Measuring Displacement Vulnerability

A Multi-Criteria Analysis of Housing Affordability

Near the Obama Presidential Center

Jade Nichols

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Introduction

Research Scope

As the Obama Presidential Center (OPC) rises from Chicago's Jackson Park, so do concerns about displacement in surrounding neighborhoods. This research paper examines the spatial patterns of displacement vulnerability in three South Side neighborhoods closest to the OPC - Hyde Park, Woodlawn, and South Shore - as they face mounting development pressure from the $830 million project. Using a multi-criteria decision analysis (MCDA) framework, this study analyzes block group level census data from 2016-2022 in order to identify areas that are most at risk of residential displacement and a decrease in housing affordability. This is measured by a 1-5 vulnerability score, which is calculated using a weighted sum of five criteria: Vacancy rate, turnover rate, distance from the OPC, and the percentage of rent burdened and severely burdened renters. The primary research question investigates and compares how vulnerable Hyde Park, Woodlawn, and South Shore are to OPC-related housing market pressure and identifies which specific block groups show the highest displacement potential. Supporting research examines neighborhood affordability trends compared to broader Cook County patterns, the relationships between changing racial demographics and housing pressure, and comparing these findings to the current residential worries of future housing affordability. By combining quantitative spatial analysis with community perspectives documented in local media, this timely research aims to provide actionable insights about displacement vulnerability patterns as the OPC nears its completion date. The findings can help inform targeted interventions to preserve housing affordability and community stability in these historically significant South Side neighborhoods.

The Obama Presidential Center

The Obama Presidential Center (OPC), currently under construction in Olmsted's renowned Jackson Park, is envisioned as a "global center for change" (Obama Foundation). Selected for Chicago's South Side in July 2016, this 19.3-acre development is designed to be more than a memorial – it aims to serve as an active community hub and catalyst for economic development (Obama Foundation, 2016). Managed by the non-profit Obama Foundation, the $830 million project was strategically placed due to the former president's connections to the area. Barack Obama taught at the University of Chicago Law School for 12 years, while Michelle Obama grew up in nearby South Shore and later worked at the University of Chicago Medical Center (Alcalay).

The OPC campus is planned to feature several interconnected facilities: an eight-story museum, a Chicago Public Library branch, an auditorium, athletic facilities, recording studios, meeting spaces, and public gardens (Obama Foundation). Unlike traditional presidential libraries, more than half of the space will be freely accessible to the public, emphasizing its role as a community resource. The project is estimated to attract 700,000 annual visitors and generate more than $3 billion in long-term economic impact, creating over 5,000 direct and indirect jobs (Chicago.gov). Construction began in September 2021 after several delays, with completion now scheduled for 2026. This timeline has shaped the methodology of this research, which seeks to understand how the site announcement and early construction phases have affected surrounding communities. As the first presidential center to be located in the heart of an urban community, the OPC represents a unique opportunity to study how a cultural institution impacts the immediate neighborhood context (Obama Foundation, 2016).

Displacement Concerns

The announcement of the OPC has sparked intense debate about displacement in Chicago's South Side, particularly in Woodlawn and South Shore. Although Hyde Park is also adjacent to the OPC and shares similar building stock, there is a stark difference in economic vitality and racial makeup. While Hyde Park has benefited from substantial private and institutional investment, the neighboring communities have seen little impact, despite proximity to major institutions, such as the Museum of Science and Industry (Saunders). Chicago's history of segregation likely plays a key role, as Woodlawn and South Shore transitioned to predominantly Black communities in the '60s and '70s, which now accounts for the large racial discrepancy between these two neighborhoods and Hyde Park (Saunders). Despite Barack Obama's 2018 assertion that gentrification concerns were premature - suggesting his "grandchildren might have to worry about that" - community data tells a different story (Rios). Property values in South Shore, where 77% of residents are renters and 92% are Black, increased by 48% between 2020 and 2021 alone (Quigley). Local organizers are urging Chicago officials to protect renters from displacement through measures like home repair funding, rental relief, and eviction protection. The Obama Community Benefits Coalition (CBA), an alliance of grassroots groups, successfully campaigned for housing protections in Woodlawn after a six-year effort and is now focusing on South Shore (Rios). Their advocacy led to significant community support, with 80% of voters in nearby precincts backing a referendum that would implement protections (Quigley). The tension between the OPC's promised economic benefits and the community's displacement fears creates an urgent need to understand which areas are most vulnerable to housing pressure – a question that this data-driven research begins to answer.

