Economic Policy Institute

Briefing Paper

1730 Rhode Island Ave., NW • #812 • Washington, DC 20036 • 202/775-8810

SCAPEGOATING RENT CONTROL: MASKING THE CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS

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Introduction

After less than a year in office, the Bush Administration has already paid more attention to the nation's epidemic of homelessness than President Reagan did in eight years. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Jack Kemp has met with advocates, visited homeless shelters, and frequently decried what he has called the "national tragedy" of homelessness.

But in that time we have seen very little in the way of government action to address this mounting problem. Speeches and tours of shelters must soon give way to commitments of resources and changes in policy. The true test of the Bush Administration's commitment to addressing the tragedy of homelessness will be the kind of public policies and-level of resources it devotes to the problem.

What policies is the Bush Administration likely to develop to address the homelessness problem?

One early test of the Administration's thinking will be its response to pressures from the real estate industry, which is urging Congress to pass legislation that would withhold federal housing funds from the numerous locales that have adopted rent control. While such efforts are not new, the present attempt is unique in claiming that rent control should be dismantled because it is the chief underlying cause of homelessness. The seemingly counter-intuitive claim that rent control causes homelessness can be traced to a much-quoted study by conservative journalist William Tucker (1987a, 1987b, 1989a, 1989b).[1]

Based on Tucker's research, Senator William Armstrong (R-Colorado)

last year added an amendment to a homeless assistance bill requiring HUD to issue a report by October, addressing the question of how rent control laws might cause homelessness. In a similar vein, Senate housing committee co-chairs Alan Cranston (D-California) and Alphonse D'Amato (R-New York) have included a provision in their pending National Affordable Housing Act giving the HUD Secretary the discretion to withhold federal funds if cities cannot prove to his satisfaction that their rent control regulations are not counter-productive.[2]

Despite the widespread attention it has received, Tucker's research is seriously flawed. The link between rent control and homelessness it purports to demonstrate does not stand up to serious scrutiny. Given the political context in which it appears, our critique of Tucker's thesis is doubly important. Unchallenged, Tucker's work represents a serious threat to local rent control by linking it with a national problem of high visibility. Second, pointing the finger at rent control can only divert attention from the true causes of homelessness, thereby thwarting any serious efforts to deal with the problem.

The growth of homelessness during the 1980s has nothing to do with the efforts by local governments to regulate skyrocketing rents. Homelessness is directly related to the overall level of poverty, to the availability of affordable housing, and to the accessibility of support services for people suffering from mental illness or alcoholism. It is no accident that the number of homeless Americans increased dramatically during the 1980s. The past decade has witnessed growing poverty, especially among the "working poor:" a decline in low-rent housing, including sharp cuts in federal low-income housing assistance: and a failure to adequately serve the deinstitutionalized mentally ill. As a result, since the early 1980s the homeless population has increased from 20 to 25 percent a year, according to the U.S. Conference of Mayors'(1989, p. 2) annual surveys. Moreover, the profile of the homeless population includes a growing number of families with young children, as well as individuals with jobs (*Ibid.*).

This assessment of the underlying causes of America's homeless problem would seem to be uncontroversial. It would also seem to suggest fairly straight-forward remedies directed at increasing the wages of America's working poor, expanding the supply of affordable housing, and providing residential and social support programs for the nation's mentally ffl. A sober examination of the evidence gives no support to Tucker's claim that rent control is somehow the root cause of homelessness.

In this paper we shall first examine the previous evidence linking rent control with housing scarcity, and conclude that no such relationship has been found. We then turn to Tucker's study, showing in detail how the connection he finds between rent control and homelessness is spurious. We conclude with a more extensive analysis of the real causes of homelessness.

The Effect of Rent Control on Investment in Rental Housing

Some 200 cities and counties currently have some form of rent regulation, including over one hundred communities in New Jersey, as well as cities and counties in Massachusetts, New York, Virginia, Maryland, Alaska, Connecticut, and California. Most of these ordinances were first enacted in the early 1970s. It is estimated that approximately ten percent of the nation's rental housing stock is presently covered by some form of rent control (Baar, 1983). These measures can be categorized as *moderate*,[3] in comparison with the more restrictive rent control which characterized New York City in the immediate post-war period.[4]

Moderate rent controls permit rent increases sufficient for the landlord to maintain an adequate return on investment,' while protecting tenants against rent gouging. All ordinances currently in effect are moderate in nature. Such controls typically peg annual rent increases to increases in the landlords' costs, and exempt newly constructed rental units from controls altogether. They also often require adequate maintenance as a condition for annual rent adjustments: tenants in buildings that are inadequately maintained can appeal their rent increases. Some permit vacated units to be temporarily decontrolled so that rents can be raised to market levels for the incoming tenants, after which they are recontrolled. Moderate rent controls thus contain a number of provisions explicitly designed to encourage both construction of new rental housing and maintenance of existing units.

