



The University of Texas at Austin
Institute for Urban Policy
Research & Analysis
College of Liberal Arts

THOSE WHO STAYED

ARE THERE MORE DOGS THAN CHILDREN IN EAST AUSTIN? ADDENDUM
TO THE MARCH 2018 REPORT

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OVERVIEW

In March 2018, the University of Texas at Austin's Institute for Urban Policy Research and Analysis (IUPRA) released a report titled "Those Who Stayed: The Impact of Gentrification on Longstanding Residents of East Austin."¹ The goals of the report were twofold: 1) To collect data on how longstanding residents perceive of the changes brought about by gentrification; 2) To understand why these longstanding residents continue to stay in heavily gentrified neighborhoods when so many of their peers have left.

This is a follow-up to the report that answers a question some have asked since its publication: *Do dogs now outnumber children in this gentrified East Austin neighborhood?*² The question was prompted by the longstanding residents themselves. The original survey did not ask about pets or children, but in its qualitative section respondents commented on how dogs appeared to outnumber children in the neighborhood. In their view, this shift epitomized the drastic changes brought about by gentrification.

Longstanding residents are correct in their perceptions. Dogs now outnumber children in the neighborhood nearly two to one. A profound absence of children, not an abundance of dogs, explains the disparity. Dog ownership rates in the neighborhood appear to be on par with national averages. However, the seventeen-and-under population in the neighborhood falls well below the city and regional averages. Moreover, one can assume that the majority of these losses were among children of color. Between 2000 and 2010 the neighborhood's Black population decreased by 60 percent, its Latino population decreased by 33 percent and its white population increased by 442 percent.

The loss of children is perhaps the clearest indicator that a neighborhood has been thoroughly gentrified, and it could also serve as a bellwether for economic and racial disparities in other communities throughout Austin.

On the Absence of Children and the Prevalence of Dogs: A sample of quotes from the "Those Who Stayed" report:

"Most people are white. They spend the whole day walking the dogs. They don't have kids... they have dogs."

– African-American female, 87

"A lot of people who move here have no kids, so a lot of elementary schools talking about tearing them down. Then going to build them up for the people who can afford it. When I was growing up there used to be a lot of kids. Now a lot more dogs and cats around."

– African-American male, 55

"[There are] no kids in the neighborhood... They need to put children back in neighborhood."

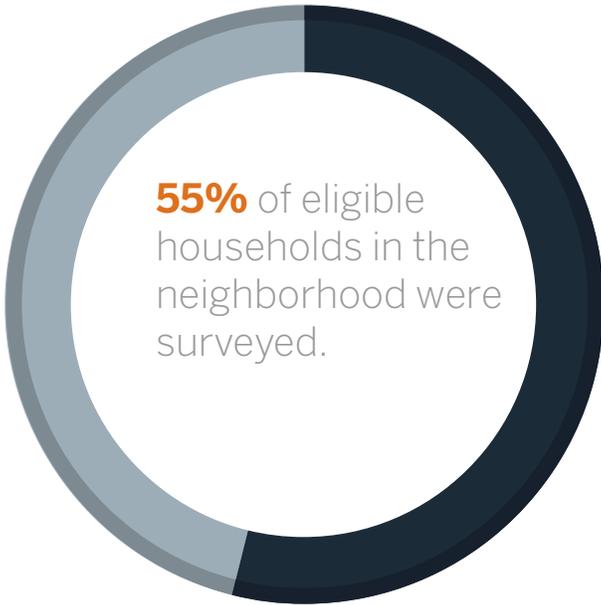
– African American female, 61

¹Tang, E., & Falola, B. (2018). *Those who stayed: The impact of gentrification on longstanding residents of East Austin*. Retrieved from https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/iupra/_files/Those-Who-Stayed.pdf

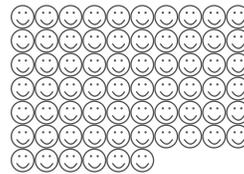
²Findell, E. (2018, April 22). In gentrifying East Austin, are dogs replacing children? *Austin American-Statesman*.

KEY FINDINGS

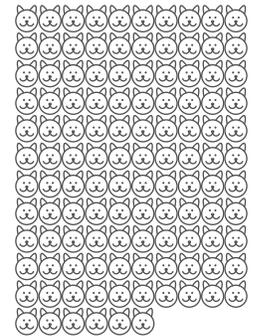
After surveying 55 percent of eligible households in the neighborhood, we counted 116 dogs and 66 children.



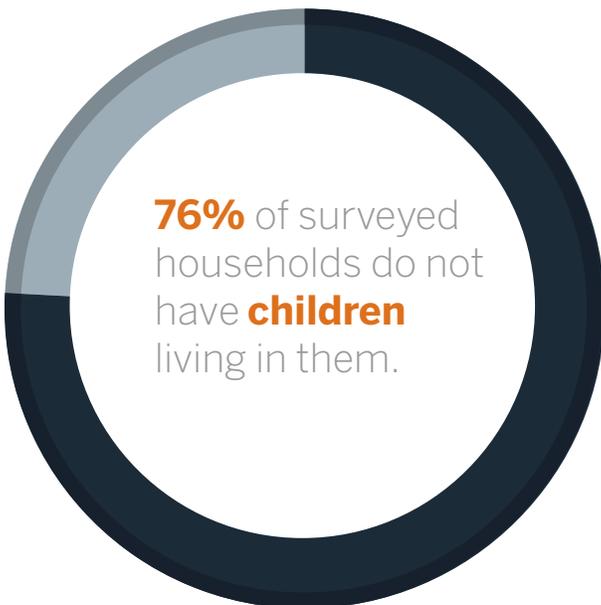
66 CHILDREN



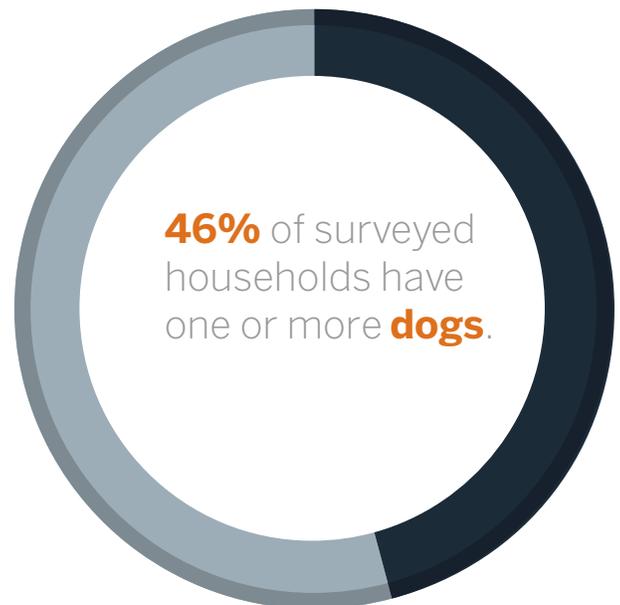
116 DOGS



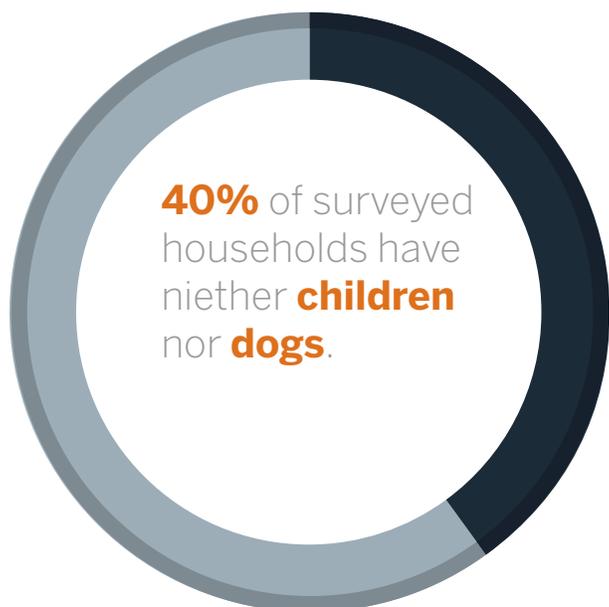
Seventy-six percent of the surveyed households (130 out of 171) do not have children living in them.



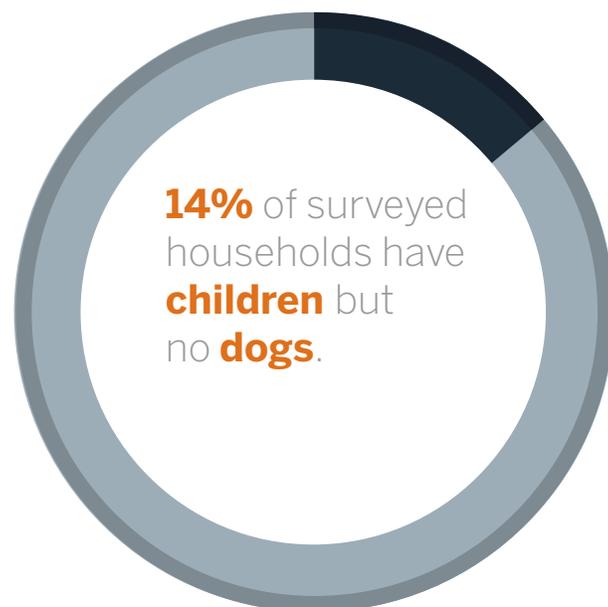
Forty-six percent of the surveyed households (79 out of 171) have one or more dogs.



