

# WHO'S RECOVERING?

## The Impact of Home Vacancies on Collective Efficacy in Post-Recession San Bernardino Neighborhoods



Jesús “Chuy” Francisco Flores  
Professors Virginia Parks & Bhavna Shamasunder  
Occidental College  
Urban and Environmental Policy

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report examines the distribution of vacant homes in San Bernardino and how that may affect neighborhoods' perceived collective efficacy. The report first chronicles San Bernardino's history of land speculation until today and then makes the case that the mortgage crisis contributed to neighborhood inequity. Afterward, literature regarding the effects of vacant, abandoned, and foreclosed homes is reviewed. Using census block group data, surveys, semi-structured interviews, and field observation notes, the case is made that African American neighborhoods are more likely to experience high vacancy rates, vacancy rate is negatively correlated with respondents' collective efficacy, and neighborhood turnover resulted in isolation. Furthermore, all but one survey respondent identified belonging to a neighborhood group. The report concludes by providing recommendations to address home vacancies including the establishment of a vacant properties registry, establishing grants for community-based organizations combatting vacant homes in the City, enact a state-level Land Banking Authority, and allow for the modification of underwater mortgages.

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## INTRODUCTION

This is not a happy time for our city. We've been living through a financial nightmare from which we have not yet awakened. In 2008 it struck our city in this Inland Empire with a tsunami-like force that left us gasping ... many of our citizens unemployed, put us in foreclosure in our home mortgages, and put dozens of individuals and businesses into bankruptcy. So here we are 18 months later, the community justifiably angry about the city's condition and the failure of leadership to address the fiscal crisis. What's to be done?

—Former Mayor Patrick J. Morris, “State of the City Address 2013”

San Bernardino has been through a lot in the past two decades. While many municipalities appear to have recovered from the 2008 subprime mortgage crisis, a number of cities are still enduring its ill effects. San Bernardino,<sup>1</sup> arguably the hardest-hit city in California, has become a quintessential example of post-recession “urban decay.” A city that saw substantial growth from the housing bubble is caught in its fourth year of municipal bankruptcy proceedings and commonly cited today as the poorest city of its size in California with over half of its residents receiving some form of welfare assistance (Hallman 2012; Dulaney 2011). Being born-and-bred in San Bernardino, I witnessed these changes first-hand. From rising crime, a deserted downtown, a general disconnect from civic leaders, and now the latest site of a mass shooting in the nation, my hometown is consistently referred to as a broken place with no hope. For my family, however, it is the opposite.

While California's coastal counties' housing prices continued to soar in the 1990s, Inland cities like San Bernardino became the only option for working class families to own relatively affordable housing. People from all over with approved subprime mortgages soon moved into San Bernardino seeking the “American dream” of owning a home. In the case of my parents, this resulted in owning the first Habitat for Humanity home in the area.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, “San Bernardino” refers to the City of San Bernardino.

Unlike traditional urban decay studies about depopulating Rust Belt cities, the case of San Bernardino signals a new type of struggling city where the population is steadily increasing (U.S. Census Bureau 2014). At the same time, however, many of those same families end up foreclosing and moving elsewhere, disrupting neighborhoods altogether. As San Bernardino continues to endure tough times, I am constantly reminded that it is the place that made me who I am today. A city with an infrastructure unfit for a working-class population and a target for exploitative financial and labor practices, my community continues to be a resilient place where we support and love one another. In an effort to understand my city better, I chose to do a project where I can learn how our community continues to fight against the recession that marked the beginning of our uphill fight for recovery. With a higher home vacancy rate than the rest of the state (“City of San Bernardino 2013-2021 Housing Element” 2014), there has been little conversation on how the presence of vacant homes affects the city on the neighborhood level. This study aims to look at the distribution of vacant homes throughout the city and how that may affect neighborhoods’ perceived collective efficacy.