In a few highly inflationary California housing markets,' controls include an additional provision: they exclude increased mortgage costs from the formulas relating landlords* costs and allowable rent increases. This provision is designed to discourage speculation in rental housing. It means that a landlord who has incurred increased capital costs (either through recent purchase or through refinancing to obtain equity capital) cannot pass the higher financing costs through to tenants in the form of rent increases.

In sum, current rent controls contain provisions which are intended

to guarantee the landlord a fair and reasonable rate of return on investment, while at the same time protecting the interests of tenants, by preserving affordable housing. Maintenance is strongly encouraged: newly-built units are not controlled at all.

Nonetheless, critics continue to argue that rent control discourages investment in rental housing. According to Tucker (1987a, 1987b, 1989a), for example, localities which enact rent control rob landlords of their rightful returns. So deprived, landlords cut costs. Maintenance suffers: buildings are abandoned. Badly-needed new units are never constructed. Although rents may be lowered in the short run, housing scarcity eventually results. Scarcity, in turn. causes homelessness. In posh areas like Santa Monica, Cambridge, or the Upper West Side of Manhattan, yuppies squeeze out low-income tenants. In blighted areas like the South Bronx, buildings are abandoned, and eventually razed by arsonists or government bulldozers. Either way, says Tucker, the poor wind up in the streets and the shelters.

This analysis is not original to Tucker: on the contrary, it is shared by a number of housing economists as well as the real estate community in general. For example, ten years ago a national survey of economists found virtually unanimous agreement that "a ceiling on rents reduces the quantity and quality of housing available" (Kearl, et *al.*, 1979). These conclusions are not based on empirical studies, but on theoretical assumptions about how housing markets are supposed to operate. The real estate lobby has been highly effective in communicating this analysis to its members and the media. Major news organizations, including the *Wall* Street *Journal* and Forbes magazine have editorialized against rent controls (Gilderbloom, 1983, pp. 137- 138).

There are numerous empirical studies of the effects of moderate rent control on rental housing investment: none support the preceding views. A comprehensive review (summarized in Table 1) finds that such controls have not caused a decline in construction, capital improvements, maintenance, abandonment, or demolition of controlled relative to noncontrolled units. This is due to the non-restrictive nature of moderate controls, which as we have seen guarantee landlords a fair and reasonable rate of return. Rent controls eliminate extreme rent increases, particularly in highly inflationary markets, but they do not eliminate the profits necessary to encourage investment in private rental housing (Gilderbloom, 1984, 1986; Heffley and Santerre, 1985: Mollenkopf and Pynoos, 1973; Daugherbaugh, 1975; Vitaliano, 1983). In particular, the vacancy

decontrol-recontrol provision in some localities results in significantly higher average rents than those that would occur in the absence of such a provision (Gilderbloom and Keating, 1982; Hartman, 1984: Clark and Heskin, 1982; Rydell, 1981; Los Angeles Rent Stabilization Division, 1985). While moderate rent control is successful in eliminating rent gouging, its impact on redistributing income from landlords to tenants clearly depends on the degree to which market conditions would otherwise have led to rent increases that greatly exceed the allowable rent levels.

Anthony Downs, in a recent and influential monograph, cites Tucker in concluding that rent controls are "damaging to some of the very low-income renters they are supposed to protect. They may even promote homelessness--the most severe of all low-income housing problems (Downs, 1988: 40)." In what amounts to a virtual declaration of war on rent control, Downs relied almost exclusively on a handful of existing studies that drew mixed conclusions about the effects of rent control. Yet after summarizing these studies, Downs reaffirms his belief that "rent controls provide short-run benefits but have immense long-run disadvantages," particularly when the controls are stringent (*Ibid.*, 6). This conclusion does not follow from the 21 empirical studies Downs reviews, even though the studies in many cases were conducted on behalf of real estate interests. Downs' study itself was published by the Urban Land Institute, a real estate industry think-tank, and sponsored by a virtual Who's Who of the real estate industry.'

Rent Control and Homelessness: Tucker's Analysis

Tucker's study is the first to look at the impact of rent control on homelessness. In order to support his argument that rent control produces homelessness by discouraging investment and thereby creating housing scarcity, Tucker sought to show that cities with rent control had lower vacancy rates and greater homelessness than cities without rent control.

For his primary dataset, Tucker relied on the single comparative study of homelessness that had been done at the time of his study--the HUD (1984) survey of homelessness in 60 metropolitan areas.[8] HUD had conducted a random sample of 20 cities in each of three size strata (50,000-250,000; 250,000-1,000,000; and over 1,000,000). Tucker took the HUD estimates for the 40 metropolitan areas in the two largest size strata. He then computed a homeless rate for each city by dividing HUD's estimate of the total number of homeless by the population of the core city

for each metropolitan area.

