

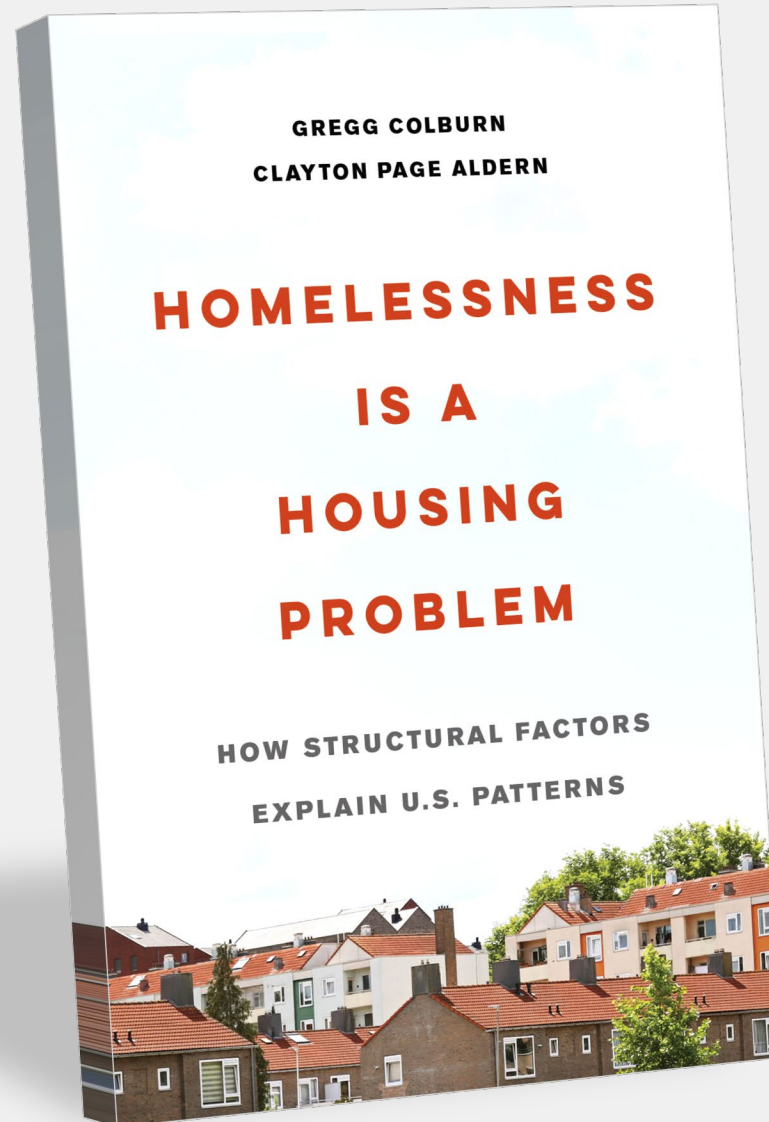
Homelessness is a **Housing** Problem

L'itinérance est
un problème de
logement

Society of Saint Vincent de Paul
Annual National Formation 2026
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Gregg Colburn | June 26, 2026
University of Washington





(The book)

Book Tour Locations

Asheville, NC
Atlanta, GA
Austin, TX
Bend, OR
Boise, ID
Boston, MA
Cedar Rapids, IA
Charlotte, NC
Charlottesville, VA
Chicago, IL
Columbus, OH
Dallas, TX
Denver, CO
Des Moines, IA
Eugene, OR
Fayetteville, AR
Flint, MI
Foster City, CA

Green Bay, WI
Houston, TX
Portland, OR
Indianapolis, IN
Kansas City, MO
Lansing, MI
Los Altos, CA
Los Angeles, CA
Lawrence, KS
Louisville, KY
Lexington, KY
Miami, FL
Minneapolis, MN
New York, NY
Orlando, FL
Osage Beach, MO
Overland Park, KS
Phoenix, AZ

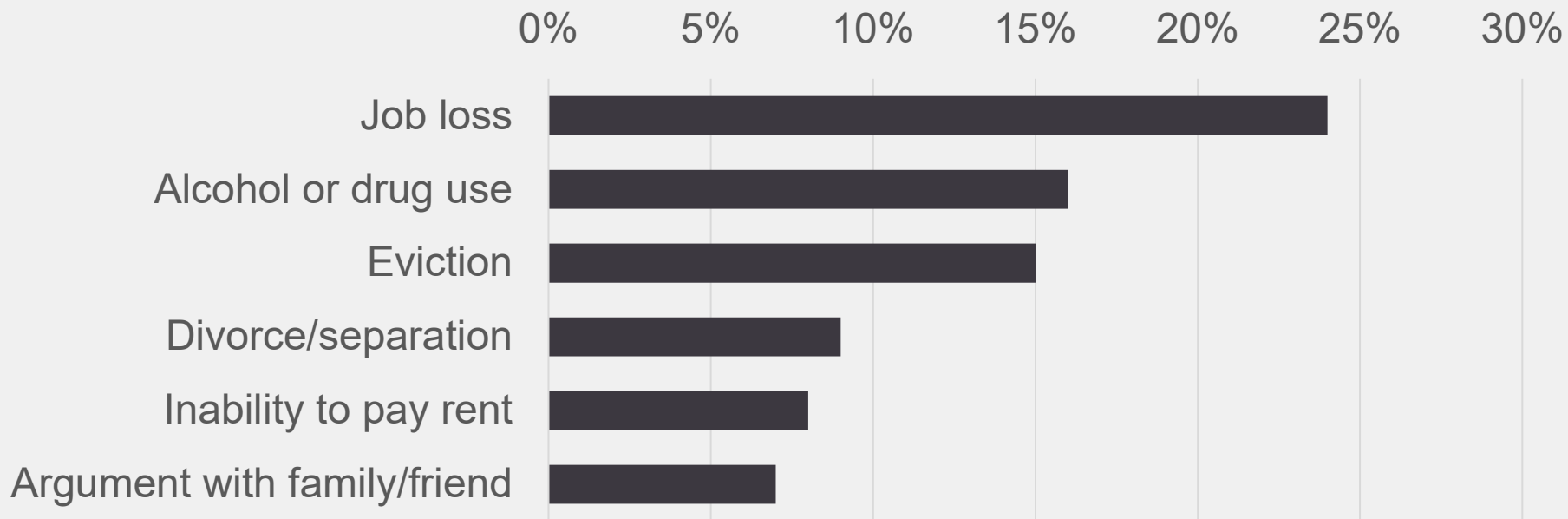
Raleigh, NC
San Diego, CA
San Francisco, CA
San Luis Obispo, CA
San Mateo, CA
Santa Barbara, CA
Santa Fe, NM
Seattle, WA
Spokane, WA
St. Louis, MO
Sun Valley, ID
Tacoma, WA
Vancouver, WA
Walla Walla, WA
Washington, DC
Wichita, KS
Wilmington, NC
Worcester, MA

Brisbane, Australia
Budapest, Hungary
Dublin, Ireland
Halifax, Nova Scotia
Melbourne, Australia
Sydney, Australia
Utrecht, Netherlands

Causes of Homelessness / de l'itinérance

Survey results suggest the following events or conditions lead to homelessness:

Les résultats de l'enquête suggèrent que les événements ou conditions suivants entraînent l'itinérance :



Source: Point-in-Time homelessness census in Seattle/King County

Causes of Homelessness / **de l'itinérance**

Are these conventional explanations of homelessness **root causes** or **precipitating events**?

Ces explications classiques de l'itinérance s'apparentent-elles à des **causes profondes** ou à des **événements déclencheurs** ?

Causes of Homelessness / de l'itinérance

Ten friends decide to play a game of musical chairs and arrange ten chairs in a circle. A leader begins the game by turning on the music, and everyone begins to walk in a circle inside the chairs. The leader removes one chair, stops the music, and the ten friends scramble to find a spot to sit—leaving one person without a chair. The loser, Mike, was on crutches after spraining his ankle. Given his condition, he was unable to move quickly enough to find a chair during the scramble that ensued.

What **caused** Mike's chairlessness?



Causes of Homelessness/ de l'itinérance

- Research demonstrates that drug use, mental illness, and poverty increase the risk of homelessness at the individual level.
- But why do these conditions produce homelessness in some geographic contexts (Boston) and not others?



Les recherches démontrent que la consommation de drogues, les troubles mentaux et la pauvreté augmentent le risque de se retrouver sans abri.

Mais pourquoi ces conditions engendrent-elles l'itinérance dans certains contextes géographiques (Boston) et pas dans d'autres ?

