INSTITUTIONAL EVICTORS

THE IMPACTS OF INSTITUTIONAL AND ABSENTEE OWNERSHIP ON EVICTION FILINGS IN MASSACHSUETTS

BACKGROUND

Image: Boston Globe

Housing instability trends have dramatically worsened over the past four years and particularly since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, which introduced temporary protective measures to support renters and homeowners alike. Since the erosion of these key support systems, rates of eviction filings have surpassed pre-pandemic averages and have remained elevated for over two consecutive years since August 2022.[1] In the two years since the end of pandemic-era protections, eviction trends across the state have varied widely, with some communities experiencing disproportionately high rates of eviction filings. The growth of tenant- and housing market-data analytics companies—such as RealPage—that have been at the center of rent-fixing controversies[2], have elevated the need among policy makers and researchers to explore the relationship between institutional and corporate ownership of rental housing and adverse housing outcomes.

This project aims to contribute to the growing body of research examining the relationship between corporate-institutional ownership and municipal eviction filing rates.[3,4,5] Moreover, this project attempts to expand on this line of inquiry by including an analysis of absentee ownership–defined as properties that are not owner occupied–and eviction filing outcomes.

METHODS

Examining the relationship between institutional ownership, absentee ownership and eviction filings required constructing a dataset containing all of these variables at the municipal level. However, eviction filing data is notoriously difficult to access and there are no existing datasets of institutional and absentee ownership available for Massachusetts. An HTML scraper was developed in R using the ***rvest*** package to harvest monthly eviction filing data from the MassLandlords website. Monthly data for the study period (Jan. 2024 to Dec. 2024) was summarized at the municipal level and filing rates were calculated by dividing the total eviction filings by the number of renter-occupied households (2023 5-year ACS estimates) and multiplied by 1,000 to give a filing rate per thousand renter households.

The institutional ownership variable was developed by processing ownership data available in the MassGIS Property Tax Parcels dataset in an R script. The script detected keywords that indicated institutional ownership, such as “LLC,” “LP,” “CORP,” “INC,” and more **(Fig. 1)**.

SITE_ADDR	OWNER_1	Institutional Owner?
23 Main Street, Boston	**Ludwin Properties LLC**	**TRUE**
7 Pleasant Road, Winthrop	Adam G Savoie	FALSE
49 Ambrose Road, Revere	**Cedar Investment Group LTD**	**TRUE**
5b East Street, Springfield	Roberta Castro	FALSE

Figure 1: *Identifying parcels owned by institutional or corporate landlords (**Note:** Names are fake)*

Additionally, to specify the analysis to residential parcels, MHP’s Residensity parcel dataset was joined to the property tax parcel data. The Residensity dataset contains standardized use codes and use descriptions for all 2+ million parcels in Massachusetts, allowing for more robust filtering to exclude parcels with non-residential uses (commercial, industrial, recreation, etc.). A summary variable of the percent of institutionally owned parcels was computed for each municipality.

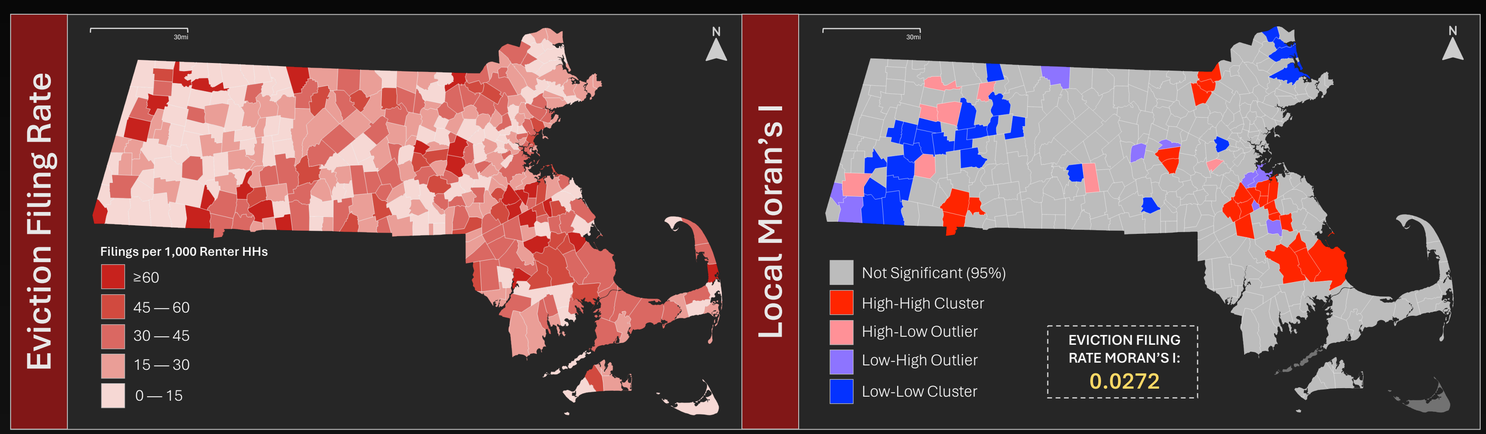
The absentee ownership variable was developed by comparing the owner address and site address fields in the Property Tax Parcels dataset to evaluate whether these addresses matched. Matching addresses indicated owner occupancy, so the absentee owner variable flagged non-matching addresses **(Figure 2)**. A summary variable of the percent of absentee-owned parcels was computed for each city.

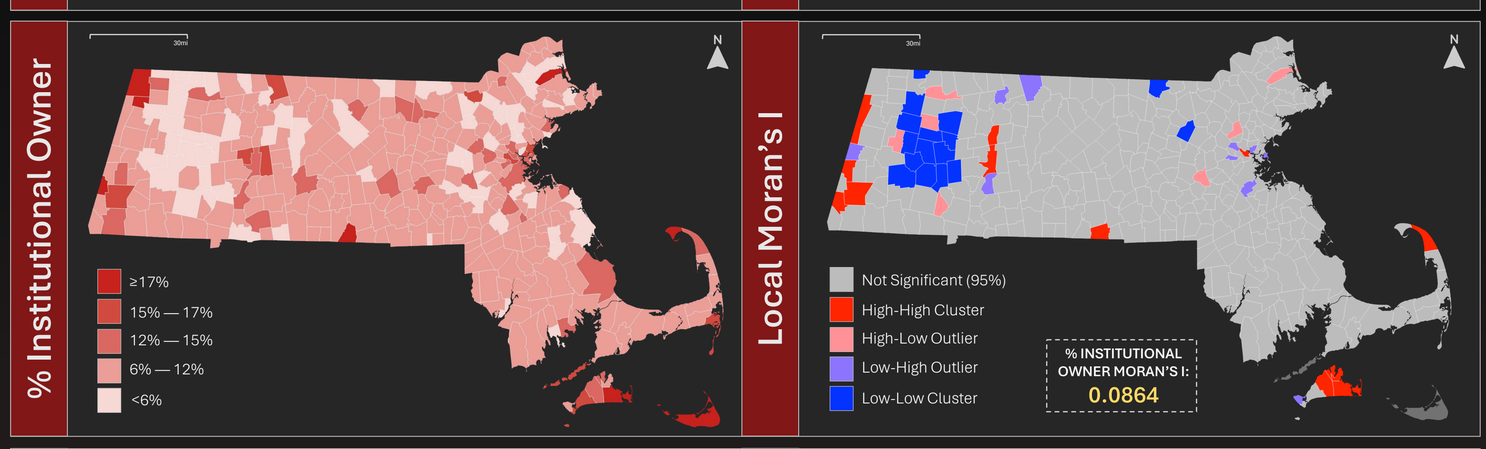
SITE_ADDR		OWNER_ADDR	Absentee Owner?
7 Pleasant Road, Winthrop		7 Pleasant Road, Winthrop	FALSE
49 Ambrose Road, Revere	**≠**	**339 North Avenue, Rochester**	**TRUE**
43 Garnet Avenue, Falmouth	**≠**	**35 Pine Bay Lane, Agawam**	**TRUE**
5b East Street, Springfield		5b East Street, Springfield	FALSE