## **BACKGROUND: A Critical History of San Bernardino Land Speculation**

By looking at San Bernardino's history with land speculation, development, and growth, we get a better understanding of the cyclical patterns of inequity and marginalization of ethnic minorities in the region. San Bernardino, situated 50 miles east of Los Angeles, lies in the heart of the Inland Empire region. Although commonly viewed as part of the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area, the Inland Empire represents a distinct economically and demographically diverse region of its own. As Patterson (2015) notes, scholarly works on Southern California tend to "[view] the inland valley to the east as a periphery – a reflection of what is happening in the larger metropolitan area" (8). Nevertheless, the Inland Empire encompasses unique historical transformations apart from the more commonly studied coastal areas of California that deserves focused consideration. As one of the oldest and largest cities in the region, San Bernardino's history of land speculation brings light to the socio-political and often racially motivated issues that manifested itself in the segregation and marginalization of non-white communities.

### **Land Contested and Commodified**

Similar to California's history, the San Bernardino area resulted from colonization and forcible displacement of people that were considered "others." Named *Wa'aach* by the Tongva people, San Bernardino was a contested frontier area between white Europeans and indigenous groups such as the Serranos for many years (Patterson 2015). Shortly after the acquisition of California from the Mexican-American War, San Bernardino became incorporated as a city in 1854, claiming a population of 1,200, most of which were Anglo-Saxon Mormon colonists ("History of San Bernardino"). Remaining a relatively small town for a few decades, it was not until the construction of the Santa Fe, Union Pacific, and Southern Pacific railroads that San Bernardino became a prominent destination for newcomers in California to settle (De Lara

2009). With easier commuter access to Los Angeles and San Francisco, investors repossessed and subdivided land from former Californio landowners to attract Anglo-Americans from the Midwest and East Coast (Patterson 2015). Many of these investors were San Francisco capitalists who took advantage of the 1863 drought by creating the San Bernardino Land Company and buying off Californios' ranchos when land values depreciated (De Lara 2009). The combination of *boosterism* with advertisements like, "San Bernardino Lands!: To People Seeking Homes" and the connectivity with the railroad industry led to a huge real-estate land bubble in the 1880s that in many ways is reminiscent of the housing bubble of 2008 (Landis 2008; De Lara 2009). As De Lara (2009) notes, "San Bernardino and Orange County property values increased from \$12 million to \$64 million between 1880 to 1890" (35), resulting in huge profits for investors.

As the citrus and other agricultural industries began to grow, the need for cheap labor arose, luring large influxes of Chinese, Mexican, Japanese and other European immigrant laborers into the Inland Empire (Gendzel 2009). Initially thought of as temporary expendable labor, prominent ethnic enclaves, such as a Chinatown, established themselves within San Bernardino (Gendzel 2009; Ocegueda 2010). Soon thereafter, however, the combination of anti-Chinese laws that forcibly displaced Chinese people and unstable political turmoil in Mexico resulted in San Bernardino's Westside (the area west of Mt. Vernon Ave. and south of 9<sup>th</sup> street) becoming a segregated Mexican *barrio* (Ocegueda 2010). Likewise, African American residents were segregated along the South side of San Bernardino, known as the Valley Farms Truck area (Ocegueda 2010). By the 1920s, in an effort to prevent Mexicans and other minorities from owning homes and settling in other parts of the city, officials increased property values above 9<sup>th</sup> street by intentionally improving public facilities such as sewers and sidewalks in white communities at the North end of the city (Ocegueda 2010). Ultimately, due to direct racist



policies, ethnic minorities were segregated into deteriorating neighborhood slums and restricted from economic mobility.