Causes of Homelessness / de l'itinérance

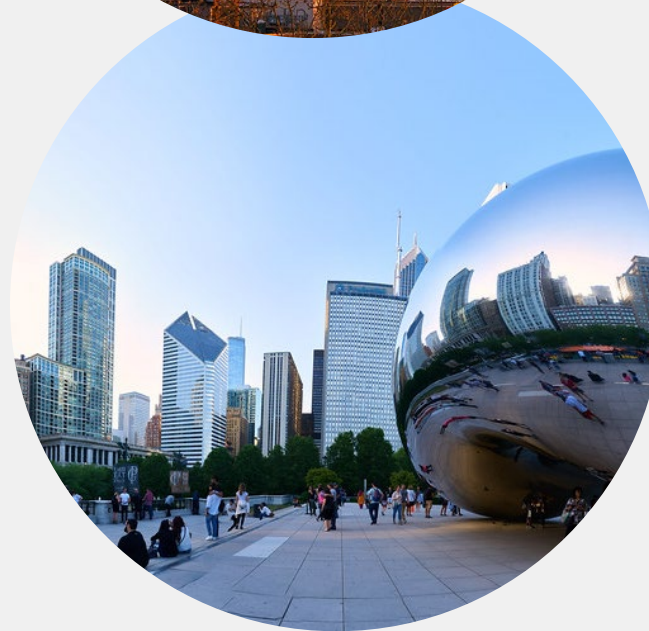
What we **observe** does not fully represent the population of people experiencing homelessness

Ce que nous **observons** ne représente pas pleinement la population des personnes sans abri.



Introduction

- **Why do rates of homelessness vary so widely throughout the United States?** Why, for example, does Seattle have between five times the per capita homelessness of Chicago?
- Does Los Angeles have a large homelessness problem because it has more people with these individual vulnerabilities?



- **Pourquoi les taux d'itinérance varient-ils autant aux États-Unis ?** Pourquoi, par exemple, Seattle compte-t-elle cinq fois plus de sans-abris par habitant que Chicago ?
- Le problème important du sans-abrisme à Los Angeles est-il dû à une plus grande concentration de personnes vulnérables ?

Introduction

- This is a book about cities, not about people.
- Understanding who becomes homeless is an important question, but it doesn't help us understand regional variation (i.e. large racial disparities).
- Our thesis: **Tight housing markets accentuate vulnerabilities.**
- Individual vulnerabilities serve as a sorting mechanism in tight housing markets.
- Ce livre traite des villes, non des individus.
- Comprendre qui devient sans-abri est une question importante, mais elle ne nous éclaire pas sur les disparités régionales (notamment les fortes inégalités raciales).
- Notre thèse : **la tension sur le marché du logement accentue les vulnérabilités.**
- Les vulnérabilités individuelles constituent un mécanisme de sélection dans un marché du logement tendu.



Rates of Homelessness

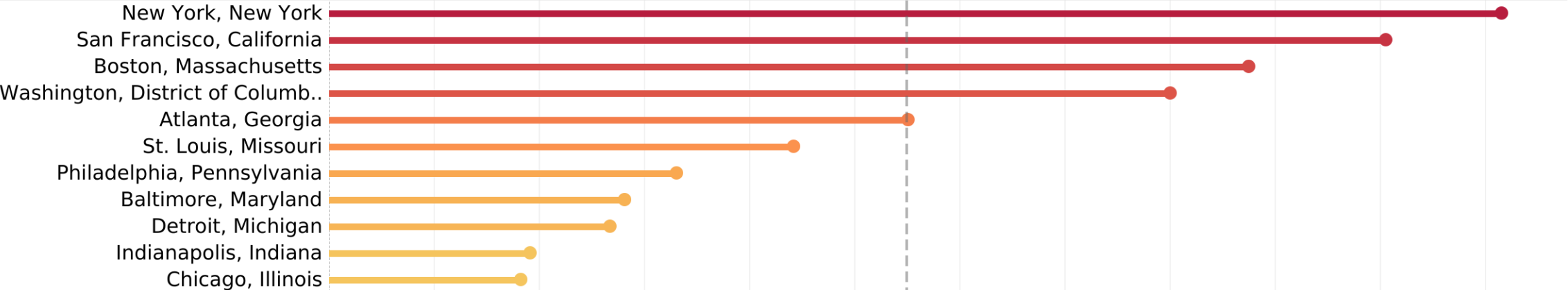
Taux de sans-abrisme



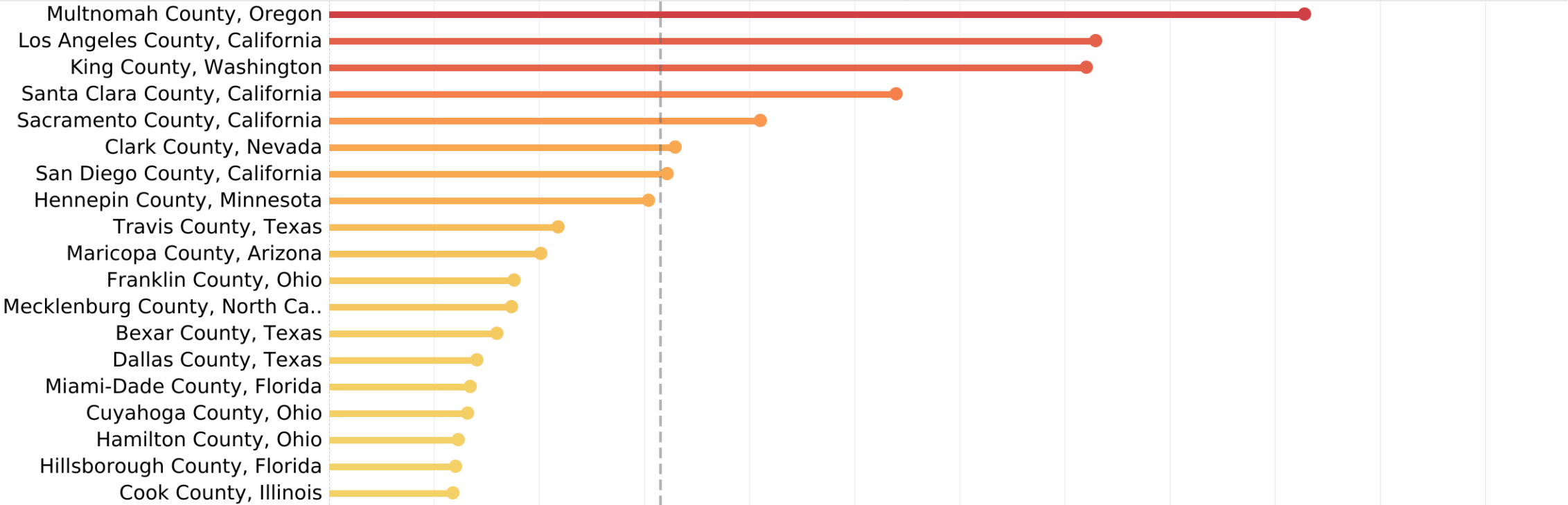
Per capita rates of homelessness in select U.S. regions, 2024

