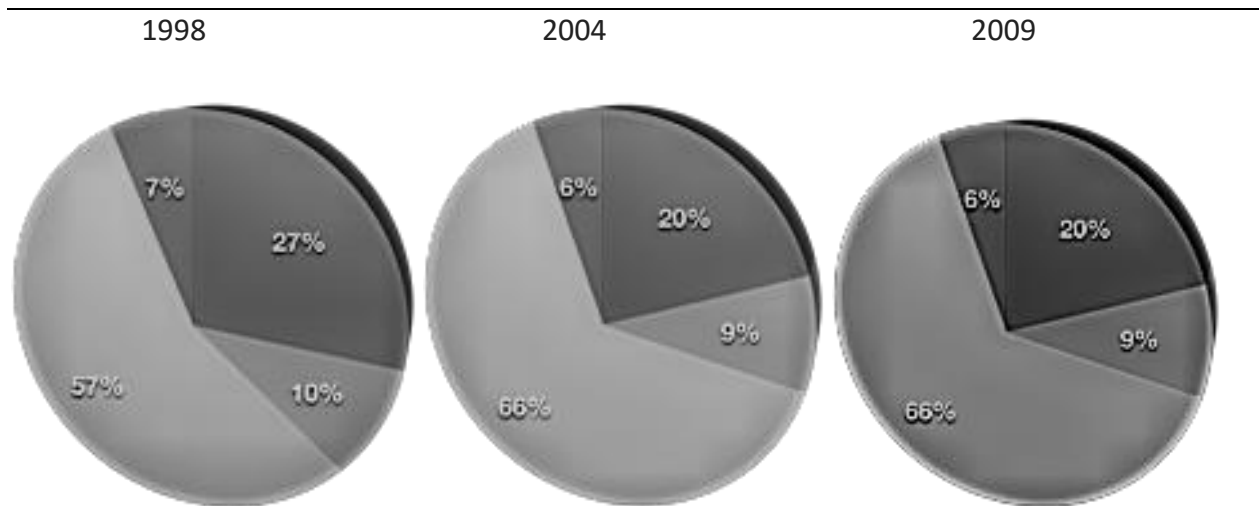
The data we have are largely descriptive, but enough to address the questions we are asking. Methodologically, these data permit descriptive analyses that aggregate voucher holders' movements in groups across Census Tracts. Such clustering then permits tracking of voucher holders' movements across both space and time. These two realities combine to necessitate the two-prong methodology we applied in the study. The first is the use of summative descriptive statistics to weigh and track group locational choice in both space and time. The second is the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to show the spatial patterns of group locational choices, also in both space and time. GIS is an expansive computer data-based system widely applied in urban and many other kinds of research endeavors to "map" subjects such as immigration and mass population movements of people, distribution of housing across space, and other kinds of matters associated with distribution. The common feature of GIS as a tool for research is that it is a digital mapping that displays data on phenomena relative to positioning on Earth's surface. Thus, GIS can be used, appropriately, to map the locational choice of voucher holders across both space and time in the City of Phoenix comprised of Census Tracts spatially distributed. While GIS can show spatial patterns of human activity, it cannot explain such activity. Accordingly, our application of GIS in this study to map the locational choice of voucher holders can show the

outcome of locational decisions, but it cannot explain them [see Star and Estes (1990) for further explication of the GIS as a research tool].

Phoenix’s Housing Voucher Program

Phoenix offers several programs that provide housing to low-income residents. These programs include Scattered Site housing, conventional public housing, senior and disabled housing, and Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers. As Figure 2 shows, the Housing Choice Vouchers - Section 8 are not only the most common type of assisted housing offered by Phoenix once initiated in 1998, but it grew exponentially as other programs contracted. According to the data files from Phoenix’s housing department, there were 3,682 voucher recipients when the program started in 1998. By 2004, that number had increased to 4,708. In 2009, it stood at 5,139, constituting 68 percent of the city’s entire assisted housing program. Phoenix follows federal policies and procedures for operating the program, selecting recipients, landlords, as well as payment scales (City of Phoenix, 2009). The Section 8 vouchers have an annual 6% turnover rate (City of Phoenix, 2004).

Figure 2. City of Phoenix Assisted Housing Programs 1998-2009



Largest segment- Housing Choice Vouchers 57%, 66%, & 66%
 Large segment- Conventional 27%, 20%, & 20%
 Small segment- Senior 10%, 9%, & 9%
 Smallest segment - Scattered Site 7%, 6%, & 6%

According to the 2000 Census, there were a total of 308 census tracts located within Phoenix’s City limits when the voucher initiative was launched in 1998. Technically, each tract

was available to mobile voucher holders. As noted above, our research covers the first decade of the program, 1998-2009. While 1998 data may appear dated to some, the essence of our study does not rise or fall on data dating. Rather, we wanted to place on record the holistic outcome of a major policy experiment, starting from the inception of the experiment. We have three important comparative points over the 10-year period. The first is the base year, 1998, at the start of the initiative, followed by 2004, at its midpoint, and finally, 2009, at the end of the first 10-year cycle. Our primary mode of analysis is Geographic Information System (GIS) cluster mapping. We use these maps to track voucher locational choice at the margin across all 308 census tracts of the city.

Qualifying for, Getting, and Using the Phoenix Mobile Voucher

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provided the general guidelines and modalities for the mobile voucher program at its inception, although actual implementation was delegated to each locality (HUD, 2017). For Phoenix's program, eligibility for a housing voucher is determined by the City of Phoenix Housing Department (PHA). HUD's guidelines required that each family's size and total income be considered, and, except for a few exceptions, the program be limited to US citizens. To qualify for a voucher, a family's income may not exceed 50% of the median income for Maricopa County or the Phoenix Metropolitan Area. PHA was required to provide 75 percent of its vouchers to applicants whose incomes do not exceed 30 percent of the Phoenix area median income. Median income levels applied are published by HUD and vary by location (HUD, 2017).

Any low-income family selected by PHA to participate is encouraged to consider several housing choices in securing the best housing for family needs. A housing voucher holder is advised of the unit size for which he or she is eligible based on family size and composition. The housing unit selected by the family must meet an acceptable level of health and safety before the PHA can approve the unit. When the voucher holder locates a unit that he or she wishes to occupy and reaches an agreement with the landlord over the lease terms, the PHA must inspect the dwelling and determine that the rent requested is reasonable. The PHA determines a payment standard that is the amount generally needed to rent a moderately-priced dwelling unit in the local housing market and that is used to calculate the amount of housing assistance a family will receive. However, the payment standard does not limit and does not affect the amount of rent a landlord may charge or the family may pay. A family which receives a housing voucher can

select any unit in any area with a rent that is below or above the payment standard. The housing voucher family must pay 30% of its monthly adjusted gross income for rent and utilities, and if the unit rent is greater than the payment standard the family is required to pay the additional amount. By law, whenever a family moves to a new unit where the rent exceeds the payment standard, the family may not pay more than 40 percent of its adjusted monthly income for rent.

