

MGC Research Snapshot

Views and Perspectives of Springfield Hispanic Residents Towards the MGM Casino, their Homes, Community and Neighborhoods June 2023

What you need to know

There has been relatively little attention in research literature on the impact of a casino on housing-related issues. This study investigated the effects of the presence of a casino on housing-related issues primarily among Hispanic residents in Springfield. Those with a high perception of safety, quality of life, sense of belonging, and rental affordability were more likely to report improvements in social conditions before and after the casino opened. Interview themes included increases in home prices and rental costs, concerns about gentrification, crime shifting to other areas, and a nuanced perspective highlighting both positive and negative aspects of the casino.

What is this research about?

The presence of a casino can have significant impacts on a community, including both positive and negative effects on the local economy, employment, and social and cultural life. However, one area that has received relatively little attention in the literature is the impact of a casino on housing-related issues. This is particularly relevant in Springfield, Massachusetts, where the opening of a new casino in 2018 has raised concerns about the potential impact on the local housing market and on the affordability and availability of housing for low- and moderate-income residents.

To address this gap in the literature and inform policy and practice, the present study aims to investigate the effects of the presence of a casino on housing-related issues primarily among Hispanic residents in Springfield.

What did the researchers do?

A Community Research Team (CRT) consisting of 11 local residents, staff from Neighbor 2 Neighbor (N2N; a community-based organization), and technical assistance providers from JSI guided the research strategy. In alignment with the principles of community-based participatory research, N2N did not prescribe a specific methodology. Instead, the CRT chose from a range of options, including survey research, key informant interviews, focus groups, and participant observations.

The study was conducted in four phases:

Discovery: Finalized contract negotiations, held kickoff meeting, hired program staff, obtained IRB approval, identified key stakeholders, developed research protocol and technical assistance plan for data analysis

Community Engagement: Recruitment and training of the CRT on the basics of research, (role playing) the creation of a governance structure, an introduction to housing issues in Springfield related to the presence of the casino, and the finalization of research questions.

Data Collection and Analysis: The CRT used a range of data collection strategies, including a web-based survey and in-depth interviews and/or focus groups. Quantitative data were analyzed using basic descriptive statistics and examined for variations by demographic variables. Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups were transcribed, coded, and analyzed for themes.

Dissemination: Presentation of findings to the community, development of recommendations for addressing housing-related issues in Springfield, and sharing recommendations with relevant stakeholders.

290 community members participated in the survey. The typical participant in this study was Spanish-speaking, Hispanic, born in Puerto Rico, aged 46.2 years and living in a rental apartment in zip code 01105. About 98% identified as Hispanic or Latino and about 72% were born outside of the continental USA, including 58% born in Puerto Rico. The vast majority spoke Spanish and had been living in Springfield for at least six years.



63 interviews were conducted in Spanish with neighbors of the casino.

Lastly, the study team analyzed GIS data about gun violence in Springfield between 2010 and 2020.

What did the researchers find?

Major findings included:

- Homeowners thought social problems got better after the arrival of the casino, while renters tended to see things as staying the same;
- Community members living in zip code 01105 thought social problems got better, while those living in 01103 thought problems got worse;
- Long-term residents (over 20 years) thought problems got better, while those living in Springfield between 6 and 20 years felt more neutral overall;
- Birthplace was not significantly associated with perceptions of social problems.

The study team also took an in-depth look at whether those perceptions varied by neighborhood indicators such as safety, sense of belonging, quality of life, knowing one's neighbors, and affordability. Those with a high perception of safety, quality of life, sense of belonging, and rental affordability were more likely to report improvements in social conditions before and after the casino opened.

Themes emerging from interviews included the increase in home prices and rental costs, concerns about gentrification, acknowledgment that crime has shifted to other areas, as well as a nuanced perspective, one that highlights positive (job creation, entertainment, improvement in physical appearance of the neighborhood) and negative aspects of the casino (e.g. crime shifts and concerns about criminalization).

The results of the analysis of GIS data concerning gun violence indicated that crime incidents clustered throughout the city and that, over the 10-year period, they have shifted away from the casino.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Recommendations include:

- Increased funding for resources that build community such as education, leisure, and public safety, and particularly in locations where community members view conditions to have deteriorated since the casino's opening, such as zip code 01103;

About the researchers

Zulmalee Rivera was the Principal Investigator and Ivette Bell was the project manager at Neighbor 2 Neighbor. The N2N Community Research Team played a crucial role in gathering data and conducting analysis. Mydalis Vera, Guerrera Writer, LLC and Rodolfo R. Vega, JSI were the lead writers. For more information about this study, please contact Zulmalee Rivera at zulma@n2nma.org.

- Policymakers and stakeholders should prioritize community engagement when conducting research or implementing policies that impact the community, and particularly take into account differing perceptions and concerns among community members based on factors such as location;
- Policymakers should consider the housing implications of casino development and to ensure that affordable housing remains available to community members. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of community engagement and transparency in understanding the impacts of casino development on the local housing market;
- Policymakers and stakeholders should conduct further research and engage with community members to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of the casino on the community, as well as ensure that policy decisions and community development efforts address the needs and concerns of all residents.

Citation

Rivera, Z., Bell, I., Vera, M., Guerrera Writer, LLC, Vega, R.R., & the N2N Community Research Team (2023). Views and Perspectives of Springfield Hispanic Residents Towards the MGM Casino, their Homes, Community and Neighborhoods. Massachusetts Gaming Commission, Boston, MA.

Key Words

Springfield; Community Engaged Research

Acknowledgments

Financial support for this study came from the Massachusetts Gaming Commission through the Public Health Trust Fund. This project was competitively bid and awarded to Neighbor 2 Neighbor in May 2021.