Tucker's study did not rely exclusively on HUD's random sample of places: rather, he modified the HUD sample in several ways. First, Tucker dropped six cities from among HUD's 40 metropolitan areas over 250,000 population: Dayton, Davenport, Colorado Springs Scranton, Raleigh, and Baton Rouge.[9] These six places were reportedly eliminated because of "the great difficulty in determining local vacancy rates" (Tucker, 1989a, p. 5, n. 4).[10] For unexplained reasons, Tucker then added one of HUD's smallest (under 250,000) metropolitan areas to his list: Lincoln, Nebraska." He also mistakenly classified Hartford as a city with rent control (Hartford does not have rent controls). Finally, Tucker (1987a, p. 1) added 15 additional cities "to include some notable HUD omissions": he does not explain how these cities were selected out of thousands of possible places across the United States.[12] Since these cities were not a part of HUD's original study, Tucker developed his own homeless estimates by making telephone calls to unspecified informants in each city.[13] This misguided sampling methodology yielded a Rnal list of 50 places for his analysis.

Once he had obtained his list of places, Tucker's second task was to identify a number of factors which might be important determinants of homelessness. He chose rates of poverty, unemployment, public housing availability, rental housing vacancy, population growth: total population: mean annual temperature and rainfall: and the presence (or absence) of rent control. [14] High rates of poverty and unemployment are indicative of an economically marginal population, and therefore should be associated with greater homelessness. Public housing availability, on the other hand, provides one form of protection against homelessness, and so should be associated with lower rates.[15] Low vacancy rates indicate scarcity in the private rental housing market, and--according to Tucker--should be associated with both rent control and homelessness. [16] Finally, larger, faster-growing places might well attract the homeless, as might places with warm temperatures and low rainfall.

Having selected these key variables, Tucker's final task was to employ them in two- and three-variable regression equations predicting homelessness. [17] While his results vary somewhat between his different reports, he generally found that the only variables that made any substantial difference in the rate of homelessness were the local vacancy rate and rent control--and that the latter statistically accounts for much of the impact of the former.[18] In fact, Tucker found that rent control by itself explains fully 27 percent of the difference in homelessness between cities;

when combined with mean temperature, it accounts for 31 percent. According to these findings, homeless people are attracted to cities with hospitable climates; when such places have rent control, increased housing scarcity is assumed to result, and--with it--greater homelessness.

In evaluating Tucker's findings, it is important to bear in mind that he classified only nine of the 50 cities as having any form of rent control at all.[19] Since all of the cities had homeless problems to varying degrees, it is obvious that rent control cannot be the principal cause of homelessness as Tucker contends. Miami, with the highest rate of homelessness in the cities under study, does not currently have rent control. Nor does St. Louis, which ranks second. Nor does Worcester, which ranks fourth. The fact that three out of four places with the most severe homeless problems lack rent control would seem to provide a prima *facie* case for rejecting Tucker's claim out of hand.

Tucker made numerous serious errors in conducting his study. The first major difficulty lies with his use of HUD's (1984) measure of homelessness as his key variable. According to two Congressional hearings that examined HUD's methods in detail, that measure was highly unreliable.[20] HUD relied on what it called "knowledgeable informants"--police departments, social service agencies, shelter staffs--who simply guessed at the numbers of homeless people in the 60 areas HUD reviewed. There was no actual count of the number of homeless in the streets, park benches, abandoned cars, and elsewhere--and certainly no estimate of the "invisible" homeless living in overcrowded apartments. Although the guesses were mainly for downtown neighborhoods, HUD acted as if they applied to much larger metropolitan areas--areas with four or five times as many people. This method, not surprisingly, produced very low rates of homelessness for the metropolitan areas HUD studied, since they guaranteed that homeless people outside the downtown areas would be excluded from the study. *Tucker's principal variable, therefore, substantially undercounts the homeless.*[21]

The second major problem results from the questionable procedures by which Tucker arrived at his 50 cities. As noted above. he began with HUD's random sample of 40 medium and large metropolitan areas, added one smaller HUD metropolitan area, selectively eliminated five places, and then added 15 others of his own choosing. Since only five of HUD's cities were among the more than 200 places with rent control,** Tucker made certain that three rent controlled cities were included among those he added. But sampling problems are compounded by the fact that the three

rent controlled cities he added are already presumably included in HUD's homeless estimates: Newark and Yonkers are part of the New York City metropolitan area, while Santa Monica is part of Los Angeles.[23] As we demonstrate in the next section of this paper, the 15 cities Tucker added to HUD's random sample systematically--across several model specifications--provide greater support for Tucker's conclusions than the HUD cities alone. In the most complete specification, strikingly, *only* Tucker's added cities provide any support for a positive relationship between rent control and homelessness.

Tucker's third major error is his failure to consider the possibility that high rents might themselves be a chief cause of homelessness, while at the same time causing tenants to demand rent control. In other words, his reported correlation between rent control and homelessness might be an artifact of the association of both with high rents. Nowhere does he look at the possible causal effect of rent on homelessness. More generally, even for those variables Tucker does consider, his method of using them or not according to how they perform in simple two- or three-variable regressions is invalid.