Findings

The basic statistics describing Phoenix’s voucher holders in 1998, 2004, and 2009 are displayed in Table 1. As we have already noted, a total of 3,682 households participated in 1998, 4,708 participated in 2004, and 5,139 participated in 2009. As Table 1 indicates, 2,590 or approximately 70 percent of the 3,682 households which participated in 1998 were classified as headed by race and ethnic minorities. The figures for 2004 and 2009 are 3,178 (68%) and 3,620 (70%) respectively.

Table1. Summary Statistics for Phoenix Voucher Holders, 1998-2009

Description	1998	2004	2009
	# Recipients	# Recipients	# Recipients
Total Number of Recipients	3,682	4,708	5,139
White	2,180	2,886	2,898
Black	1,360	1,600	1,958
Hispanic	1,230	1,578	1,662
Other	142	254	283
Female Head of Household	3,289	3,919	4,232

Source: Calculated from data from the City of Phoenix Housing Department.

Did Vouchers Deconcentrate Poverty in Phoenix Between 1998 and 2009?

Table 2 displays the conditions for perfect equal distribution of voucher recipients across the 308 census tracts between 1998 and 2009. In 1998, the condition of perfect equal distribution required that approximately 12 voucher users reside in each census tract. In 2004 that condition moves to 15 while in 2009, it becomes approximately 17.

Table 2. Conditions of Perfect Distribution of Phoenix Voucher Holders, 1998-2009

Category	1998		2004		2009	
	Vouchers	Tracks	Vouchers	Tracks	Vouchers	Tracks
	3,682	308	4,708	308	5,139	308
Ideal Distribution		12		15		17

Source: Calculated from data from the City of Phoenix Housing Department.

Table 3. Phoenix Housing Choice Voucher Distribution by Census Tract, 1998-2009

# HCV per Tract	1998	2004	2009
	# Tracts	# Tracts	# Tracts
0	109	44	49
1 to 9	108	126	124
10 to 19	23	58	60
20 to 29	30	31	27
30 to 42	16	22	23
43 to 68	10	22	14
69 to 467	12	5	11
Totals	308	308	308

Source: Calculated from data from the City of Phoenix Housing Department.

The actual patterns of locational distribution of voucher holders in 1998, 2004, and 2009 are shown in Table 3. As Table 3 shows, in 1998, as many as 109 of the 308 tracks had no voucher users whatsoever, while the figures for 2004 and 2009 are 44 and 49 respectively. The second row of Table 3 reporting on the number of voucher holders resident in given tracks is equally insightful. As at 1998, 108 of the 308 tracks had only 1-9 voucher users residing in them. Again, the data for 2004 and 2009 are 126 and 124 respectively. Taken together, these first two columns show that as many as 217 of the 308 tracks had either no voucher resident or had only 1-9 families residing in them. In 2004, the figure is 170 tracks, while in 2009 it is 173.

These numbers suggest, very clearly, that some movement occurred with voucher holders, especially between the 1998-2004 periods. However, the numbers nevertheless suggest heavy concentrations of voucher users in the remaining tracks. This distribution, where a great member of tracks has very few or no voucher users and a few tracks have too many vouchers does not support the expectation that vouchers would deconcentrate poverty appreciably overtime. Indeed,

the dispersion outcomes for the 2004 and 2009 period, where the gains of the 1998-2004 period appeared to be reversing, makes that prospect even more doubtful.

Making these observations more meaningful, though, requires that they be situated within the larger context of de-concentration of poverty away from the poverty belt. To address this, we examine the GIS mapping of these dispersion data vis-à-vis the Phoenix poverty belt. These results are shown in Figure 3 for 1998, 2004, and 2009. A comparison of these maps shows an initial voucher movement toward the middle-belt and Northern Phoenix. By 2009, however, even with the clearly visible movement toward the North, there seemed to be greater concentration in the Southwestern poverty belt. Some voucher holders seemed to have located up North, away from the poverty belt, while others are concentrated in the poverty south. Our data seem to be suggesting that the real question with vouchers is not whether or not they will disperse the poor at the margin, but whether sufficient dispersion will occur to eliminate poverty concentration appreciably. Our data seems to suggest that the real question with vouchers is not whether or not working exclusively on their own, vouchers will disperse the poor at the margin.

Tables 4 and Figure 4 display information about census tracts with the greatest voucher changes within the study period. As shown in Table 4, there are 20 tracts (of the 308) that experienced extreme growth and decline. Ten census tracts with the greatest growth combined to increase by 1,341 vouchers. Plus, two of these census tracts 1125.06 and 1166.01 grew by 765 housing choice vouchers in eleven years. Conversely, the combined total of the 10 tracts with the greatest voucher decline decreased by 764 voucher holders. The decreases were most notable in tracts 1123.02 and 1090.00. The two census tracts lost a total of 234 voucher users. These data are mapped in Figure 4, showing that these tracts are concentrated in the Southern portion of the city.

