

Locked Out of Place:

How Neighborhood Level Factors Influence Housing Discrimination Against People with Felony Convictions

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Background/motivation

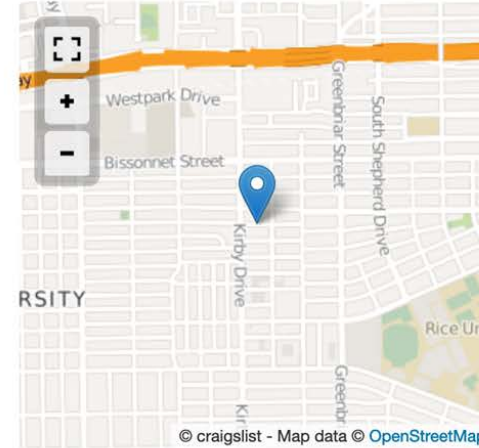
- 19 million Americans (8% of adults) have a felony conviction record (Shannon et al. 2017)
- Evidence of elevated housing instability among individuals with felony convictions (Bryan 2022)
- Landlords legally permitted to reject rental applicants based on criminal history
 - Criminal background checks common in rental screening
 - Only 10 cities and 2 states (NJ, CO) limit use of criminal history in tenant screening

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\$1,850 / 1br - 950ft² - Cute Upstairs 1Br in Rice Village! ALL BILLS PAID (Rice Village)



© craigslist - Map data © OpenStreetMap

[\(google map\)](#)

1BR / 1Ba

950ft²

available now

cats are OK - purrr

dogs are OK - woof

duplex

w/d in unit

carport

rent period: monthly



charming second floor duplex

All bills paid including basic internet, electricity, water, trash and yard maintenance

The unit has one bedroom, living room, breakfast room, kitchen and one bathroom plus a fantastic rooftop deck

Open the front door and let your pup out to the fully fenced, turfed dog run that goes along the side of the property

The washer and dryer is included and is inside the unit

One reserved covered parking spot in the back of the property

The first floor of the property is a hair salon that operates Tuesday through Saturday

Great location with easy access to 59 and minutes from Rice Village, Rice University, downtown and the med center

Pets are case by case

Good credit required, no evictions or convictions

12 month lease minimum

Good credit required, no evictions or convictions

Text or Email for a time to see this property!

Research questions

1. How much discrimination do individuals with felony conviction records face in the private rental market?
2. Is extent of discrimination moderated by other individual characteristics (e.g., race, gender, age)?
3. Do these relationships differ across place/types of neighborhoods? By unit characteristics?

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Study design

- Correspondence test using Craigslist rental postings
 - Test conditions varied within email text & signature
- 40 largest U.S. cities
- Data collected:
 - Price
 - Unit **location** (address, latitude/longitude provided in ad)
 - Pull in Census (ACS) neighborhood characteristics at block group level
 - Full text of ad
 - Email responses received

Email text

Single

[Hi, / Hello, /Hi. / Hello.]

I'm interested in the ad you posted on Craigslist. I was wondering if I could come visit the property sometime soon. A bit about me: I'm [a mom / dad] in my [20s / 30s / 40s] and don't have pets. [I do want to let you know that I have a [2 / 5 / 8 / 12] year old felony, but no arrests since. Is that a problem, or would you be willing to consider an application from me?] I'm happy to provide references.

Thank you,
[First & last name]

Married

[Hi, / Hello, /Hi. / Hello.]

I'm interested in the ad you posted on Craigslist. I was wondering if my [wife / husband] and I could come visit the property sometime soon. A bit about us: We're in our [20s / 30s / 40s][, have a second grader,] and don't have pets. [I do want to let you know that I have a [2 / 5 / 8 / 12] year old felony, but no arrests since. Is that a problem, or would you be willing to consider an application from us?] I'm happy to provide references.