Dashed lines indicate city and county averages of per capita PIT counts

Cities



Counties



2024 PIT counts adjusted in Chicago and NYC to account for migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers.

Potential explanations: **The individual**

Explications possibles :
L'individu

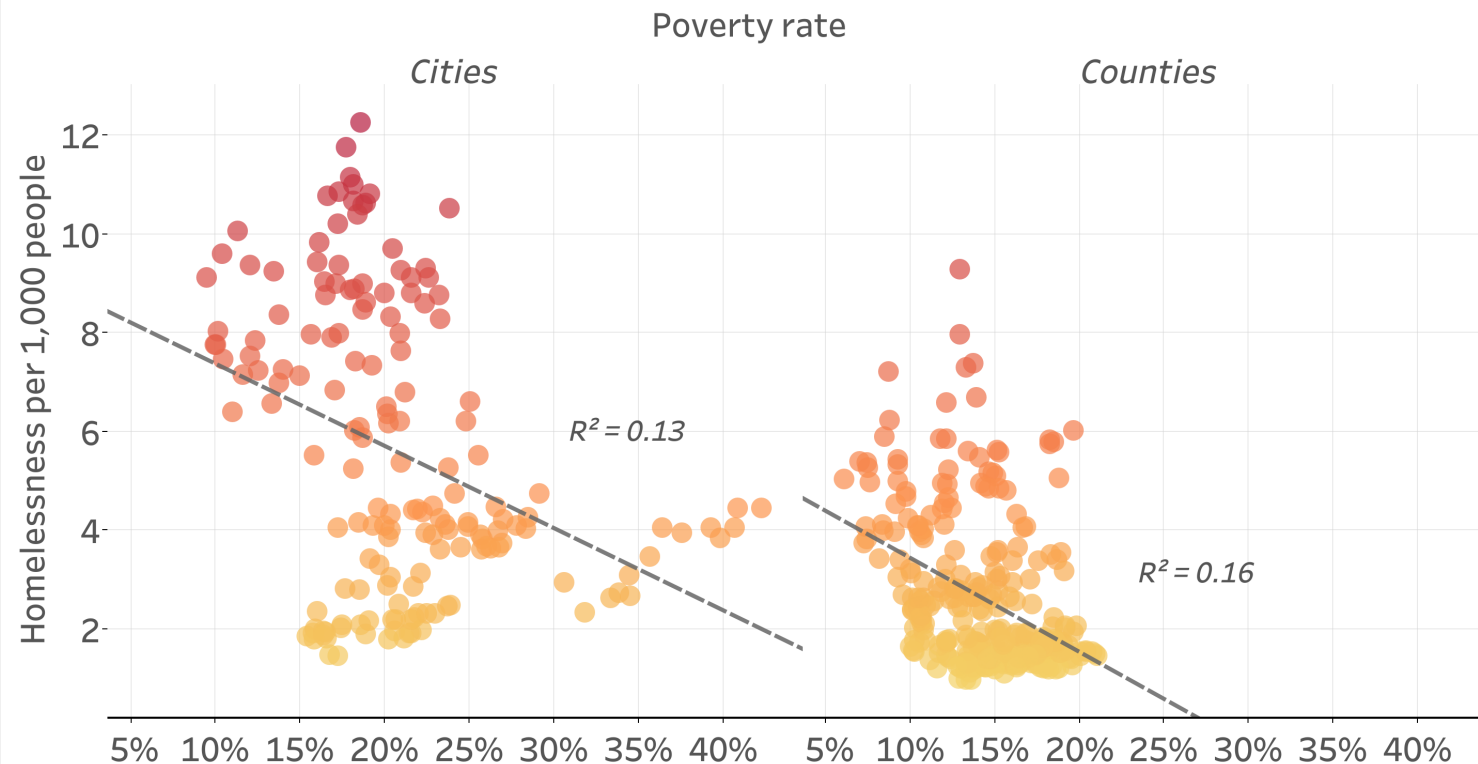


Potential explanations: The individual

Explications possibles : L'individu

Poverty rate versus per capita PIT count

Dashed lines indicate a linear regression of per capita PIT counts onto the poverty rate for a sample of U.S. regions, 2007 to 2024.



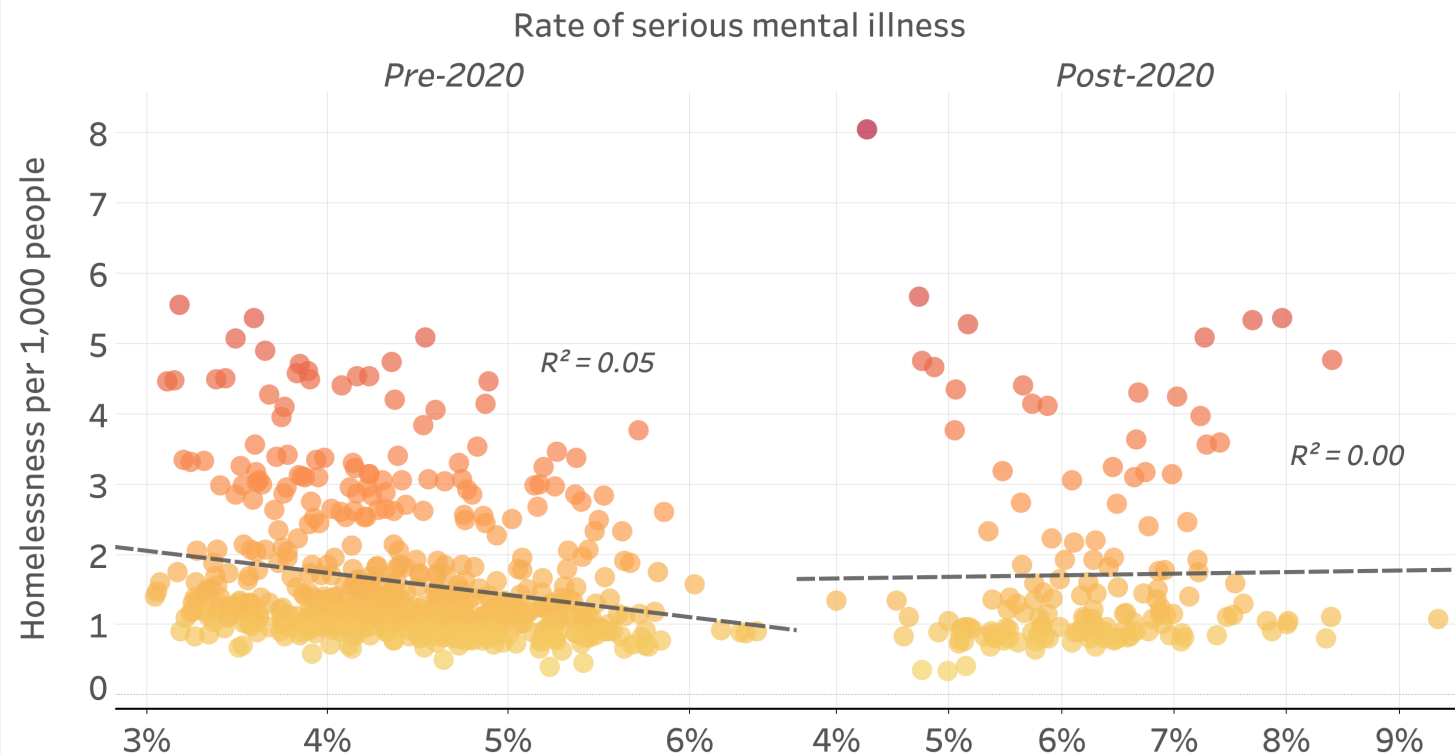
2023 & 2024 PIT counts adjusted in Chicago and NYC to account for migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers. Data source: HUD / US Census.

Potential explanations: The individual

Explications possibles : L'individu

Serious mental illness rate versus per capita PIT count

Dashed lines indicate a linear regression of per capita PIT counts onto rates of serious mental illness in U.S. states, 2007 to 2024.



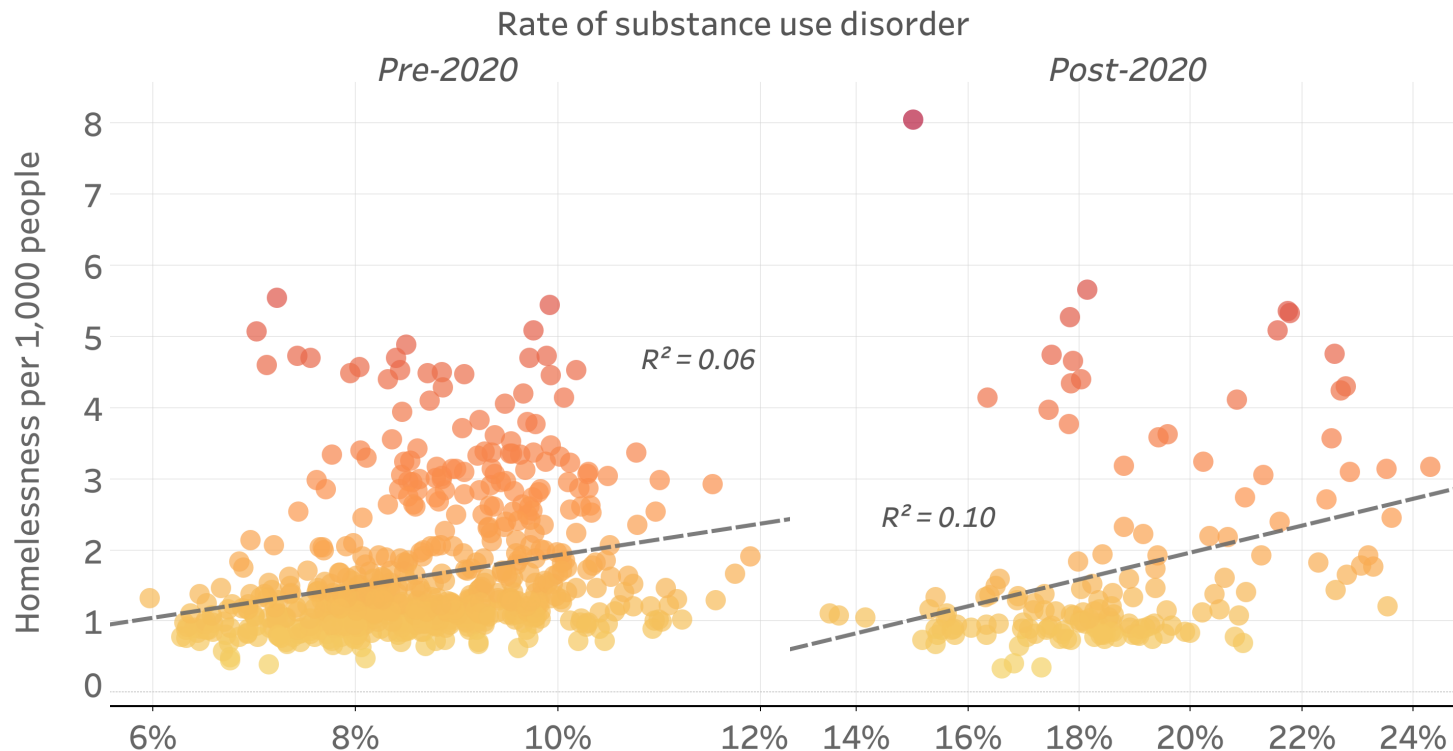
Due to methodological changes in the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, pre- and post-2020 estimates cannot be compared directly. 2023 & 2024 PIT counts adjusted in IL and NY to account for migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers. Data source: HUD / SAMHSA.

Potential explanations: The individual

Explications possibles : L'individu

Substance use disorder rate versus per capita PIT count

Dashed lines indicate a linear regression of per capita PIT counts onto rates of substance use disorder in U.S. states, 2007 to 2024.



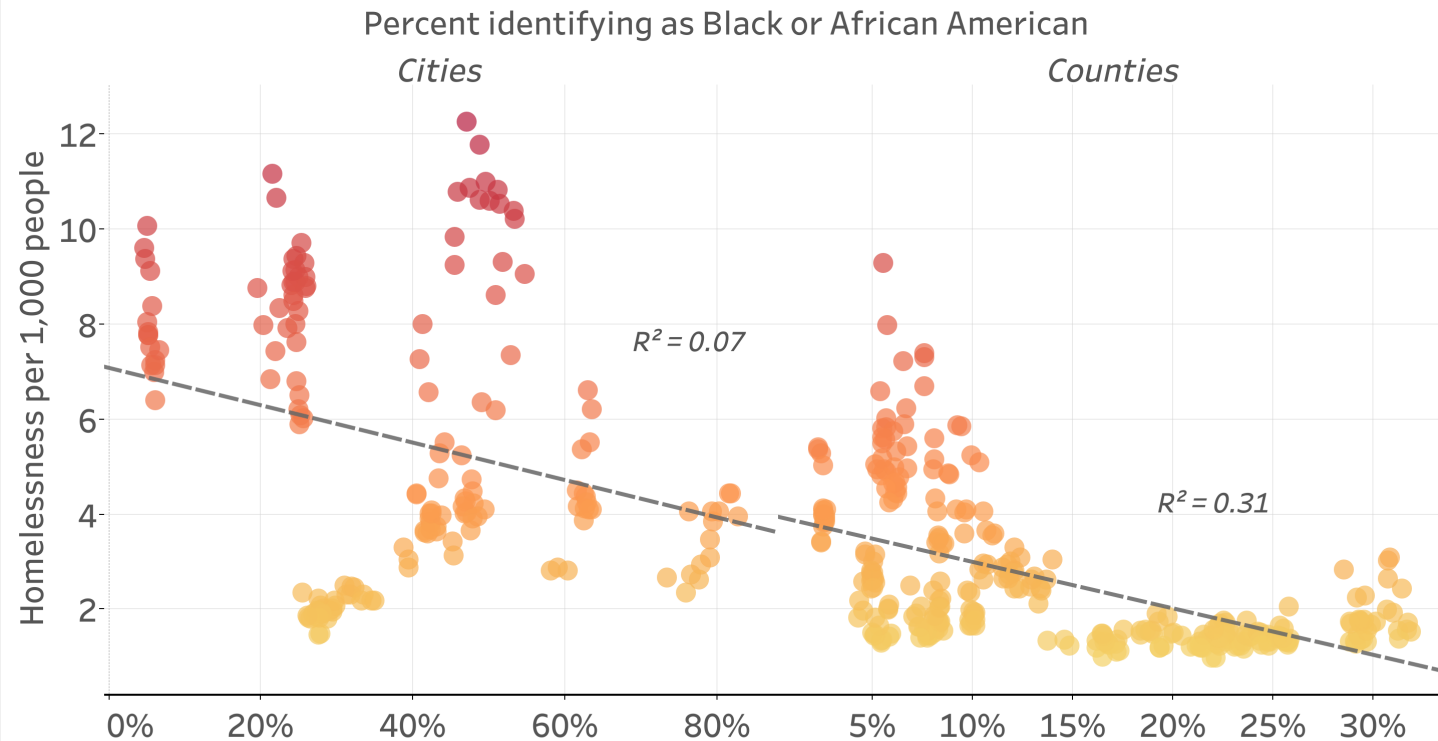
Due to methodological changes in the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, pre- and post-2020 estimates cannot be compared directly. 2023 & 2024 PIT counts adjusted in IL and NY to account for migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers. Data source: HUD / SAMHSA.

Potential explanations: The individual

Explications possibles : L'individu

Percent Black/African American versus per capita PIT count

Dashed lines indicate a linear regression of per capita PIT counts onto the proportion of persons identifying as Black or African American for a sample of U.S. regions, 2007 to 2024.



2023 & 2024 PIT counts adjusted in Chicago and NYC to account for migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers. Data source: HUD / US Census.

Potential explanations:
Local context

Explications possibles :
Le contexte local

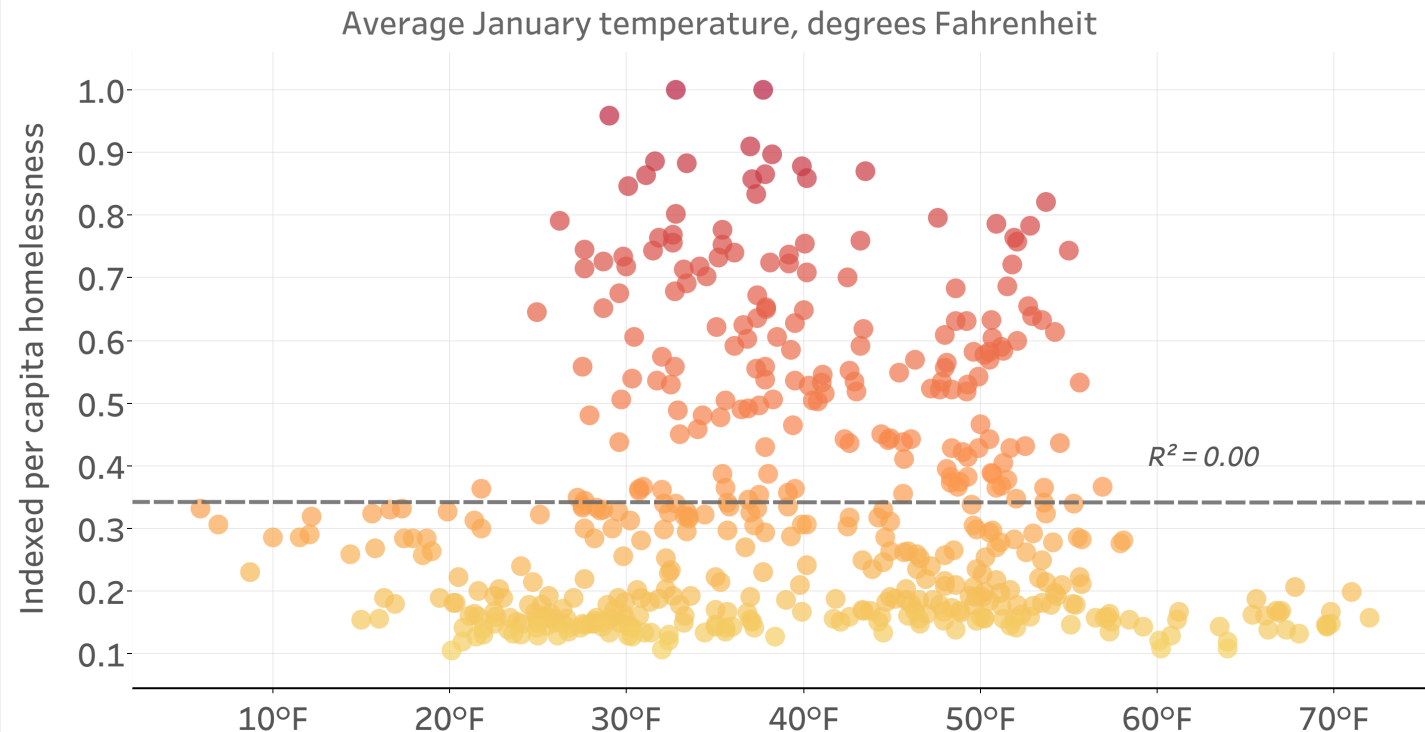


Potential explanations: Local Context

Explications possibles : Le contexte local

January average temperature versus indexed homelessness

Dashed lines indicate a linear regression of indexed rates of homelessness onto average January temperatures for a sample of U.S. regions, 2007 to 2024.



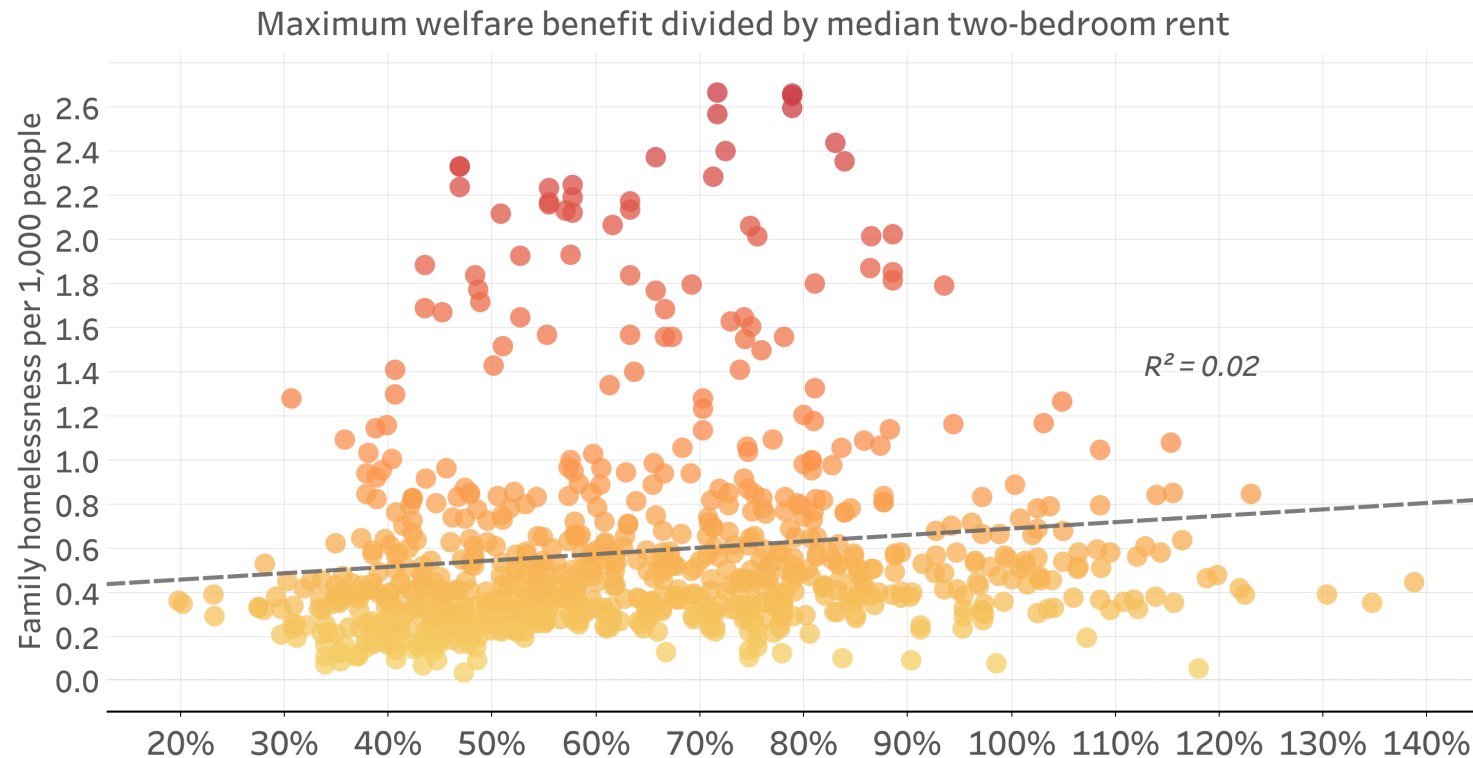
Indexed rates of homelessness refer to a normalized measure of per capita rates, whereby each region-year is scaled with respect to the maximum rate across all cities or counties (over all years). 2023 & 2024 PIT counts adjusted in Chicago and NYC to account for migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers. Data source: HUD / NOAA.

Potential explanations: Local Context

Explications possibles : Le contexte local

Benefit/rent ratio versus per capita family PIT count

Dashed lines indicate a linear regression of family per capita PIT counts onto benefit/rent ratios in U.S. states, 2007 to 2024.



2023 & 2024 family PIT counts removed in IL and NY to account for distortions due to migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers.

Data source: HUD / Welfare Rules Database.

Potential explanations:
Housing market

Explications possibles :
Le marché immobilier



Potential explanations: **Housing Market**

Explications possibles : **Le marché immobilier**

Spoiler Alert: Homelessness Is a Housing Problem

A new book concludes that the factor determining whether an individual's or household's struggle ends up on the street is usually the cost of maintaining a roof overhead.



By FRAN QUIGLEY

Nov 11, 2023

[Common Dreams](#)

~~Gregg Colburn and Clayton Page Aldern would make lousy mystery~~
~~writers~~, but they have gifted us with an important new book about housing. With zero effort at deception, they happily give away their thesis with the book title: *Homelessness is a Housing Problem*.

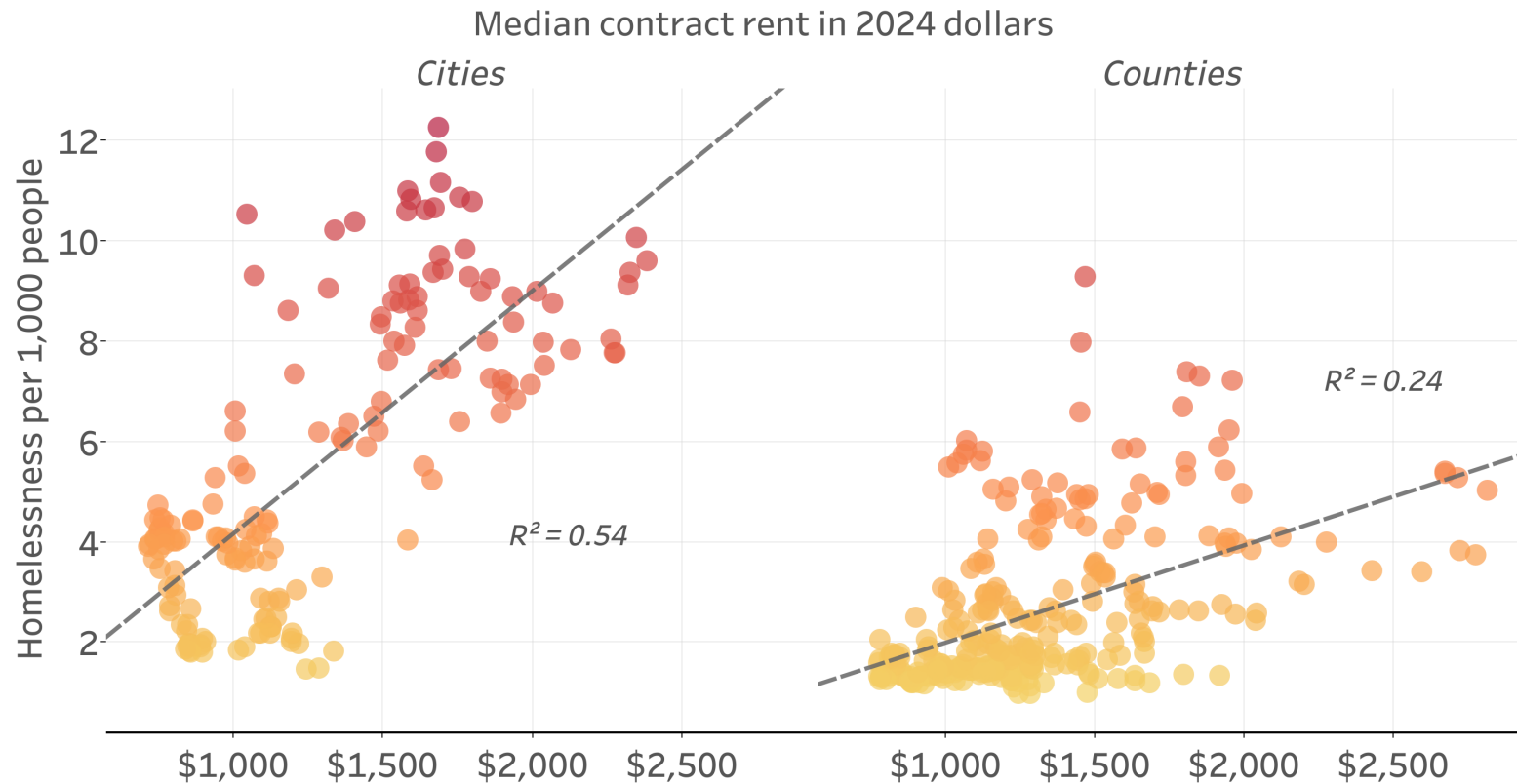
Colburn is a housing policy professor at the University of Washington and Aldern is a Seattle-based data scientist. They analyze the cause of

Potential explanations: Housing Market

Explications possibles : Le marché immobilier

Median contract rent versus per capita PIT count

Dashed lines indicate a linear regression of per capita PIT counts onto median contract rent for a sample of U.S. regions, 2007 to 2024.