Figure 3c. Distribution of Phoenix Voucher Holders 2009

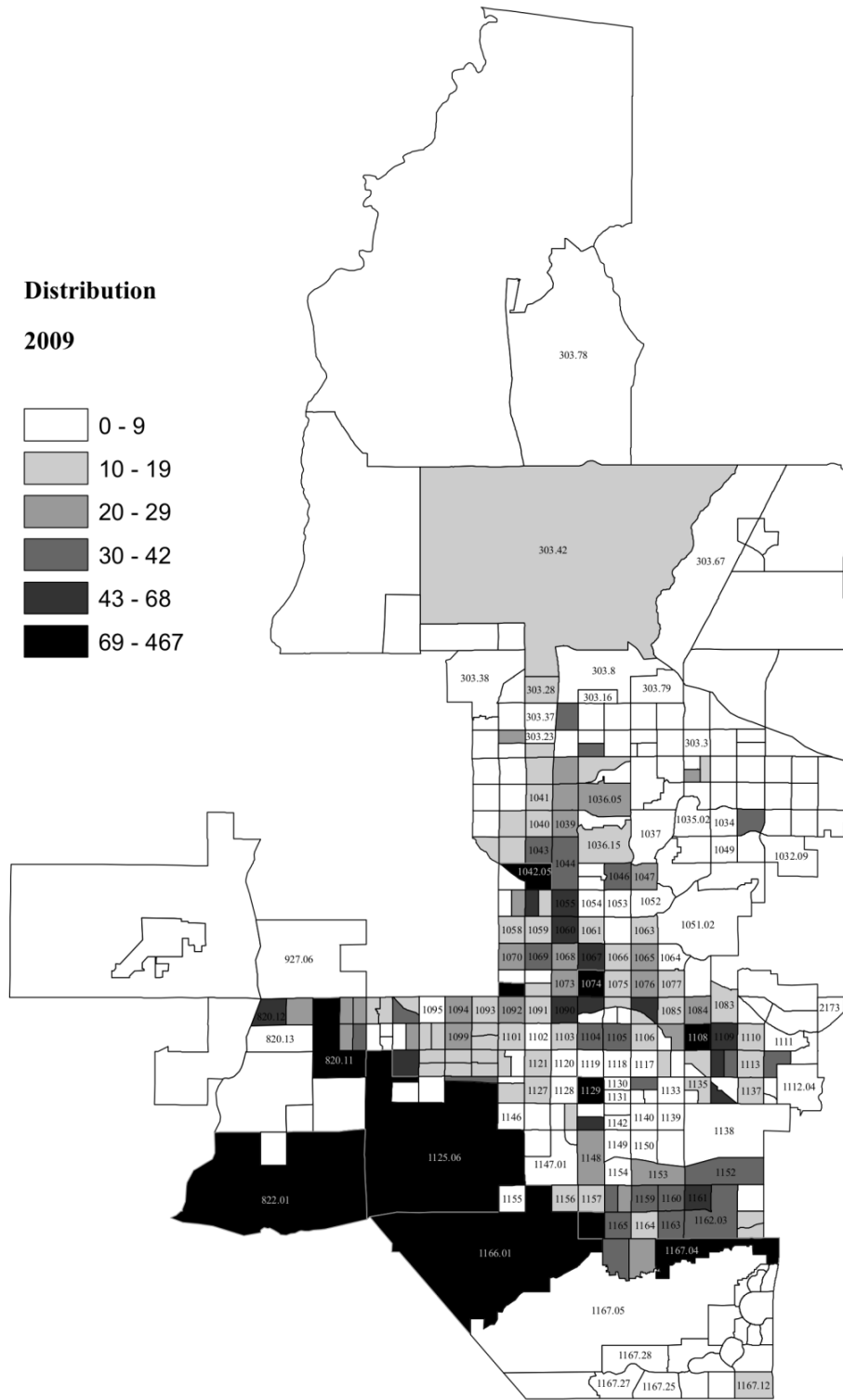


Table 4a. Phoenix HCV Largest Tract Changes 1998-2009

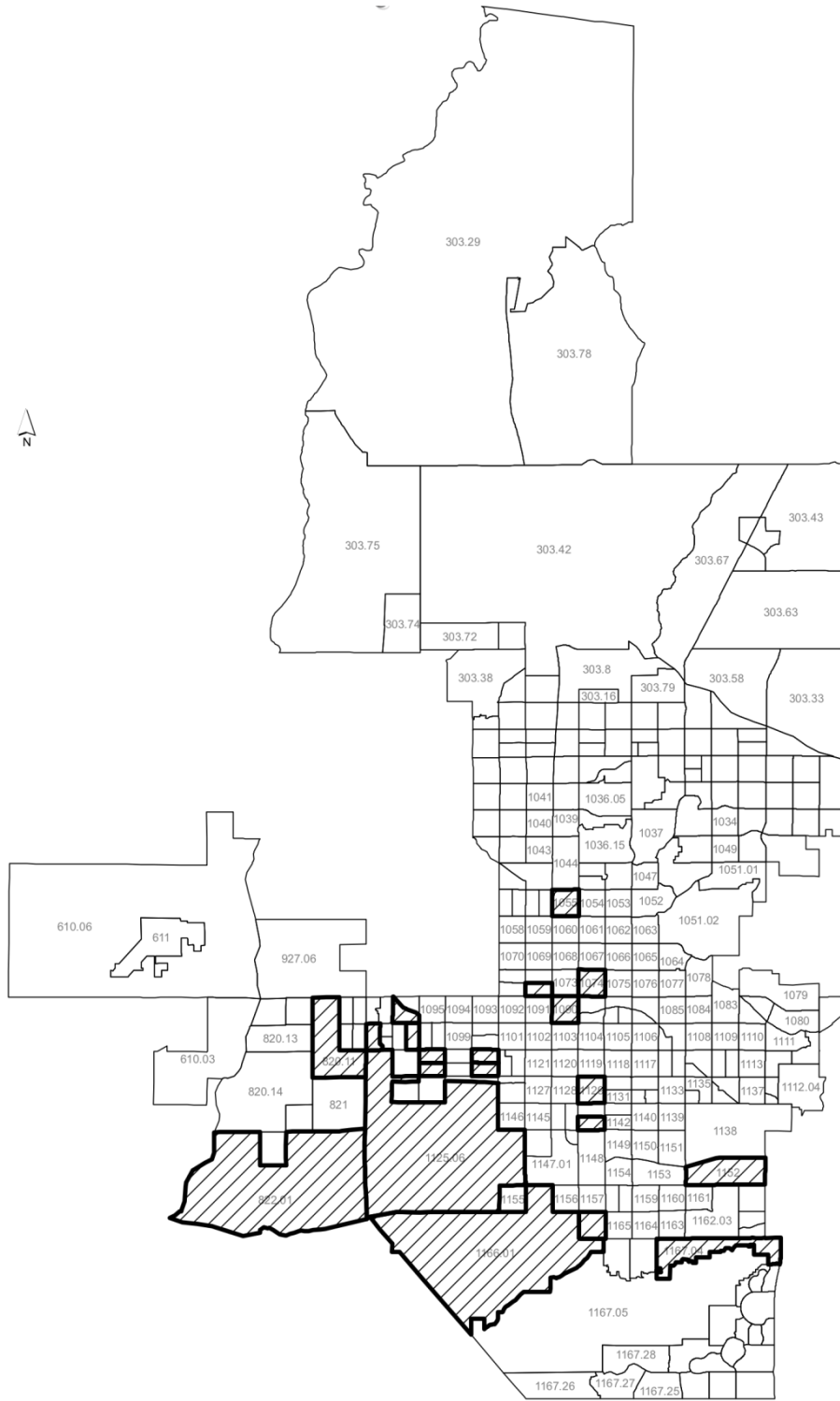
Tract	1998	2009	Change
1143.02	1	54	53
1166.02	25	81	56
1055.00	3	65	62
1129.00	4	75	71
820.11	7	99	92
1074.00	92	193	101
1167.04	10	125	115
822.01	0	126	126
1125.06	30	235	205
1166.01	7	467	460
Total	179	1,520	1,341