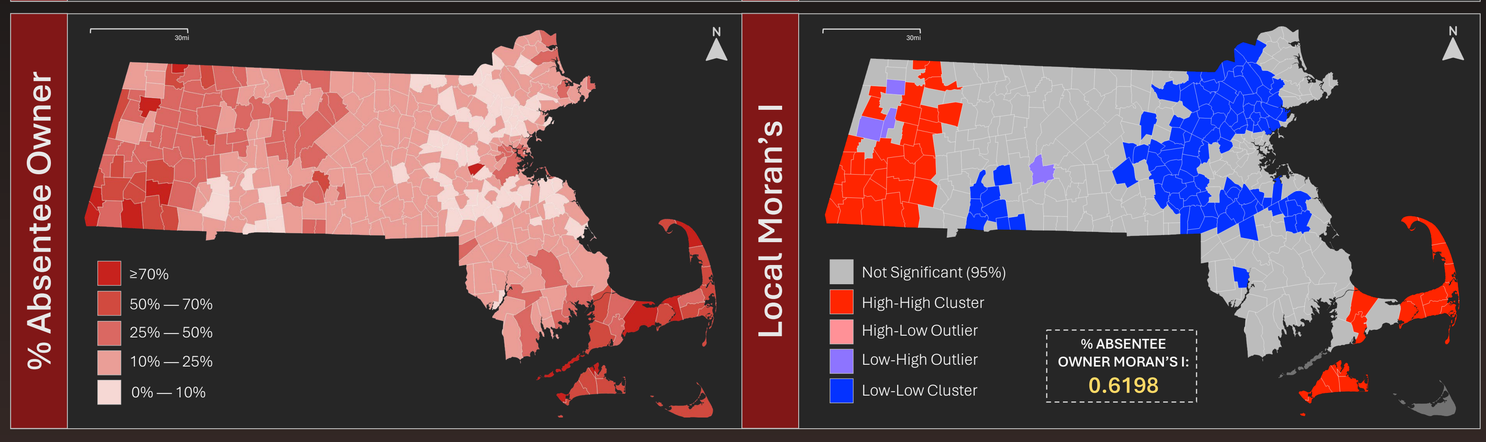
Figure 2: *Identifying parcels owned by absentee landlords (**Note:** Addresses are fake)*

Regression analyses were performed to examine the relationship between institutional ownership, absentee ownership and eviction filings, with additional economic and demographic variables added based on their relevance to eviction risk and property ownership structures. These additional variables include the percent of households experiencing rent burden (defined as paying over 30% of their income towards rent), percentage of single parent households, and average household size. Basic outlier analysis was performed to remove municipalities with eviction filing rates beyond the 99th percentile. These cities had very few eviction filings (often only one), but their filing rates were inflated due to their small number of renter-occupied households.

An exploratory OLS regression model was used to assess the linear relationship between these variables. A natural log transformation was applied to the eviction filing rate to address skewness in the dependent variable. Diagnostic testing of the OLS model using Lagrange Multiplier tests revealed spatial autocorrelation in the residuals, with significance in the adjusted RS lag term, suggesting that a spatial lag model would be appropriate. A spatial lag model using a first-order queen’s contiguity weight matrix was implemented to account for the influence of eviction patterns in neighboring municipalities. The ***spatialreg*** package in R was used for the spatial lag analysis.







RESULTS

	OLS Model		Spatial Lag Model		
Variable	**Coefficient**	**Probability**	**Direct**	**Indirect**	**Total**
% Institutional Owner	0.2872	0.0011	0.2570 **	0.0700 *	0.3271 **
% Absentee Owner	-0.0829	2.53E-06	-0.0655 ***	-0.0178 *	-0.0834 ***
% Rent Burden (>30%)	0.1112	4.06E-07	0.1137 ***	0.0310 *	0.1446 ***
% Single Parent Household	0.1478	0.0123	0.1491 **	0.0406 •	0.1897 *
Average Household Size	0.9902	0.3943	0.5799	0.1580	0.7379
R^2	0.25		0.22		
AIC	2139		2131		
Figure 3: *Regression Results*	***Spatial lag model signif. codes:*** *0 ‘***’ 0.001 ‘**’ 0.01 ‘*’ 0.05 ‘•’ 0.1 ‘ ’ 1*				