### **Wartime Housing Boom: Benefitting Whom?**

The advent of war in the 1940s led to a reorganization and diversification of the Inland Empire's land-based economy that persistently excluded racial minorities and foreign-born immigrants. With the introduction of factories and large manufacturing bases, like the Norton Air Force Base in San Bernardino, good-paying jobs attracted huge influxes of people into the Inland Empire like never before (Patterson 2014). San Bernardino's population, in particular, grew by as much as 50% during this time (Patterson 2014). Due to a swell in demand for housing, speculators and developers bought off citrus fields that had been dying off to disease in the late 1940s (Patterson 2014). This housing boom was further perpetuated by the Federal Housing Administration's low-interest loans aimed at meeting housing needs in the area (Patterson 2014). Although opportunities for economic mobility – either through employment or homeownership – increased dramatically, marginalized communities remained in the shadows.

Government-sponsored programs played a pivotal role in solidifying racial disparities in the region. For instance, the combination of housing subsidies and abundant land in the Inland Empire prompted home developers to profusely build a diverse array of tract housing that produced mixed-income, white suburban communities in the Inland Empire. Reminiscent of the Levittowns of the East Coast, Patterson (2014) notes, “many community builders refused to sell to minorities, thereby reinforcing and reproducing already existing patterns of segregation” (194). Meanwhile, Mexican laborers, hired through the government-sponsored *bracero* program, arrived in the agriculture fields in large numbers only to be paid subpar wages (Patterson 2014). The creation of highways only seemed to exacerbate things. For instance, the creation of the I-

215 freeway reinforced the segregation of the Westwide *barrio* in San Bernardino (Ocegueda 2010), while the I-10 freeway promoted industrial economic growth that largely benefitted the white middle class in the region by directly connecting the city to the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach (Patterson 2014). This ultimately left marginalized communities working menial jobs while corporate business owners, including those in the agriculture industry, gained immense profits (De Lara 2009).

### **The Downturn to Today: Proposition 13, Closing Bases, and Subprime Lending**

Following the 1970s, the Inland Empire faced a series of events and structural changes that proved too volatile for the region's economy. Perhaps the most significant factor that allowed this to happen was California's tax legislation Proposition 13, which forced municipalities to rely heavily on home sales as sources of revenue. Passed in 1979 by homeowners, Proposition 13 began a fiscal era where "tax assessments [are] to be calculated in terms of the price at the time of sale rather than current value" (Patterson 2014, 213). Combined with the loss of manufacturing jobs and the rise of subprime lending, San Bernardino faced a "perfect storm" that left the city distressed like never before.

Aside from patterns neighborhood segregation within municipalities, regional disparities began to manifest themselves between the Inland Empire and coastal counties. For the remaining decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, San Bernardino, like many other cities, became more demographically diverse due to desegregation and civil rights laws from the 1960s. At the same time however, there was a gradual decrease in the middle class due to losses in manufacturing jobs, particularly the closure of Norton Air Force Base, which cost San Bernardino approximately 2,133 jobs (De Lara 2009). As coastal counties were becoming less affordable to live in, demand for housing in the Inland Empire continued until the 2000s due to affordability,

making it one of the fastest growing regions in the nation (Patterson 2014). A large portion of that growth was driven by federally backed, subprime mortgages that lured many first-time homeowners into purchasing homes. When the housing bubble burst, San Bernardino began to see some of the highest rates of foreclosures in the country (Mozingo 2015). This caused the city to lose as much as \$10 million to \$16 million in tax revenues since their peak in 2008, forcing leaders to file for Chapter 9 bankruptcy (Gruszecki 2012). On top of the city now being majority non-white, the vast majority of people losing their homes were African-Americans and, to a lesser extent, Latinos (Olson 2012), bringing into question again the systemic disenfranchisement of historically marginalized communities while banks and investors went largely unpunished.