Table 4b. Phoenix HCV Tracts with Largest Declines 1998-2009

Tract	1998	2009	Change
1123.02	130	10	-120
1090.00	157	43	-114
1152.00	127	37	-90
1096.02	117	30	-87
1097.01	110	25	-85
1125.04	75	13	-62
1125.02	69	10	-59
1072.01	71	15	-56
1097.02	53	7	-46
1123.01	56	11	-45
Total	965	201	-764

Source: Calculated from data from the City of Phoenix Housing Department.

Figure 4. Phoenix HCV Largest Tract Changes 1998-2009



We suspected that the patterns of Phoenix’s residential segregation, where poor race and ethnic minority populations are concentrated in the Southern poverty belt and whites in the Northern corridor may hold some of the answer to patterns of dispersion achieved with vouchers between 1998 and 2009. Our preliminary suspicion is the prospect that white voucher holders may be the ones principally locating toward the middle-belt and up North, while minorities concentrated more in the poverty belt. To examine this possibility, we now turn to the analysis for minority status.

Did Minority Status Impact the Extent of De-concentration between 1998 and 2009?

The data on the distribution of Non-Hispanic minority voucher holders between 1998 and 2009 are displayed in Table 5. The data in Table 5 show that 159 tracks had no voucher holders in 1998. However, by 2004 and 2009, that number had declined to 84 tracks each. Again, this suggests movement by voucher holders. When the second column, tracks housing 1-5 families is considered, the picture of sparse distribution of voucher holders becomes clearer. In 1998, 230 or 75% of the 308 census tracks had either no voucher holders at all or had 1-5 holders. In 2004, 210 or 68% of the tracks had none, or 1-5 voucher holders, in 2009, 211 or 68% fell into that category. This means the bulk of Non-Hispanic voucher holders resided in 25% of the tracks in 1998, 32% in 2004, and 31% in 2009.

Table 5. Distribution of Phoenix Non-Hispanic Minority Voucher Holders, 1998-2009

# Race Minority per Tract	1998 # Tracts	2004 #Tracts	2009 # Tracts
0	159	84	84
1 to 5	71	126	127
6 to 11	38	45	51
12 to 18	14	32	21
19 to 25	13	9	13
26 to 42	7	9	6
43 to 333	6	3	6
Total	308	308	308

Source: Calculated from data from the City of Phoenix Housing Department.