Forty percent of the surveyed households (68 out of 171) have neither children nor dogs.



Fourteen percent of the surveyed households (24 out of 171) have at least one child and no dogs.



BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

The “Those Who Stayed” report was based on surveys of longstanding residents (those whose residency dates back to at least 1999) who live in Census Tract 9.01, block group 1.

The neighborhood was once the heart of Austin’s “Negro District”—a racially segregated part of downtown created by the City of Austin in 1928. Back then, city leaders sought to confine the African-American population to one area of the urban core. Prior to this, African Americans lived in various enclaves throughout the entire city.

The report concluded that most longstanding residents feel negatively about the changes they have witnessed. They are not the beneficiaries of the ostensible “upside” to gentrification. Although gentrification has led to the establishment of new businesses, lower crime, infrastructural improvements, and higher property values, most respondents claimed that they did not see a marked improvement in their own quality of lives.

To the contrary, respondents claimed that their neighborhood had lost its sense of community. Underscoring this loss is the absence of children. Whereas children once served as a bonding force in the neighborhood—they occupied its public spaces and served as a key link between neighborhood families—they were, by 2016, only 15.6 percent of the population, according to census data.

The loss of children led some respondents to seriously question whether or not dogs now outnumbered children in the neighborhood. In April 2018, a group of faculty and students from the University of Texas at Austin returned to the neighborhood to study the question.

Our survey team canvassed the neighborhood, knocking on the doors of all single- family homes. Apartment units were excluded from the survey, owing to possible restrictions on pet ownership imposed by property owners or management.

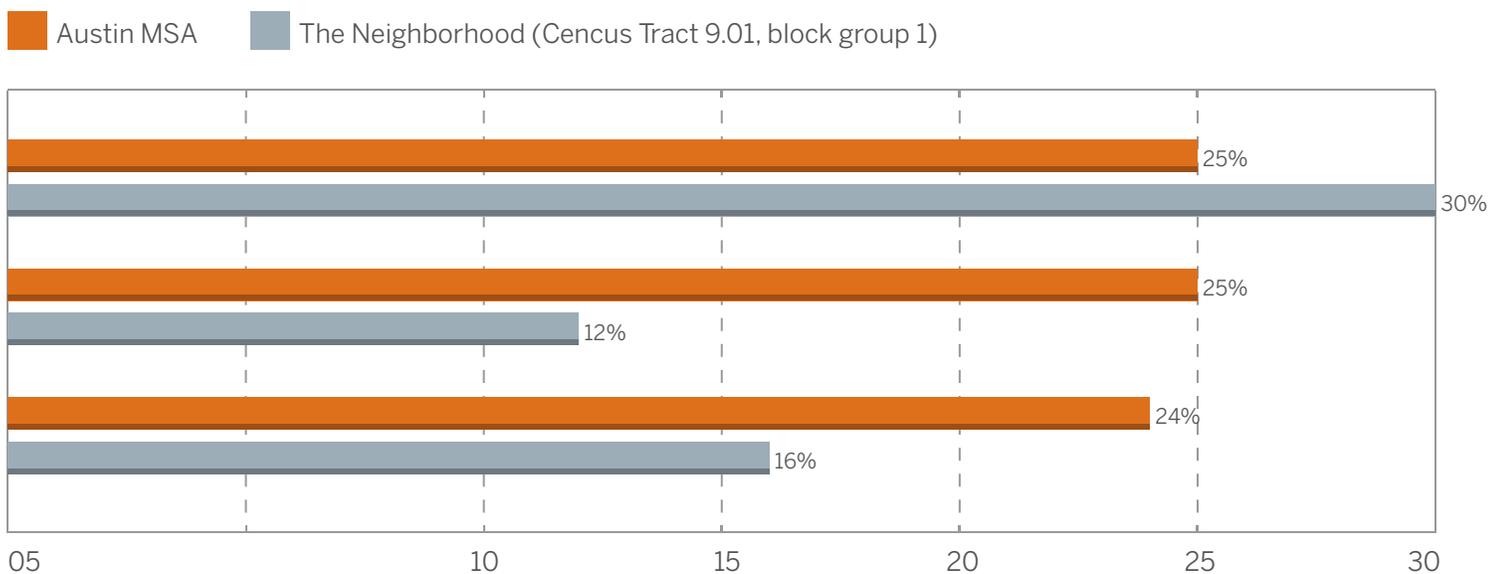
After cross referencing a map of parcels from the Travis County Central Appraisal District with Google Maps satellite images of neighborhood homes, we determined that there were 341 single family homes in the neighborhood. We surveyed 171 of them (55 percent).