Reanalysis of Tucker's Data

We have reanalyzed Tucker's dataset,[24] using more standard methodological techniques. Our strategy is as follows. First, we replicate Tucker's three variable equations, comparing the results for three groups: HUD's original random sample of 41 larger cities,[25] the 15 cities Tucker added. and all 56 cities combined. In this fashion we hope to be able to determine to what extent Tucker's results stem from his selective addition of 15 cities of his own choosing. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 2A, which examines the effect of mean temperature and rent control on homelessness, and Table 2B, which examines the effect of vacancy rate and homelessness on rent control.

Next, we do our own more comprehensive analysis, a model which examines the combined effect of a larger number of variables on homelessness (Table 3). Tucker's highly simplified two- and three-variable equations are likely to omit other possible important determinants of homelessness, thereby producing erroneous results. In addition to the variables Tucker considered singly or in pairs,[26] we have added median rents and the percentage of housing units that are renter-occupied.[27] Median rents are an index of housing affordability; high rents might be expected to contribute to homelessness.[28] High rents might also encourage

tenants to enact rent controls, in which case both high rates of homelessness and rent control would be found in the same (high rent) cities. Omitting this variable, as Tucker did, would then impart an upward bias to the observed association between homelessness and rent control. The proportion of households renting is an index of the population at risk of being homeless, since renters in most cities are heavily concentrated among lower-income groups, and--if evicted--are the most likely to wind up in streets and shelters.

Looking first at Tables 2A and 2B, we find that rent control shows approximately the same association with homelessness in HUD's 41 randomly-sampled cities, Tucker's 15 additional cities, and all 56 cities combined. This is true whether rent control is paired with mean temperature or vacancy rate: in all cases, there are. from four to six more homeless people per thousand population in rent controlled cities than in non-rent controlled ones, and this difference is statistically significant. But how are we to interpret these results? Could rent control and homelessness both result from some other factors that are not considered in these simple three-variables models? Notice, too, that the estimated coefficient relating rent control to homelessness is somewhat larger for the 15 cities Tucker added than for the I-IUD randomly-sampled cities. This suggests that there may be problems with the way Tucker selected his 15 cities.

These questions are addressed in Table 3, which examines the combined effect of a number of variables on homelessness, including whether or not a city has rent control.[29] Looking at the first two columns, we see that among the 41 cities in HUD's original sample, rent control has no statistically significant effect on homelessness. Indeed, the coefficient has a negative sign, indicating that rent control is associated with lower rates of homelessness rather than the reverse, although the coefficient is not significantly different from zero. Of the eight variables in the equation, homelessness is significantly associated with only four: higher rates of unemployment, higher mean temperatures, higher percentages of renters, and lower vacancy rates. In *other words, in a randomly-selected list of cities, homelessness is associated with unemployment, temperature, percentage of renters, and vacancy rate, but not rent control.*

In contrast, if one looks only at the 15 cities selectively added by Tucker (columns 3 and 4), one finds the reverse is true: rent control is one of the only variables that approaches significance,[30] with rent controlled cities averaging seven per thousand more homeless people than non-rent

controlled cities. Among these 15 cities, the three with rent control are among the four with the highest homeless rates (only St. Louis is reportedly higher). Thus, in this more completely specified model, only the 15 cities that Tucker added provide any support for Tucker's contention that rent control increases homelessness, while the cities in HUD's random sample do not. Finally, in this more complete model, when we combine HUD's randomly-selected list with Tucker's hand-picked list, rent control is not significantly associated with homelessness (columns 5 and 6).

Even had Tucker's data provided a strong positive connection between homelessness and rent control--and, as we have shown, they do not--such a result would have limited import. First, as noted, the dependent variable is a highly doubtful measure of homelessness. Second, results from this type of cross-section regression pertain not to the causes of homelessness but to its differential rate between cities--not always the same thing. For example, mean temperature proves to be significantly connected with homelessness in the more appropriate model we have tested (Table 3). It does not thereby follow that rising homelessness in the 1980s was one more (little-noted) consequence of the "greenhouse effect" or that national homelessness would be mitigated if aid to cities were tied to local initiatives aimed at lowering mean temperatures. Once the problem is posed in this way--what changes in the 1980s are responsible for the alarming growth in the problem of homelessness over the decade--the answers become obvious to a fair-minded observer.

Why Do We Have a Homelessness Problem?

The United States now faces the worst housing crisis since the Great Depression. The underlying problem is a widening gap between what Americans can afford to pay and what it costs to build and operate housing. In this situation, the poor are the most vulnerable to joining the ranks of those without a home.

The number of poor Americans (now about 33 million people) is growing, and the poor are getting poorer (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1988, p. 1; Children's Defense Fund, 1989, pp. 16-26. 100-106 and 115: U.S. Joint Economic Committee of Congress, 1988, ch. VII). The largest increase is among the "working poor"--people who earn their poverty on the job because of low wages. Among the "welfare poor"--primarily single mothers and their children--AFDC and other benefits have declined far below the poverty level. These are people who are only one rent increase. hospital stay, or layoff away from becoming homeless. In fact, a

recent report by the U.S. Conference of Mayors (1989:2) found that almost one-quarter of the homeless work, but simply have wages too low to afford permanent housing.