Literature Review

Existing research on the Obama Presidential Center has primarily focused on political and institutional dynamics rather than quantitative spatial analysis of displacement risk. Fennelly's study of the OPC as an anchor institution demonstrates how large cultural projects can override local community visions, and she dives into the political tensions between developers and residents through stakeholder interviews and planning document analysis (Fennelly). Similarly, Stutz's research explores how the Obama Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) Coalition has advocated for low-income Black residents at risk of displacement, highlighting the complex geographic and social dynamics at play in development negotiations (Stutz). While these studies provide valuable insights into the political and social dimensions of the OPC development, there remains a need for data-driven analysis of displacement vulnerability patterns. Multi-criteria decision analysis (MCDA) offers a promising framework, having been successfully applied to various urban vulnerability studies. For example, Alizadeh et al. demonstrated MCDA's effectiveness in evaluating seismic vulnerability of residential areas by combining multiple risk factors through weighted criteria and GIS analysis (Alizadeh et al.) More directly relevant to displacement analysis, Cooks employed an MCDA approach to study gentrification in the Hudson Valley, creating a "Gentrification Score" that analyzed neighborhood change at the block group level between 2011-2019 (Cooks). This research addresses a critical gap in the literature by applying MCDA methodology to forecast displacement pressure related specifically to the three neighborhoods that could be impacted by OPC development. While previous studies have documented community concerns and political dynamics, no research has yet attempted to quantitatively map vulnerability patterns in the surrounding neighborhoods.

Research Methods

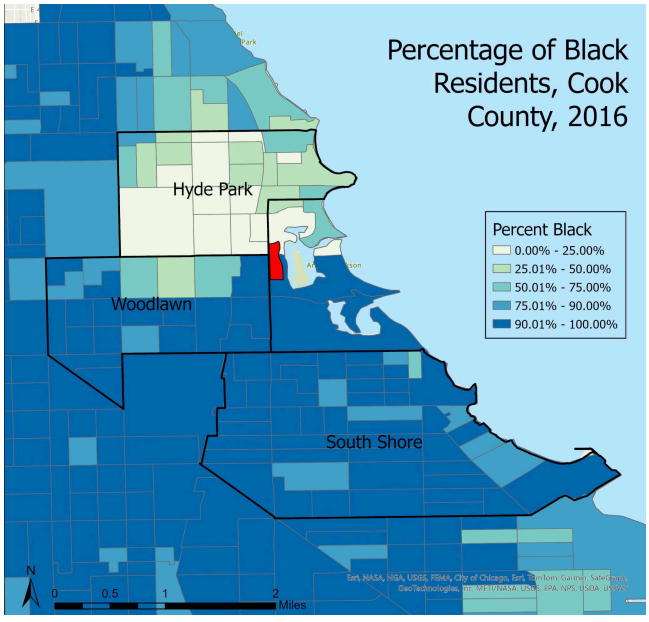
Study Area

This study focuses on three neighborhoods surrounding the Obama Presidential Center: Hyde Park, Woodlawn, and South Shore (Map 1). These neighborhoods, located within Cook County, Illinois, were selected due to their immediate proximity to the OPC site in Jackson Park and their distinct socioeconomic characteristics. Hyde Park, home to the University of Chicago, has historically maintained economic stability, while Woodlawn and South Shore have experienced disinvestment and racial differences. These contrasts provide an opportunity to examine how the OPC's impact may vary across different neighborhood contexts. The analysis centers specifically on renters, who comprise 27% of Hyde Park residents, 78% of Woodlawn residents, and 77% of South Shore residents. Renters typically have



Map 1. Study Area Context Map.

less housing security than homeowners and are more susceptible to rapid market changes through rent increases, building sales, or conversion of rental units to owner-occupied housing. The temporal scope of data change analysis is between 2016 and 2022, which captures neighborhood changes from the OPC's site selection announcement in Jackson Park (July 2016) through the early construction phase, using the most recent American Community Survey 5-year estimates available. This timeframe allows us to analyze how the anticipation and initial development of the OPC has influenced housing market dynamics in surrounding areas. The racial composition of these neighborhoods (Map 2) reveals stark patterns of segregation that contextualize current displacement concerns. South Shore, the largest with 50,768 residents and 17,742 rental units, is predominantly Black (93.6%), as is Woodlawn (85.0% Black, 23,808 residents). In contrast, Hyde Park (26,673 residents) shows greater racial diversity with 29.1% Black residents, though all three neighborhoods exceed Cook County's overall Black population percentage of 23.9%.



Map 2. Percentage of Black Residents, Cook County, 2016.

This demographic pattern reflects Chicago's history of racial segregation and raises particular concerns about the displacement of Black residents, who have historically been disproportionately impacted by large-scale development projects in Chicago. However, note this is simply a framework from which to analyze the vulnerability scores of the target neighborhoods, and thus was not included as a criterion in our MCDA framework since race alone does not determine displacement risk. Rather, we focus on economic and housing market indicators that directly measure housing pressure and affordability challenges.