The survey consisted of two sets of questions: the first having to do with the type and quantity of household pets, and the second having to do with the total number of children who resided in the home.

DISCUSSION

The number of dogs (116) is nearly double the number of children (66), confirming longstanding neighborhood residents' beliefs about the relative numbers of each. The 66 children were counted among 55 percent of the eligible households in the neighborhood. According to the U.S. Census, there were a total 145 children in the neighborhood in 2016 (55 percent of this equals 79 children). Our findings comport with census data showing that the share of children in the neighborhood is very low when compared to that of the broader Austin metropolitan statistical area (MSA) since 2000:

Percentage of Children: Austin MSA Compared to East Austin



Sources: 2000 and 2010 data based on 2000 and 2010 U.S. Decennial Census; 2016 data based on 2016 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates.

Between 2000 and 2016, the seventeen-and-under population remained consistently between 24 and 30 percent of the Austin MSA population. During this same period, the share of children in East Austin dropped dramatically. The dearth of children in the neighborhood is highly localized, and a sign of gentrification that cannot be attributed to broader social factors such shifting maternity rates.³

³Stone, L. (2018, February 13). American women are having fewer children than they'd like. *New York Times*.

Forty-six percent of the households we surveyed had one or more dogs. Dog ownership in the neighborhood is not significantly higher than it is throughout the rest of the United States: just under half of all U.S. households have dogs.⁴

As we canvassed the neighborhood, our survey team noted that one or more dogs were present at approximately one-third of the homes where nobody answered. Had we been able to survey these households, our dog count would have increased, but not significantly enough to make this neighborhood stand out when it comes to dog ownership. It is impossible to say whether or not we would have counted more children at these properties.

The displacement of children is the defining characteristic of gentrification in the neighborhood. During our eight canvassing sessions – all of them took place in evening between 6:00pm to 8:00pm—our team encountered children playing in the streets only once. On one other occasion, we noted two children riding bicycles with an adult. We did not spot children in public spaces outside of these two instances.

By contrast, during each of our outings, we noted multiple residents walking their dogs. The absence of children leaves one with the impression that there is an abundance of dogs, but our findings suggest that the former factor, not the latter one, tells the truer story about gentrification.

The residential neighborhoods of East Austin were planned with children in mind. This is reflected not only in zoning regulations that call for single family homes, but in the establishment of neighborhood parks and public schools. Over the past two decades, gentrification has displaced most of these children, and future research should focus on what happened to them: How did they fare socially, economically and educationally after moving out? Considering that gentrification trends move from one neighborhood to the next, how many of these children were subjected to multiple displacements?

The loss of children is conterminous with the rise of incomes in the neighborhood. Between 2000 and 2016, the median family income (MFI) in the neighborhood jumped from \$28,929 to \$69,570. If this trend continues, then the urban core will become increasingly economically and socially heterogenous (and the MSA as a whole more economically segregated) as families with children and moderate incomes are pushed to outlying areas. Current efforts to rewrite Austin's land development code (i.e. "CodeNext") call for diversifying the type of housing stock that can be built in the urban core, but the question remains whether or not such housing will be appropriate and affordable for families with children. Data from the Austin Independent School District show that a miniscule number of its students live in the thousands of new apartment units that have been created in central Austin over the past five years.⁵

The creation of new affordable housing (as well as the maintenance of existing affordable units) is the key factor that will allow for the repopulation of families with children in the neighborhoods of central East Austin. This requires public intervention—from the public capitalization of new affordable homes, to municipal programs that conduct targeted outreach and marketing to families in need, to city agencies that monitor public-private agreements in which developers are incentivized to create affordable units. In this sense, gentrification is not simply a market issue, but a phenomenon profoundly shaped by the actions taken (and not taken) by city officials.

⁴ Findell, E. (2018, April 22). In gentrifying East Austin, are dogs replacing children? *Austin American-Statesman*.

⁵ This is based on cross referencing AISD data with the addresses of new apartment buildings in East Austin neighborhoods. The data show only six AISD students living in the 1,930 new apartment units.