Demographic Changes in Public Housing, 1977-2000

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Background
Public Housing Projects administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development have been in urban areas since 1937. Over time, their demographics have significantly changed, largely due to broader urban demographic and socioeconomic trends. The future of public housing is in question - many urban centers are changing, and so are their residents; many cities have actively sought to modify or remove public housing projects, and many residents of those projects are moving on to different areas. In this project, HUD data were evaluated to determine more accurately what demographic changes have occurred in HUD-administered public housing.

Objective and Methods
Demographic data on each HUD Public Housing project were gathered from HUD’s online database, formatted to be input into GIS, and created as point files. From the 200+ variables provided by HUD, 3 were selected to be analyzed: the percent of households classified as: minority, female-headed, and elderly. These data were joined to the project points, and then the rate difference (end percentage - beginning percentage) over 3 time periods (1977-2000, 1977-1993, and 1993-2000) with the Field Calculator. These rate difference statistics were then averaged and summarized by state or region or town within Rhode Island; region polygons were dissolved from states based on U.S. Census Bureau regions.

Data Criteria
Used HUD’s definition of “meaningful” percent reported: 35% Used only HUD-administered public housing Eliminated projects that did not have data for all 3 demographic categories in the time period analyzed. This resulted in 4,380 records for 1977-1993, 10,395 records for 1993-2000, and 4,599 records for 1977-2000.

Results (National):
Generally, the % of households classified as elderly decreased over the 23-year research period, while minority and female-headed households increased. This holds true for all regions and time periods, except for the W. N. Central, where female-headed households decreased. The Mountain region showed less change, most likely due to the significantly lower number of projects in that area that crossed the reporting threshold.

Discussion
This project gives a fair approximation of trends in demographics within public housing projects. It should not, however, substitute for any rigorous statistical analysis. There were also a number of relevant variables - relating to welfare, income levels (within the projects and in relation to the neighboring median), etc. that were not analyzed due to time and space constraints. Furthermore, since the vast majority of public housing projects are placed in urban or suburban areas, more detailed analysis on the city level would give more detailed insights.

Sources
HUDUser: HUD’s public online information database http://www.huduser.org/publications/pubasst/subsid.html


National Housing Trust, “Changes to Project-Base Multifamily Units in HUD’s Inventory 1995-2003”