MCDA Framework

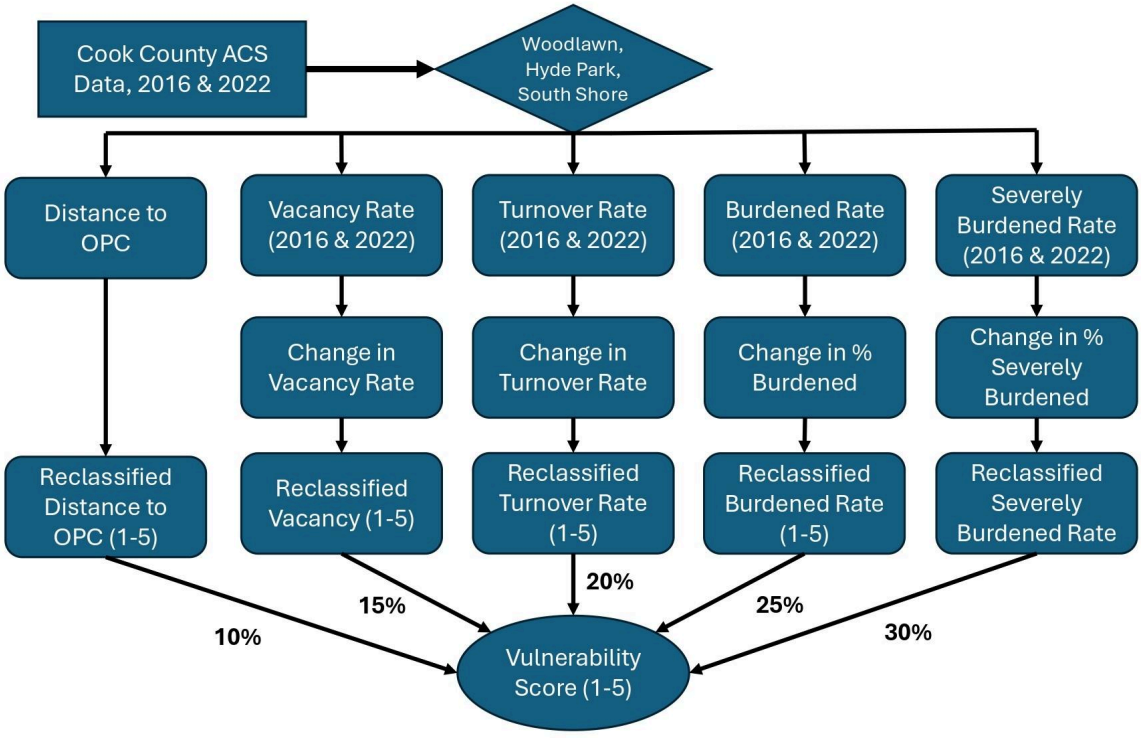


Figure 1. Multi Criteria Decision Analysis Flow Chart

To assess displacement vulnerability, this study employs a Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA) framework that combines weighted housing market indicators into a single vulnerability score for each block group (Figure 1). The MCDA approach allows us to evaluate displacement risk through multiple dimensions while weighing the relative importance of different factors. Our framework focuses on three key dimensions of housing vulnerability: housing affordability stress, population stability, and market conditions. Housing affordability stress, weighted at 55% of the total vulnerability score, is measured through changes in rent-burdened households between 2016-2022. This metric is split between moderately rent-burdened households (spending 30-49% of income on rent) and severely rent-burdened households (spending 50%+ of income on rent). The former is weighted at 30%, the latter at 25%. Increases in rent-burdened households indicate growing affordability challenges and higher displacement risk. Population stability, measured by changes in turnover rate and weighted at 20%, captures how frequently residents are moving. For our purposes, this was calculated as the percentage of residents that moved in within the previous year (2015 or later for 2016 and 2021 or later for 2022). Higher turnover rates can signal housing instability and market pressures, while also potentially enabling rapid demographic changes. Finally, market conditions and location factors comprise the remaining 25% of the vulnerability score. This includes changes in rental vacancy rates (15%) and distance to the OPC (10%). The former was calculated as vacant units for rent / (renter occupied units + vacant units for rent), illustrating the proportion of total rental housing stock that is vacant. Declining vacancy rates can indicate increasing market demand for rental units in an area, while proximity to the OPC captures potential direct impacts from the development. The change in each metric (delta) between 2016 and 2022 was then

measured and standardized on a 1-5 scale, with higher scores indicating greater vulnerability. Table 1 below demonstrates the bounds used for these reclassifications (Reclassify Field tool in GIS), based on the ranges for the changes in the five criteria (except OPC distance, which stays constant). The difference in bounds were approximately calculated by dividing the total range by 5, keeping whole numbers.