Thank you,
[First & last name]

Study design

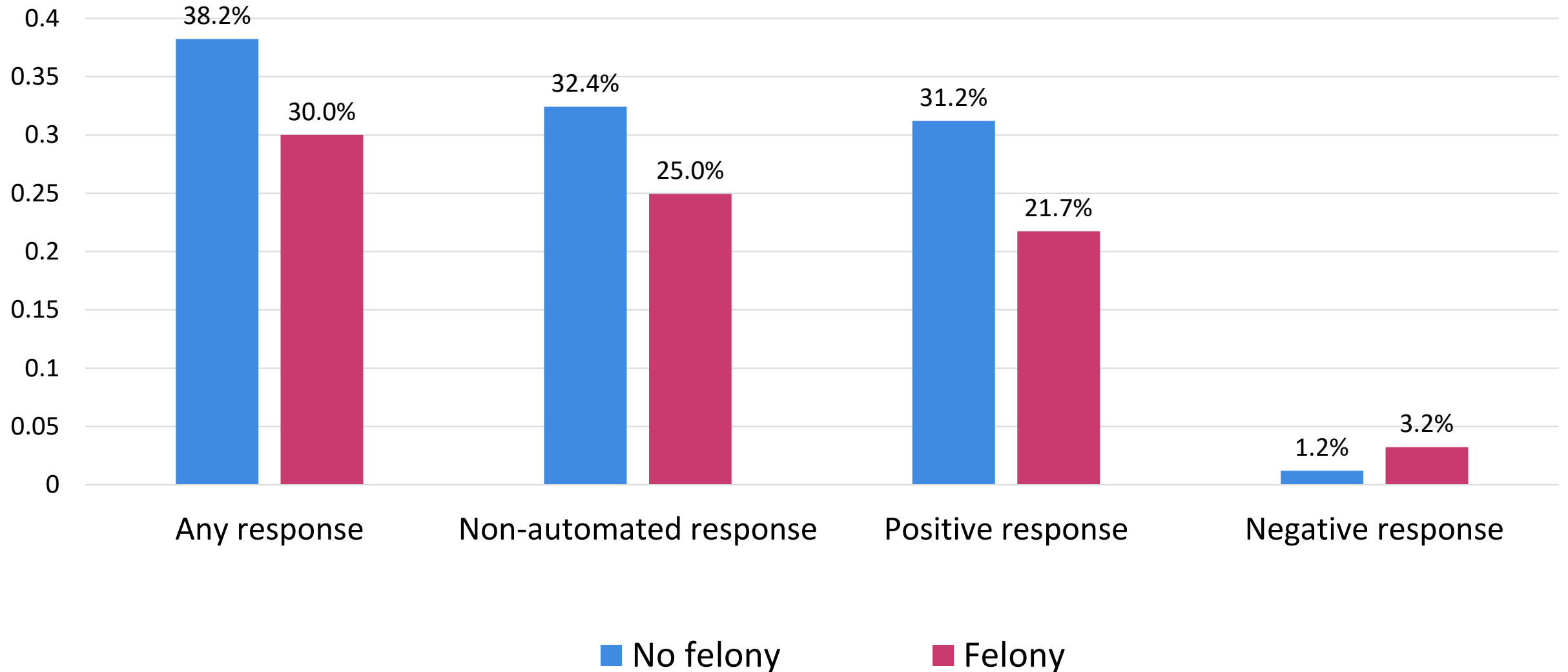
- 1 email per posting to reduce odds of detection
- Avoiding duplicate emails sent to same gatekeeper
 - Multiple ads for same unit
 - Multiple ads for different units in the same building/complex
 - Multiple ads for different units/buildings posted by the same property manager, leasing agent, etc.
- Using text & image comparison to identify likely duplicates, plus unique emails and phone numbers (when available)