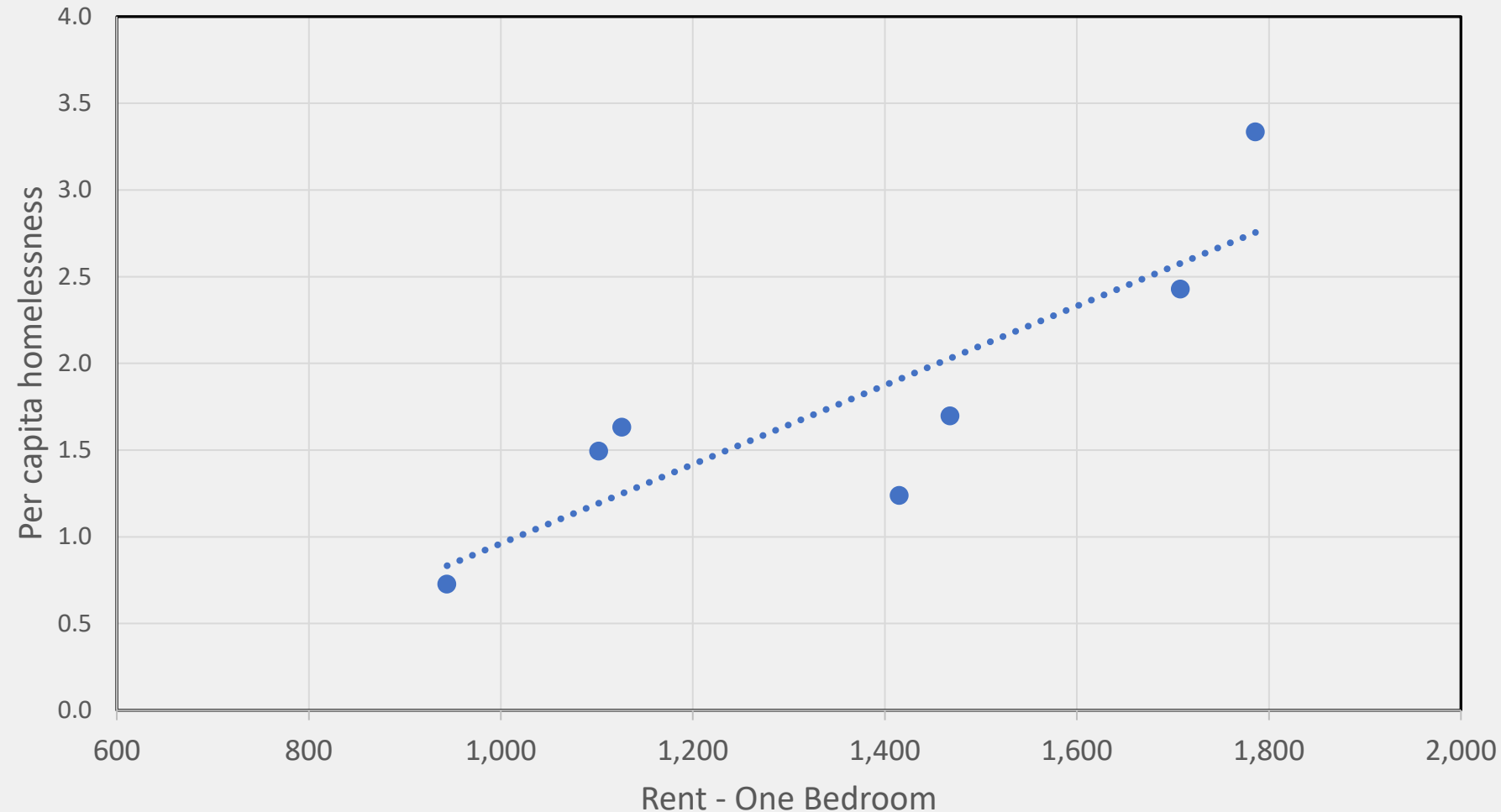


2023 & 2024 PIT counts adjusted in Chicago and NYC to account for migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers. Data source: HUD / US Census.

Potential explanations: Housing Market

Explications possibles : Le marché immobilier

Rent and Homelessness - Canadian Cities

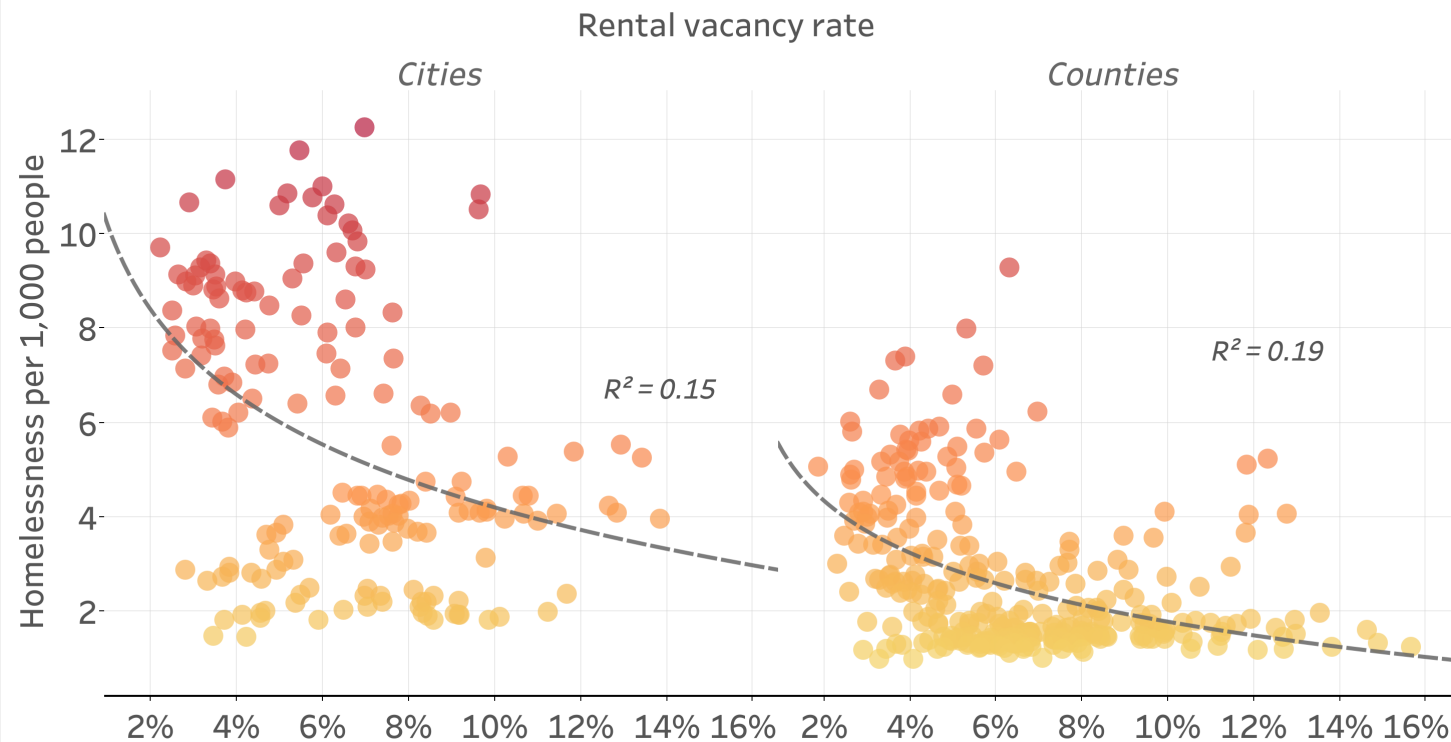


Potential explanations: Housing Market

Explications possibles : Le marché immobilier

Rental vacancy rate versus per capita PIT count

Dashed lines indicate a linear regression of per capita PIT counts onto the natural log of rental vacancy rate for a sample of U.S. regions, 2007 to 2024.



2023 & 2024 PIT counts adjusted in Chicago and NYC to account for migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers. Data source: HUD / US Census.