Figure 5a. Distribution of Phoenix Non-Hispanic Minority Voucher Holders, 1998

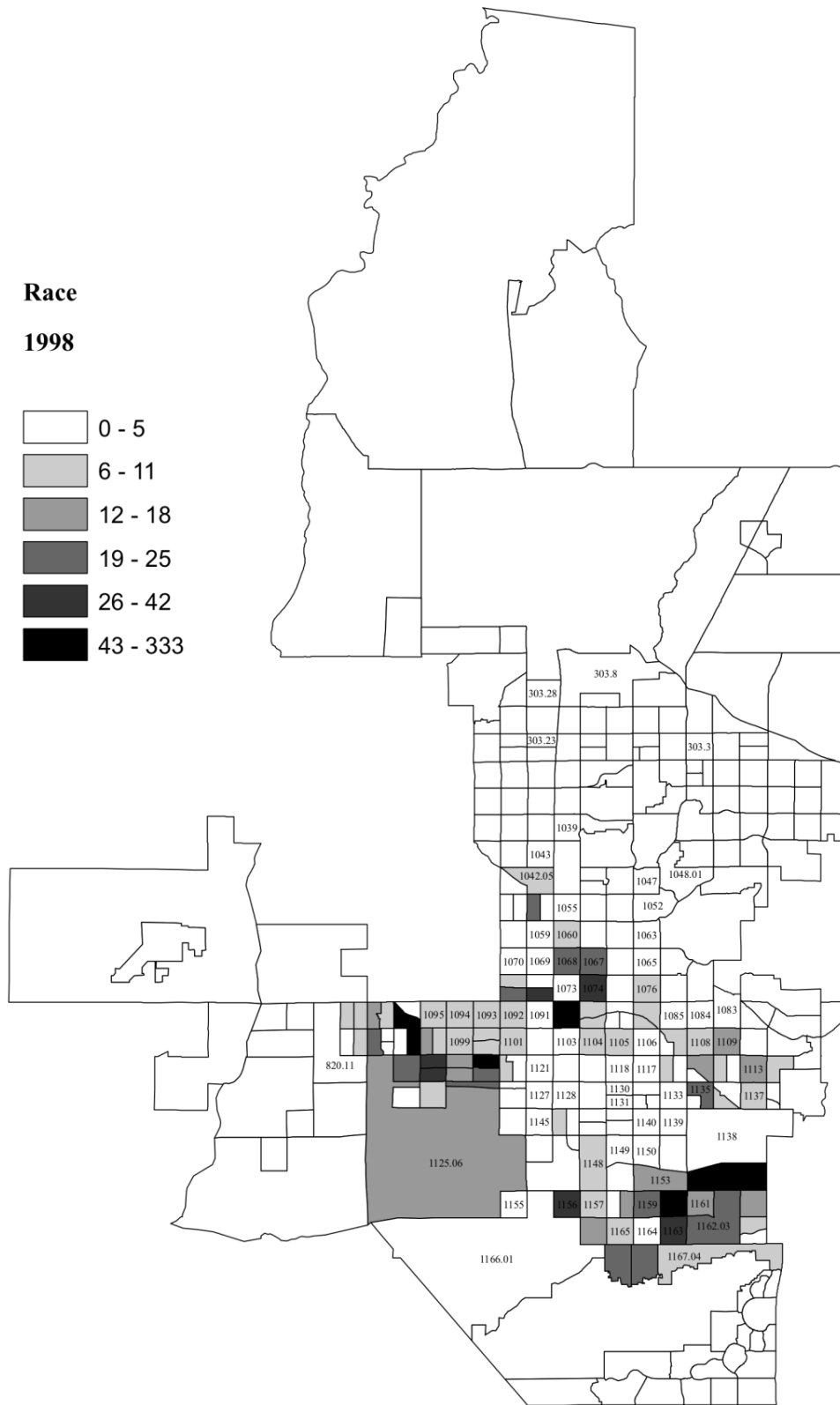
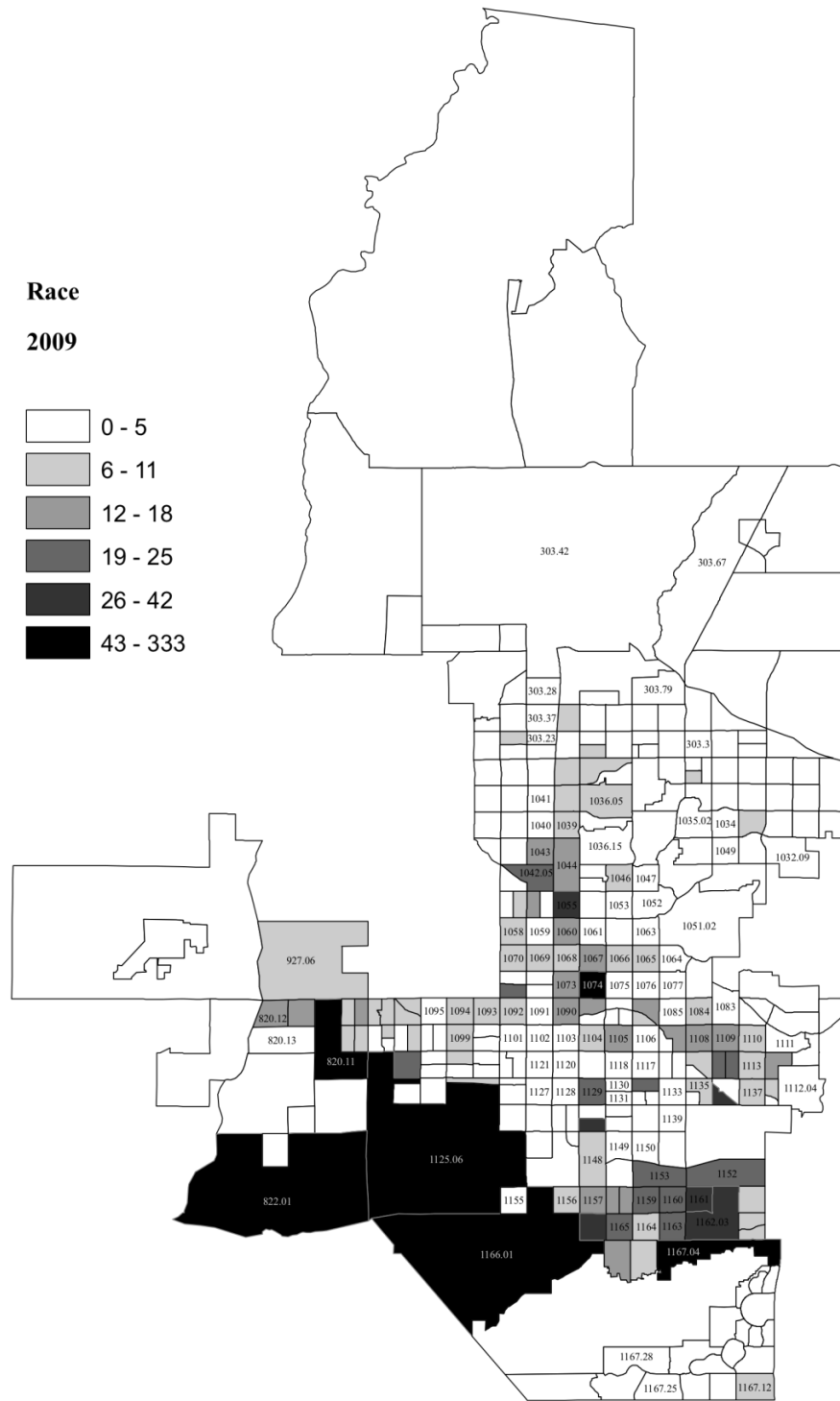


Figure 5c. Distribution of Phoenix Non-Hispanic Minority Voucher Holders 2009



To get a better sense of this dispersion vis-à-vis the poverty belt, we again return to GIS cluster mapping. The results are shown in Figure 5. These data suggest less movement away from the poverty belt compared to the results shown in Figure 3. As the third map in Figure 5 shows, there was greater concentration in the poverty belt in 2009 than there was in 2004.

The last group of analysis examined Hispanic voucher holders as a group. We thought such an analysis was warranted given that Hispanics are the single largest minority group within the City of Phoenix, comprising as much as 35 percent of the total population in 1995. As can be seen in Table 1, there were a total of 1,230 Hispanic voucher holders resident in Phoenix in 1998, 33 percent of the total. That number increased by 432 in 2009, to 1,578 or 34 percent of the total. By 2009, another 84 had been added, for a total of 1,662 or 32 percent of the total recipients for that year. The data shown in Table 6 for Hispanic voucher holders largely mirrors the trajectory already depicted for Non-Hispanic minorities in Table 5. Essentially, many census tracts housed none to four Hispanic voucher holders, while a great many of the holders concentrated in a few tracts. By 2009, 39 percent of all Hispanic voucher holders lived in only 13 census tracts.

Table 6. Distribution of Phoenix Hispanic Minority Voucher Holders 1998-2009

# Hispanics HCVR per Tract	1998 # Tracts	2004 # Tracts	2009 # Tracts
0	153	84	98
1 to 4	83	119	109
5 to 9	30	51	49
10 to 14	17	23	28
15 to 19	10	20	11
20 to 37	10	7	7
38 to 137	5	4	6
Totals	308	308	308

Source: Calculated from data from the City of Phoenix Housing Department.