In the aftermath of massive job losses and foreclosures in the past few decades, San Bernardino now resides as one of the most distressed cities in the United States according to the Economic Innovation Group's "Distressed Community Index" (2016). Most recently, Los Angeles Times took advantage of the city's current state to release its first full-length documentary. Contrary to what the documentary and other news media depicts, San Bernardino's current condition is more nuanced than a "failed" city. Considering the long history of segregation within the city, there is no doubt San Bernardino continues to have more neglected parts of the city than others. By examining the differing effects the foreclosure crisis left at the neighborhood-level within San Bernardino, a better understanding of the city's current state can unfold and, hopefully, spark conversations about addressing neighborhood inequality.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

The relationship between vacant housing and neighborhood effects has been studied under two different contexts: 1) the urban decay of the Rust Belt cities, and 2) the aftermath from the mortgage crisis. Since the 1970s, numerous studies examined declining populations of Rust Belt cities, such as Detroit, Pittsburgh, and Baltimore. Sometimes cited as urban decaying cities, the loss of the manufacturing industry made job opportunities scarce, causing residents to leave their homes behind in search of better outcomes in suburban areas. This left several properties, residential and commercial, abandoned. In their study, “Addressing the Vacant and Abandoned Property Problem,” Accordino and Johnson (2000) interviewed public officials from the 200 most populous cities in the U.S. to determine whether and where abandoned properties were considered a significant problem. They found that abandonment was a general concern for most officials, especially in cities where the population was fairly static or declining. Moreover, these cities were more likely to be located in the Northeast and South, i.e. the Rust Belt. In a more localized study, Cohen (2001) directly linked the issue of abandonment with population loss in old industrial cities by looking at population data over the past several centuries. Although San Bernardino also lost industrial jobs around the same time, it is important to note that many of these studies on vacancy and abandonment originated from changes in population that later manifested itself in the housing market, not vice versa (Mikelbank 2008).

After the mortgage crisis, a new wave of research on housing vacancies and abandonment emerged. In contrast to the studies on Rust Belt cities, this thread of research focuses on vacancy that directly originates from the housing market itself, not depopulation (Mikelbank 2008). However, generally speaking, the findings on vacancy/abandonment and its impact on the

neighborhood have not changed dramatically. The principal difference before and after the mortgage crisis was the focused research on foreclosures themselves. Coupled with the growing interest in identifying neighborhood-level influences, there is an extensive array of literature devoted to vacancy, abandonment, and foreclosures and their adverse spillover effects associated with traditional measures like property values, crime, health, and, to a lesser extent, social capital (Lochner et al. 2003; Whitaker and Fitzpatrick 2011).

### **Differentiating Vacant, Foreclosed, and Abandoned Homes**

Before reviewing the literature on vacant homes and neighborhood effects, a distinction between the terms “vacant,” “foreclosed,” and “abandoned” must be made. As Whitaker and Fitzpatrick (2011) note, as foreclosure-based studies continue to grow, a distinction between vacant, tax-delinquent, and foreclosed homes is needed in order to fully understand the effects of each characteristic individually; otherwise, the impacts of foreclosures are being overestimated. Simply put, foreclosures occur when a debtor is unable to make the necessary payments to pay off a mortgage loan of a home. This eventually causes the lender to evict the residents and try to sell the property to someone else. Vacancy, although closely related, refers to when the home does not have any occupants. Although foreclosed homes usually result in a vacancy period, there tends to be significantly more vacancies than foreclosures in general (Whitaker and Fitzpatrick 2011). Vacant homes may be considered abandoned when the property is ignored all completely, which many times is manifested during a tax foreclosure. According to Whitaker and Fitzpatrick (2011), abandonment specifically occurs when “property owners and inhabitants stop investing in the property with the intent of foregoing their ownership interests” (5).

While definitions of “vacant” and “foreclosed” remain fairly consistent, “abandoned” does not. This is mostly due to the fact that every municipality has a distinct way of determining

whether a property is considered “abandoned” from a combination of factors, such as, physical condition and length of vacancy (J. R. Cohen 2001). In fact, according to Pagano and Bowman’s (2000) survey results from across 70 different cities, the collection of data on and criteria for abandoned structures varied significantly. This included the majority of cities learning about abandoned structures through informal channels, such as, “calls from neighbors” or “informal feedback” from city officials (7). Many cities, including San Bernardino, do not keep any inventory of abandoned, vacant, or foreclosed structures in their records due to budget constraints.

As Schilling (2009) noted in his work about code enforcement, there are currently two formal databases for vacant houses: 1) the U.S. Census vacant housing unit data and 2) the U.S. Postal Service’s (USPS) undeliverable addresses list. However, he added that neither is very accurate nor indicates a current snapshot of what condition these properties may be in, due to the nature of abandoned properties in general. On the same note, foreclosure public data sets do not indicate when the property becomes vacant (Schilling 2009). This variability is reflected in several studies related to vacant and foreclosed properties where researchers use a wide array of methodologies in their studies depending on the data that is available for them. Due to the haphazard nature of abandoned and foreclosed data as well as USPS’s limitations on their data set, this study focuses on vacant housing unit data available through the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey.

### **Vacancy and Foreclosure Impacts on Property Values, Health, and Crime**

As previously mentioned, the vast majority of research has focused on the effect of vacancy and foreclosure on traditional neighborhood-level indicators like property values, health, and crime. For the most part, the presence of vacant homes and foreclosures are negatively

correlated with these neighborhood indicators. Although not as thoroughly explored directly, themes relating to social capital – defined as social ties amongst people – are commonly referred to in studies relating to vacant homes and neighborhood effect.

There is a general consensus in the literature that vacant and foreclosed homes tend to reduce property values in the immediate area. Frame (2010) reviews a comprehensive array of literature on foreclosures and property values and concludes that sale prices drop between 0.9 to 8.7 percent for properties near foreclosed homes. A study of foreclosures in New York City from 2000 to 2005, more specifically, reinforces this notion (Schuetz, Been, and Ellen 2008). Additionally, Schuetz, Been, and Ellen (2008) determine that concentration of foreclosures have significantly more pronounced effects on local property values. In “Spatial Analysis of the Impact of Vacant, Abandoned, and Foreclosed Properties,” Mikelbank (2008) used a spatial econometric model to differentiate the impacts of vacancy, tax-delinquency, and foreclosure on property values at the parcel-level. He finds that vacant properties have a stronger negative impact on the immediate neighborhood’s property values in contrast to foreclosures. On the same note, in Cleveland, OH the study found that properties within 500 feet of a vacancy can drop property values by 1.7 to 2.1 percent, depending on concentration of poverty in the area (Mikelbank 2008). This was done using a hedonic price model and incorporating vacancy rate of single-family homes. Ultimately, general research tends to agree that vacancy, foreclosure, or abandonment of property adversely affects property values in the immediate neighborhood.

Research evaluating the relationship between vacancy, abandonment, and/or foreclosure with crime signals similar effects. That is, when a property becomes vacant social scientists tend to agree that, if left unkempt, the home will attract crime under the “broken windows” theory (“Vacant and Abandoned Properties: Turning Liabilities Into Assets” 2014). There seems to be

evidence to support this. For instance, a study in Pittsburgh found that vacant properties are associated with a higher rate of violent crime within 250 feet from the property compared to the rest of the area (Cui and Walsh 2015). However, this evidence does not mean to say that vacancy directly affects crime. When considering the “broken windows” theory, it is important to note that social capital, such as networks between neighbors, is an important indicator of preventing crime (Sampson 2013). Thus, although many studies associate vacant homes with crime, social capital remains an important link between the two.

On a similar note, vacancies and foreclosures are often linked with poorer health outcomes. In a study covering over 107 U.S. cities, boarded-up homes were strongly associated with higher rates of gonorrhea and premature mortality, even after controlling for socioeconomic demographics (D. A. Cohen et al. 2003). The authors suggest that this is potentially due to lack of social networks in the neighborhood that prevent any “opportunities to engage in healthful behavior,” or, in other words, social capital (467). On the same note, Schootman et. al (2012) found lower levels of self-rated health among breast cancer survivors in neighborhoods with higher foreclosure rates after surveying roughly 1,164 women. They determined that “this association was explained by lower household income, no physical activity, and worse perception of neighborhood conditions” (8). Thus, social capital and perception of neighborhood emerge as important indicators when considering the impact vacant homes have on the neighborhood.

### **Neighborhood Effect: Social Capital and Collective Efficacy**

When studying neighborhood effects, social capital is an important characteristic to consider. A term that evolved out of Shay and McKay’s social disorganization theory in the 1940s, social capital is a concept that aims to describe “social ties among persons – networks,



norms, and trust” (Sampson 2013). Without strong social capital in a neighborhood, residents are “less able to realize common values and maintain the social networks that foster safety and efforts to promote social good” (Ibid). In the same way vacant, abandoned, and foreclosed homes were correlated with neighborhood-level conditions, social capital has been used as a determinant of neighborhood effect.

One of the earlier studies examining social capital and its effect on neighborhood health is Lochner et. al’s (2003) research, “Social capital and neighborhood mortality rates in Chicago”. Taking advantage of the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods survey data, the researchers were able to cross-examine mortality rates and social capital for 342 Chicago neighborhoods (Lochner et al. 2003). In confirmation with other studies on social capital, they found that social capital – measured by reciprocity, trust, and civic participation – was generally associated with lower rates of mortality (Ibid). Thus, social capital can be a powerful indicator of neighborhood conditions. However, as Sampson (2013) and Lochner et. al. (2003) note, the lack of a standardized measurement and conceptual criticisms for social capital remain as weaknesses. This prompted Sampson and his colleagues to refocus the intentionality of what social capital aims to measure into collective efficacy.

As described by Sampson, collective efficacy combines “social cohesion” and “shared expectations for control” (2013). Social cohesion refers to residents’ ability to work along well with each other, while social control is the residents’ ability “to work together to prevent and solve problems within their community” (Weffer et al. 2014). In other words, collective efficacy refers to residents’ collective intent to address concerns in their neighborhood. Originally developed as a theory to address neighborhood crime, other scholars have extended the application of collective efficacy to a wide array of topics, including schooling, self-reported

health, and delinquency among teens (Weffer et al. 2014). For instance, collective efficacy was shown to be a significant indicator of self-rated physical health in Chicago neighborhoods, where collective efficacy is positively correlated with overall self-rated physical health (Browning and Cagney 2002). Considering the residential instability and “broken windows” theory associated with vacant housing, the theory of collective efficacy could prove useful in getting a more comprehensive understanding of neighborhoods impacted by the mortgage crisis.

To date, only one study known to the researcher examines the relationship between foreclosed homes and collective efficacy. In their article, “The Impacts of Foreclosure on Collective Efficacy and Civic Engagement: Findings from Two Central California Communities,” Weffer et. al. (2014) surveyed residents using questions from the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods in Central Californian neighborhoods drastically impacted by the mortgage crisis. They discover that, in line with Sampson’s theory of collective efficacy, residential stability is positively correlated with perceived collective efficacy. On the other hand, however, they find that length of residency is negatively associated with collective efficacy, citing possibilities with disillusionment from the lack of jobs available (Ibid). Considering this is the first peer-reviewed study that looks at the relationship between the aftermath of mortgage crisis and collective efficacy, there are still many things that should be considered. For instance, as discussed before, focusing on foreclosures leaves ambiguity whether vacancy or abandonment were contributing factors. Additionally, despite being one the major epicenters of the mortgage crisis, the Inland Empire has largely been absent from scholarly discourse.

## **Conclusion**

Research looking at the neighborhood effects of vacant, abandoned, and foreclosed housing has been extensively studied. