The Rise of YIMBY: A Discourse Analysis of the Housing Debate on Twitter

A thesis submitted by

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Introduction

The policy debate surrounding the present housing crisis has largely centered on an imbalance between supply and demand as the key force driving increasing prices. This view has become hegemonic in mainstream political discourse such that it structures the way society conceptualizes the problem. “Of all the narratives put forward to explain the skyrocketing costs of housing, neoclassical economic theory has come to dominate the political sphere” (Tapp, 2021: 2). YIMBY, a grassroots organization of Millennial renters priced out of homeownership and squeezed by rising rents, has used Twitter to spread this message to a wider audience, stirring a national drumbeat for land use reform and increased housing production. Despite the popularity of this framing, it's unclear from existing research that loosened zoning restrictions, and by inference increased housing production, would lead to lower prices, especially for households with low incomes. Goetz succinctly summarizes the state of the debate:

> “Neither is it clear that greater rates of housing construction (whether induced by barrier reduction or not) will result in reduced housing costs for lower-income people. On this question, there is vigorous debate among researchers. The so-called YIMBY movement advocating for greater production even at luxury price points to help relieve the affordability crisis for low income households points to some supportive research evidence (see, e.g., Mast 2019), but there are also critics of this idea armed with counter evidence (e.g., Damiano 2019; Rodriguez-Pose and Storper 2019; Zuk and Chapple 2016).” (Goetz, 2019: 8)

Despite the prevalence of the YIMBY narrative, there are alternative explanations for the increasing cost of housing. The Housing Justice movement, a coalition comprised of renters’ organizations like CityLife/Vida Urbana, Tenants Together, and the national alliance Homes for

All, argues that the root causes are unchecked global capital, speculative investment, and income inequality. They propose solutions such as building more social housing, stronger tenant protections, decommodification, and regulations to limit speculation (housingjusticeplatform.org, 2022; Gowan and Cooper, 2018). They have argued that policies to stimulate production, such as upzoning, can do harm to vulnerable renters by incentivizing development and accelerating the gentrification of city neighborhoods (Marti, 2017; Axel-Lute, 2019; Dougherty, 2020). This alternative narrative has been marginalized in mainstream political discourse, which is consistent with Aalbers' observations that non-market solutions are not taken seriously and often ridiculed "tout court" (Aalbers, 2016: 144).

In light of the empirical uncertainty related to the effects of upzoning and new construction, how has the YIMBY lens become the dominant way of conceptualizing the housing crisis? The neoclassical economic narrative has been used as justification to liberalize zoning and incentivize development in cities across the country. And while it is necessary to explore further the effects of these policies, it's also essential to understand how this view has become institutionalized in our political discourse over other equally relevant narratives. It's also important to explore the YIMBY movement's connection to power – who stands to directly benefit from their solutions – lest we as planners advocate for policy solutions that exacerbate existing patterns of inequality. In the words of Rydin, "A closer attention to policy discourses reveals exactly how knowledge is constructed within the policy process and can help identify how policy may be improved through discursive means" (Rydin, 2005: 73).

In order to explore the ways in which the supply/demand framing of the housing crisis has become dominant, I have undertaken a discourse analysis of YIMBY and Housing Justice opinion leaders on Twitter to answer the following questions:

- How do YIMBY opinion leaders frame the housing issue on Twitter?
- How do Housing Justice opinion leaders frame the issue?
- What knowledge/evidence does YIMBY use and legitimize? How does YIMBY police the bounds of relevant knowledge?
- What knowledge/evidence do housing justice activists use and legitimize?

1.2 Summary of Methods

In order to conduct a discourse analysis of YIMBY and Housing Justice tweets, I collected a corpus of tweets from individuals and organizations associated with the YIMBY housing movement and the housing justice movement. I analyzed approximately 225,000 tweets written by 29 Twitter accounts during 2017 and 2018. Eighteen accounts are associated with the YIMBY movement, 9 associated with housing justice, and 2 accounts who were academics in the field of urban planning and frequent commentators on issues of urban development.

I performed text search queries using NVIVO, a qualitative data analysis software to identify relevant tweets which attempted to make meaning of the issue of housing. I then performed a thematic analysis on these tweets to identify underlying themes and meaning. I analyzed and coded each tweet based on the topic being discussed and its underlying meaning. After coding the tweets twice to ensure accuracy and inclusion of themes that may not have been evident during the initial analysis, I organized them again into themes and identified the overarching structure and narratives in each group of texts.

1.3 Outline

First, I will provide a brief background on the housing problem in the United States and the emergence of the YIMBY movement. Next, I will explore the theory and methods associated with discourse analysis, including potential pitfalls and criticism. After that, I will provide background on Twitter as a site for social research. Following this, I will explore the frames that YIMBY uses to construct an understanding of the housing crisis and then I will do the same for the Housing Justice movement. Mainstream discourses are often in implicit conversation with each other; for example, a YIMBY frame could be a response to a criticism from the Housing Justice movement. I have chosen to explore these more direct engagements in a later chapter to understand the ways each movement interacts and attempts to frame each other. Finally, I will discuss my conclusions and implications for planners and policy makers.

Chapter 2: Background

2.1 The Housing Problem

There are a number of distinct, but interrelated, problems that could be classified as housing crises: increased rates of eviction and homelessness or decades-long waiting lists for housing assistance are just some. But when most people talk about the housing crisis today in America, they refer to the rapidly rising cost of housing in urban areas. Home prices and rents have increased much faster than incomes and an increasing number of people are experiencing homelessness, struggling to pay rent, or unable afford their first home. The present ‘crisis’ is defined by the broadening of housing affordability problems to young middle-income

households who aspire to home ownership but are priced out of the housing market and the increasing problems faced by low-income households (Gabriel et. al. 2005). It's unsurprising that the narrative of the housing crisis has focused on this first group – young, middle-class households priced out of the housing market. It mirrors Castells' observation that "…an urban crisis is not defined by human suffering or lack of shelter, but by the extent to which the basic goals of an urban system cannot be achieved by a dominant set of social interests…" (Castells, 1983: 217).

Homeownership, considered a "fundamental feature of the cultural conceptions of citizenship and belonging" in the U.S., has become unattainable to the middle class in much of the country (Taylor, 2019:2). Price-to-income ratios, a measure of affordability which takes into account household income, have risen to all-time highs as a result of "rapid growth in home prices, relatively stagnant incomes, and historically low interest rates" (Hermann, 2018). The problem is most acute in so-called "superstar cities", places which have succeeded in attracting investment capital and high-income workers (Gyourko, Mayer, Sinai, 2013). In cities like Miami, Denver, and Seattle, price-to-income ratios have more than doubled over the past thirty years (Hermann, 2018). The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated these trends; in the first quarter of 2021, home prices increased by at least 10% in 85 of 100 metro areas tracked by the FHFA (Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2021). The situation is especially acute in California cities like Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, and San Jose, where the average household is unable to afford *more than 75% of all homes sold* (Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2019). Households at the top – those in the 90th income percentile - have been insulated by the crisis, as their incomes have risen at a similar rate to home prices (Hermann, 2018).

Although discourse of this crisis largely centers the burden of the middle class, low-income households remain the most severely burdened. For every 100 extremely low-income renter families, there are only 37 affordable and available homes (Aurand et al., 2021). The low-income families currently living in public housing endure deteriorating conditions, a result of a $70 billion backlog of capital funding and millions more remain on waitlists (Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2021). Eighty-three percent of households earning less than $15,000 are housing cost-burdened, as are 79% of households earning less than $30,000 (Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2020). In the nation's 25 most expensive housing markets, 70% of all renter households making between $30,000 and $45,000 were cost burdened (Ibid). Across the nation, nearly half of all renter households spend more than 30% of their income on rent and one quarter of all renter households spend at least 50% (Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2020). Black and Hispanic renters are more likely to be housing cost-burdened than white or Asian renters and were more likely to be behind on rent during the pandemic (Aurand et al., 2021). When housing gets more expensive, households are forced to crowd into smaller units, sacrifice other necessities, or move further out from the city (Schuetz, 2019).

2.2 Mobilization of YIMBY

In response to these housing pressures, a grassroots populist movement has mobilized by harnessing the frustration of middle-class renters burdened by rising rents and locked out of housing markets. The YIMBY (yes in my backyard) movement advocates for "overbuilding" to solve the housing crisis (Tapp, 2018: 115). The movement is grounded in neoclassical economic ideas, popularized by urban economist Edward Glaeser, who argues that rising housing costs are the result of strict land use controls which inhibit housing production:

> "When the demand for a city rises, prices will rise unless more homes are built. When cities restrict construction, they become more expensive…The failure of places like New York and San Francisco to build up has pushed Americans elsewhere, to places that embrace construction. In such areas, like Houston and Phoenix, development is unfettered, and as a result, prices stay low" (Glaeser, 2011).

This framing centers the role of so-called NIMBY homeowners and restrictive zoning regulations as the root cause of the crisis. According to this narrative, if zoning permitted (and neighbors supported) denser development, developers could build more, and prices would decrease. This storyline works on three levels: to focus blame on an adversary (NIMBYs), to construct an alternative (build more), and to mobilize action (zoning reform) (Gamson, 1995). Heeding the call, local grassroots YIMBY organizations have formed in cities in the U.S. (San Francisco, Los Angeles, Boston, Boulder, Seattle, New York, Portland), the U.K (London, Brighton, Bristol, Cambridge, Oxford, Portsmouth) and Canada (Vancouver, Toronto). Over the past decade, the YIMBY movement and its populist discourse has become a powerful force in urban development politics.

YIMBY argues that by restricting access to areas where jobs are plentiful, *exclusionary zoning* drives up the cost of housing, leads to segregation by race and income, exacerbates racial and generation wealth gaps, and worsens pollution by encouraging sprawl (Reeves, 2017; Dougherty, 2020). YIMBY policy solutions have focused on upzoning (allowing for more dense development, especially around transit) and streamlined permitting processes for multifamily housing. YIMBY frames itself as a progressive counterbalance to NIMBY homeowners and deeply concerned with issues of social justice: *"YIMBYs are just the newest members of a venerable fair housing tradition"* (@hanlonbt, 2018).

YIMBY framing of the urban housing problem is widespread in political discourse. From editorials in national newspapers — "*America Needs More Neighbors*" (New York Times Editorial Board, 2019) — to glowing magazine profiles of movement leaders— "*50 Ideas Blowing up American Politics*" (Woellert, 2017) — to politicians declaring their allegiance — "*San Diego's Mayor Explains Why He Became a YIMBY*" (Levin, 2019), the narrative has been adopted and shared by elite actors in the political sphere.

The YIMBY (Yes In My Backyard) framing has gained traction such that observers predict it is "*becoming a tenet of urban liberalism*" (Dougherty, 2020: 229, emphasis added). This mirrors the observations of Peck, who notes "a distinctive form of urban-economic orthodoxy is under construction" (Peck, 2016: 1) and Tapp, who predicts "supply-side economic rationales linked to deregulation and overbuilding are likely to become *new fixtures of 21st century urban politics"* (Tapp, 2018: 138, emphasis added).

2.3 Land Use Policy Changes

Across the country, land use regimes that have remained largely unchanged for more than a century are being radically challenged as "governments and thinktanks argue for altering zoning laws and for allowing increasing building through upzoning" (Freemark, 2019: 4). In 2021, California, the epicenter of numerous contentious battles over housing, the legislature passed SB9, a bill which eliminated single-family zoning across the state (Yglesias, 2020). This followed similar measures in Oregon, where in 2019, the legislature passed HB2001, a law requiring all cities with at least 10,000 residents to allow duplexes in areas previously zoned for single family homes. In 2018 Minneapolis became the first major American city to eliminate single family zoning, allowing duplexes and triplexes in every neighborhood (Mervosh, 2018).

In 2021, Massachusetts passed "the biggest reform to state zoning laws in five decades", requiring neighborhoods near transit stations to allow multifamily housing by right (Chesto, 2021). It's too soon to know what the effects of these changes will be, but it is clear that YIMBY discourse is having significant effects on urban development politics.

2.5 Increased Development, Increasing Prices

Development capital has responded to rising prices and historically low interest rates by continuing to funnel money into real estate assets. They have built and acquired multifamily housing at rates not seen in nearly half a century. As of early 2020 (prior to the Covid-19 pandemic), there were more units of multifamily housing under construction than at any time since 1973 (Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2020). Locally, Boston permitted more units of housing in 2017 (5,379) than in the *entire decade* of the 1990s (City of Boston, 2017). Most of the new multifamily housing produced has been largely unaffordable to low- or middle-class residents, "intended primarily for the higher end of the market" (Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2019). By the city's estimates, 61% of all new housing built between 2011 and June 2017 was unaffordable to households making less than 135% of the Area Median Income (Coalition for Affordable Boston, 2017). Similar trends can be seen in Los Angeles, where "by the mid-2010s and onwards, the construction of luxury units outpaced affordable units 8:1" (Tapp, 2021: 7). In spite of this new surge in supply, in the short-term rents and prices have continued on a "remarkable uptrend" and cities have experienced a significant loss of low-cost housing through upgrading, removal from subsidized housing programs, and rent increases (Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2020). As of 2020, the average rent in Boston was $2,450, $450 more than a family in the city earning the median income can afford and an increase of more than $700 since 2010, when the average rent was about $1,700 (Modestino et. al., 2019;

Bluestone et. al., 2010). Between 2011 and 2017, the number of apartments renting for less than $800 decreased by at least 20% in the majority of large and mid-size cities (Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2018). Between 2010 and 2020, Boston lost roughly 145,000 low- and middle-income homeowners. Over that time, the share of high-income households in Boston has more than doubled, to 32% (Gorey, 2022).

2.6 Existing Research

Neoclassical economic explanations for the housing crisis are intuitive to anyone who has taken an introductory class in microeconomics, where one is taught that price is driven by supply and demand. It is easy to apply these ideas to housing markets, but there is limited evidence to show that increased housing production will lower prices, especially for low-income populations. Recent research suggests that new construction can reduce regional housing pressures but concludes "there is little existing direct evidence on either the price effects or the local effects of new construction (Mast, 2019: 25). According to Glaeser and Gyourko, "The general conclusion of existing research is that local land use regulation reduces the elasticity of housing supply, and that this results in a smaller stock of housing, higher house prices, greater volatility of house prices, and less volatility of new construction." (Glaeser and Gyourko, 2018: 8). Glaeser and Ward's research into rising home prices in Eastern Massachusetts find the reason prices have increased over the previous 25 years "reflects increasingly restricted supply" but conclude but that when controlling for demographics and density, *stricter land use controls are not correlated with differences in property prices* (Glaeser and Ward, 2009: 278, emphasis added). Previous research on the subject has failed to conclusively confirm the theoretical links between zoning and prices. Quigley and Rosenthal conclude the "drawing firm general conclusions about the linkage between local regulations and housing prices is not possible" (Quigley and Rosenthal,

2005:89). Schill agrees, “Existing research on the effects of government regulation on the supply and cost of housing is insufficient to guide public policy” (Schill, 2005: 5).

But given that restrictive zoning has been correlated with decreased housing construction and (potentially) higher prices, policy makers have inferred that loosened zoning restrictions would have the opposite effect. However, existing research has also had difficulty demonstrating these effects. In the real-world, large-scale zoning reform is rare. Loosened zoning regulations more commonly occur in specific neighborhoods, corridors, or even parcels. And it is unclear that these specific changes lead to increased construction and reduced prices. Freemark’s (2019) research showed that upzoning increases land value and increased costs for individual housing units without increasing housing production in the short term. This is consistent with Angotti’s analysis of zoning changes in New York City that showed “property values in upzoned areas rapidly increased in comparison to other parts of the city” (Angotti, 2017).

There is some evidence to suggest increasing housing supply may reduce demand pressure at the regional level, but it is unclear if this reduced demand translates to lower prices for low-income people or if the market-rate development may actually increase rents in in the immediate vicinity. Research suggests that new housing construction in low-income areas slows local rent increases by absorbing high-income households (Asquith, Mast, Reed, 2020). But some research suggests that new construction may actually *increase* rents on the least expensive housing in the immediate vicinity (Damiano and Frenier, 2020).

Chapter 3: Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method

3.1 Discourse Analysis as Theory

"What if language does not simply mirror or picture the world but instead profoundly shapes our view of it in the first place?" (Fischer and Forester, 1993:1) This question is the central premise behind analyzing language and discourse. Language and discourse help set policy agendas and structure the terms of debate, what Foucault calls "the limits and forms of the sayable" (Foucault, 1991: 59). This approach, referred to as 'social constructionist', contends that language is more than "a neutral medium in which ideas and an objective world can be both represented and discussed" but that it acts "as a *medium*, a system of signification through which actors not simply describe but *create* the world" (Jacobs and Manzi,1996: 543; Hajer, 1993: 44, emphasis included in original). If language shapes our understanding of the world, the process of shaping language and meaning must be bound up with relations of power (Fischer and Forester, 1993). Language is one of the means by which power is exercised. According to Lukes' three-dimensional view of power, power is not only exercised in situations of observable conflict, but through "the control of information, through mass media and through processes of socialization" (Lukes, 1978: 23).

Discourse is the struggle over contested meanings, to which power is intrinsically linked (Fischer and Forrester, 1993; Jacobs, 2006; Beauregard, 2003). Van Dijke defines discourse as "what people say or write in order to accomplish social, political, or cultural acts" (Van Dijke, 1997:1). Hajer defines discourse as "an ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is given to a phenomenon" (Hajer, 1993: 45). Discourse acts as "a mediating lens", a "fabric existing between the world and ourselves" which allows us to make meaning of the world

around us from the constant stream of events and phenomenon (Waitt, 2005: 217; Dunn and Neumann, 2016: 33). Discourses simplify and condense complex problems into narratives which are easier to interpret. Because political actors use language to exercise power, discourses are often designed to optimize support or acceptance for a political agenda or policy solution (Hastings, 1999). Interest groups and political organizations use discourse to establish narratives and pursue political objectives (Jacobs, 2006). Through discourse, political actors establish "regimes of truth" which set parameters for talking about and addressing issues in need of policy intervention (Foucault, 1991). The purpose of analyzing discourse is to uncover "hegemonic ways of thinking and talking about how things should be done that serve vested interests" (Lees, 2004: 102). By recognizing that social problems are socially constructed and policy discussions contain contested meanings, we can begin to question how power has shaped our understanding of issues.

Researchers in the social sciences have recognized the importance of discourse and language in shaping policy. In the early to mid-1990s, scholars of planning and policy began deploying discourse analysis to better understand processes of policymaking and issue framing in a variety of contexts, recognizing that "People decide how to respond on the basis of meaning, not facts" (Beauregard, 1993: 21). The argumentative turn in planning and policy analysis followed the widespread application of discourse analysis in other social sciences. Using discourse analysis, scholars have demonstrated that housing issues are "enunciated…as the outcome of power relations, ideological contestation and political conflict" (Jacobs and Manzi, 1996: 544). There are two strands of discourse analysis – political economy/Marxist and Foucauldian. Marxist discourse analysis is used as "a tool for uncovering hegemonic ways of thinking and talking about how things should be done that serve vested interests" (Lees, 2004: 102). It seeks to

identify the linguistic strategies that are used to shape policy agendas. Foucauldian discourse analysis is based on the ideas of language and power of Michel Foucault, who argued that "language plays an instrumental role in establishing "regimes of truth" by which social problems are formulated and addressed" (Jacobs, 2006: 41). The "regimes of truth" represent the "acceptable formulation of problems and solutions to those problems" (Lees, 2004: 103). The discourse of the housing problem is comprised of multiple frames, which organize information and provide "meaning to an unfolding strip of events" (Gamson and Modigliani, 1987: 143).

3.2 Framing & Discourse

Framing is "the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue" (Chong & Druckman, 2007: 104). This definition, while helpful, obscures the agency of political actors in the process of constructing frames. The central premise of framing mirrors the social constructionist approach to language. Framing recognizes the way language can alter the perspective from which people view political issues and events. The concepts of frame and framing processes have been applied in sociology, cognitive psychology, linguistics and discourse analysis, communication and media studies, and political science and policy studies (Benford and Snow, 2000). In the 1990s there was a proliferation of scholarship on framing processes within social movements. Scholars began to recognize framing as "a central dynamic in understanding the character and course of social movements" (Ibid, 612). Application of the concept of frames and framing to social movements derives from the work of Goffman, who saw frames as "schemata of interpretation" that allow people to identify and label events (Goffman, 1974).

Social movement actors use frames to change the way that people perceive an issue. For example, a new high-end apartment building is proposed in the neighborhood. Whereas YIMBY may frame the building in terms of relieving pressure on demand, renters may frame it as an encroachment of capital and gentrification. It's the same building, but its meaning is produced and challenged by the individual actors involved. Social movement actors are active in the dynamic and evolving process of meaning production. Frames help people interpret and give meaning to their lived experience by promoting "particular definitions and interpretations of political issues" (Shah et. al., 2002: 343) with the goal of mobilizing potential supporters. The process of framing is inherently one of simplification and exclusion, the "mobilization of bias" whereby "some issues are organized into politics and others are organized out" (Schattschneider, 1960: 71). Snow and Benford describe the process as "…simplifying and condensing aspects of the world out there, but in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents…and to demobilize antagonists" (Snow & Benford, 2000: 614).

Framing can help explain political mobilization and show how opinions are formed and shifted through language. Citizens, politicians, activists, and the media can adopt and use frames, and in turn be influenced by frames. Politicians adopt frames used by other politicians, the media, and citizens, and the media can employ frames used by politicians, social activists, other media or citizen. Citizens "regularly adopt frames they learn in discussions with other citizens" (Chong & Druckman, 2007: 109).

Framing changes attitudes by altering the "underlying considerations" that people use to evaluate an issue (Ibid, 110). In order for a frame to be effective, the underlying consideration must be available (people must be aware of and understand it) and it must be accessible. Regular or recent exposure to a frame increases the accessibility of its underlying consideration. The process

of framing can be contentious, as new frames can challenge existing ones. The process of framing by social movement actors is, by nature, one of exclusion. In order to provide a clear and concise narrative, issues must be condensed, and nuance ignored. But this process of exclusion can have implications for policy and may exacerbate existing social inequalities. According to Hanssen and Saglie, "Mechanisms of exclusion may have severe negative consequences, both from a planning perspective and from a democratic viewpoint, because they may lead to cities being designed for a narrow spectrum of citizens, thereby further marginalizing other groups" (Hanssen and Saglie, 2010: 549).

Sniderman and Theriault argue that in a context of competing frames, people choose the one that is most consistent with their prior beliefs (Sniderman and Theriault, 2004). There is limited research regarding people's behavior when exposed to competing frames, but Chong and Druckman theorize individuals will choose the frame perceived to have the most strength and relevance (Chong and Druckman, 2007). As digital media becomes an increasing part of everyday life and a source of news and discussion, social movements have used social media sites like Twitter to frame their causes.

3.3 Discourse Analysis as Method

Despite the strengths of discourse analysis to highlight the way in which language is used in the realm of urban policy, it is not without criticism as a method of investigation. Researchers have argued that as practiced, discourse analysis often lacks methodological rigor as it is more craft skill which requires interpretative leeway. In practice, researchers have often mixed the two strands (Marxist/Foucauldian) of discourse analysis and have not been clear in detailing their methods (Lees, 2004). Other critics argue that without clear guidelines for methodology

researchers select data that fits their analysis and ignore that which does not. Jacobs notes that in order to overcome the "considerable challenges" inherent in discourse analysis, researchers must adopt a "clear methodological framework that sets out the basis for the selection of texts and precise details of how the analysis is to be undertaken" (Jacobs, 2006:48).

The data used in this thesis come from a corpus of tweets collected from individuals and organizations associated with the YIMBY housing movement and the housing justice movement. I analyzed a total of 225,000 tweets written by 29 Twitter accounts during 2017 and 2018, a nascent moment for YIMBY. Eighteen accounts are associated with the YIMBY movement, 9 associated with housing justice, and 2 accounts who were academics in the field of urban planning and frequent commentators on issues of urban development.

I analyzed approximately 170,000 tweets from accounts from YIMBY leaders and supporters. Of these, five are official organizational accounts (SF YIMBY, Abundant Housing LA, YIMBY Action, California YIMBY) and seven are movement leaders (Sonja Trauss, Executive Director, YIMBY Law; Brian Hanlon, CEO California YIMBY; Laura Foote, Executive Director of YIMBY Action; Jesse Kanson-Benanov, Executive Director, Abundant Housing MA; Laura Loe, Executive Director, Share the Cities; Darrel Owens, Co-Executive Director, East Bay for Everyone; and Matthew Lewis, Director of Communications, California YIMBY).

The remaining six accounts are from frequent commentors and supporters of YIMBY discourse who have a reasonably large number of followers (median of 7,300): Alex Baca, D.C. Policy Director for the urbanist blog Greater Greater Washington; Henry Kraemer, Housing Fellow with Data for Progress; Jake Anbinder, PhD candidate in history at Harvard University; Jenny Schuetz, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institute; Emily Badger of the New York Times;

Stephen Smith of the Market Urbanism blog, and Randy Shaw, Executive Director of the Tenderloin Housing Clinic and author of *Generation Priced Out*.

My analysis of the housing justice movement included approximately 26,000 tweets from 9 accounts, three of which were organizational accounts from renters' organizations: Tenants Together; CityLife/VidaUrbana; and the LA Tenants Union. I also analyzed the Democratic Socialists of America Housing Justice Commission and activists associated with the housing justice movement: Shanti Singh, Communications and Legislative Director with Tenants Together; Cea Weaver, Campaign Coordinator with Housing Justice for All; Tara Raghuveer, Director of the KC Tenants Union; Grace Holley, community planner and housing activist in Boston; and Sahra Sulaiman; Communities Editor of Streetsblog LA. These accounts had a median number of followers of 6,300.

I chose the accounts from my experience participating in the discursive space of housing Twitter. All of the accounts included met the following criteria: (1) consistent participants in the space (2) recognized as opinion leaders by having a significant number of followers and/or (3) official accounts of YIMBY or Housing Justice organizations. At the time of analysis, the accounts in my dataset had between 3,400 and 35,000 followers.

After compiling the list of key YIMBY and Housing Justice accounts, I ordered historical tweets from the analytics company Vicinitas, a third-party service with access to Twitter's Historical Powertrack, the "Firehose" stream of all public tweets. Access to the Powertrack stream is the only way to obtain a complete account of historical tweets, as Twitter's API limits searches to tweets within the past 7 days from the time of search. Research comparing the three sources of Twitter data show the Powertrack data are more complete than either the Search or Streaming APIs (Kim, Nordgren, Emergy, 2020). Vicinitas delivered Excel spreadsheets for each individual

account which included date and time of each tweet, the text, the number of times it had been favorited, the number of times it had been retweeted, as well as whether it was a reply to another tweet. A retweet is a broadcast by other Twitter users. In order to analyze this large amount of data (approximately 225,000 tweets in total), I performed text search queries using NVIVO, a qualitative data analysis software. The purpose of the keyword searches was to identify relevant tweets, those that which were related to and attempted to make meaning of the issue of housing.