Criteria	**Range**	Upper Bound: 1	Upper Bound: 2	Upper Bound: 3	Upper Bound: 4	Upper Bound: 5
Δ VacRate	-37% +19%	20%	8%	-4%	-16%	-28%
Δ TurnoverRate	-24% +32%	-12%	-1%	11%	22%	32%
Δ 30-49_Rate	-54% +50%	-33%	-12%	9%	30%	50%
Δ 50plus_Rate	-70% +80%	-40%	-10%	20%	50%	80%

Table 1. Multi Criteria Decision Analysis Reclassification Bounds for Criteria

Data Sourcing, Cleaning, and Preparation

Data Sourcing

This analysis primarily relies on American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates at the block group level for 2016 and 2022, accessed through Social Explorer. Block groups, the smallest geographical unit for which the Census Bureau publishes sample data, provide sufficient granularity to analyze neighborhood-level changes while maintaining statistical reliability. The following variables were selected to measure housing vulnerability:

Housing Market Indicators:

- Vacancy status by type of vacancy
- Median gross rent
- Year householder moved into unit

Housing Affordability Metrics:

- Median household income
- Number of renter-occupied units by percent of household income spent on rent
- Percentage of renter-occupied units by percent of household income spent on rent

Demographic Context:

- Total population
- Population by race

Geographic boundary data was obtained from multiple sources. Neighborhood boundaries for Hyde Park, Woodlawn, and South Shore were downloaded from the Chicago Data Portal through ArcGIS Online. The Cook County boundary shapefile, used for broader context and comparison, was also acquired through ArcGIS Online. The OPC site location was manually digitized as a polygon feature class based on construction plans and aerial imagery.

Data Cleaning and Preparation

The data preparation process involved several steps across Excel and ArcGIS Pro to create the final vulnerability assessment dataset. First, ACS data tables were cleaned in Excel by removing unnecessary rows and columns, inserting an ID field, standardizing field names, and calculating preliminary metrics (e.g., vacancy rates, turnover rates). Block group level data from 2016 and 2022 were matched using the GEOID as the unique identifier, allowing for temporal comparison. In ArcGIS Pro, the Cook County block group shapefile was joined to the cleaned Excel data using GEOID as the join field. The resulting dataset was then clipped to the study

area using a merged shapefile of Hyde Park, Woodlawn, and South Shore neighborhood boundaries. Additionally, the near tool was used to calculate the euclidean distance from block group centroids to the OPC site, the Explore Statistics tool was used to determine distributions and averages for variable classification, the reclassify field was used to standardize the criterion to a 1-5 score, and the Calculate Field tool was used to compute the final weighted vulnerability score for each block group. Due to high margins of error or low response rates, some block groups had incomplete data, particularly for median household income metrics. Block groups where the total reported households paying rent did not sum to 100% of renter-occupied units were flagged for potential reliability issues. The final dataset includes 94 block groups across the three neighborhoods (22 in Hyde Park, 23 in Woodlawn, 49 in South Shore). To maintain transparency about data reliability, block groups with missing or potentially unreliable data are noted in the analysis results.

