# Renters show homeowner-like NIMBYism in top-tier cities, research finds

The theory goes that renters and homeowners traditionally have different objectives and reactions to development proposals.

Renters, it is said, are generally in favor of new housing and development, while homeowners are more likely to oppose new residential housing developments. However, a new paper from Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies indicates that this is not always the case.

The paper, based on new national-level experimental data and city-specific behavioral data, shows that where this old adage falls away is in high-housing cost cities where renters and homeowners both oppose new residential developments proposed for their neighborhoods.

This may be why many top-tier cities, even those with a large renter population, struggle to get new developments approved. Housing prices for both rentals and sales have been on the rise in many coastal cities, especially places where housing supply has not kept pace with demand.

## The trouble with NIMBYism

The paper from Michael Hankinson shows that the NIMBY ("not in my backyard") factor has had a major impact on the number of permits issued.

Research shows that even if residents support a citywide increase in the supply of housing, they are less interested in having specific projects built in their neighborhood. The problem, of course, is that everywhere is *someone's* backyard.

While new supply may help ease prices for renters, in some places renters may still want to protect their neighborhoods from changes caused by development.

On the national front, the study showed that homeowners surveyed largely opposed the proposed 10-percent increase in their city's housing supply (28 percent approval), while a majority of renters supported the new supply (59 percent approval).

Homeowners prefer permitted buildings that were farther away from their home, but renters (on average) did not pick buildings based on distance from their home.

The picture changes in high-rent cities, and renters in expensive cities are just as NIMBY toward market-rate housing as homeowners. They still want more housing, they just don't want it near them.

A San Francisco exit poll done as part of the research showed that although both renters and owners wanted more housing citywide, owners — and especially renters — would support a ban on market-rate development in their neighborhood.

In the poll of 1,660 people surveyed after the 2015 San Francisco election, 62 percent of renters supported a NIMBY-like ban on housing compared to 40 percent of homeowners.

## What’s going on?

What the survey doesn’t quite answer is why this might be the case.

Do renters feel a greater sense of ownership in high-rent cities? It could be that in these cities renters are less likely to move into a home of their own (in their own neighborhoods or elsewhere), so they are essentially already acting like homeowners.

It may also be that in these areas where there are more renters, the stigma of being a renter may be less and so renters may feel like more of a community than they do in other cities, where buyers are the norm and renting is seen as a brief stage before ownership.

*Deidre Woollard is the co-founder of Lion & Orb, a real estate public relations company. Follow her on* Twitter *@Deidre.*

Email Deidre Woollard*.*

Source: click here