YIMBY Twitter Accounts							
Handle	**Background**	**Date Joined**	**Followers (May 2020)**	**Followers (March 2022)**	**Total Tweets (2017-2018)**	**Tweets Included in Analysis**	**Tweets Coded**
cayimby	California YIMBY	Jun-17	4,800	11,000	625	277	85
AbundantHousing	Abundant Housing LA	May-15	3,400	5,608	925	234	110
yimbyaction	YIMBY Action	May-15	7,700	13,600	1,063	169	122
SFyimby	San Francisco YIMBY	Nov-14	11,100	14,200	7,389	1,164	554
sonjatrauss	Sonja Trauss, Executive Director, YIMBY Law Founder, Co-Founder, BARF	May-16	7,300	8,780	6,628	568	305
neversassylaura	Laura Foote, Founder & Executive Director, YIMBY Action	Jun-16	5,400	7,840	6,652	955	627
IDoTheThinking	Darrell Owens, Co-Executive Director, East Bay for Everyone, Policy Assistant, California YIMBY	Jul-13	5,600	30,200	32,605	5,585	181
hanlonbt	Brian Hanlon, CEO California YIMBY, Co-Fonder, California Renter Legal Advocacy and Education Fund	May-10	3,900	5,690	3,674	636	534
jessekb	Jesse Kanson-Benanov, founder, A Better Cambridge; Executive Director, Abundant Homes MA	Jan-09	3,400	4,419	5,068	643	431
beyondchron	Randy Shaw, Director, Tenderloin Housing Clinic, author *Generation Priced Out*	Nov-09	5,400	6,460	1,012	501	338
alexbaca	Alex Baca, DC Policy Director, Greater Greater Washington	Nov-07	9,300	10,400	14,949	1,164	413
Marketurbanism	free-market-focused urbanism blog	May-09	31,300	42,000	31,136	5,642	447
henrykraemer	Henry Honorof, writer, Senior Housing Fellow, Data for Progress	Mar-09	7,300	account deleted	1,971	174	121
jakeanbinder	PhD candidate in history at Harvard	Jun-13	10,300	23,800	14,647	670	246
emilymbadger	NYT urban policy writer	Feb-11	35,300	38,300	1,562	184	14
jenny_schuetz	Senior Fellow, Brookings Institute, author, *Fixer Upper: How to Repair America's Broken housing System*	Sep-17	7,900	13,700	1,057	392	82
sharethecities	Laura Loe, Executive Director, Share the Cities Community Education and Share the Cities Action Fund	Jan-16	4,600	8,113	21,270	1,905	226
mateosfo	Matthew Lewis, Director of Communications, California YIMBY	Dec-09	8,000	17,400	18,118	1,464	405
Totals			**172,000**	**261,510**	**170,351**	**22,327**	**5,241**

Figure 1: YIMBY Twitter Accounts included in the data

Housing Justice Twitter Accounts							
Handle	**Background**	**Date Joined**	**Followers (May 2020)**	**Followers (March 2022)**	**Total Tweets (2017-2018)**	**Tweets Included in Analysis**	**Tweets Coded**
TenantsTogether	Tenants Together	Jul-09	6,900	10,100	1,190	719	288
LATenantsUnion	LA Tenants Union	Aug-15	7,700	15,900	445	185	105
CityLife_Clvu	City Life/Vida Urbana	Sep-11	6,600	10,300	685	233	175
dsa_housing	Democratic Socialists of America Housing Justice Commission	Dec-17	unknown	2,476	171	91	62
uhshanti	Shanti Singh, Communications and Legistlative Director, Tenants Together	Apr-11	8,700	15,100	13,848	2,800	629
hollley	Grace Holley, Community Planner and Housing Activist, Boston	Mar-09	3,900	5,060	2,937	765	332
ceaweaver	Cea Weaver, Campagin Coordinator, Housing Justice for All	Feb-15	4,500	9,300	2,109	329	180
taraghuveer	Tara Raghuveer, Director, KC Tenants Union, Homes Guarantee Campaign Director	Sep-09	6,800	10,900	895	162	80
sahrasulaiman	Sahra Sulaiman, Communities Editor, StreetsblogLA	Mar-14	4,400	7,860	4,607	777	175
Totals			**49,500**	**86,996**	**26,887**	**6,061**	**2,026**

Opinion Leaders Twitter Accounts							
Handle	**Background**	**Date Joined**	**Followers (May 2020)**	**Followers March 2022**	**Total Tweets (2017-2018)**	**Tweets Included in Analysis**	**Tweets Coded**
surlyurbanist	Jamaal Green, Postdoctoral Scholar, UPenn	Sep-09	7,400	7,543	14,626	1,541	211
drschweitzer	Lisa Schweitzer Professor of Urban Planning USC	Mar-08	5,500	account deleted	13,724	809	175
Totals			**12,900**	**7,543**	**28,350**	**2,350**	**386**

Figure 2: Housing Justice twitter accounts, opinion leader twitter accounts

I chose 29 keywords which included (1) general terms associated with housing discourse: housing crisis, displacement, gentrification, zoning, and density, (2) previously identified recurrent themes: segregation, shortage, scarcity, market, financialization, and (3) contested topics and solutions: speculation, local control, rent control, social housing, lived experience, and neoliberal. To limit bias introduced in the process of keyword searches, I collected tweets from random dates from each account. This helped to limit bias by ensuring that the data in my analysis is an accurate reflection of the tweets from each account, that I am not merely collecting data that supports my initial hypothesis or final conclusions.

I used the same keywords for both the group of YIMBY and housing justice leaders to identify contested terms or concepts and areas of convergence between the competing discourses. The complete list of search terms is below:

> [activist; community; displacement; DSA; exclusion; gentrification; "housing crisis"; neighborhood; segregation; shortage; zoning; speculation; "local control"; "social housing"; scarcity; evidence; empirical; research; hypocrisy; developer; "lived experience"; “faith”; financialization; “rent control”; economics; data; market; density; neoliberal]

Performing a text search query on each individual Twitter account (29 in total) yielded approximately 30,700 tweets (13% of the total) that contained one or more of the search terms. I then performed a thematic analysis on these tweets to identify underlying themes and meaning. Thematic analysis is described as the “most useful in capturing the complexities of meaning within a textual data set” (Guest, Macqueen, Namey, 2011: 10). I analyzed each and coded each tweet based on the topic being discussed – i.e. gentrification, climate change, zoning – as well the underlying meaning behind each utterance. I developed and applied codes to the texts which

intended to make meaning to the issue of housing. A visual representation of the codes developed for YIMBY can be seen below in Figure 4 and for housing justice in Figure 5.

After coding the tweets twice to ensure accuracy and inclusion of themes that may not have been evident during the initial analysis, I organized them again into overarching themes and identified the overarching structure and narratives in each group of texts.

3.4 Limitations

Because my data was overwhelmingly large in scope (approximately 225,000 Tweets), I introduced keyword searches to identify utterances which were relevant to the housing debate. The keyword searches reduced the total number of tweets from approximately 225k to 30k. While this was a necessary step to make the analysis manageable, my selection of particular keywords introduced the potential for bias as I looked for frames that I had previously identified based on my participation and observation of the online space. Despite the pitfalls involved in discourse analysis, I found it a useful way to systematize my analysis of what each movement was actually saying, using terms drawn from previous utterances.

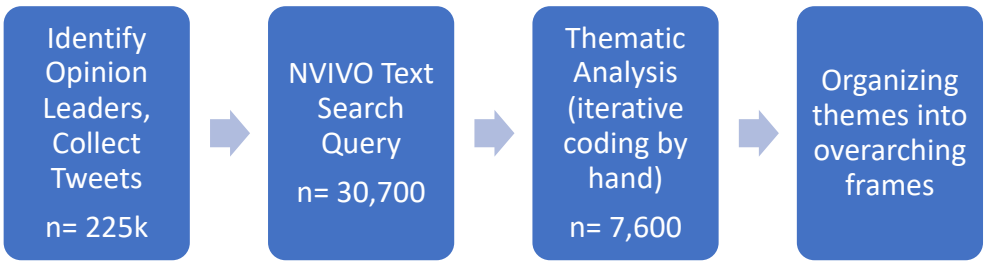

Figure 3: Process for data analysis

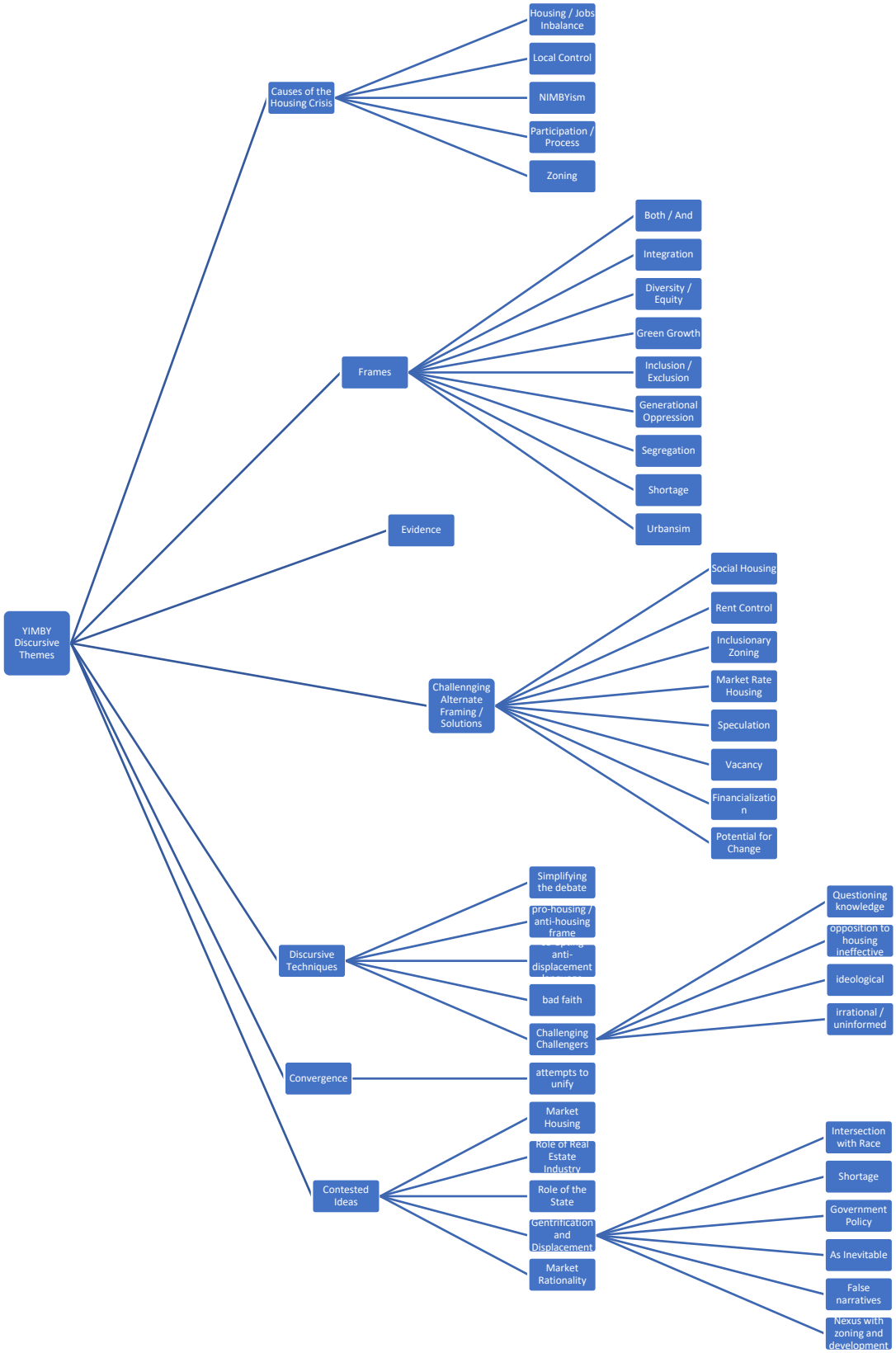

Figure 4: Codes of YIMBY tweets

Figure 5: Codes for Housing Justice tweets

Chapter 4: Housing Twitter as a Discursive Space

Digital social media has become increasingly important in mobilizing and organizing grassroots social movements in the 21st century (González-Bailón, 2013; Postill and Pink, 2012). Scholars have documented the use of digital social media in mobilizing and framing political campaigns such as the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, the Indignados movement in Spain, and the uprising in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014 (Ibid).

Twitter, in particular, has been crucial in mobilizing social movements and framing social issues. Twitter is a microblogging site where users share, and broadcast short messages called tweets. There are multiple functions of tweets: citizen journalism, political activism, maintaining a fan base, crowd sourcing, social networking, and ambient sociability, a term used to describe the sense of being simultaneously alone but also aware of or in contact with friends (Gillen and Merchant, 2013). Scholars describe Twitter as a "highly interactive and public online discussion" (Ibid: 48) and a "major meeting point for politicians, activists, journalists, technologists, scholars and others who are actively engaged in public life" (Postill and Pink, 2012: 128). It offers users "a medium for expressing personal evaluation to a large body of listeners with which one can affiliate ambiently" (Zappavinga, 2011: 803). The site is described as a democratic discursive space, "a strong contemporary example of the dialogic" in which participants produce texts in relation and response to other texts, "a link in a…complexly organized chain of other utterances…" (Bahktin, 1986: 69, quoted in Gillen and Merchant, 2013).

Twitter shapes political discourse by expanding the diffusion potential of opinion leaders and creating opportunities for engagement, participation, and learning. The site allows ideas and opinions to spread to online networks which are orders of magnitude larger than interpersonal

networks. In this way, opinion leaders can have an outsized impact on political debates and public opinion. Opinion leaders are "people that are more exposed to news sources and pass on a digested version of the information through their personal networks" (González-Bailón, 2014: 3). This process of informal learning "may facilitate learners becoming more informed, engaged citizens" as even passive users can stay abreast of current events, like the hyper-local politics once covered by local newspapers (Gleason, 2013, 966). This process of knowledge diffusion is based on the concept of a "two-step flow of communication", whereby word-of-mouth contacts play an important role in shaping public opinion and voting behavior (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955).