Data Description and Transformation

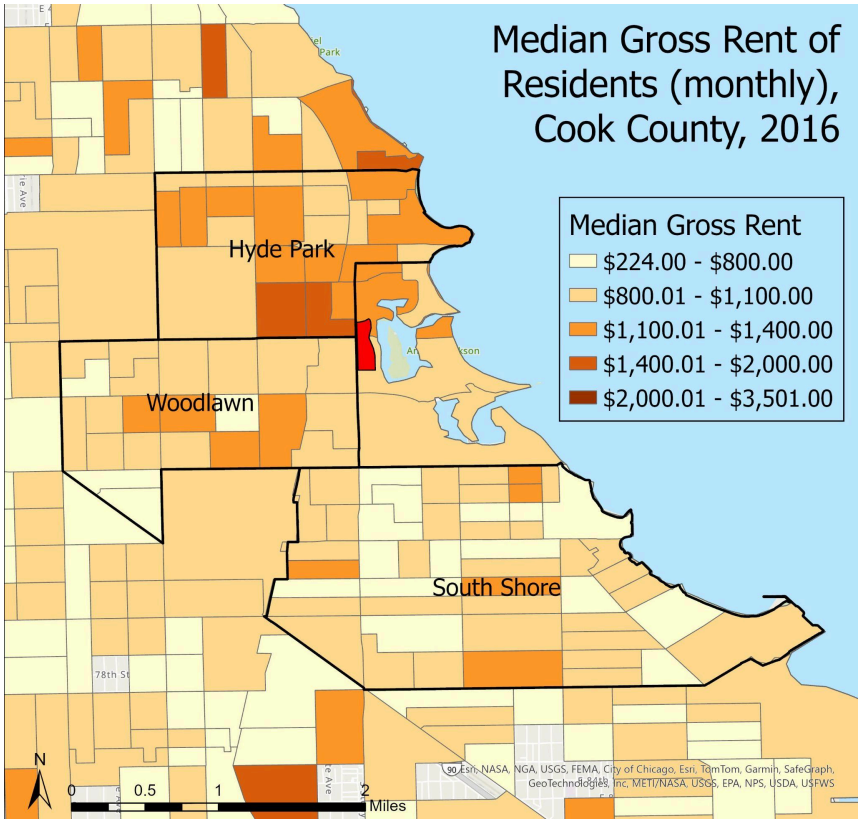
Baseline Statistics

The 2016 baseline conditions reveal stark socioeconomic disparities between the three study neighborhoods and significant housing affordability challenges. Hyde Park's median household income ($52,308) closely matched Cook County's ($55,677), while Woodlawn ($20,361) and South Shore ($24,070) reported less than half these levels. These income disparities are particularly concerning given the housing cost burden in these communities. The spatial distribution of median gross rents (Map 3) shows highest rents concentrated in Hyde Park ($1,103), exceeding the county median ($980), while Woodlawn ($883) and South Shore ($875)

had lower but still substantial rents given their income levels. This rent-to-income mismatch is reflected in severe rent burden rates (households spending 50%+ of income on rent), which were notably higher in South Shore (37.9%), Woodlawn (33.1%), and Hyde Park (31.7%) compared to Cook County's 25.7%. Moderate rent burden rates (30-49% of income) were more consistent across geographies, ranging from 19.7% to 22.3%. Market indicators suggest underlying housing instability across all three neighborhoods. Rental vacancy rates were more than double the county average of 5%, reaching 12.4% in South Shore, 10.9% in Woodlawn, and 9.7% in Hyde Park. Turnover rates varied significantly, with Hyde Park showing the highest resident mobility (10.2% compared to Cook County's 9%), while Woodlawn (6.2%) and South Shore (7.5%) had lower turnover despite their high vacancy rates. These baseline conditions—particularly the combination of high vacancy rates, severe rent burden, and income disparities—suggest these neighborhoods were already experiencing housing market stress before the OPC announcement.

Criteria (2016)	**Hyde Park**	**Woodlawn**	**South Shore**	**Cook County**
Median Household Income	$52,308	$20,361	$24,070	$55,677
Median Gross Rent	$1,103	$883	$875	$980
Rental Vacancy Rate	9.7%	10.9%	12.4%	5%
Turnover Rate	10.2%	6.2%	7.5%	9%
% of Rent Burdened Renters	21.3%	19.7%	22.2%	22.3%
% of Severely Rent Burdened Renters	31.7%	33.1%	37.9%	25.7%

Table 2. 2016 criteria figures for Hyde Park, Woodlawn, South Shore, and Cook County.



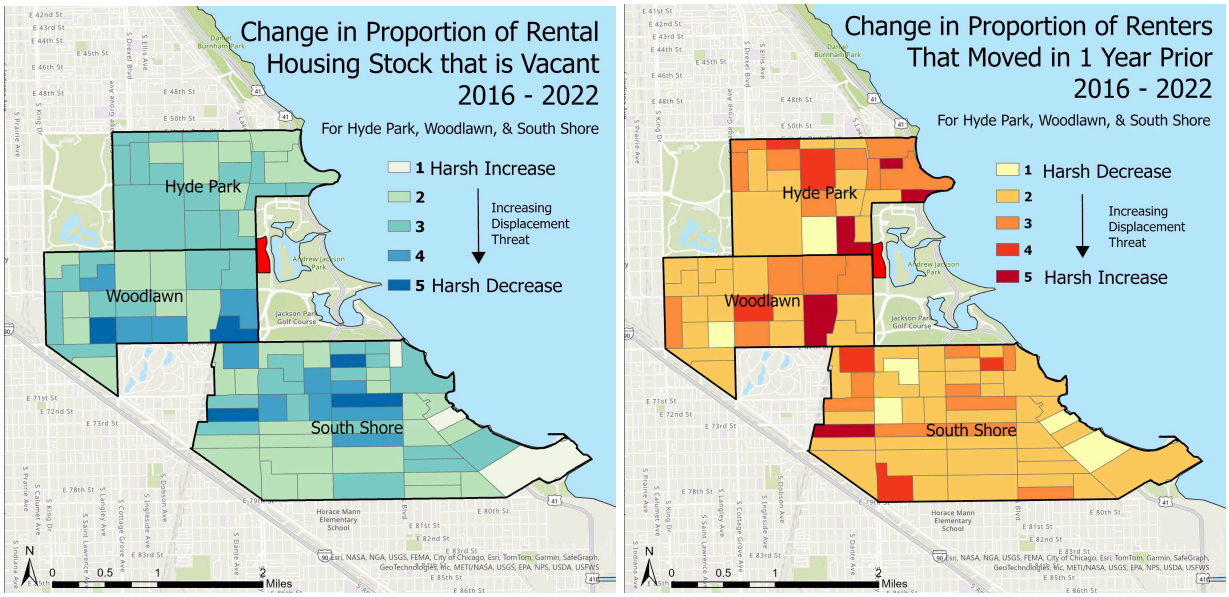
Map 3. Median gross rent (monthly), Cook County, 2016.