The plight of the poor is worsened by the steadily rising housing costs that have plagued the economy throughout the past decade (see U.S. Comptroller General, 1979, for an early announcement of the housing crisis). On the one hand, rising homeownership costs have forced many would-be first-time buyers into the status of reluctant long-term renters, greatly increasing pressures on the rental housing market. Homeownership rates have been declining steadily since 1980. particularly among first-time homebuyers. Among households where the head was under 25, for example, ownership declined from 23.4 percent to 15.1 percent of all households, a drop of 36 percent: for those headed by someone aged 25-34, the decline was from 51.4 percent to 45.1 percent, or 12 percent (Apgar, 1988, p. 24). In 1973, it took 23 percent of the median income of a young family with children to carry a new mortgage on an average-priced house. Today, it takes over half of a young family's income (Children's Defense Fund, 1988, p. 57).

On the other hand, renters confront chronic production shortages and rising rents. Between 1970 and 1983 rents tripled, while renters' incomes only doubled. As a result the average rent-income ratio grew from roughly one-quarter to one-third: the proportion of tenants paying 25 percent or more of their income for rent increased from one-third to one-half. By 1985, close to one out of every four renters paid over half of their income for housing costs. Eleven million families now pay over one-third of income in rent: five million pay over half.

The problem is especially acute for the poor, who are now competing with the middle-class for scarce apartments. It is estimated that by 1985 there was a national shortage of some 3.3 million affordable units for households earning under $5,000--an increase of more than 80 percent since 1978 (Leonard, et *al.*, 1989, p. 9). Among the nation's nearly seven million poor renter households, 45 percent spent more than 70 percent of their income on housing in 1985; two out of three paid more than half; while fully 85 percent--some 5.8 million households--paid more than the 30 percent officially regarded as "affordable" under current federal standards. The median poor tenant household paid almost two-thirds of its income on rent (Leonard. et *al.*, 1989, pp. l-2). The typical young single parent pays 81 percent of her meager income just to keep a roof over her childrens' heads (Children's Defense Fund, 1988, p. 59).

Despite the severity of these problems, less than one-third of poor households receive any kind of housing subsidy--(Leonard, et *al.*, 1989, p. 27; U.S. Congressional Budget Office, 1988, p. 3). This is the lowest level of any industrial nation in the world. Some six to seven million low-income renter families receive no housing assistance whatsoever, and are therefore, completely at the mercy of housing markets which place them immediately at risk of being homeless. And, while the number of poor families has risen during the 1980s, the number of low-rent private apartments has plummeted as a result of rising rents, urban redevelopment activities, condo conversions, and arson. Between 1974 and 1985, the number of privately owned, unsubsidized apartments renting for less that $300 (measured in 1988 dollars) fell by one-third, a loss of nearly three million units (Apgar, et *al.*, 1989, p. 4). The swelling waiting lists of even the most deteriorated subsidized housing projects are telling evidence of the desperation of the poor looking for affordable homes.

The already existing shortage of affordable private housing was worsened considerably by the short-sighted actions of the Reagan-Bush Administration. The 1986 Tax Reform Act, for example, removed many of the tax benefits which previously made it profitable for the private sector to rent housing to poorer families. It is estimated that the loss of tax shelters for housing will eventually reduce the value of income from property by some 20 percent, forcing compensating rent increases of 25 percent by the early 1990s. The National Association of Home Builders predicted that rental housing construction would decline by half as a direct result (Furlong, 1986, p. 16); an MIT market simulation predicted an eventual loss of some 1.4 million units (Apgar, et *al.*, 1985,. p. 1).

The Reagan Administration's budget cutbacks virtually eviscerated publicly owned and subsidized housing, all but eliminating the already small federal commitment to providing housing for the poor. Not only were safety net programs cut in general, but housing was selected to bear the brunt of budgetary retrenchment. Between 1981 and 1989 federal expenditures for subsidized housing declined by four-fifths, from $32 billion to $6 billion. Total federal housing starts declined from 183,000 in 1980 to 20,000 in 1989 (Low Income Housing Information Service, 1989). The Administration even proposed to sell off 100,000 units of public housing, an effort that was stymied largely because public housing tenants were too poor to afford their units. A number of specific programs were "zeroed out" in the 1989 budget, including several directed at the needs of the homeless. It should be pointed out that even as draconian as these

measures may appear, President Reagan's proposed cuts were still deeper: philosophically committed to ending federal involvement in housing altogether, he was prevented from doing so only by the lobbying efforts of low-income housing advocates before a Democratically-controlled Congress. A single statistic tells the story in unambiguous terms. When Reagan came to office in 1981, the federal government spent seven dollars on defense for every dollar on housing. When he left office in 1989, the ratio was 46 to one.