If the people we interact with in the real world influence our political beliefs, it would make sense that the people we follow on social media have a similar effect. What constitutes an opinion leader on Twitter may be subjective, but previous research has used the number of followers, retweets, or mentions as ways of measuring influence (Cha et. al, 2010). One of Twitter's defining characteristics is that connections are asymmetrical; one does not need to "follow" in order to "be followed". Sites like Facebook are comprised of symmetrical relations, mutual friendship. While it is not uncommon for users to follow each other in a reciprocal sociality, it is neither required nor a norm. Therefore, influential users may have many followers and may follow other, different users. Each individuals' Twitter feed "gives the individual a personal point of view and a social network of people that are "followed" over time, and partly as a group of reciprocity, a group of "followers" (Gillen and Merchant, 2013: 51).

Located within the site are loose affiliations of users who engage in discussions on particular topics, such as issues of housing and urbanism. Zappavinga describes how the use of hashtags around a specific topic can create a "copresent (Goffman, 1963), impermanent, community"

(Zappavinga, 2011: 800). 'Housing Twitter' functions similarly, as a space comprised of the interactions between 'opinion leaders' – accounts who generate the vast majority of "original content", that is, not a reply, retweet, or quote tweet. Participants in the space of Housing Twitter regularly refer to the interconnected stream of discussion within the community as *the discourse*. Housing Twitter is often described as a site of contentious, vitriolic debate (Schneider, 2019; Anzilotti, 2019; Brasuell, 2019). Participants generally occupy two home positions of competing ideologies: those who espouse the neoclassical economic conception and support bolstering market mechanisms (YIMBY) and "supply skeptics" who question "the premise that increasing the supply of market rate housing will result in housing that is more affordable" (Been et. al. 2018). This description simplifies the spectrum of debate, but nevertheless serves as a rough guide for organizing an understanding of the space.

YIMBYs have used Twitter effectively to diffuse their message and build a grassroots network of participants (Schneider, 2019; Anzilotti, 2019; Brasuell, 2019; Dougherty, 2020.). In her study of the nascent YIMBY movement in Los Angeles, Tapp estimated that over 15,000 individuals in the city received YIMBY messaging through social media, primarily Facebook and Twitter (Tapp, 2021). By 2022, the 18 Twitter accounts that I analyzed were followed by approximately 250,000 people.

As an observer and participant of Housing Twitter discourse, I became influenced by the YIMBY narrative. As an aspiring practitioner of urban planning interested in housing issues, I interacted with local YIMBY leaders in both the online and offline world and interned with a national organization of developers whose work focused on promoting policies of 'smart growth.' YIMBY framing provided the explanation I needed for why and how my city had undergone gentrification and become unaffordable to the people I had grown up with. The daily

stream of tweets in my feed helped to crystalize these ideas and I became convinced that solutions like zoning reform and accessory dwelling units were effective solutions to the problem. However, I also observed a strong opposition to YIMBY from tenant organizations who framed the housing problem in language I struggled to comprehend. Although at the time I did not know them by name, the Housing Justice leaders used language like greed and speculation. Their opposition lead to frequent conflict which left me feeling uneasy that perhaps there was something I had missed.

The discourse of Housing Twitter consists of highly contested political ideas, rather than neutral questions of policy. To some, new apartments meant added supply that would ease demand while others saw future displacement. Where some saw empty homes as a distraction, an insignificant data point, others saw an unequal and inefficient system of distribution. Where some saw developers as harbingers of gentrification, others saw maligned businessmen trying to navigate a byzantine system of rules. All of these constructions attempt to shape our understanding of the problem and potential solutions. This echoes Lees' observation that "discourses are not simply reflections or (mis)representations of reality; rather they create their own regimes of truth" that to a large extent determine the acceptable formations of policy and their solutions (Lees, 2004).

One of the critiques of those who analyze political discourse on Twitter is that the site does not accurately reflect political reality because the vast majority of tweets (97%) are produced by a small minority of users (25%) (Mcclain et al., 2021). In this vein, it could be easy to dismiss YIMBY discourse on the site as inconsequential, an echo chamber of like-minded individuals who are not representative of the political discourse in the offline world. This would be a mistake. Over the past 5 years, the narrative trumpeted by YIMBY has been used as justification for a number of important land use policy changes on the local and state levels, where the

majority of U.S. land use policy is set. In the section that follows, I will illustrate the ways in which YIMBY attempts to frame the housing problem.

Chapter 5: YIMBY Framing

Above all, 2017 in SF and CA politics was the Year of the Yimby. Pro-housing activists shaped the public debate (@beyondchron, 2017)

We can build inclusive cities of opportunity for all. We can build dense vibrant integrated neighborhoods. We can stem displacement and bring more people back to the cities we love. It will require building abundant housing. (@neversassylaura, 2018)

In this section, I illustrate how YIMBYs in my dataset frame the housing problem. I demonstrate how YIMBYs utilize five common frames: shortage, inclusion-exclusion, Both-And, green growth, and generational oppression. The shortage frame posits the core problem as a shortage of homes and logically proposes building more homes as a fix. The inclusion-exclusion frame equates opposition to housing as regressive and exclusionary and building more housing as progressive and inclusive. The Both-And frame challenges the notion that the goals of the YIMBY movement (zoning reform to encourage increased market-rate housing production) are inherently at odds with the goals of housing justice organizations (tenant protections, rent control, construction of new public housing). Both-And serves to combat the conception of YIMBY as singularly focused movement blind to the concerns of marginalized populations for whom new market rate development is out of reach. The green growth frame argues a compact city is the only sustainable model for urban development. The frame is characterized by "an emphasis on the need to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and achieve sustainable development by developing a compact city and integrating land-use and transport, while neglecting arguments for the preservation of intra-urban green areas, biodiversity, etc." (Hanssen & Saglie, 2010: 506). The generational oppression frame centers the millennial generation as being economically

oppressed by land-owning Baby Boomers, whose anti-growth attitudes have led to prices increases.

4.1 The Shortage Frame

> *"…there's not enough housing to go around. That's the underlying problem." (@sonjatrauss, 2017).*

Shortage is the most prevalent frame employed by YIMBYs on Twitter. In my analysis of 19 Twitter accounts associated with the YIMBY movement, I found 329 tweets that employed the shortage frame; 276 of which use the word "shortage" specifically and 53 which make reference to this idea in other terms like "scarcity." The shortage frame is so prominent in YIMBY discourse that this finding is not surprising. Shortage is the raison d'etre of YIMBY and both "shortage" and "scarcity" were included in the keyword searches. While the inclusion of these terms created the potential for bias, it was necessary to employ a mix of inductive and deductive methods in order to effectively analyze the large amount of data. In addition, this frame is quite prominent in the discourse. YIMBY organizations refer to themselves as an "anti-shortage movement" (@SFyimby, 2017) and refer to their work as "solving the housing shortage" (@yimbyaction, 2018). Every aspect of the housing crisis – homelessness, displacement, speculation, the proliferation of luxury apartments, gentrification, racial segregation, racial wealth gaps – are seen through this lens. Laura Foote, Executive Director of YIMBY Action, explains this view:

> *Whether looking at the 10-year wait list for Affordable Housing, the $2.2 mil average home price in Cupertino, the grey housing market, the overcrowding, the speculation and house-flipping,* ***they are all symptoms of a chronic housing shortage****. All, or many of these problems, will be rendered insignificant if we were to build more housing to accommodate growth. (@neversassylaura, 2017)*

The shortage frame is effective in large part because of its clarity and simplicity. The complex landscape of urban development becomes rendered comprehensible to non-experts, reducing the barrier to entry and encouraging participation in arcane public processes and individual development battles. When the overall situation is framed in terms of shortage, new housing is seen as the *cure* to the underlying problem and every neighborhood and municipality has a moral responsibility to do their part. This frame encourages new participants to become involved in issues of urban development both within and outside of their neighborhoods in order to counteract the effects of NIMBYism. Whereas participatory processes regarding development usually only involves direct neighbors and abutters, leaders of YIMBY first gained notoriety for showing up in person to mid-day hearings in support of the "small project developer" against neighborhood opposition (@neversassylaura, 2018). Conceptualizing the housing crisis through the shortage frame leads to the logical conclusion that building more housing is "the only long-term solution to the housing crisis" and "anything else is a temporary fix, at best" (@jenny_schuetz, 2018). Any opposition to housing development, whether by neighbors fighting for preservation of their leafy suburbs or community activists pushing for deeper affordability, becomes counterproductive to the overall goal.

In discussions online, YIMBYs often return to the shortage frame as their Rock of Gibraltar; a sure foundation from which complicated situations can be made clear. Shortage also enables YIMBY to create a discursive Catch-22: those who refuse to accept the existence of a shortage are deemed irrational and unworthy of further engagement, while those who concede are left to explain how building more homes could be bad for the shortage:

> *So your position Brandon is that there is no shortage, or that there is, but you don't want to cure it? (@sfyimby, 2017)*
>
> *A convincing counter narrative to what we are working on would have to either argue that there is no shortage, or that shortage is a good thing, which are both impossible points to convincingly make. (@sonjatrauss, 2017)*

YIMBYs use the shortage frame to explain gentrification and displacement. They describe the housing market as "a cruel game of musical chairs" (Bertolet, 2017) in which a shortage of homes (the chairs) causes the poor to lose out and become displaced by the rich. In order to meet demand, existing residents must "make room" by embracing new development in their neighborhoods (adding more chairs). The shortage frame works to challenge the popular narrative that gentrification and displacement is caused by new development. Instead, YIMBYs contend that new development helps to relieve pressure by providing housing for those who would have otherwise outbid low-income residents for existing stock.

> ***Displacement is driven by a chronic housing shortage*** *and the low density zoning in exclusionary communities. It is my belief that the only way to stem displacement is to create abundant housing. (@neversassylaura, 2018)*
>
> *...**Excessive regulation leading to under building is a root cause of displacement** today. (@jessekb, 2017)*
>
> *"It is **a failure to build housing that causes displacement**."- @Scott_Wiener (@sfyimby, 2018)*

The shortage frame leads adherents to becomes skeptical of any roadblocks, delays, policies, or extractions that could threaten the feasibility of development. This view has led to contentious conflicts over developments and rezoning efforts in low-income neighborhoods. YIMBYs are often maligned for supporting market solutions that critics contend could accelerate the

gentrification that they aim to suppress. The following tweets show how YIMBYs have framed (or re-framed) gentrification and displacement as a result of shortage, not development.

> ***Housing shortage causes displacement.*** *We can have both: tenant protections AND more housing. Coverage of yesterday's rally: https://t.co/B6U4xOUdgg https://t.co/Yku9Yb0Kns*
> *(@sonjatrauss, 2018)*
>
> ***If the problem was brought about by a shortage, it doesnt make sense to inhibit market growth of housing****. Short term solutions to stop displacement require a multi-billion dollar bond measure and state reform of property taxes.*
> *(@IDoTheThinking, 2017)*
>
> **NOT* building units for rich people doesn't mean they won't move to Boston. They're coming, and* ***if we don't build for them they'll just come for our existing housing stock, and exacerbate gentrification and displacement.***
> *(@jessekb, 2018)*
>
> *8PM: Donate now! Because* ***we have a serious housing shortage and we need to add supply to combat displacement.*** *Can YIMBYs reverse the impact of gentrification? (@sonjatrauss, 2018)*

4.2 The Equity and Inclusion Frame

The Equity and Inclusion frame aims to moralize the housing debate by equating zoning reform and housing development with progressivism and opposition to housing as a barrier to social progress. YIMBY frames progressives who oppose new housing as complicit in maintaining a system of racial and economic segregation.

I found 359 instances of this frame, which frame inclusion as "*making room*", "*finding room*", "*let more people in*", and describes zoning as "*invisible gates",* a tool whose "*intended purpose*" is to "*increase racial and class segregation*" (@henrykraemer, 2018; @yimbyaction, 2018; @alexbaca, 2018; @sharethecities, 2018; @hanlonbt, 2017).

YIMBY frames its mission in terms of remedying economic and racial segregation through zoning reform. YIMBY describes abolishing "*exclusionary zoning"* as the most important tool to "*solve segregation"* by allowing poor and minority people the *"economic, social, & educational opportunity"* afforded by "*schools and amenities of high income neighborhoods" (@hanlonbt,2017; @neverssarylaura, 2018)*. Abolishing exclusionary zoning would foster the conditions for "*rich social integration*", "*integrated neighborhoods*," and "*just and equitable communities*" (@jessekb, 2017; @neversassylaura, 2018; @jessekb, 2018; @sonjatrauss, 2018; @sfyimby, 2018).

YIMBY frames its own policies in terms of remedying segregation. They describe SB827 and SB50, two California bills which would have upzoned areas around transit, as efforts which *"attack the problem of racial and economic segregation*", "*directly attacks the elitist, racist, exclusionary features of single-family home and low-density zoning* (@sfyimby, 2018; @beyondchron, 2018). YIMBY uses the metaphor of walls and immigration when discussing zoning. They liken opposition to housing with "*xenophobia"* and being *"anti-immigration"* and refer to zoning as a city's "*de facto immigration policy*" (@hanlonbt, 2017; @mateosfo, 2018; @jessekb, 2017). They frame the embrace of development as a moral imperative for Progressives: "*If in the abstract, you support immigration & refugee resettlement in the USA, you're morally obligated to support more housing in your community"(*@henrykraemer, 2018).

This frame works to neutralize the opposition of both anti-growth NIMBY homeowners who may identify as progressive and the Progressive Left, a coalition that has traditionally resisted housing development on social justice and environmental grounds. It is an attempt to redefine inclusion (as acceptance of housing) and what it means to be a

progressive. To the Progressive-Left, inclusion has historically meant greater citizen participation and the devolution of power to neighborhood groups (Beitel, 2013). YIMBY sees the Progressive-Left's definition of inclusion and urban development politics as a failure by empowering local groups to control and obstruct the course of urban development. YIMBY framing attempts to highlight the hypocrisy of left-leaning cities like Berkeley and Cambridge which profess liberal values of inclusiveness but are home to some of the highest housing prices in the nation. effectively becoming "*gated communities*" (hanlonbt, 2017).