Analysis & Results

Temporal Changes

Analysis of the changes between 2016 and 2022 reveals significant shifts in housing market dynamics across the study area. The average change in percentage points for each criteria in each neighborhood are shown in table 3, with concerning figures bolded. All three neighborhoods experienced alarming substantial decreases in vacancy rates, with South Shore showing the most dramatic decline (-7.1%), followed by Hyde Park (-5.2%) and Woodlawn

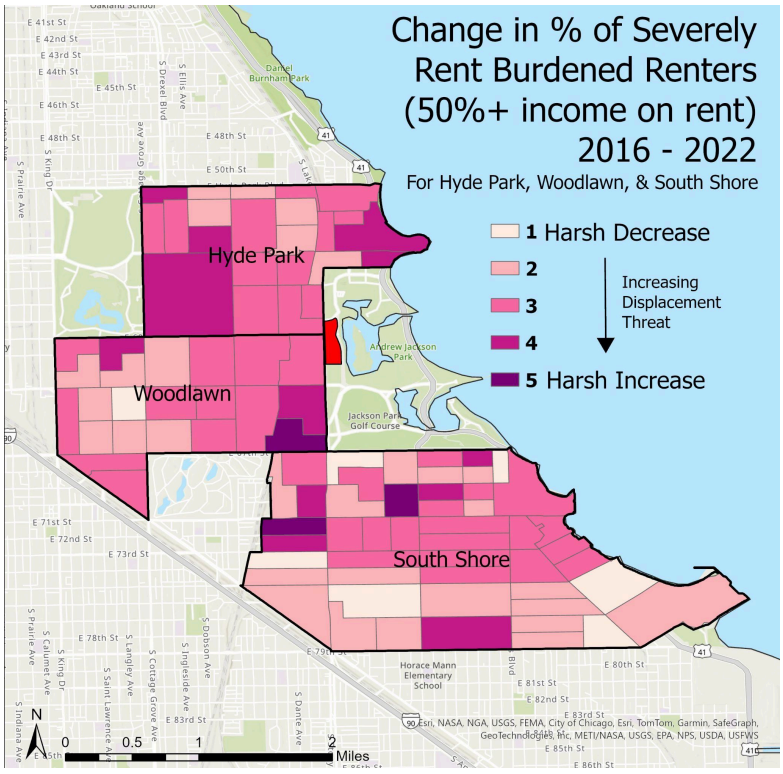
(-4.5%), as shown in Map 4, with 3 of South Shore's block groups having a level 5 decrease in vacancy rate. These decreases, bringing rates closer to the county average, suggest increasing housing interest across the study area, especially in Woodlawn and South Shore. Median rents rose substantially in all three neighborhoods, with increases of $437 in Hyde Park, $238 in Woodlawn, and $225 in South Shore. However, income growth did not keep pace with these rent increases. While Hyde Park saw modest income growth ($5,770), Woodlawn's larger relative increase ($10,100) and South Shore's significant gain ($14,332) still left both neighborhoods well below the county's median income, which grew by $24,115 during the same period.



Maps 4 and 5. Change in vacancy rate 2016 - 2022 (left) and change in turnover rate 2016 - 2022 (right) for Woodlawn, Hyde Park, and South Shore.

The turnover rate patterns (Map 5) show divergent neighborhood trajectories. Hyde Park experienced a notable increase (+4.3%), suggesting growing market activity and potential displacement pressure. In contrast, both Woodlawn (-0.7%) and South Shore (-3.5%) saw decreases in turnover, possibly indicating increased housing stability or, alternatively, fewer housing options for residents seeking to move. For Woodlawn and South Shore respectively, only

1 block group had a level 5 increase in turnover rate, while Hyde Park had 3 block groups experiencing stark increase in moving activity. Changes in rent burden (Map 6) present a complex picture. Moderate rent burden (30-49% of income) increased most significantly in Hyde Park (+4.8%) and Woodlawn (+3.7%), with a smaller increase in South Shore (+0.5%). However, the severe rent burden figure (50%+ of income) decreased across all three neighborhoods, most notably in South Shore (-6.6%). However, these positive changes are not felt across the entire neighborhood. Two block groups within South Shore actually experienced a level 5 increase in severely rent burdened renters, but many block groups (six) also experienced a harsh decrease, which could represent new residents with higher income. This disparity is less visible in Woodlawn, with only one level 5 block group, and Hyde Park, with zero. In these neighborhoods, almost all changes are in the 2-4 range, showing less volatility in the change of severely rent burdened renters.