Collected Data

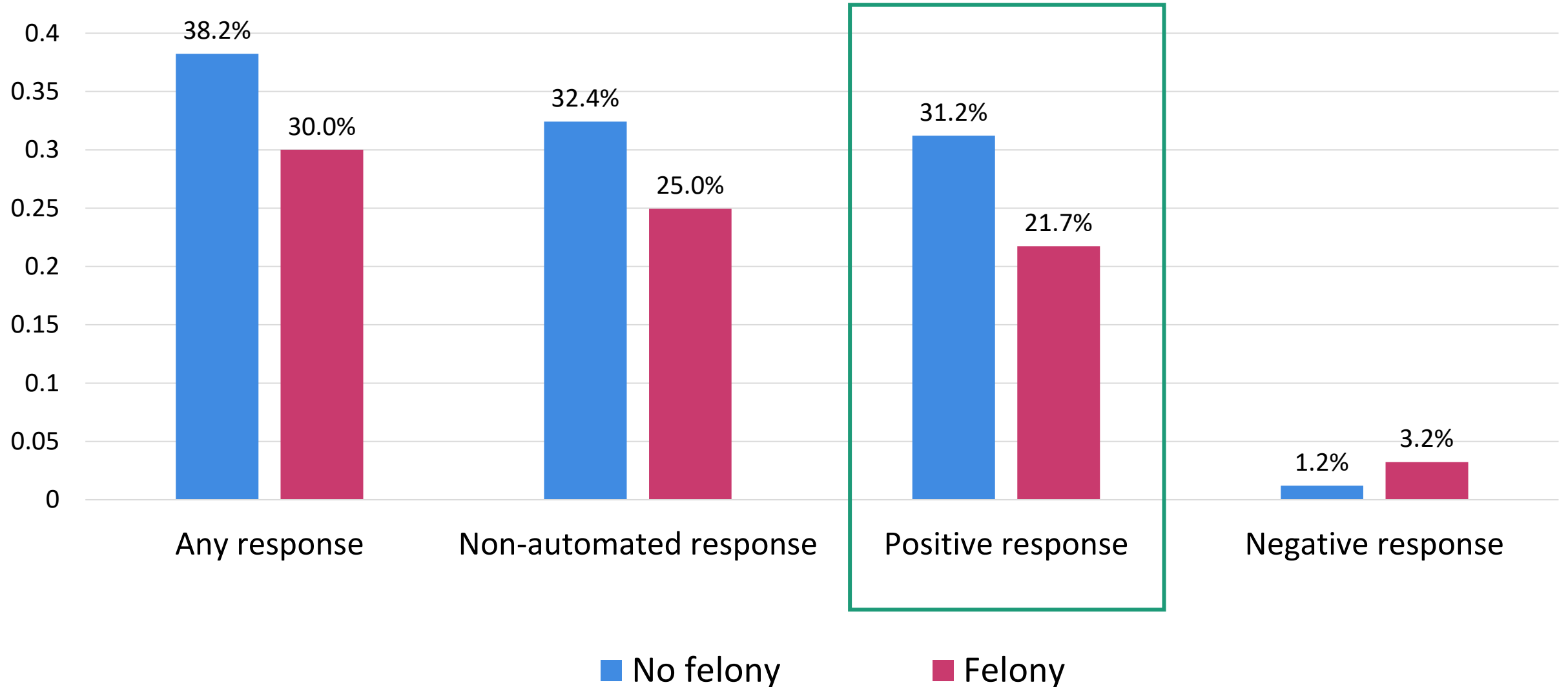
- 26,429 units emailed between November 2022 and September 2023
- 25,414 units after removing ads for SROs, roommates, and those with responses that we didn't know how to categorize (e.g., "?")
- Received 12,311 response emails
 - Coded all response emails manually with team of RAs
 - Coding completed May 2024

Findings

Response rate by felony status



Response rate by felony status



Moderating effects

Location and unit specific interactions

- Rent (standardized within city)

- Census block group (ACS 2016-2020 5-year estimates):

Economic characteristics

- % below poverty line
- % receiving public assistance
- Avg. household income
- % college educated
- Income inequality

Demographic characteristics

- Racial/ethnic heterogeneity
- % white non-Hispanic
- % black non-Hispanic
- % Hispanic
- % households with children
- % owners who are white
- Violent crime rate

Housing characteristics

- % occupied units
- % crowding
- % single-family units
- Median rent
- Avg. length of renter residence
- Median home values

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Moderating effect of unit rent price

Moderating effect of neighborhood median rent

Moderating effect of median home values

Moderating effect of neighborhood poverty level

Moderating effect of % black (non-Hispanic)

Moderating effect of violent crime rate

Still to come

- Exploring non-linearities in neighborhood characteristics
- Exploring variation across cities/markets
 - Vacancy rate
 - Local policy context
 - Local conviction rate
- Considering landlord size/professionalization

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Thank you!

Comments/suggestions/questions welcome at

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