> *If you're looking for **gated communities**, look around the Bay Area - **restrictive zoning leads to racial & class exclusion.***
> *(@hanlonbt, 2017)*

> *"It's not enough to be angry about 2200 homeless school children in San Francisco while you're also blocking new housing in your neighborhood." "**You can not call yourself a progressive democrat while you're opposing housing near transit stations."***
> *- housing hero @Scott_Wiener*
> *(@mateosfo, 2018)*

> ***The best argument we have is that bringing multifamily homes into a neighborhood will help undo racist, classist policy**. **Decent argument in a progressive place**. That's why the largely bad faith description of it is giveaways to developers. Totally undermines the case.*
> *(@henrykraemer, 2018)*

> *"All Are Welcome Here…*
> *As Long As You Can Afford to Buy a House In Our Historic, Single-Family Neighborhood"*
> *(@jessekb, 2018)*

> ***"If you drive a Prius and recycle, yet don't allow apartments to be built**, and then force people to drive 50 miles each way to work and cause all that pollution, you can't say 'out of sight, out of mind.'" Read about challenges facing **"progressive" cities***
> *(@cayimby, 2018)*

> ***Berkeley homeowners treat class segregation as a "Bay Area problem" while ignoring their own role in fostering it****, @kimmaicutler, @RobertGammon, @bedwardstiek*
> *(@beyondchron, 2018)*

4.3 The Both/And Frame

> *Market-rate multifamily housing is absolutely necessary - and also insufficient to address the totality of the current housing crisis. We need to be building more housing faster, while greatly increasing funding for subsidized housing.* ***YIMBY is not either/or, it's both/and.***
> (@sfyimby, 2018)

> *So yes, rent control, yes, public housing, yes, inclusionary zoning, yes, upzoning, yes, infill development, yes, developer profits, yes, luxury housing, yes, yes, yes. We need every square foot. At this stage****, saying no to *any* housing can only be categorized as ""not helping."***
> (@mateosfo, 2018)

The Both/And frame emphasizes the importance of a multitude of policy solutions to address the housing crisis. The overarching theme of Both/And is that increased market-rate housing production is necessary but not sufficient. It attempts to smooth over the perceived conflict between supply-focused policies and non-market-based solutions. It challenges the ideas that market-rate housing is a zero-sum game and support for market rate housing inherently signifies less support for other approaches. YIMBY uses this frame to neutralize opponents by deflecting criticism that the movement is too narrowly focused on zoning reform while overlooking concerns about displacement and housing for residents for whom market-rate housing will always be out of reach. In my analysis, I found 205 examples of the Both/And frame in YIMBY Twitter discourse. Of these tweets, two explicitly use the phrase "*Both/And*", 5 use the phrase "*either/or*", 28 use phrases like "*We need both*", "*We have to do both*", or "*We can have both*," while others use phrases such as "*kitchen sink approach*", "*multipronged*", and "*all-the-above strategy"*. The "both" in these examples can mean different things – zoning reform AND

funding affordable housing, more market rate AND affordable housing, or tenant protections AND streamlined production.

YIMBYs use the Both/And frame to rhetorically demonstrate support for non-market solutions to the housing crisis such as tenant protections, social housing, rent stabilization, and land trusts.

> ***"There shouldn't be a conflict between affordable and market rate housing****. And there isn't. It's just that we're putting them up as if they're in conflict. We need both."*
> *(@neversassylaura, 2018)*
>
> *No doubt. And the point I was trying to make on the show yesterday is that* ***it's not an either-or, it's a both-and.*** *We need to develop as much affordable housing as possible to serve the ppl most at risk of displacement, however, we can never build enough for all at risk.*
> *(@jessekb, 2018)*
>
> *For tenants facing eviction due to huge rent increases, the lack of rent control is the "root cause" of their displacement.* ***Cities need strong tenant protections in addition to building more housing, it's not either/ or.*** *@SFyimby, @ABetterCambMA, @pdx4all*
> *(@beyondchron, 2018)*
>
> *Building more regular market rate housing is no excuse not to increase funding for subsidized Affordable Housing. Increasing funding for subsidized Affordable Housing is no excuse to block the production of market rate housing****. We can and should do both.***
> *(@sfyimby, 2017)*
>
> ***Why can't we adopt both anti-displacement and affordable housing policies?*** *I don't think this was intended to mean we should only do one.*
> *(@neversassylaura, 2018)*
>
> ***Funding and upzoning go together!*** *They're PB&J of addressing the housing crisis!*
> *(sfyimby, 2018)*

Whereas the movements' initial framing of the housing crisis focused solely on "*zoning code hacks*" (@jessekb, 2017), they have moved, at least rhetorically, beyond a strict focus on zoning towards a recognition that "*We cannot ONLY build our way out of the housing crisis...*" (neversassylaura, 2018). While they support solutions other than market rate production in

conversation, in practice, YIMBYs stop short of devoting organizing resources and power to support these causes. The clearest example of this is the failure of CA YIMBY to endorse Prop 10, the 2018 statewide ballot measure to allow communities to expand rent control. YIMBYs explained this decision as a skepticism of local control, giving individual municipalities the ability to set local rent control policies.

4.4 The Green Growth Frame

> ***California's housing crisis is inextricably linked to climate change.*** *We're forcing people to drive because too many prevent the construction of denser housing.*
> *(@mateosfo, 2018)*
>
> *"…embracing of dense lifestyles and rejecting sprawl. That's fundamentally what yimbyism is about…"* (@neversassylaura, 2018).

The Green Growth frame argues that dense, urban infill housing is good for the environment because it reduces carbon emissions from transportation and allows cities to "*grow without sprawl*" (@alexbaca, 2018). YIMBYs characterize zoning as "*the single most important climate policy tool*" and call single family zoning is "*bad for the environment*" (@mateosfo, 2018; @jenny_schuetz, 2018). They describe acceptance of new urban infill as a moral imperative – "*we all have to do it*"- in order to "*live up to our promises on climate*" (@mateosfo, 2018). This frame argues that low-density development promotes sprawl and auto-dependence by forcing workers to commute from further outside the city. It associates dense infill housing - focusing "*new growth in the urban core*" - with climate adaptation and resilience, as "*ways to get ppl out of their cars & cut transportation emissions"* and *"stop climate change*" *(@jessekb, 2018; @idothethinking, 2017).* YIMBY describes urban infill development as "*the number one way*" to reduce carbon pollution (@mateosfo, 2018). This framing is a classic example of what Hajer

characterizes as an "ecological modernization" discourse, an argument that economic growth and environmental protection are mutually compatible (Hajer, 1993).

> *"**In the battle against climate change, we must build** – specifically, more affordable homes for our growing population." Read more here about how local zoning can get in the way of making housing more affordable, and the solution to fixing it.*
> *(@cayimby, 2018)*
>
> *Now there is an opportunity **to repurpose a defunct old mall - the perfect symbol of transitioning our old, dysfunctional, car-centric infrastructure into a vibrant community.** But what future will Cupertino choose?*
> *(sfyimby, 2018)*

This frame evokes the language of smart growth and new urbanism, concepts which involve concentrating growth in dense urban areas that has been popular in planning and environmental circles since the 1990s. Jocoy demonstrates how these discourses have been embraced as a new rationale for development as a "sustainability fix" (Jocoy, 2018: 389). In my analysis, I found 114 instances where YIMBY uses this frame in conversation to bolster the case for density and gain potential adherents and neutralize opponents concerned about the environment. The green growth frame challenges traditional environmental arguments linking development to environmental degradation used by environmentalist and homeowner movements since the 1980s who have "organized around limiting development and extracting public goods from developers" (Jocoy, 2018: 392). By promoting growth as environmentally beneficial, YIMBY undermines the arguments for extractions and increased citizen participation gained through social movements by framing growth as its own benefit. YIMBY frames the refusal to accept development as "*climate denial*" and "*abrogating your duty on climate"* (@mateosfo, 2018). With green growth, YIMBY is attempting to ally with progressive environmentalists by framing development in terms of climate resilience.

4.5 Generational Oppression

The Generational Oppression frame highlights the "*generational divide*" between rent-burdened millennials – "*our most vulnerable, those just starting out"* - and homeowners who have benefitted from increasing property values while at the same time blocking new housing in their communities (@sfyimby, 2018, Ibid, 2017). The generational oppression frame centers millennials as a "*generation stunted by a chronic housing shortage*" at the hands of "*rich olds*", "*Boomer homeowners*", and "*septuagenarians complaining about their zucchini*" (@neversassylaura, 2018; @hanlonbt, 2017; beyondchron, 2018; @jakeanbinder, 2017). This frame occurs less frequently than the shortage, Equity and Inclusion, Both/And, or Green Growth, but appears frequently enough in YIMBY speech to merit discussion. I found 39 examples of this frame, containing phrases such as "*stunted*", "*ageing pensioners", a*nd "*generational theft*". The generation oppression frame seeks to gain adherents by centering the lived experience of many of its members and hardening the focus on the perceived enemy: NIMBY homeowners who "*have prevented the 20s-30s middle class from buying homes*" by dominating public meetings for potential developments because they "*don't want people to block their views"* (@beyondchron, 2017; sfyimby, 2018).

Chapter 6: Housing Justice Framing

In this section, I illustrate how housing justice organizers in my dataset frame the housing problem. The housing justice movement utilizes five common frames when discussing the housing crisis: People Most Affected Must Lead, Crisis of Displacement, Commodification, Inequality, and Racial Justice is Housing Justice. In addition, housing justice offers a direct

critique of YIMBY and their policy agenda. The "People Most Affected Must Lead" frame affirms and centers the lived experience and local knowledge of marginalized communities experiencing housing instability and promotes the self-determination of marginalized communities in conflicts of urban development. Crisis of Displacement re-frames the housing crisis, rhetorically centering the instability of low-income renters. The Commodification frame argues that the current "crisis" is the result of the inherent conflict between housing's use value and its exchange value. The Inequality frame describes the housing crisis as a result of deeper inequalities embedded within society. The Housing Justice is Racial Justice frame emphasizes the intersectionality of race and housing and calls for race-affirmative planning and policies to redress injustice and inequities.

5.1 People Most Affected Must Lead

A common frame used by the housing justice movement is the need for marginalized peoples to lead and guide any housing movement and determine solutions to the problem. I call this frame "People Most Affected Must Lead." I identified 55 tweets that use this frame in my analysis. It promotes the idea that housing justice is a movement led by the oppressed – *"it needs to be lead by the people most affected"* - and rooted in the self-determination of marginalized communities: *"housing justice does not come from above, or from men with charts"* (@citylife_clvu, 2018; @uhsanti, 2018). Tweets in the frame include phrases like *"center vulnerable folks"* (@sahrasulaiman, 2018) and call for *"policies and solutions based on the real experiences and leadership of residents, especially working class people of color"* (@hollley, 2018). Housing justice implores observers to *"trust in solutions coming from the people most affected"* who

"*know what's best for them"* and to *"…listen to impacted communities, follow their lead…""* (@hollley, 2018; @uhshanti, 2018; @taraghuveer, 2018).

This frame affirms the value of lived experience of marginalized communities as *"wisdom"* and "*on the ground reality"* (@citylife_clvu, 2018; @uhshanti, 2018) and challenges the domination of scientific knowledge within the discussion of housing as "*obtuse paternalism*" (@uhshanti, 2017). It acknowledges the political nature of housing, as being influenced and "formed by conflicts between classes, institutions, and the state" (Madden and Marcuse, 2016: 87). The idea of People Most Affected Must Lead is a reflection of Lefebvre's Right to the City, which argues for "the need to restructure the power relations that underlie the production of urban space, fundamentally shifting control away from capital and the state and toward urban inhabitants", underpin this frame (Purcell, 2002: 101).

People Most Affected Must Lead promotes "*community self determination w/r/t investment*" in urban development, saying that "*Development must be accountable to the community"* (@uhshanti, 2018; @citylife_clvu, 2018). Housing justice activists denounce the "*newly minted housing arguers*" who "*silence those same redlined communities ignore their visions cuz they don't rly get it"* (@uhshanti, 2018; @hollley, 2018). The concept of self-determination illustrates a clear dichotomy between the Housing Justice and YIMBY. While YIMBY often frames the housing problem as a need to limit citizen participation and influence over development, the housing justice movement argues that marginalized communities should have *greater* say in determining the shape of housing investment in their neighborhoods and that this is *"simply another flavor of local control*" (@uhshanti, 2018).

5.2 A Crisis of Displacement

The Housing Justice movement frames (or reframes) the housing crisis as a crisis of displacement. This frame is an intentional rhetorical move to center the experience of low-income renters, whose housing instability have been largely overshadowed in the discourse of the housing crisis by "the experience of middle-class homeowners and investors" Madden and Marcuse, 2016: 10). In my analysis, I found 19 examples where this frame was used. The tweets include phrases like *"the housing crisis is a especially a displacement crisis"* (@tenantstogether, 2017), *"displacement is the crisis, frontline folks are the answer"* (@citylife_clvu, 2018), and "*non-displacement is THE goal"(*@uhshanti, 2018). Highlighting displacement as the critical element of the housing crisis challenges the "the forces of alienation that are active in urban space" and asserts the importance of housing's use value over its exchange value (Aalbers and Gibb, 2014: 2008). The housing justice movement sees displacement as a symptom of allowing the profit motive to rule the production of space within the city and calls for creating 'cities for people, not for profit' (Brenner, Marcuse, & Mayer, 2009).

Housing Justice movement frames gentrification and displacement as something that can be resisted. Rather than a natural process of urban transformation - *"gentrification is not inevitable*" - it is framed as the expected result of deliberate collaboration between *"private actors and public actors working together to drive up property values in a way that displaces low-income people"* (@LATenantsUnion, 2018; @ceaweaver, 2018). Housing Justice emphasizes the effects beyond mere physical displacement: "*the kind of displacement people fear is about more than housing. It's cultural erasure, it's the disruption of networks that keep their communities functioning, and the stress of losing a connection to place/community."* (@sahrasulaiman, 2018).

