

Uprooted: Evictions in Wisconsin

Rental housing evictions are pervasive in some Wisconsin communities, destabilizing families and neighborhoods. Our research finds eviction rates vary widely across the state and are particularly concentrated in southeast Wisconsin, where an effort to address the problem has begun in Milwaukee.

Last month, we published [No Place Like Home](#), a report that documents Milwaukee County’s high rate of rental housing evictions and presents strategies for preventing them in the future. As detailed in Matthew Desmond’s Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *Evicted*, which focused on Milwaukee, evictions often have a cascading effect. They can lead to job losses, increased school absences, homelessness, and other impacts on the entire community.

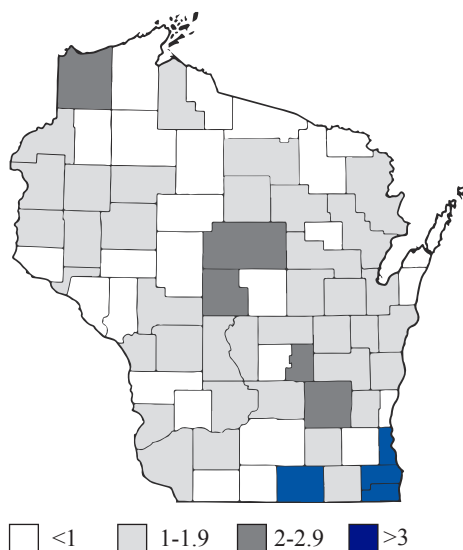
Recently, Desmond and his “Eviction Lab” team at Princeton University produced a website with data on evictions in counties, cities, and census tracts nationwide. Using the data, we now explore the extent of this problem throughout Wisconsin. We primarily look at eviction rates, which are the percentage of renter households in a community evicted in a given year.

Evictions Higher in Southeast

In 2016, three of the four counties with the highest eviction rates in Wisconsin were densely populated counties in the southeast corner of the state (Racine, Kenosha, and Milwaukee) and the fourth was nearby Rock County. (See Figure 1.) At least 3% of renter households in those counties were evicted that year. The data show those four counties have consistently had eviction rates over 3% dating back to at least 2010, while no other county broke the 3% mark during that period.

Racine and Kenosha counties had the highest eviction rates in the state in

Fig 1: Eviction Rates Highest in Southeast
Evictions per 100 Renter Households (2016)



Sources: Eviction Lab, U.S. Census Bureau

2016, but Milwaukee County had the highest number of evictions (6,313). Milwaukee County also experienced a disproportionate number of evictions; its population accounted for about 17% of the state’s total in 2016, but its 6,313 evictions comprised more than 42% of the state’s total that year.

Five less-populated counties scattered throughout the state had eviction rates of at least 2% in 2016: Wood, Douglas, Dodge, Marathon, and Green Lake. All other counties had rates below 2%.

Eviction Rates and Poverty

Evictions are often associated with poverty, but the Eviction Lab’s data show not all counties with high eviction

rates have high poverty rates. In fact, among the 10 counties with the highest eviction rates in 2016, half had poverty rates above the statewide average and half below. (See Table 1.)

An important contributing factor is that evictions are not evenly distributed throughout each county. Rather, they are often overwhelmingly concentrated in a small number of municipalities or even neighborhoods. For example, among Milwaukee County’s 296 census tracts, 19 had extremely high eviction rates of 10% or higher in 2016, while 85 others had rates below 1%. The census tracts with the highest eviction rates are all high-poverty census tracts on the city of Milwaukee’s north and northwest sides.

Also striking is that counties with the highest eviction rates are not necessarily the same as those with the highest percentages of rent-burdened households. As we explained in [Focus #18-2018](#), a household is considered rent-burdened if it spends more than 30% of its income on rent. Only four counties had both eviction and rent burden rates above statewide averages in 2016: Racine, Kenosha, Milwaukee, and Rock. Data on rent-burdened households represent five-year averages (2012-16) and are the most recent figures available from the U.S. Census Bureau for all Wisconsin counties.

One reason some counties with high percentages of rent-burdened households may not have high eviction rates is that several have large student popu-

Table 1: Comparison of Ten Counties with Highest Eviction Rates (2016)

County	Eviction Rate %	Total Evictions	Renter Households	Poverty Rate %	Rent Burden %
Racine	3.86%	937	24,294	9.2%	49.7%
Kenosha	3.47%	748	21,578	11.0%	51.6%
Milwaukee	3.26%	6,313	193,601	17.2%	52.9%
Rock	3.23%	645	19,995	11.6%	46.9%
Wood	2.25%	206	9,170	7.2%	42.7%
Douglas	2.23%	139	6,225	11.7%	44.6%
Dodge	2.19%	214	9,788	6.1%	40.8%
Marathon	2.17%	335	15,406	7.2%	42.6%
Green Lake	2.02%	41	2,028	7.8%	36.9%
Manitowoc	1.99%	181	9,085	6.4%	36.1%
Fond du Lac	1.97%	244	12,406	6.5%	42.1%
Wisconsin	1.89%	14,871	787,739	8.6%	46.7%

Sources: Eviction Lab, U.S. Census Bureau

lations, including Dane, Eau Claire, and La Crosse. College students may be more likely to have family support that allows them to afford rent despite low income.

Solutions Sought

An eviction prevention task force formed earlier this year in Milwaukee County plans to pursue several strategies for reducing evictions that may have relevance for other Wisconsin communities, such as establishing a resource center similar to

one in Madison where both tenants and landlords can seek guidance about housing problems; increasing tenant-landlord mediation services to keep housing disputes out of court; and expanding rent assistance programs for renters facing temporary financial emergencies. Addressing evictions is a challenging task that may require greater public and philanthropic resources, but it is also one that could pay dividends in helping to alleviate poverty, improve student outcomes, and reduce homelessness. □

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Capitol notes

■ Broad legislation approved on Dec. 5 and now before Gov. Scott Walker would impact state income and sales taxes. As detailed in [Focus #14-2018](#), a June U.S. Supreme Court decision led to Wisconsin starting on Oct. 1 to collect taxes on more sales of goods shipped into the state. The bill would codify the ruling and ensure the 2019 implementation of existing law that the sales tax increase be used to lower income taxes by the same amount.

The Wayfair decision was previously

estimated to raise state sales tax collections—and lower income taxes—by \$120 million a year. The ruling is now expected to increase sales taxes and decrease income taxes by \$60 million annually.

■ According to data from The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, high school graduates in Wisconsin are projected to decline by 6.6% between 2013-14 and 2031-32. Fueled by declining birth rates and immigration, this overall figure masks wide variations in

projected numbers of graduates by gender, race, and ethnicity. The number of graduates is projected to fall by 10.6% for black males and 6.8% for black females. Meanwhile, Hispanic graduates are projected to increase by 39.2% overall. Potential local impacts could include school closures and consolidations, expansion of online instruction, cuts to school budgets, or increases in voter referenda to exceed state caps on school district revenue and increase property taxes.