Typology

Typologie

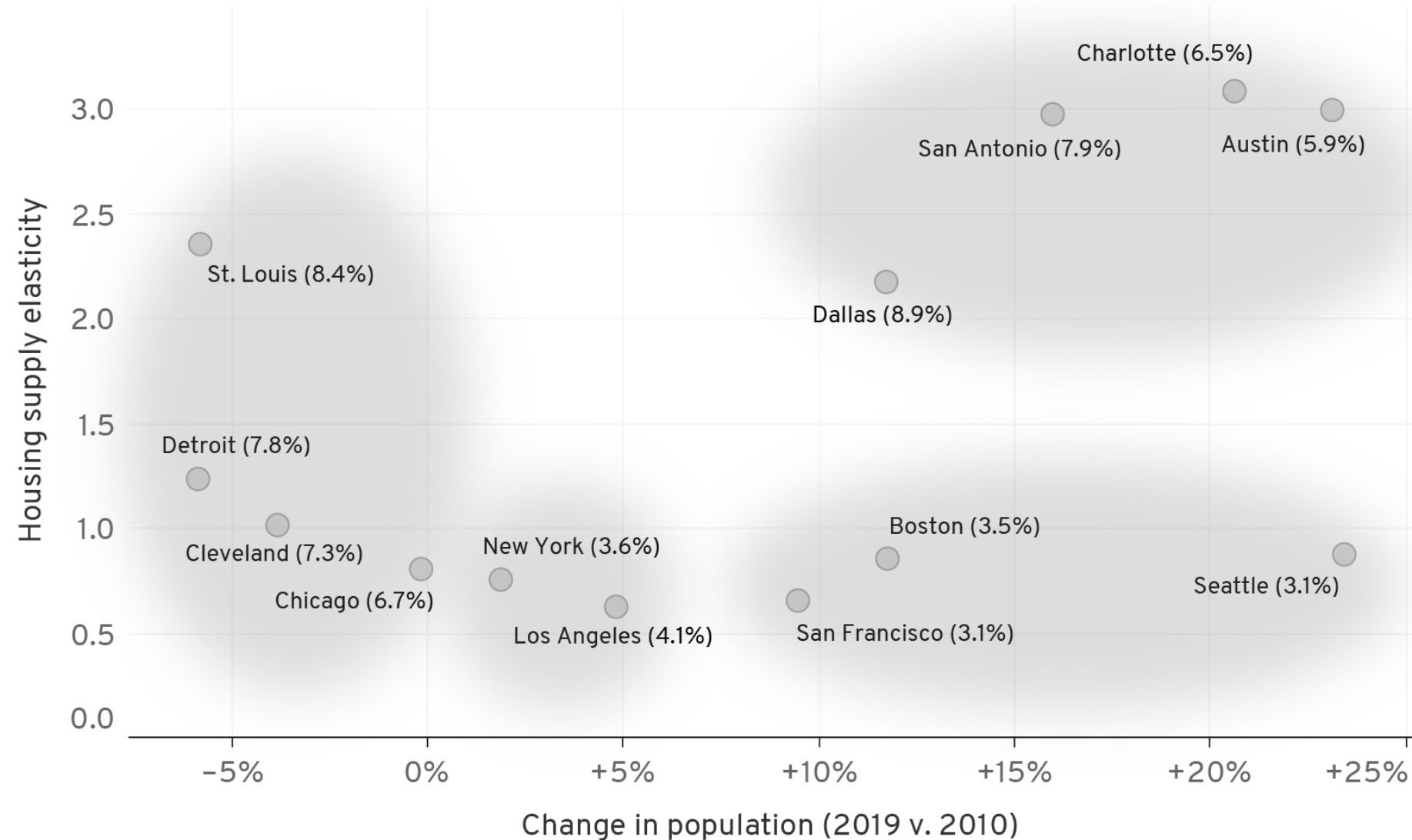


Typology

Typologie

Population growth versus housing supply elasticity

Dots indicate U.S. cities; parentheses indicate 2010–2019 rental vacancy rates.



Updates

Mises à jour

Question 1: What do the **data** tell us since the publication of the book?

Question 1 : Que nous apprennent **les données** depuis la publication du livre?

Updates

The **logic** of the book still holds

Highest per capita rates remain in coastal communities (LA, SF, Seattle, Boston, NY, DC)

Troubling trends in: Maricopa County (Phoenix); Travis County (Austin); Sacramento County; Clark County (Las Vegas); Denver

Mises à jour

La **logique** du livre reste valable.

Les taux par habitant **les plus élevés** se trouvent toujours dans les villes côtières (Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Boston, New York, Washington D.C.).

Tendances inquiétantes à : Maricopa (Phoenix), Travis (Austin), Sacramento, Clark (Las Vegas) et Denver.

Updates

Mises à jour

Question 2: What has been the **response** to the book?

Question 2: Quelles ont été les réactions au livre ?

Updates

The response has been overwhelmingly positive...



Mises à jour

En majorité positive...



Updates

...but there is a **vocal** and **angry** minority

...mais il existe une
minorité **bruyante** et en
colère

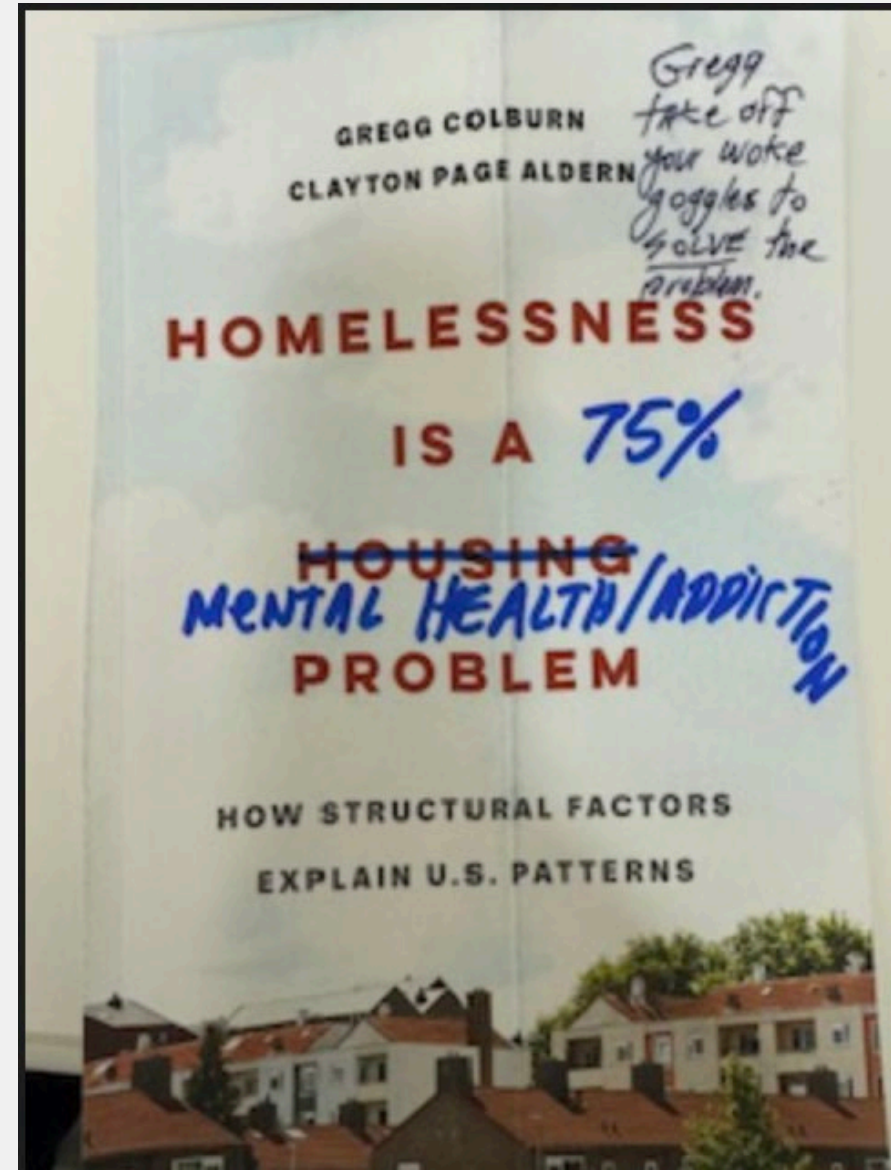


We Heart Seattle ✓
@weheartseattle



Call to Action: Gregg Colburn is an associate professor of real estate in the University of Washington's College of Built Environments. In his research, Gregg studies housing policy, housing markets, housing affordability, and homelessness. Gregg is the author of Homelessness is a Housing Problem that Washington elected leaders have turned to as their solutions manual. This book has misguided policy makers nation wide and killed our loved ones. Buy this book and post pictures of you burning it.

Mises à jour



Updates

Mises à jour

Question 3: How are we **responding** at the federal, state, and local level?

Question 3: Comment réagissons-nous aux niveaux fédéral, étatique et local ?

Updates

Mises à jour

 **CNN** **Politics** SCOTUS Congress Facts First 2024 Elections

Homeless people can be ticketed for sleeping outside, Supreme Court rules

 By [Devan Cole](#) and [John Fritze](#), CNN
🕒 4 minute read · Updated 12:41 PM EDT, Fri June 28, 2024

 **Reuters** World ▾ Business ▾ Markets ▾ Sustainability ▾ Legal ▾ Breakingviews ▾ More ▾

US Supreme Court | Supreme Court of the United States | Human Rights | Civil Rights | Appellate

US Supreme Court ruling will worsen homelessness crisis, groups warn

By [Jonathan Allen](#) and [Liya Cui](#)

June 28, 2024 3:18 PM PDT · Updated a month ago

US NEWS *EXCLUSIVE PHOTOS*

75 homeless camps in DC cleared by US Park Police since Trump's 'Safe and Beautiful' executive order

By **Diana Nerozzi** and **David Propper**

Published Aug. 15, 2025, 5:50 p.m. ET

 707 Comments

Updates

Mises à jour



Oklahoma Watch

No Favorites No Falsehoods No Fear

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HOUSING

Breaking Camp: Lawmakers Take Aim at Homeless Encampments on State Land

Two bills would outlaw sleeping on state land that isn't a designated campsite. Supporters say it's for safety. Opponents say there are better ways.



by **Heather Warlick**

March 7, 2024

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Homelessness and a Housing Problem

“Do I feel like homelessness is a housing problem?” Weaver said. “It could be. I mean, it could be if they don’t have any place to live.”