Figure 6a. Distribution of Phoenix Hispanic Minority Voucher Holders 1998

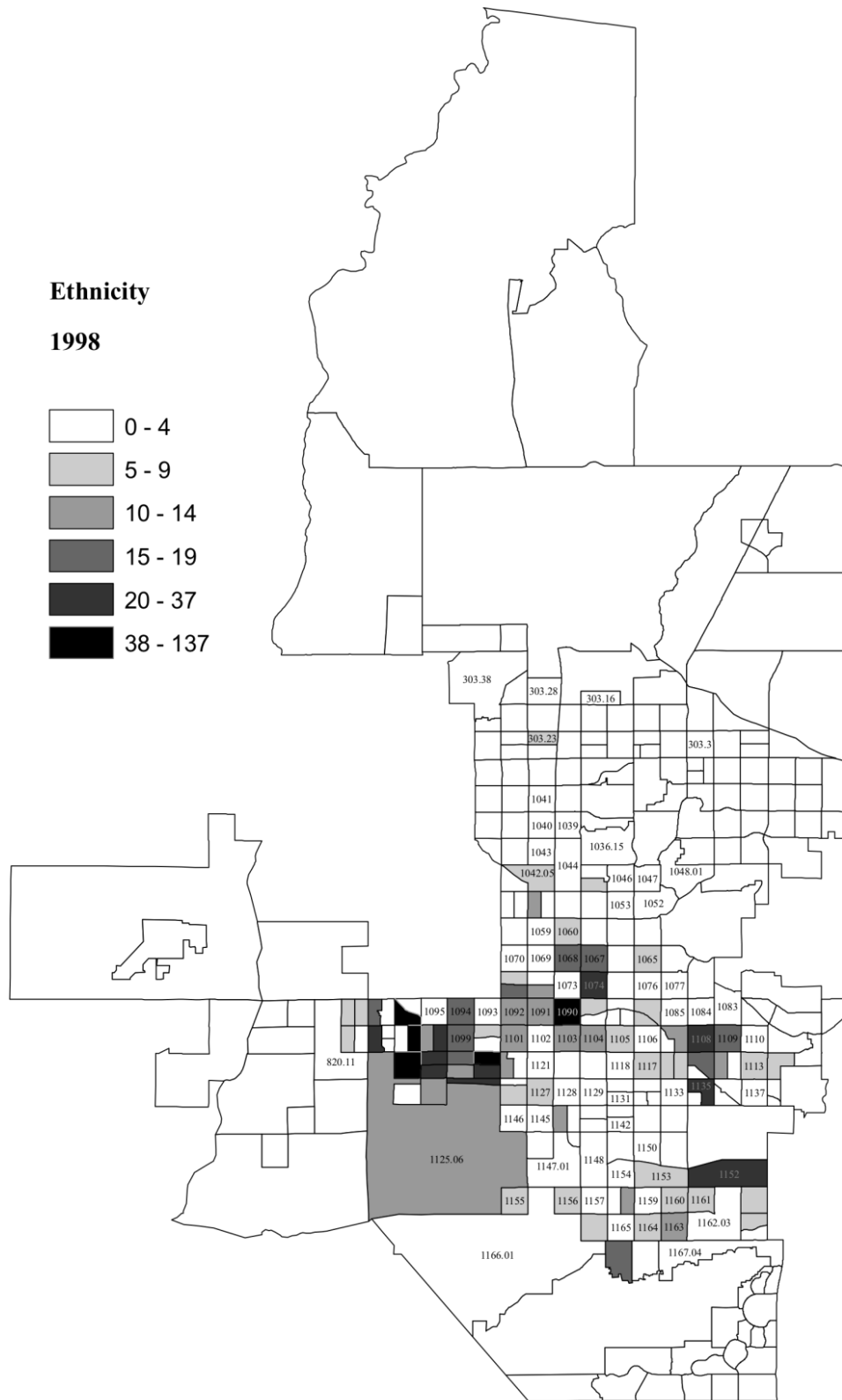


Figure 6b. Distribution of Phoenix Hispanic Minority Voucher Holders 2004

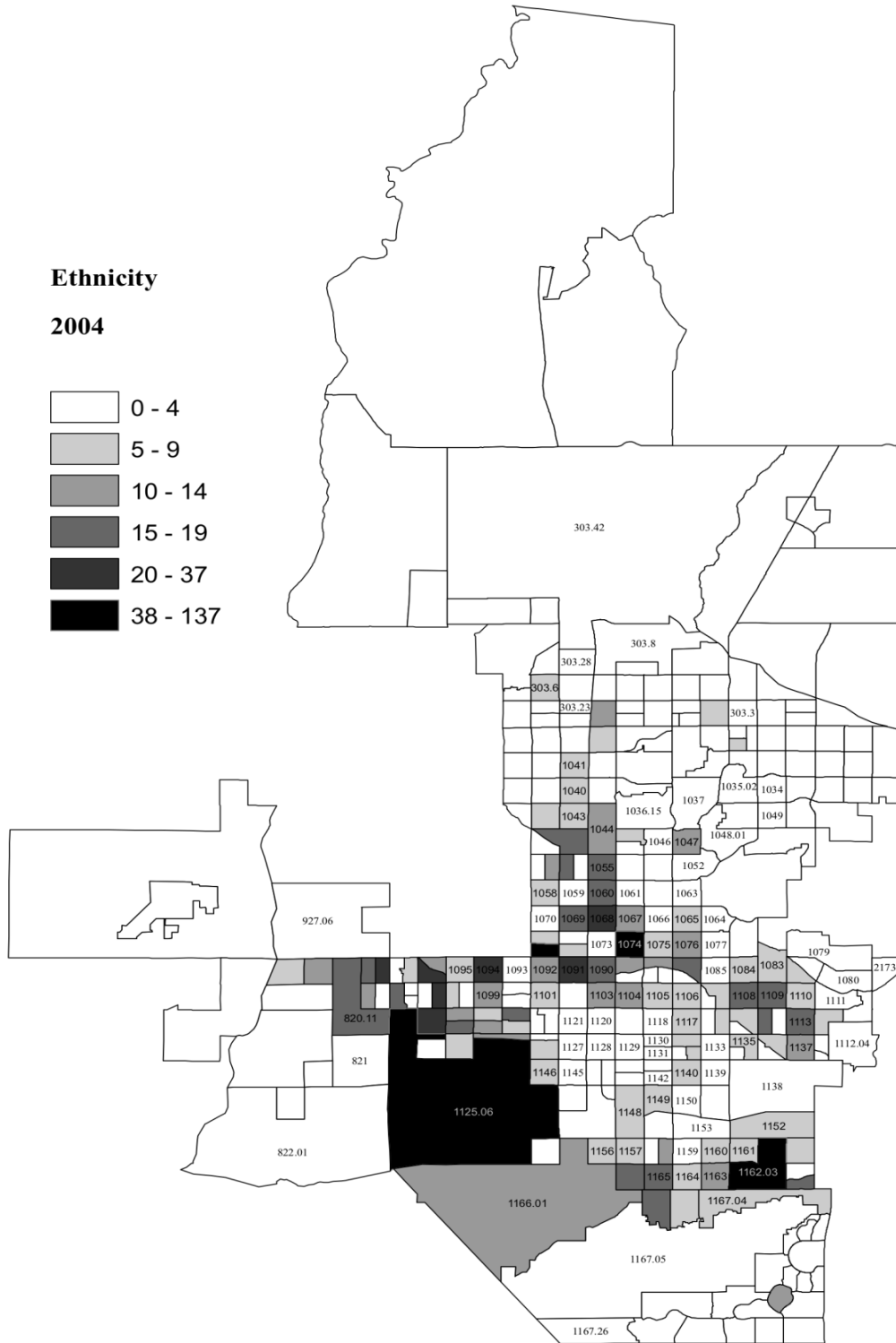


Figure 6c. Distribution of Phoenix Hispanic Minority Voucher Holders 2009

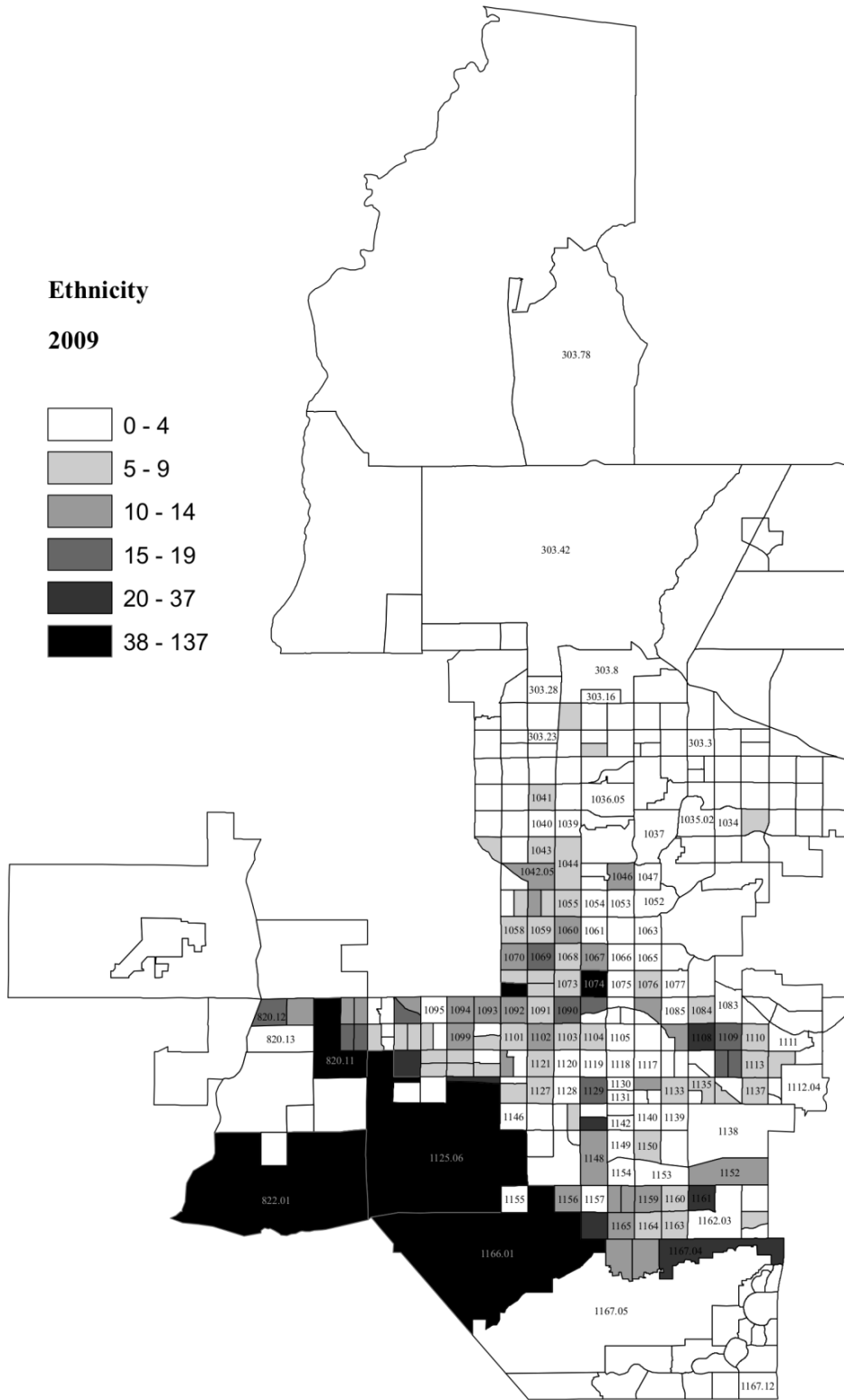


Figure 6 displays these patterns of distribution relative to the poverty belt. These maps not only show little concentration away from the poverty belt, but the result for 2009 suggests greater concentration in the southwestern poverty belt. Taken together, the results of the analyses for both Non-Hispanic and Hispanic minorities suggests that our initial suspicion that much of the movement that took place away from the southern poverty belt was by white voucher holders was indeed the case. By implication, then, our theoretical expectation that patterns of race and ethnic minority residential segregation may partly hold the key to how much is achieved in poverty de-concentration by mobile vouchers takes center stage.

Implications for Non-liberalism, Vouchers, and Poverty Dispersion

Facing a national poverty rate of 19 percent, President Lyndon B. Johnson appeared before a joint session of Congress on Wednesday, January 8, 1964 in a multi-prong State of the Union address on poverty, which became known unofficially as “The War on Poverty”. More than five decades after Johnson’s spirited alarm against poverty, poverty is still endemic in American life. While billions of funds, both public and private, have been expended on poverty alleviation stretching from health and nutrition to housing and elimination of the cycle of poverty, many believe that these efforts largely speak to the universal need to secure a minimum level of livelihood, including both a minimum level of consumption and providing a roof over people’s heads. At root, the question of how to eliminate poverty remains not only in policy circles, but among policy and urban scholars in particular. With the spectacular failure of public housing projects that concentrated poverty and made eradication of inter-generational poverty impossible (Utt 1996), buttressing the growth of neoliberal ideology and skepticism about the veracity of the state as a direct provider of social goods and services (Dodson, 2006), attention shifted to making the poor mobile through administration of mobile vouchers.