5.3 Commodification

The commodification of housing is a common thread of the discourse of the housing crisis among Housing Justice movement. Commodification refers to when "the economic value of a thing comes to dominate its other uses" (Madden and Marcuse, 2016: 17). The commodification of housing means that its function as real estate, an investment to be bought, sold, and traded, "takes precedence over its usefulness as a place to live" (Ibid). In my analysis, I found forty-two examples of this frame, which include direct references to commodification and speculation as a driver of the housing crisis. Together, these tweets point to commodification as the root cause of the crisis and decommodification of housing as a solution. These tweets describe commodification as *"the core of this whole problem"* (@uhshanti, 2017), *"The current U.S. housing system, rooted in the commodification of land and housing as speculation, is not our only option"* (@citylife_clvu, 2018), *"inherently problematic"* (@uhshanti, 2018), and describe the problem as *"our finance-driven housing crisis"* (@tenantstogether, 2018). They point to decommodification, the removal of housing from the private market, as the answer to the crisis: "…*we MUST decommodify housing and guarantee homes for all*", (@taraghuveer, 2018); "*The answer is to bring housing into the public domain wherever possible…"* (@uhshanti, 2017). Commodification is the through line for understanding the interconnected crises of housing: *Gentrification, home mortgage bubbles, homelessness, skyrocketing rent…are the outcomes of the policies that consign the basic human need of location to the whims of rent-obsessed landlords and chop-licking speculators looking for an easy flip" (@tenantstogether, 2018).*

Housing justice uses the lens of commodification to focus on the harmful nature of land speculation. Housing justice organizers describe speculation as *"an epidemic"* (@LATenantsUnion, 2017), *"killing our city"* (@citylife_clvu, 2017), and one of the *"roots of the crisis"* (@tenantstogether, 2018). They argue that speculation, rather than shortage, is the

driving force behind the current crisis. They call on developers to *"stop inflating land cost through speculation"* (@citylife_clvu, 2018) and argue that housing prices have become "*inflated due to speculation"* from short term rentals and corporate investors. They highlight "*the role of corporate speculators in driving rents and displacement*" (@taraghuveer, 2018). Investment in urban housing is thus seen as a cause: *"investment in capital in multifamily (and single-family) housing has caused the housing crisis. We don't need more housing speculation, we need #rentcontrol"* (@tenantstogether, 2017).

Housing justice expresses a deep skepticism in the ability of "the market" to produce just outcomes, especially for the poor "*private markets cannot and will not deliver the social good of affordable and stable housing for all";* (@LATenantsUnion, 2018); "*The market doesn't work.* (@taraghuveer, 2018); "*The brutal, unfettered market won't stop displacement"* (@tenantstogether, 2017); *...this is literally what the market does: it produces scarcity to extract monopoly prices* (@LATenantsUnion, 2018).

5.4 Inequality

Housing justice organizers frame the housing crisis as a symptom of deeper, structural inequalities within society. They challenge the idea that the housing crisis is merely a question of shortage by arguing that worsening inequality inherently leads to unequal and insufficient distribution of housing *"...the issue is not always one of scarcity. It's usually one of distribution. For every one homeless person, there are nearly four empty properties in Oakland"* (@tenantstogether, 2018). They frame the housing crisis as a global phenomenon, rather than the unique result of American land use policy: *"the housing crisis is an international political economy problem…because growing inequality and rapid urbanization are happening*

everywhere. including places where zoning doesn't exist" (@uhshanti, 2018), *"housing crisis is global, directly related int'l political economy, financialization of housing mkts, growing concentrated wealth, worsening inequality (yes, worsening in Tokyo & places w no zoning too"* (@hollley, 2018). For housing justice, the existence of vacant units, especially high-end units, calls into question the relevance of shortage as a lens for understanding the crisis and highlights the inefficiency of the current system: "*1000s of vacant lux units sitting while tent cities expand…"* (@hollley, 2018), *"cash buying of highest-end units often sitting empty"* (Ibid). Housing Justice's use of vacancy (to highlight inequality) illustrates a sharp contrast with YIMBY, as YIMBY often disputes that vacant units are an important factor in the housing crisis. It is no surprise that the Housing Justice movement has used vacant homes as sites of protest and radical demands, like Moms 4 Housing occupation in Oakland, California.

5.5 Housing Justice is Racial Justice

The Housing Justice movement frames the housing problem as an inextricable aspect of racial oppression that must be viewed within a socio-historical context. This framing recognizes that communities of color continue to suffer from the consequences of racialized housing policies and that planners and policymakers must include race as part of a framework in crafting housing policy. They frame housing injustice as the direct result of systemic racism and white supremacy: *"racism created segregation, discrimination in lending, seeds for today's crisis"* (@taraghuveer, 2018); *"Gentrification. Redlining. 2 sides of the same systemically racist coin"* (@LATenantsUnion, 2018);*"Gentrification…part of a centuries long process of white supremacy in the housing/land market"* (@ceaweaver, 2018*), "Exclusionary property rights, predatory mortgage lending, housing (and school and economic) segregation and disinvestment, rezoning, community displacement -- all tools that have been used by the capitalist state to*

maintain white supremacy. Housing justice is racial justice." (@dsa_housing, 2018); "…*where urbanists blame zoning for all inequality I blame racialized capital because the same outcome *empirically* exists where zoning does not*" (@uhshanti, 2018). " Housing justice actively works to frame the housing problem in terms of racial justice: *"Boston's displacement crisis is a racial justice issue"* (@citylife_clvu, 2018); *"…housing must be treated as a racial justice issue"* (@taraghuveer, 2018). Housing justice calls for solutions which include race as part of a framework in planning processes: *"the answer is to…think about race and class displacement as part of planning in hot markets which we never do"* (@uhshanti, 2017). Housing Justice criticizes the emphasis on zoning as an exceptional tool, rather than part of a larger system of racial oppression.

Chapter 7: Discursive Engagements

7.1 Introduction

Both the YIMBY and Housing Justice movement compete to frame the issue of housing on Twitter. This process often involves direct critiques of each other which aim to restructure the terms of the housing debate. YIMBY attempts to frame itself as a movement built on a foundation of data and economics. They paint opponents as fundamentally irrational; lacking knowledge of economics, housing markets, and driven by a rigid ideology that deepens the housing problem. YIMBY frames itself as "pro-housing" and criticizes renters' organizations as "anti-housing" to create a narrative that renters' groups are behaving irrationally or being taken advantage of by NIMBYs. YIMBY attempts to co-opt the language of anti-displacement activism to appeal to potential supporters sympathetic with these themes.

The housing justice movement offers a detailed critique of the YIMBY framing of the housing crisis. They challenge the idea that the crisis is merely a problem of shortage and outline several theoretical problems with the logic of the YIMBY movement. They question how an unjust system of housing allocation can be made to work for the working class without challenging the profit motive of the real estate industry. These critiques can be categorized into the following sub-categories: financialization, exclusion of socioeconomic context, collateral damage, dismissive authority, market segmentation, and centering zoning. The housing justice movement actors in my dataset contend that YIMBY fails to acknowledge problems wrought by the increasing financialization of housing. They argue that the YIMBY policy agenda lacks a nuanced understanding of social context and spatial difference and treats low-income renters as collateral damage. They deride YIMBY for acting with a dismissive authority towards the lived experience and local knowledge of marginalized people. Finally, the accounts in my dataset argue that YIMBY centers zoning in a way that is disproportionate to its relevance to the problem of housing, which serves to distract from other, more relevant issues. The first five sections below outlines YIMBY discursive engagements with their opponents, followed by six sections outlining Housing Justice engagements with YIMBY.

7.2 'Neutrality of Market Logic'

> *YIMBYs believe, based on good evidence, that while the world is vastly complex, there are also basic fundamentals.* (@neversassylaura, 2017)

YIMBY opinion leaders frame the movement as one built on a foundation of research, expert consensus, and rationality. My dataset of YIMBY tweets include phrases such as "*data matters*" (@jessekb, 2017), "*nobody serious rejects supply*" (@henrykraemer, 2018), "*robust empirical evidence*" (Ibid), "*relevant scholarship*" (@hanlonbt, 2017), and "*shared understanding of*

measurable/empirical reality" (@mateosfo, 2018). I identified 169 tweets which frame the housing problem as one in which there is wide academic consensus among experts of the underlying cause – shortage - as well as the solution – to build more housing. When talking about housing, YIMBY privileges expert knowledge - research, data, and empirical evidence - and are dismissive of their opponents claims as "anecdata".

According to YIMBY, there is an "*abundance of available research*" on the nature of the housing problem (@mateosfo, 2018). There is "*an ocean of social scientific & legal research*" that community control of land use leads to segregation and "*much research*" that we need more market rate housing (@hanlonbt, 2017; @jessekb, 2017). In addition, there is *"strong empirical evidence that restrictive zoning leads to black displacement"* (@hanlonbt, 2017) and "*its proven*" that restrictions on building causes displacement of vulnerable populations (@jessekb, 2017). There is "*SO MUCH research"* that market rate housing does not lead to induced demand and *"historical evidence"* that increasing supply will cause developers to build lower-cost units (@sfyimby, 2017; @jakeanbinder, 2018) YIMBY also claims that there is *"tons of evidence"* that strong inclusionary zoning policies *increases* displacement by reducing incentives for market rate development (@sfyimby, 2017). YIMBY paints a picture of an issue about which there is vast expert consensus on both the causes and solutions.

7.3 Opponents are Irrational

YIMBYs also stigmatize opponents as irrational, uneducated, and ideological. They criticize them for lacking basic knowledge of the concrete laws of supply and demand, and for in turn confusing the causal relationships of gentrification and displacement, which causes them to misplace blame on developers, who they paint as unfairly maligned: *"All housing is produced by*

developers, just like all food is created by farmers"; "*developers, just like grocers, want to make a profit*." (@neversassylaura, 2018). In total, I identified 98 Tweets in which YIMBYs call into question opponents' knowledge, evidence, and rationality:

> *"your knowledge of how housing urban housing policy has worked historically and continues to work is lacking"*
>
> (@jakeanbinder, 2018)
>
> *"Boston, maybe, but you know as well as I do, Matt, that economics do not apply to the People's Republik of Cambridge."*
>
> (@jessekb, 2017)
>
> *"In addition to a housing crisis, Berkeley has an economic illiteracy crisis."* (@mateosfo, 2017)
>
> *"…they have no idea how housing markets work…"*
>
> (@idothethinking, 2017)
>
> *"[their] understanding of what causes gentrification and displacement is incorrect"*
>
> (@hanlonbt, 2018)
>
> *"No more housing, all because you've conflated two entirely different economic concepts"*
>
> (@neversassylaura, 2017)
>
> *If you think there isn't a housing shortage in CA and you think the "real problem" is developers and vacant units, then you are not an ally.*
>
> (@neversassylaura, 2018)
>
> *As an organizer, people who think building housing causes displacement are the opposition and not people I should spend too much time on.*
>
> (@neversassylaura, 2017)
>
> *"…makes me wonder if you have any idea whatsoever about the nature of the problem…"*
>
> (@mateosfo, 2018)

YIMBY also attempts to propagate a narrative that opponents lack empirical evidence for their positions by referring to opponents' knowledge as anecdotes or "anecdata." Together, these paint a picture of one-sided housing debate: those who possess the knowledge (YIMBY) and those who do not.

*"**Anecdote ≠ data**" (@mateosfo, 2018)*

*"**There is no data that backs up your claim**. If you want me to believe that it will set off a gentrification bomb, you're going to have to convince me."* (@neversassylaura, 2018)

*"**Data can be a problem for anti-development folks** wanting to claim that greater supply doesn't decease housing costs."* (@jessekb, 2017)

*"**Do you have any evidence of induced demand in housing?** I know it feels "truthy" to you?"* (@sfyimby, 2017)

*"So, **you don't have any actual data, just a bunch of hyperbole.** I don't think that's a great approach to advocacy on a topic of scientific importance"* (@mateosfo, 2018)

***"I would love to see the actual data - not just anecdotal** about buildings in Chinatown, Boston…"* (@jessekb, 2017)

*"**What evidence have you provided of the anecdotes** you're referring to unspecifically?* (@neversassylaura, 2018)

*"**Could you provide a citation to your claim that increased local control over land use decisions ("community empowerment") reduces displacement or gentrification?**"*

(@hanlonbt, 2017)

*"**I know many people feel that more development in NYC lead to more displacement, but I haven't seen any substantiation of that claim.**"* (@hanlont, 2017)

*I've seen good critiques, but **on a fact basis its sophomoric**. Same generic "int'l speculation" excuse. Same bad "market-solution" strawmans"* (@idothethinking, 2017)

*"Love too blame mysterious Chinese and Arab millionaires with **no evidence** and not have it been seen as racist because the politics of housing are fucked up"* (@jakeanbinder, 2017)

YIMBY frames efforts to resist market rate housing as counterproductive: *"time & activism on preventing building? I think you're a cause of gentrification, of west Oakland for instance"* (@sfyimby, 2017). They portray anti-displacement activism as "*perpetuating a housing shortage*", advocating for "*guaranteed revenue for landlords*" (@sfyimby, 2017 @jakeanbinder, 2018), and say *"share the blame if they block new market rate housing*" (@sharethecities, 2018). While they defend anti-displacement work conceptually – *"organizing to prevent displacement is good…"* (@hanlonbt, 2017), YIMBY attacks resistance to market-rate housing as "*an impediment to progress"* and misguided: *"Stopping building doesn't stop displacement… don't pretend stopping building stops displacement or gentrification"*; "*Wake me up when they manage to keep rents, home prices, white population, etc. down, beyond just destroying tokens of gentrification"* (@mateosfo, 2018; @sharethecities, 2018; @marketurbanism, 2017).