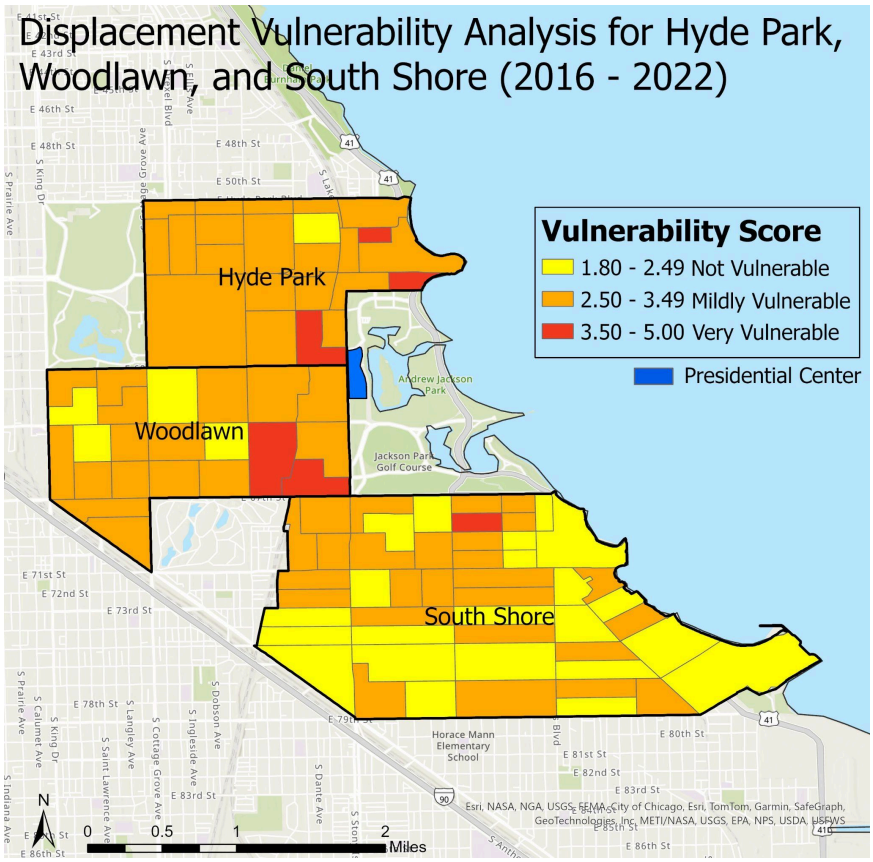


Map 6. Change in percentage of severely rent burdened renters, 2016 - 2022

Criteria (2016-2022)	Hyde Park	Woodlawn	South Shore
Change in Vacancy Rate	**–5.2%**	**–4.5%**	**–7.1%**
Change in Turnover Rate	**+4.3%**	–0.7%	–3.5%
Change in % of Rent Burdened Renters	**+4.8%**	**+3.7%**	+0.5%
Change in % of Severely Rent Burdened Renters	-1.3%	-0.7%	-6.6%

Table 3. Median change in Criteria (2016 - 2022) for Hyde Park, Woodlawn, and South Shore

Vulnerability Assessment



Map 7. Final Vulnerability Index map for target neighborhoods (2016 -2022)

The MCDA vulnerability analysis reveals distinct spatial patterns of displacement risk across the three neighborhoods (Map 7). Overall, six block groups show high vulnerability scores (above 3.5), with the highest concentrations in Hyde Park and Woodlawn, particularly in areas closest to the OPC site. The two most vulnerable block groups, scoring above 4.0, are located in Woodlawn (4.25) and Hyde Park (4.05), both within a half-mile of the development site. Woodlawn shows the highest average vulnerability (mean: 2.97), driven largely by changes in rent burden rates. The neighborhood's most vulnerable block group (group 2, census tract 8439) demonstrates particularly concerning trends, with high scores across multiple criteria including a level 5 rating for severely rent-burdened households. Woodlawn's relatively high median vulnerability score (2.9) and positive skewness (0.62) indicate that displacement pressure is broadly distributed across the neighborhood rather than concentrated in a few areas. Hyde Park exhibits similar overall vulnerability levels (mean: 2.96) but with more spatial variation, as indicated by its higher kurtosis (3.38). Three block groups in Hyde Park show high vulnerability scores (3.5+), all located in the southeastern portion of the neighborhood nearest to the OPC. While Hyde Park shows no level 5 scores in either rent burden category, it consistently scores above average across all metrics, particularly in turnover rate changes (mean: 2.85) and moderate rent burden changes (mean: 3.07).