Conclusion

In sum, declining incomes at the bottom have converged with rising housing costs to produce a potentially explosive situation. which unwise short-term federal policies have served to worsen. Rent control plays no role in this unfolding tragedy. According to one estimate (Clay, 1987, i), by 2003 "the gap between the total low-rent housing supply (subsidized and unsubsidized) and households needing such housing is expected to grow to 7.8 million units," representing an affordable housing loss for nearly 19 million people. This figure represents the potential constituency of the homeless, as the United States moves into the 21st century.

On its own, rent control cannot solve the housing crisis. It is merely one tool available to local governments with which to confront skyrocketing rents and a shortage of affordable housing. Until the federal government renews its responsibility to help poor and working class people fill the gap between what they can afford and what housing costs to build and operate, rent control can at least help to keep a roof over their heads. Tucker's study does not demonstrate what it sets out to do and so cannot be used to rationalize a scapegoating of rent control for the mounting tragedy of homelessness.

October 1989

Table 1
Effects of Modern Rent Control Laws on
Rents, Affordability, and Investment in Rental Housing:
Summary of the Results of Existing Studies

I. Effects on Rents and Affordability
A. Effect of rent increase formulas
1. vacancy decontrol-recontrol provisions: result in large rent increases on decontrol.
Clark, **Heskin,** and Manuel, 1980 (Los Angeles)
Gilderbloom, 1986 (New Jersey)
Gilderbloom and Keating, 1982 (New Jersey)
Los Angeles RSD, 1985 (Los Angeles)
2. full CPI formulas: bring percentage rent increases in line with national average Gilderbloom, 1984 (New Jersey)

B. Effect on overall affordability: minor except for strong rent controls (Santa Monica, Berkeley, West Hollywood)
Appelbaum, 1986 (Santa Monica, Berkeley, West Hollywood)
Clark and **Heskin,** 1982 (Los Angeles)
Daugherbaugh, 1975 (Anchorage and Fairbanks, Alaska)
Gilderbloom, 1986 (New Jersey)
Gilderbloom and Keating, 1982 (Springfield, **New Jersey)**
Hartman, 1984 (San Francisco)
Heffley and Santerre, 1985 (New Jersey)
Levine and Grigsby, 1987 (Santa Monica)
Los Angeles RSD, 1985 (Los Angeles)
Los Angeles RSD, 1988 (Los Angeles)
Mollenkopf and Pynoos, 1973 (Cambridge, Massachusetts)
Rydell, 1981 (Los Angeles)
Shulman, 1980 (Santa Monica)
Vitaliano, 1983 (New York State)

II. Effects on Investment in Rental Housing
A. Effect on New Construction: none
Appelbaum, 1983 (Santa Monica)
Clark, **Heskin,** and Manuel, 1980 (Los Angeles)
Gilderbloom, 1983 (New Jersey)
Gruen and Gruen, 1977 (New Jersey)
Los Angeles Community Development Department, 1979 (Los Angeles)
Los Angeles RSD, 1985 (Los Angeles)
Sorenson, 1983 (Alaska)
Vitaliano, 1983 (New York State)

B. Effect on maintenance and capital improvements: none
Apartment and Office Building Association, 1977 (Montgomery County, Maryland)
Clark, **Heskin,** and Manuel, 1980 (Los Angeles)
Eckert, 1977 (Brookline, Massachusetts)
Gilderbloom, 1978 (Fort Lee, New Jersey)

Los Angeles RSD, 1985 (Los Angeles)
Los Angeles RSD, 1988 (Los Angeles)
Rydell, 1981 (Los Angeles)
Sternlieb, 1974 (Boston)
Sternlieb, 1975 (Fort Lee, New Jersey)
Urban Planing Aid, 1975 (Boston area)
Vitaliano, 1983 (New York State)
Wolfe, 1983 (Berkeley, Oakland, and Hayward, California)

C. Effect on abandonment and demolitions: none
Gilderbloom, 1983 (New Jersey)
Marcuse, 1981 (New York City)
U.S. General Accounting Office, 1978 (various cities)

D. Effect on overall valuation of rental housing and tax base: minimal
Clark, Heskin, and Manuel, 1980 (Los Angeles)
Eckert, 1977 (Brookline, Massachusetts)
Gilderbloom, 1978, 1983 (New Jersey)
Gilderbloom, 1981 (Fort Lee, New Jersey)
Los Angeles RSD, 1985 (Los Angeles)
Massachusetts Department of Corporations and Taxation, 1974 (Cambridge, Massachusetts)
Revenue and Rent Study Committee, 1974 (Brookline, Massachusetts)

Tab10 2
Replication of Tucker's Analysis, Based on
41* HUD Randomly-Sampled Cities,
15 Cities added by Tucker, and
Combined 56 Cities

Table 2A
Effect of Rent Control and Temperature
on Homelessness Rate

	Sample (Number of Cities)					
	HUD (41)		Tucker (15)		Total (56)	
variable	coeff	t-value	coeff	t-value	coeff	t-value
rent control	4.42	2.93[c]	4.83	2.81[b]	4.67	4.10[c]
mean temperature	0.10	1.47	0.02	.20	0.08	1.46
(constant)	-2.20		3.05		-0.74	
Adj R-square	.193		.297		.243	