> *Plaza 16 coalition "heroically" blocked the monster in the mission and then what? Increased displacement in West Oakland.* (@sfyimby, 2017)
>
> *"All your [heroes] have been in politics for 20 years, pursuing the same strategy of opposing market rate housing, and negotiating one project at a time for benefits. What is the outcome? Is SF affordable? No. I only started in 2014." (@sonjatrauss, 2018)*

7.4 Opponents are Ideological

"…neoliberal? What's your proposal for ending the shortage" (@sfyimby, 2017)

""We're about policy, not ideology," yeah whatever" (@mateosfo, 2018)

*"Dude, just deal with high rents and a housing shortage, use no known solutions**, just wait for the Reds to take Washington and we'll be fine.**"* (@idothethinking, 2017)

"the problem is that they don't want private individuals or companies to profit from house building." (@sonjatrauss, 2017)

"the left"…doesn't agree on basic issues, such as economics, science etc. (@mateosfo, 2018)

YIMBYs are dismissive of leftist critics as dogmatically ideological; unwilling to engage in practical solutions. They use phrases like "*fantasy world*", "*magical*", "*impossible*", "*delusion*", "*hardcore*", and "*misguided*" to discredit opponents. I identified 35 Tweets in which this meaning is present. YIMBY reduces leftist solutions to waiting for a social revolution that will never come: *"just wait for the Reds to take Washington"* (@idothethinking, 2017); "*hand wave about a violent revolution that will never happen* (@mateosfo, 2017); and "*fighting a (misguided) proxy war against capitalism*" (@sharethecities, 2018). The subtext of these Tweets is that the leftist approach is unreasonable and ineffective.

In addition to portraying leftists as ideological, YIMBY Tweets portray their demands and solutions as infeasible. They refer to the "*depth of delusion*" of affordable housing advocates for pushing for deeper affordability and for believing "*upzoning can pay for ponies and rainbows*" (@marketubranism, 2018, Ibid, 2017). They question the feasibility of building only affordable housing as "*impossible in most markets*" (@mateosfo, 2017) and question whether it is a "*realistic strategy"* (@jessekb, 2017). On the idea of producing European-style social housing,

YIMBY contradicts itself. At the same time that they express enthusiasm and support for the idea: "*let's bring back social housing!"* (@hanlonbt, 2017); "*We've come out strongly for building social housing*" (@sfyimby, 2018); "*The city can do one better and actually build social housing"* (@sonjatrauss, 2017), they doubt its practicality: *"You think developers working for free is realistic but social housing isn't?"* (@sonjatrauss, 2017); "*We need a TON of new public/social housing. But if you try to pencil out the costs of meeting the housing supply need that way, it's basically impossible*" (@henrykraemer, 2018); "*I'm a socialist AND a YIMBY, and the thing that drives me nuts is other socialists refusing to do the math on new housing*." (@henrykraemer, 2018).

This same contradiction is seen in YIMBY discourse on rent control. Like with social housing, they walk a fine line between displaying tepid support and questioning its efficacy, calling it *"an inefficient subsidy w/ lots of unfair disparities, but rent control provides housing security, is a net +"*; "*We still need strong tenant protections and possibl[y] even rent control in some circumstances"* (@jessekb, 2018); *"So yes, rent control…"* (@mateosfo, 2018). But YIMBY also regularly posted about rent control in a negative light, calling it "*crude*" (hanlonbt, 2017), *"overly-broad"* (@abundanthousing, 2018), *"not enough"* (@sfyimby, 2017), and a *"boneheaded system"* (@idothethinking, 2017). "*Rent control as the only solution to control housing costs has been in effect for 30 years and our problem has gotten worse"* (@sonjatrauss, 2017). They sew doubt over unintended consequences: *"ample evidence of rent control backfiring when done incorrectly*" (@henrykraemer, 2018) and highlight the potential negative consequences "*rent control without new housing supply basically ensures middle/low-income residents can't ever move anywhere else"* (@idothethinking, 2017). The Twitter account for San Francisco YIMBY described themselves as a *"pro-building org with members who have a*

number of different ideas about rent control" (Ibid, 2017). YIMBYs lament the centrality of rent control in tenant activism: *"if all tenant orgs work on is rent control and don't work on zoning that's problematic"*; *"it's all rent control, rent control, rent control"; "rent control becomes the rallying cry of people who don't need it, to the exclusion of other forms of housing activism"* (@sharethecities, 2018; @marketurbanism, 2018; @jakeanbinder, 2018).

7. 5 Pro – Housing / Anti – Housing

*"Well **we're pro-housing**, and "developer" is the word for the type of person or company that builds housing."* (@sfyimby, 2017)

YIMBY creates a false dichotomy in the housing debate by employing a pro - anti framing. This rhetorical tactic creates two sides – those who are in support of housing and those who are against it. YIMBY accounts refer to themselves as "*pro-housing activists*" (@beyondchron, 2017; @sfyimby, 2018), "*pro-housing groups*" (@yimbyaction, 2018), "*pro-apartment activists*" (@beyondchron, 2018), a "*pro-building org*" (@sfyimby, 2017). They also refer to YIMBY as a "*pro-housing movement*" and to its supporters as "*pro-building people*" and "pro-housing voters" (@sharethecities, 2018; @sfyimby, 2017; @beyondchron, 2018). They refer to their candidates as "*pro-housing candidates*" (@mateosfo, 2018) to refer to a community which passed favorable measures as a "*pro-housing community*" (Ibid, 2017). Proposed developments are framed as "*the pro-housing option*" (Ibid, 2017).

Conversely, YIMBYs frame opponents as "anti" housing: *When leftist housing advocates are actually anti-housing (any kind of housing), they are perpetuating the shortage* (@neversassylaura, 2017); the San Francisco Tenants Union: "*The SFTU, seems anti-housing because of the anti-housing stances it takes*:" (@sfyimby, 2017); "*They should stick to*

advancing rent control & remain neutral on new housing" (Ibid, 2017); Democratic Socialists: "*Some of the most active democratic socialists in my community are also the most anti-housing, or only believe in 100% BMR development* (@jessekb, 2018), and environmentalists: "*anti-housing activists who identify as environmentalists*" (@beyondcrhon, 2018). YIMBY also refers to stances against their legislation as "*anti-housing positions*" (@sfyimby, 2017). This framing questions of housing clearly demarcates the sides and leaves little room for nuance.

7.6 Co-opting Anti-Displacement Language

"if we want to win, we need to A) speak to concerns about capitalism, displacement, and near-term prices…" (@henrykraemer, 2018)

The YIMBY movement adopts the anti-displacement language of renters' organizations. In doing so, they attempt to frame the movement as one deeply concerned with combatting displacement. I identified 32 Tweets from 10 unique users which fall into this category. Twenty-three tweets place anti-displacement as the central goal of YIMBY: "*We're the _increase capacity_ arm of anti-displacement."* (@syfyimby, 2017);*"…we need to add supply to combat displacement* (@sonjatrauss, 2018); "*preventing renter displacement is at the core of our advocacy*" (@hanlonbt, 2018); "*I hate displacement. It's literally why I'm a YIMBY"* (@neversassylaura, 2017); "*We want to make it easier to build. new homes and to minimize displacement*" (@abundanthousing, 2018). In addition, these accounts use language such as "*development without displacement"* (6x), "*housing is a human right"* (4x), and "*homes for all*" (1x), phrases associated with tenant organizations within the housing justice movement. They also invoke the language of neighborhood defense: "*You know what it looks like for Oakland to "defend itself"? The YIMBY Party. We're going to upzone your neighborhood"* (@sfyimby, 2017).

7.7 Failure to Acknowledge Financialization

Housing justice criticizes YIMBY for failing *"to acknowledge the fundamental problem of financialization"* in housing markets as *"the driving issue"* behind the current crises (@hollley, 2018). They note how the shortage frame has obscured the role of financialization: *""the supply problem" message has successfully allowed some of the leading drivers of our housing crisis: the rise of Wall Street's new rental empire"* (@uhshanti, 2018). Financialization in housing refers to the way in which global capital has come to play an increasingly large role in housing markets. It also describes the way that housing has become a driver of national economic growth, transforming its basic function from shelter to investment. Scholars have argued "the absorption of capital by the housing sector and real estate more generally was one of the defining characteristics of the current age of financialization" (Fernandez, 2016: 72). The housing sector has served as a temporary fix to the "global pool of excess liquidity" looking for profitable investment (Ibid, 84). The accounts I analyzed use financialization to refer to the way that housing, as a globally traded asset, has become increasingly disconnected from the social need of communities. Housing justice highlights the increasing involvement of "Wall Street", big banks, REITS, and corporations in housing markets: *"Wall Street as a mega landlord";* "*big banks are buying up foreclosed SFH and rent-controlled housing*"; *corporate/investor-owned units"* (@uhshanti, 2018; Ibid; @hollley, 2018).

7. 8 Exclusion of Socioeconomic Context

Housing Justice criticizes YIMBY for the *"constant exclusion"* of "*social contexts*" from the *"supply/demand conversation",* which *"leaves out so much about what happens to ppl as n'hoods gentrify"* (@sahrasulaiman, 2018; @hollley, 2018). "*YIMBY folx (speaking generally,*

here) need to stop telling ppl concerned abt gentrification abt supply & demand. We all know about supply & demand - it is not that mysterious. The issues arise w/ regard to how devpt plays out on the ground...that's why analytical nuance matters" (@sahrasulaiman, 2018). This criticism is directed towards YIMBY's tendency to attack activist groups pushing for greater and deeper affordability in new development. HJ criticizes YIMBY for casting "*groups asking for more affordability as obstructionists"* (@uhshanti, 2018). YIMBY has a tendency to conflate renters organizations defensive stance towards new development and NIMBYs' anti-development attitudes. Housing Justice attempts to make the distinction between the two groups: *"These POC-renter-led groups aren't NIMBYs…"* (@citylife_clvu, 2018); "*…the biggest threat to housing supply increase is not working people rightfully afraid of displacement…"* (@surlyurbanist, 2018).

7.9 Collateral Damage

A central criticism of the YIMBY movement by housing justice actors in my dataset is that its policies fail to accurately protect low-income renters against potential displacement induced by upzoning and development. They argue that while YIMBY policies *"*might* bring down the median cost of housing REGIONALLY, long term, big scale, Short term: it increases local (neighborhood costs....." (@ceaweaver, 2018)* but have the potential to induce *"hyperlocalized displacement"* (@uhshanti, 2018). For Housing Justice, *"it's real & common sense that high-end increases area value/pricing/rent* " (@hollley). One merely needs to listen to the experiences of low-income residents: *"You don't think building market rate forces ppl out?...Have you spoken to any of literal thousands of ppl who this has happened to in Boston?"* (@hollley, 2017)

They express skepticism and fear that rezoning low-income neighborhoods could lead to displacement: *"YIMBYs rightly recognize that zoning was used to do harm, for example, but have struggled to accept that lifting restrictions/upzoning around disenfranchised communities could do more harm"* (@sahrasulaiman, 2018); *"I have yet to hear of a single upzoning of a low-income area in the United States that has been done in a way that hasn't led to mass displacement on racial and economic lines"* (@uhshanti, 2018). They also express doubt that rezonings would be implemented in a way that would not disproportionately hurt working-class communities: "*Th[e] problem with upzone everywhere…is that we won't"* (@drschweitzer).

> *"I don't think just upzoning marginalized communities will usher us into the post-racial post-scarcity utopia"* (@uhshanti)

In addition to concern over hyperlocalized displacement, housing justice argues that low-income people in upzoned neighborhoods could be displaced by the time any aggregate price decreases take effect: "*Increased supply concentrated in 'hot' neighborhoods is likely to drive displacement in the short-term while only reducing housing costs over the long-term at the regional scale."* (LATenantsUnion) The idea of timeframe, or lag, is explained by Professor Lisa Schweitzer (@drschweitzer), Professor of Urban Planning at USC:

> *I think what community advocates (real ones, not the Beverly Hills ones) are concerned that* ***if you build BEFORE you look after poor renters, the poor renters are screwed in the short term even if the supply strategies are helpful in the long terms.*** *That's what I see anyway.* (@drschweitzer, 2018)

Some YIMBY opinion leaders acknowledge their argument for affordability is premised on a long-term fix that fails to address potential short-term pain. User @sharethecities, remarks:

> *Problem is lag…Ppl suffering…w/ no relief or support for 5-10 yrs while we wait for market to overbuild.* ***Lag isn't equitable or just & hurts generations of same ppl who were screwed over by past land use wrongs.*** (@sharethecities)

Meanwhile, @jakeanbinder admits that it would take time for the price of new housing to come down under a deregulated scenario:

> *"I also don't think any YIMBY would argue that the marginal housing units built after zoning repeal would be "affordable" in the progressive sense. It's a long-term argument we're making." (@jakeanbinder, 2017)*

7.10 Dismissive Authority

Housing Justice criticizes YIMBY for being dismissive of the lived experience and concerns marginalized communities and treating them with a *"dismissive, condescending, and outright aggressive attitude"* (@uhshanti, 2018). They argue that YIMBY rhetoric silences the communities they claim to be fighting for: "*And so, my point: Glaring disrespect of our least privileged communities is so tired. YIMBY backers of SB827 base arguments on saving/freeing redlined communities…but they're (quite literally) silencing those same communities like they've been silenced throughout history* (@hollley, 2018). They claim the YIMBY policy agenda treats marginalized populations as collateral damage and dismisses their concerns as "*anecdata*" (@ushanti, 2018). They say YIMBYs *"have ignored or insulted those working with vulnerable populations"* and have a *"demonstrable lack of interest in accessing the lived empirical experience of people you're claiming to save"* (@hollley, 2018; @uhshanti, 2018). Observers confirm that in discourse, YIMBY tends to be dismissive of these concerns: *"rhetorically dunking*

on working class communities understandably wary of new development" (@surlyurbanist, 2018).