South Shore, despite having the largest population and highest initial rent burden rates, shows the lowest average vulnerability score (mean: 2.64). However, this lower overall vulnerability masks concerns trends in specific block groups. Two block groups (group 1, tract 4304 and group 2, tract 4302) show level 5 scores for severe rent burden changes (50%+), suggesting pockets of intense housing unaffordability. The reason that these block groups didn’t

reach a score of over 3.5 was due to having low (level 1 and 2) scores for rent burden changes (30-49%), but this is misleading, as most renters are likely transitioning from the 30-49% range to the 50%+ range. South Shore's vulnerability assessment is also impacted by its greater distance from the OPC site, which affects the overall scores due to the distance criterion weighting. I would add these two block groups to the six existing groups with vulnerability scores of over 3.5, for a total of eight block groups that show alarming signs of costly housing and displacement risk.

Conclusions & Applications

Key Findings

1. The highest vulnerability scores are concentrated within a half-mile radius of the OPC site, particularly in southeastern Hyde Park and eastern Woodlawn, suggesting that proximity to the development is a significant factor in displacement pressure despite Obama's 2018 assertion that gentrification concerns were premature
2. Hyde Park shows consistent moderate-to-high vulnerability across all metrics (mean vulnerability score of 2.96), as well as high rent increases, but its higher median household income ($58,078) may provide resilience against displacement
3. Woodlawn demonstrates the highest average vulnerability (mean score of 2.97) and contains the most vulnerable block group (score of 4.25), suggesting that the housing protections secured through community organizing were necessary.

4. South Shore, while showing the lowest average vulnerability (mean score 2.64), exhibits concerning trends in specific block groups, indicating some potential displacement pressure despite being farther from the OPC.
5. Three of the six most vulnerable block groups (scoring above 3.5) have populations that are over 90% Black, highlighting areas where displacement risk monitoring and targeted housing protections may be most critical given Chicago's history of development-driven displacement of Black residents.

Data Limitations

Several important limitations should be considered when interpreting this study's findings. The primary data constraints stem from American Community Survey (ACS) coverage and reliability issues at the block group level. Income data was somewhat problematic with coverage rates of only 77.3% for Woodlawn and 75.5% for South Shore in 2022, and median gross rent saw coverage of 70% in Cook County and 86.4% for Woodlawn. However, none of these metrics were directly used in the vulnerability score calculation. Methodological limitations arise from both the MCDA framework and temporal constraints. The weighting scheme, while based on housing literature and community concerns, remains inherently subjective. The higher weights assigned to rent burden metrics (55% combined) compared to market indicators (25%) and distance (10%) reflect an emphasis on current housing stress but could underestimate the importance of other factors. Additionally, the 2016-2022 study period captures the announcement and early construction phases of the OPC project, potentially missing more recent displacement pressures. The criteria themselves also have limitations. The distance metric treats proximity to the OPC as a linear relationship with displacement risk, which may oversimplify complex spatial dynamics. Changes in vacancy rates and turnover rates are also not

black and white. A decline in vacancy rates could represent either positive neighborhood revitalization or market speculation, while decreased turnover rates might reflect either successful resident retention or a lack of affordable relocation options for existing residents who wish to move. These limitations suggest the need for continued monitoring of displacement pressure using additional metrics and data sources as they become available, particularly in highly vulnerable block groups with large Black populations.

Policy Implementation & Future Research

Future research should track displacement patterns beyond 2022 to capture the full impact of OPC construction and opening, ideally incorporating parcel-level property sales data, eviction records, and qualitative resident surveys to provide a more complete picture of neighborhood change. This would be particularly valuable for the three block groups with over 90% Black populations that currently show high vulnerability scores. Policy interventions should be targeted based on spatial vulnerability patterns, with consideration for expanding Woodlawn's housing protections to other high-risk areas, particularly in South Shore. Specific measures on the block groups with a score of over 3.5 could include preservation of affordable housing, restrictions on investor purchases, and rental assistance programs. These approaches should be guided by continuous monitoring of displacement indicators at granular geographic scales to enable rapid response to emerging housing pressures. Building on the success of the Woodlawn Housing Preservation Ordinance achieved by the Obama Community Benefits Agreement Coalition, similar legally binding protections could be pursued for other highly vulnerable areas, particularly in South Shore where 80% of voters have already expressed support for such measures. In sum, the spatial analysis of displacement vulnerability around the Obama Presidential Center reveals patterns of housing pressure that validate community concerns and

demonstrate an urgent need for proactive policy interventions, particularly in predominantly Black neighborhoods where economic development must be balanced with the existing community fabric.

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