The theory of mobile vouchers suggests that providing “mobile money” to the poor will change lives. Taking its fundamental assumptions from the literature of public choice that people will seek to maximize their self-interests when given the opportunity to decide, the theory expects vouchers to provide the push the poor need to vacate deteriorating neighborhoods since it allows them to live any place they choose within the city. This mechanism of essentially “voting with their mobile funds” should de-concentrate poverty and impact the culture of poverty. In 2009 alone, 1.6 million vouchers were issued nationwide. While the theory of vouchers has received

wide acclaim and considerable resources have been expended in furthering it, there is no agreement on the net effect of vouchers vis-à-vis poverty de-concentration. At best, the available evidence is mixed, although the weight of that evidence is clearly beginning to swing to the negative direction.

The research we have reported here examines the distributional outcomes of the voucher program initiated by the City of Phoenix in 1998. The research asks three basic questions: 1) was the phoenix Mobile Housing Voucher program successful in deconcentrating poverty in Phoenix between 1998 and 2009? 2) To what extent did minority status (race/ethnicity) impact the propensity to deconcentrate poverty? 3) Finally, what are the implications for future policy aiming to deconcentrate poverty in Phoenix in particular? Our findings are insightful. First, on the question of de-concentration of poverty in the city in its first 10 years of operation, from 1998 to 2009, our data suggest that, as theorized, redistribution of voucher holders occurred largely at the margin. However, answering the question as to whether that redistribution meant de-concentration of poverty provides a disappointing answer. Much of the movement observed in the data occurred within Phoenix's poverty belt itself, as voucher holders moved within it. Much lesser location was seen outside the poverty belt. Quite simply, the extent of redistribution was not enough to warrant a conclusion that voucher holding de-concentrated poverty.

Regarding the second question, #2, on the relevance of minority status to the propensity to deconcentrate poverty, the data suggest that a complex interaction of race/ethnicity and residential segregation may be at play. Essentially, as a group, poor whites with Housing Vouchers tended to migrate more away from the poverty belt with high concentrations of race/ethnic minorities, toward the more affluent parts of the city with higher concentrations of whites. It is not that race/ethnic minorities with Housing Vouchers did not move. They did, but not away from the poverty belt. They only tended to relocate within it, ultimately negating the broader expectation that they would vacate the poverty belt. This outcome is consistent with the results of the well-known Moving to Opportunity (MTO) program in Chicago.

These findings have important implications for public policy and that brings us to the third and final question on the implications for future public policy aiming to deconcentrate poverty in Phoenix in particular (Question #3). While, given research convention on external validity, we do not attempt to generalize these findings to other cities and, indeed, do not construe the value of the findings as necessarily hinging on such generalization, we do see very important policy implications, some of which parallel what is already known. In fact, we are willing to accept the

uniqueness of the City of Phoenix that may skew the result of the questions we have asked, especially with the geographical distribution of the minority populations and the nature of residential segregation. However, what is not in doubt is the fact that the answers to our questions have relevance far beyond the City of Phoenix as a jurisdiction. The Phoenix poor Voucher holders did not move in droves out of the poverty belt, as the theory suggested. The policy implication of this finding ultimately lies with answering the question as to why they did not “exit” the poverty belt. Obviously, one cannot accept the seemingly simple de-constructivist narrative that Voucher holders are irrational actors who would not use Vouchers to “better” their circumstances. Quite to the contrary, it appears that a broader mix of factors are at play, leading to the clear observation that, as well-meaning and as theorized as Vouchers may be, simply handing them to the poor is not enough. Policymakers must understand the complex set of factors facing the average Voucher holder decision maker as he or she contemplates the decisive question of whether to relocate their families, sometimes from the very living environments that have defined generations of their family members. This, alone, calls into question the veracity of the neoliberal stance on the viability of mobile vouchers.

It is clear that the broad sociological imperatives enumerated earlier in the study, particularly the fact that the poor may opt to stay in neighborhoods that have others of similar socio-economic background as part of both social solidarity and obtaining services that merely holding the Voucher and obtaining housing elsewhere will not necessarily guarantee. Indeed, this also seems to explain the patterns of movement noted earlier in the study between poor white Voucher holders and poor race/ethnic minority voucher holders, with the latter opting to remain in the poverty belt with high concentrations of members of their race/ethnic minority groups. There is also the matter of the level of information Voucher holders have as to the potential benefits of Vouchers and their sophistication (level of education and self-confidence) to approach landlords in the more affluent areas of town since they are required to negotiate lease agreements by themselves. These are qualitative matters that, if pursued with face-to-face interviews, could have further clarified our findings. Unfortunately, because of family privacy issues, City Officials would not provide information that could lead to the identification of individual Voucher holders. Nor would they have permitted such contacts as part of the arrangement to release the data we analyzed here. What is clear from a policy perspective is that, for Vouchers to have any chance of deconcentrating poverty, more needs to be understood about the circumstances of the poor,

including the pertains of residential segregation already underlined in this study. Moreover, there may also be a level of active “help” required to get the poor to understand the benefits of Vouchers and getting housing elsewhere. This is where Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum’s (2000) epic findings on the comparison of the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) Housing Program and the Gautreaux Voucher Program in Chicago becomes instructive. Rubinowitz and Rosenbaum found that Gautreaux’s Court-ordered program actively involved program managers in the placement of voucher recipients outside the poverty and race concentrated parts of town and that became the catalyst for family relocation. On the contrary, the MTO program did not exercise such an active control. Neither were voucher holders provided specific guidance about relocation. Consequently, MTO voucher recipients stayed in low income neighborhoods closer to their original homes rather than move to the more affluent Chicago suburbs.

We expected this research to add to the body of evidence on the efficacy of vouchers. We also expected that the research would contribute insights that may aid further theorizing and clarification of the potential benefits of vouchers. We achieved both. Two significant messages are apparent for public policy: 1) The poor will not relocate out of the poverty belt or failed neighborhoods just because they have vouchers that say they can do so. This policy outcome is consistent with the outcome of the MTO program. Additional “active” measures may be required to make vouchers viable as an instrument of dispersing the poor. 2) Race/ethnicity and residential segregation may hold part of the answer to untangling the veracity of vouchers on poverty de-concentration in residentially segregated communities. The results of the Gautreaux program are consistent with this conclusion. Finally, we must note that our research has concentrated on only one side of the poverty mobility equation: those moving. That is by design. However, there is the additional focus on the impact on receiving neighborhoods where, as research has suggested, a myriad of economic and sociological issues must be considered (Duncan and Zuberi, 2006).⁸ Both sides of this equation must be addressed for both the veracity of neoliberal arguments about poverty alleviation and the final chapter on poverty de-concentration to be written. Overall, it is clear that the jury is still out on the question of the viability of dispersing the poor as a mechanism for tackling poverty.

⁸ Duncan and Zuberi (2006) provides an excellent discussion on these issues.

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