7.11 Reliance on the Market

Housing justice express skepticism in the potential of the private market to provide housing for the poor: *"The private housing market doesn't magically work to the benefit of all"* (@tenantstogether, 2017). While they make clear they consider new supply to be a part of the solution - *"we're not shortage denialists"*- they express doubt that the poor will benefit from the production of market rate housing (@uhshanti, 2018). They contend that the "musical chairs" description of the housing market is an inaccurate portrayal. In reality, HJ claims, housing markets are segmented into distinct submarkets, with little interaction between them. Hence, increasing supply in one submarket, for example high-end units, has little effect on the price of units in other submarkets, such as affordable apartments. In short, housing justice organizers believe *"empty luxury units & small decreases in high-end rents do nothing for most"* (@hollley, 2018). This position challenges YIMBY's contention that everyone benefits from new housing: *"density is its own reward and more housing is more housing"* @sonjatruass, 2018). Housing organizer Shanti Singh expresses skepticism for the idea that more housing at any level will benefit the poor:

> *" the whole idea of "if my landlord boots me, w/ more supply I can move down the block" doesn't work if I make $40K and all my neighbors do too, and you put a $1M condo on my block"* (@uhshanti)
>
> "*There is no amount of housing we could build that would make LA affordable to the folks who are…barely able to make $1500 rent. That's a reality those are the folks we are concerned about"(*@sahrasulaiman, 2018)

7. 12 Focus on Zoning

The housing justice movement criticizes its focus on zoning as a cause and cure of housing affordability, racial and economic segregation, and climate change. According to Housing Justice, the problems of housing run deeper; their sources are structural in nature and stem from inequality, racism, and the inherent contradiction between housing as a commodity and as shelter. They describe YIMBY as a *"...solipsistic desire to reduce literally all social issues on the planet to zoning..."* (@uhshanti, 2018). Whereas YIMBY frames the crisis as a technical problem, HJ express skepticism in "*zoning as the ur-policy to solve all issues"* (@surlyurbanist, 2018). The focus on zoning is detrimental because it obscures the true nature of problems and obscures the role of the market. Housing justice feels *"the zoning debate sucks oxygen"* from talking about more pertinent structural problems and *"rhetorically *centers* zoning in a way that is disproportionate and a distraction from the breathtaking scale of the socioeconomic makeover required"* and obscures the role of the market as the *"primary driver"* of racist housing policies such as *"single family zoning, redlining, or other forms of housing discrimination"* (@uhshanti, 2018). HJ sees zoning as a tool used by the state for racist ends, not as the primary cause of segregation. Racism is deeply embedded not just in zoning, but in the housing market and society at large. The narrative of government as the cause of racist tools like zoning fails to accurately reflect the way that it also serves the interests of capital: *"...capital drove exclusionary zoning by government..."* (@uhshanti, 2018)

Chapter 8: Conclusion

YIMBY has used Twitter to cement a "regime of truth" around the idea that the driving force behind the housing crisis is a shortage of supply. This idea has come to dominate mainstream

political discourse of the housing problem. YIMBY discourse marginalizes alternative narratives, "which are mobilized out of the discursive picture" (Stenson and Watt, 1999: 192, as quoted in Lees, 2004). Hanssen and Saglie refer to this process of invisible exclusion of alternative points of view as "cognitive closure", whereby discourses "can be used to give some arguments power while invalidating others" (Hanssen and Saglie, 2011: 499) My research of YIMBY and Housing Justice framing on Twitter demonstrates the methods through which this process of exclusion occurs.

YIMBY discourse builds its regime of truth through a number of discursive techniques. My analysis shows how YIMBY constructs an "aura of objectivity" around itself by privileging an idea of 'expert' knowledge based on based on academic research and economic 'laws', even when the research does not corroborate their views (Aalbers, 2016: 143). In privileging 'expert' knowledge, YIMBY discourse is dismissive of the lived experience of communities directly impacted by housing insecurity. Tapp refers to YIMBYs steadfast reliance on the neoclassical economic narratives as the "neutrality of market logic and economic savvy", a stance which marginalizes counter narratives and contradictory evidence which does not align with its logic (Tapp, 2021: 11). YIMBY discourse creates a false impression of widespread academic consensus around the causes and solutions for the housing problem and denigrates opponents as irrational, uneducated in the irrefutable laws of the economics, and/or driven by ideological fervor. YIMBY employs a Pro/Anti framing which creates a false dichotomy of the housing debate as two distinct oppositional sides: Pro-housing (YIMBY) and Anti-Housing (everyone else). YIMBYs walk a tight rope regarding non-market solutions such as social housing or rent control; at once expressing support while also dismissing them as infeasible or potentially

harmful to the fundamental goal of production. For YIMBY, any organizing effort that questions the logic of development exacerbates the crisis.

My research also shows how the Housing Justice movement likewise attempts to redefine the crisis on their terms, in language that highlights housing's transformation from shelter to vehicle for investment. Together, these two movements construct the discourse of housing of Twitter. Whereas YIMBY discourse is repeated as a politically neutral "obvious truth" in mainstream media and discourse, Housing Justice discourse is marginalized as an ideologically motivated and therefore, less rigorous analysis. To understand why the YIMBY narrative has become dominant, I would return to Castells' observations that urban crises are defined through the eyes of a dominant set of social interests (Castells, 1983). In the case of housing, the neoclassical narrative serves a number of entrenched interests, most importantly development and finance capital for which loosened land use laws would open opportunities for the continued flow of capital. I also be the dominance of YIMBY discourse can be traced to its simplicity. The supply/demand narrative is intuitive and easier to comprehend than contradictions between housing's use value and its exchange value. The idea of housing as an investment has become so ingrained over the past half a century that it is difficult to consider an alternative. Despite this, Housing Justice continues its fight for relevance in the discursive space.

Housing Justice reframes YIMBYs' "aura of objectivity" as "dismissive authority" as they criticize YIMBY for marginalizing the opinions and lived experience of vulnerable renters. They challenge YIMBY for failing to acknowledge financialization as a cause of the inflation of land and housing prices. They also criticize YIMBY for proposing broad brush solutions which treat low-income renters as 'collateral damage.' Housing Justice impugns neoclassical economic

theory by casting skepticism on the idea that the housing market can work for the benefit of all and criticizes YIMBY for reducing the complex subject of housing into debates over zoning.

Marginalized Narratives

My research into the discourse of housing on Twitter demonstrates the ways in which YIMBY discourse marginalizes alternative narratives of the housing crisis. But what if these discourses hold important keys to the housing problem? In my research into Housing Justice and YIMBY framing, I realized that YIMBYs "obvious truths" do not hold up to scrutiny. My research also allowed me to see the crisis through the alternative lens of Housing Justice and to understand their critiques more fully. Throughout my research, I found convincing arguments that painted a vastly more complex picture of the housing problem than is explained in the YIMBY narrative. There may be many worthwhile critiques to explore, the one I found most compelling was narrative of financialization. The literature on financialization describes housing as a "wicked problem" in which significant parts of the electorate are invested in continued house price inflation: "House price inflation is not a discrete problem, but a key pillar of the structuring of neoliberal societies that is deeply embedded in their operation" (Gallent, 2019; Adkins, Cooper, and Konings, 2020: 88).

The financialization of housing refers to the processes by which land has become "the object of speculative lending and investment, resulting in land and housing prices separating themselves from growth and incomes in the wider economy" (Ryan-Collins et. al, 2017: 110). It highlights the ways in which easy access to capital has fundamentally transformed the nature of housing "from basic shelter…to its final manifestation as a store for wealth, investment, and income for individuals and upwards to national economies" (Gallent, 2019: 5). Scholars of housing

financialization point to the supply of money directed at housing as the driving force behind rapidly inflating land and housing prices. Aalbers concludes, “House prices did not skyrocket because demand increased faster than supply (although this can be a contributing factor) but because the supply of money directed towards housing went up, irrespective of the demand for either housing or money…If the price of money, namely the interest rate, is low enough, it will be used either to construct, develop, buy-up, rent out, sell or buy housing.” (Aalbers, 2016: 139). Ryan-Collins also finds that a driving force behind house price inflation in the UK has been a “relatively elastic supply of credit meeting a fixed supply of land along with increased speculative demand for homeownership” (Ryan-Collins, 2017: 117) Gallent laments the institutionalization of the YIMBY discourse into a policy response focused on supply. He adds that adding supply is part of “a bigger puzzle”, namely “an economy hooked on wealth extraction from land and property” (Gallent, 2019: 132).

YIMBY discourse obscures these structural economic factors completely. The movement has structured the terms of the housing debate narrowly around conversations of supply and demand in such a way that leaves little room for alternative explanations. Accepting the debate on YIMBY terms - that there is a shortage of housing which is leading to increasing prices - is a prerequisite for participation in the discussion altogether. To refute either of these points is to risk ridicule:

> *A convincing counter narrative to what we are working on would have to either argue that there is no shortage, or that shortage is a good thing, which are both impossible points to convincingly make.*
>
> (@sonjatrauss, 2017)

But to accept these terms leaves us with only one logical solution: to build more housing. By accepting YIMBY framing, we lose the ability to question the larger economic structures in

place outlined in the literature of financialization. We also lose the ability to question the deeper logic of private property ownership and the resulting wealth creation as a fundamental tenet of society. According to Aalbers, "aligning oneself with the build more agenda will typically do little to alleviate housing costs and housing-induced harm. It will rarely bring prices down, and it will rarely improve the housing conditions or the location of that housing for low and moderate-income individuals" (Aalbers, 2016: 144).

Connection to Power

The question at the outset of this project was, given the empirical uncertainty, how has the YIMBY narrative become the dominant way of conceptualizing the housing problem? My research has attempted to demonstrate the discursive techniques through which YIMBY marginalizes alternative narratives. But these techniques alone do not explain why this message has come to dominate political discourse. According to Hanssen and Saglie, "power structures affect how discourses are framed and may cause dominant discourses to legitimize some arguments and delegitimize others" (Hanssen and Saglie, 2011: 501). I argue that this narrative serves existing power structures by expanding opportunities for capital flow within the built environment and maintaining the status quo of financialized housing. The financial and political support received by YIMBYs should also give cause for concern. Their ability to attract financial support from tech companies and philanthropic institutions paints a picture of a movement with the winds of existing power structures at its sails. These organizations have enabled the fledgling movement to scale up quickly and become serious political players in state politics, especially in California (Dougherty, 2020; Yglesias, 2020; Kendall, 2018). Within two years of their founding in 2017, California YIMBY had taken in more than $6.3 million in funding according to publicly available online tax filings. Tech companies Yelp and Stripe have donated significant amounts of

money to YIMBY organizations like California YIMBY and its predecessor, the Bay Area Renter's Federation (Pender, 2018; Kendall, 2018). The Chan-Zuckerberg Initiative was an early funder of California YIMBY, as was Open Philanthropy, "the first major institutional funder of the YIMBY movement" (Klein, 2021). Open Philanthropy, founded by Facebook co-founder and billionaire Dustin Moskovitz and wife Cari Tuna, describes the evolution of YIMBY as "just something that was kind of new and weird and has now become a nationwide movement. And that was not how it was when we started funding it" (Ibid).

Since 2015, Open Philanthropy has provided nearly $11 million in grants to YIMBY organizations across the country: Abundant Housing Massachusetts, Better Boulder, California YIMBY, California Renters Legal Advocacy and Education Fund, East Bay Forward, Greater Greater Washington, Open New York, Seattle for Everyone, Sightline Institute, and YIMBY Law, including funding the national YIMBYTown conferences in 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 (openphilanthropy.org, 2022). Open Philanthropy's description of the housing problem mirrors YIMBY framing, focusing on zoning in high-cost cities as the root cause:

> "Local laws often prohibit the construction of dense new housing, leading to higher housing prices, especially in a few large high-wage metropolitan areas (e.g., New York, Boston, San Francisco, Seattle, and Washington D.C.). More permissive policy could contribute to both affordable housing and the continued growth of centers of economic activity" (openphilanthropy.org, 2022).

YIMBY discourse of the housing crisis serves vested power interests. The growing portion of the economy dependent on the circulation of capital into land – homeowners, mortgage originators, developers, investors, and the state itself — whom Stein calls the "Real Estate State" and Logan and Molotch the "Growth Machine" — all stand to benefit from loosened regulation of land use regimes and policies that promote 'growth' (Stein, 2019; Logan and Molotch, 2007). YIMBY renters comprise the third leg of what Tapp calls the "tech-real estate-renter nexus", a

relationship born out of mutual interest (Tapp, 2021: 12). According to Harvey, as the rent increases, workers demand higher wages, which cuts into capitalist profits. Forced to pay higher wages, capital may throw its weight behind workers pushing for lower housing costs in an effort to preserve their own bottom line.

> "…In much the same way that the proletariat frequently sided with rising industrial bourgeoisie against the landed interests in the early years of capitalism, so we often find capital in general siding with labor in the advanced capital societies against excessive appropriation of rent and rising costs of new development. The coalition is not forged altruistically but arises organically out of the relation between the wage rate and the costs of reproduction of labor power." (Harvey, 1976: 274)

Key Takeaways and Recommendations

- Planners must be cognizant of the role that language plays in shaping the construction of policy discourse and understand that power permeates all discourse. The field of urban planning is inherently political and communicative and therefore subject to influence and manipulation through discursive techniques.
- YIMBY discourse – the supply/demand narrative and its related frames - leads to cognitive closure on the issue of housing. This invisible exclusion of ideas from consideration may lead to planning and development processes being driven and by a dominant set of social interests and exacerbate existing inequalities.
- In order to avoid this, planners should carefully scrutinize the source of language in order to ask the questions: Who is doing the meaning making? Who benefits from this framing / rhetorical construction? Which ideas are left out or ignored? Are there other ways to conceive the problem? These guiding questions may help researchers and practitioners recognize (and ultimately challenge) hegemonic ways of thinking.

- Despite the hegemonic status of the supply/demand narrative, there is widespread academic debate about both the causes and potential solutions of the housing problem. Planners should by wary of explanations and solutions which fail to capture the complexity of the problem. Research into financialization, in particular, may hold important 'truths' for the housing debate and should be explored further.

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