Table 2B
Effect of Rent Control and Vacancy Rate
on Homelessness Rate

	Sample (Number of Cities)					
	HUD (41)		Tucker (15)		Total (56)	
variable	coeff	t-value	coeff	t-value	coeff	t-value
rent control	4.49	2.93[c]	6.00	3.89[a]	4.85	4.12[c]
vacancy rate	-0.28	-.90	0.57	2.23[b]	0.08	.38
(constant)	5.41		-0.28		2.96	
Adj R-square	.165		.501		.215	

*Tucker included Lincoln, Nebraska in his analysis, even though it is in HUD's tier of small metropolitan areas (see text). We have therefore also included it in this analysis.

[a]sig. at p≤.10
[b]sig. at p≤.05
[c]sig. at p≤.01

Table 3
Analysis of the Determinants of Homelessness, Utilizing a Multivariate Model, For 41* HUD Randomly-Sampled Cities, 15 cities added by Tucker, and All 56 Cities Combined

	Sample (Number of Cities)					
	HUD (41)		Tucker (15)		Total (56)	
variable	coeff	t-value	coeff	t-value	coeff	t-value
median rent	0.03	1.36	0.05	.55	0.02	.76
poverty rate	- 0.28	-1.27	-0.02	- .04	- 0.13	- .81
unemploy. rate	0.56	2.09[b]	0.46	.70	0.32	1.42
mean temp.	0.25	2.73'	0.08	.48	0.19	2.66[b]
vacancy rate	- 0.53	-1.91[a]	0.54	.81	-0.20	- .85
pop. growth	- 0.05	-1.56	-0.15	-1.70	- 0.06	-1.95[a]
pct renters	0.26	3.21'	-0.21	- .85	0.17	2.46[b]
rent control**	- 1.88	-1.02	7.08	1.72	- 0.13	- .08
(constant)	-26.56		-9.08		-18.39	
Adj R-square	.473		.428		.394	

*Includes Lincoln Nebraska. See note to Table 2.
**Coded 1=rent control, 0=no rent control (as in Tucker).

[a]sig. at p≤.10
[b]sig. at p≤.05
[c]sig. at p≤.01

Endnotes

1. The Tucker study has received widespread attention as the result of a well-orchestrated effort on the part of conservative research institutes and publications. Both the Manhattan Institute and the Heritage Foundation published Tucker's study and distributed it to opinion leaders and policy-makers. Heritage, which provided HUD Secretary Kemp with his top policy aide, called a press conference soon after President Bush's inauguration, where Tucker reported that the nation's homeless had rent control (and its liberal proponents) to blame. Different versions of his report have appeared in the *National Review* and American **Spectator (both** publications of the conservative movement), as well as the mainstream New York *Times* and *Wall* Street *Journal.* Its claims have even been cited in the popular weekly *Parade* magazine, and even reprinted in at least one college textbook (Tucker, 1989b).

2. The effort to outlaw rent control on the grounds that it is destructive of housing markets long predates Tucker's study. Landlord organizations have been lobbying state legislatures to ban rent control at least since 1972. In 1983. the President's Commission on Housing called for federal legislation banning local rent controls (see also Downs, 1983). The California State legislature routinely considers legislation that would inhibit the ability of localities to enact rent control: a 1986 measure, for example, would have required all local rent control ordinances to provide for the decontrol of recently vacated units -- a measure which would have significantly weakened the voter-adopted measures in Berkeley, Santa Monica, and West Hollywood. (It was eventually killed in committee.)

3. For a more detailed discussion, see Gilderbloom (1981, 1983, 1986, and 1987): Gilderbloom and Appelbaum (1988, ch. 7); Appelbaum and Gilderbloom (1990); Gilderbloom and Capek (1990).

4. Although restrictive rent controls are no longer enacted, many opponents of rent control continue to associate all current versions with this type.

5. The courts have repeatedly upheld rent control laws so long as they do not constitute an unfair "taking" of the landlord's property. In 1988, for example, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in **Pennell** vs. San Jose that the city could take tenants' welfare into account in setting rent ceilings.

6. Santa Monica. Berkeley, and West Hollywood are the only rent control ordinances which disallow refinancing costs with which we are familiar.

7. The sponsors included the Building Owners and Managers Association International, the California Housing Council, the Mortgage Bankers' Association, the National Apartment Association, the National Association of

Home Builders, the National Association of Realtors, the National Multi Housing Council, and the National Really Committee, among others.

8. HUD (1989) has since completed a second survey of shelter operators across the country: the Urban Institute (1989) has conducted a study of prepared meals for the homeless in a sample of cities. The original HUD study and these two recent surveys are the only systematic studies of homelessness in a random sample of places that have been done, as far as we know.