Updates

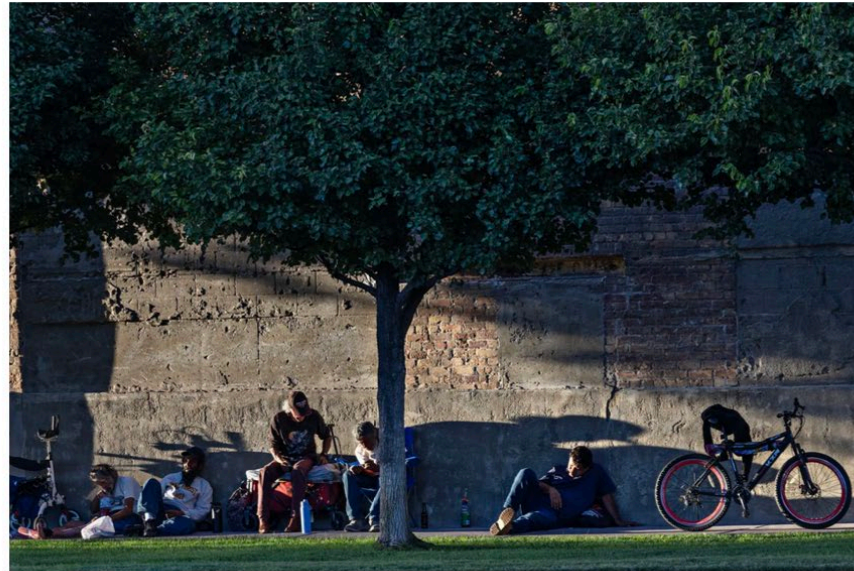
Trump Says ‘Housing First’ Failed the Homeless. Here’s What the Evidence Says.

The Trump administration has sought to move away from the model, which supporters call “evidence based” but opponents consider overly permissive.

 Share full article



 1.1K



Few aid policies have been studied as extensively as Housing First, and supporters’ faith that it is “evidence based” lends the debate special intensity. Kim Raff for The New York Times



By Jason DeParle

Published Dec. 25, 2025 Updated Dec. 26, 2025

Mises à jour

Updates

Mises à jour

Question 4: Where do we see **progress** and **success**?

Question 4: Où constatons-nous des progrès et du succès ?

Updates

Mises à jour

We've had success at the federal level by providing **housing** and **services**...

Nous avons obtenu des résultats positifs en fournissant des **logements** et des **services** au niveau fédéral . . .

Decline in Veterans' Homelessness Spurs Hopes for a Broader Solution

Two federal agencies, backed by ample funding from Congress, have quietly shown that it is possible to make progress on a seemingly intractable problem.

Updates

Mises à jour

There are significant **local success** stories...

Il existe des **réussites locales** significatives...

URBAN WIRE

Denver's Progress on Reducing Unsheltered Homelessness and Encampments Offers a Promising Path for Other Cities

[Samantha Batko](#), [Anna Doñate](#), [Brendan Chen](#), [Pear Moraras](#), [Alyse D. Oneto](#)

August 26, 2025

Chattanooga reduced its homeless population by almost 50% last year. Here's how.

Local advocates credit a focus on housing, an eviction prevention initiative and efforts to target services to specific at-risk groups.

Published Feb. 12, 2024

By Kalena Thomhave

Updates

Mises à jour

Question 5: Given well-documented successes, why is there so much **skepticism** about our ability to reduce/end homelessness?

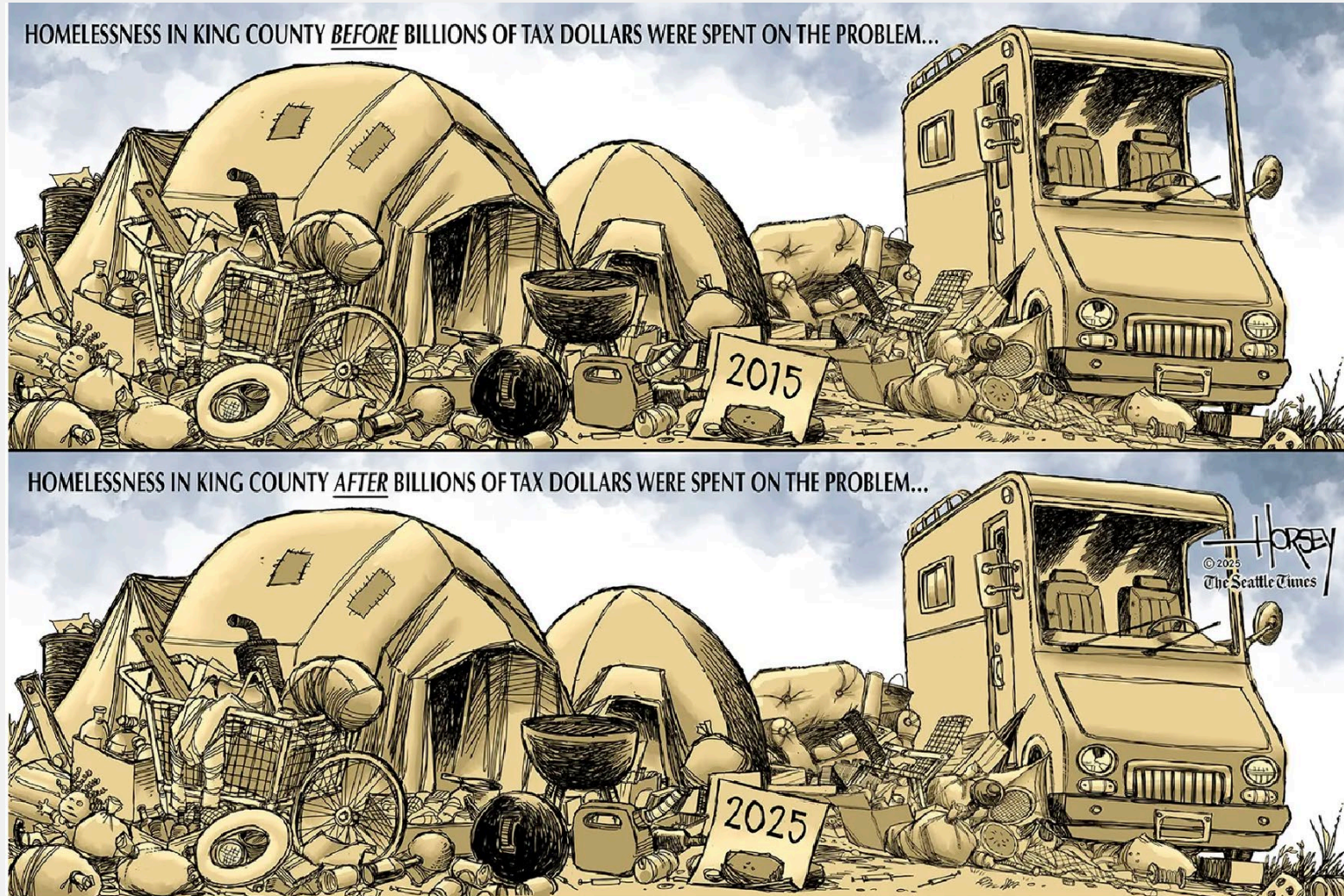
Question 5: Compte tenu des succès avérés, pourquoi tant de scepticisme quant à notre capacité à réduire, voire à mettre fin, à l'itinérance?

Updates

The **scale** of our **response** has been **inadequate**, therefore meaningful progress is overwhelmed by persistent strong inflow into homelessness

L'**ampleur** de notre réponse est **insuffisante**, et donc tout progrès significatif est masqué par un afflux important et persistant de personnes sans abri.

Mises à jour



By David Horsey
Seattle Times cartoonist

Conclusion



Conclusion

Regions need two types of investments:

- 1) **Operating investments** to fund housing support, maintenance, and services, and
- 2) **Capital investments** to construct housing.

And where housing is difficult to construct, changes to regulations and land use policy are needed

Les régions ont besoin de deux types d'investissements :

1. **des investissements de fonctionnement** pour financer le soutien, l'entretien et les services liés au logement, et
2. **des investissements de capital** pour la construction de logements.

Là où la construction de logements est difficile, des modifications de la réglementation et des politiques d'aménagement du territoire sont nécessaires.

Three Tensions

Three tensions **complicate** this response:

- Short vs long-term
- Public versus private
- Local versus federal government

Trois Tensions

Trois tensions complexifient cette réponse :

1. Court terme vs long terme
2. Secteur public vs secteur privé
3. Gouvernement local vs gouvernement fédéral

Conclusion

- Continuing to diagnose homelessness as a problem of the **individual** will undermine efforts to prevent and end it.
- The country requires a **structural understanding of and structural responses to homelessness**.
- Bright spot: the dramatic fall in veteran homelessness in the United States over the last decade
- Continuer à considérer l'itinérance comme un **problème individuel** compromettra les efforts de prévention et d'éradication.
- Le pays a besoin d'une **compréhension structurelle** de l'itinérance et de **réponses structurelles** à ce problème.
- Point positif : la baisse spectaculaire du nombre d'anciens combattants sans abris aux USA au cours de la dernière décennie.

Thank you, **merci**, *Wela'lioq*

<https://homelessnesshousingproblem.com>

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