The Local Moran’s I analysis of eviction filings shows weak but statistically significant positive spatial autocorrelation in eviction filing rates. Notable high-high clusters include Randolph, Stoughton, and surrounding communities; towns in Plymouth County, including Middleborough and Carver; Lowell and surrounding towns, and; towns in Greater Springfield, including West Springfield and Southwick. Institutional ownership also exhibits positive spatial autocorrelation, however with few notable high-high clusters. A low-low cluster can be observed across towns to the West of the Pioneer Valley. Absentee ownership shows very strong spatial autocorrelation with high-high clusters in the Berkshires, Nantucket, and along Cape Cod. These trends are likely representative of the many vacation homes in these communities. Low-low clusters were observed in the Greater Boston and Greater Springfield suburbs.

The OLS and spatial lag models illuminate some of the underlying relationships between institutional ownership, absentee ownership, and eviction filing rates **(Fig. 3)**. Both models suggest that **communities with higher proportions of corporate and institutional owners are positively associated with eviction filings.** The OLS model finds that a one percentage point increase in institutional ownership is associated with a 33 percent increase in eviction filing rates. A spatial lag model was used to estimate possible spillover effects, where eviction filing trends in one city may influence nearby cities, possibly due to shared business practices of corporate landlords and bias in regional housing courts. The spatial lag model suggests that **a one percentage point increase in institutional ownership in one community is associated with a 29 percent increase in filing rates in the same city and a 7 percent increase in filing rates in neighboring communities**.

Conversely, **the percentage of absentee landlords exhibits a significant and negative association with eviction filing rates**. The OLS models suggests that a one percentage point increase in absentee ownership is associated with an 8 percent decrease in eviction filing rates. While this finding was initially surprising, it also seems logical since many of the communities with high proportions of absentee landlords also appear to be vacation communities, as noted in the interpretation of the Local Moran’s I analysis. This finding could also be supported by a logical framework suggesting that absentee landlords may have a more hands-off or informal approach to managing their properties, and therefore less likely to pursue eviction. Further analysis is needed examining the specific relationship between absentee owners who are actively renting out income properties and excludes the more prominent vacation home dynamic likely being captured by the percent-absentee owner variable in this analysis. Lastly, the OLS model demonstrated that communities with higher percentages of rent-burdened households and single parent households were associated with higher rates of eviction filing.

These results suggest that institutional owners may have more aggressive eviction filing practices that contribute to higher rates of housing instability. Policies which increase scrutiny of institutional evictors, such as mandatory public reporting of eviction filings and “just-cause” eviction laws may help reduce the frequency of eviction filings by institutional owners. Finally, finding alternatives to eviction filings, such as pre-filing mediation and efficient rental assistance programs would better support tenants experiencing housing instability, particularly single-parent households and households experiencing severe rent burden.

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References

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2. Greene, J. (2025, April 9). RealPage goes on the offense in lawsuit against city of Berkeley over AI rent pricing law. Reuters.
3. McElroy, E. (2023). DIS/POSSESSORY DATA POLITICS: From Tenant Screening to AntiEviction Organizing. Int. J. Urban Reg. Res., 47(1), 54–70.
4. Raymond, E. L., Duckworth, R., Miller, B., Lucas, M., & Pokharel, S. (2018). Housing Insecurity in CorporateOwned SingleFamily Rentals. Cityscape, 20(3), 159–188. JSTOR.
5. Weiss, B. (2023). Corporate Consolidation of Rental Housing & the Case for National Rent Stabilization. Wash. UL Rev., 101, 553.

Map Data Sources

1. MassGIS Data: Property Tax Parcels (March 2025)
2. MassLandlords: Massachusetts Eviction Data and Housing Court Statistics (Jan. – Dec. 2024)

Projection: Massachusetts State Plane Coordinate System *(EPSG 26896)*

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