9. Oddly, Tucker (1989a, p. 5, n. 4) claims that he eliminated only five cities, incorrectly naming Grand Rapids as one, while failing to mention Raleigh and Baton Rouge.

10. This reasoning is poor. since local vacancy data are readily available from utility companies, local governments, real estate organizations, and the Census.

11. See the table in Tucker (1987a, p. 35, reproduced as an appendix to Tucker, 1989a) for a complete listing of Tucker's cities.

12. Tucker's (1989a, p. 5, n. 4) claim that these places were added "using similar methods" (to HUD's) apparently contradicts his earlier (1987a, p. 1) contention that the 15 others were chosen "to include some notable HUD omissions." The selective addition of cities to HUD's sample undermines the original sampling procedure.

13. Personal telephone conversation, September 7, 1988.

14. In his original studies, Tucker (1987a, 1987b) apparently did not utilize population growth rate nor mean annual rainfall: while his most recent (1989a) study does, the appendix reports only the original seven independent variables.

15. This strikes us as doubtful reasoning, given the enormous waiting lists for public housing in most cities--in some cases, more than five years. It is more likely that the relative size of the public housing stock is an index of local poverty or low-income housing shortages.

16. In fact. there is evidence that average vacancy rates are not a true measure of rental housing scarcity, especially for particular submarkets--see Gilderbloom and Appelbaum (1988, ch. 5); and Apgar (1988, pp. 9- 11).

17. Regression analysis is a statistical method for looking at the effect of a number of causal variables on a single dependent variable--in this case, the rate of homelessness. It enables the researcher to measure the independent effect of each variable in the equation while holding constant the effects of the others. Tucker apparently ran only two- and three-variable regressions, using various combinations of his independent variables. As far as can be

determined from his published reports, he never incorporated all of his variables into a single equation.

18. In his original study, Tucker (1987a, p. 2) found that in simple two variable correlations, poverty accounted for five percent of the variation in homelessness, unemployment two percent, public housing was negligible (although the relationship was "slightly positive"), city size and temperature were not significant, vacancy rate accounted for 15 percent, and rent control 27 percent. In his three variable equations. when homelessness was regressed on temperature and rent control together. temperature became significant. now accounting for four percent of the variation in homelessness: when homelesseness was regressed on rent control and vacancy together, vacancy lost its significance. In the 1989a (p. 6) report on the same data, however, the results are somewhat different. Public housing and city size remained non-significant, while unemployment and poverty lost their initial significance. Temperature was now found to be significant; growth lightly so (the actual relationship was found to be negative): the rent control and vacancy effects remain the same. No explanations are offered for these differing results, presumably obtained from the same data analysis.

19. In fact, the actual number is eight, since as we have noted Hartford was incorrectly classified as having rent control. Among the original HUD cities, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Washington, Boston, and New York have rent control: among the 15 Tucker added, Santa Monica, Newark, and Yonkers have rent control.

20. For detailed analyses of the shortcomings of the HUD Study, see Appelbaum (1984, 1985, and 1990). Recall that Tucker relied on I-IUD's data for 35 cities, while presumably replicating HUD's methodology for the remaining 15.

21. Tucker (1989a, pp. 4-5) was aware of the problems with HUD's measure, but argued that any inaccuracies would be randomly distributed across cities. He offers no evidence for this assertion. Note that Tucker's use of core city population as the denominator in computing a homeless rate still leaves the city homeless rate biased downward if I-IUD's numbers were, at best, estimates of the downtown homeless.

22. We are here reclassifying Hartford as a non-rent controlled city: see footnote 18.

23. Recall that while Tucker is applying HUD's homeless estimates only to the principal city, HUD in fact claims that their figures cover the entire metropolitan area. To the extent that this is true, Tucker's figures for the three cities he added are double-counted with the figures for the New York and Los Angeles metropolitan areas.

24. Data were first verified in the City-County Fact Book.

25. Since Tucker had included Lincoln, Nebraska among the cities he selected from HUD's medium- and large-sized cities, we did likewise, although technically Lincoln belongs in HUD's small city sample. The inclusion of Lincoln did not alter the results.

26. Since public housing and poverty are highly correlated (r=.77), including both in the same equation would have created multicollinearity problems. We therefore ran two complete sets of equations, the first including poverty among the independent variables (reported here), the second including public housing (not reported). The latter equation did not produce significantly different results than the former, and did not affect the final conclusions.

27. Both of these variables were obtained from the 1980 Census of Housing.

28. A better index would be the proportion of renters paying half or more of their income in rent, since median rent figures do not measure affordability; unfortunately, we do not have this index.

29. We first ran the equation with all variables, then eliminated population size, since it was highly correlated with rent control(r=.7), resulting in problems of multicollinearity.

30. It is difficult to obtain statistically significant relationships in so small a sample size, but for the 15 cities Tucker added, the rent control variable has the highest t-value (1.7). In a two-sided test, the hull hypothesis (that the true coefficient is zero) is rejected at a significance level of .136.

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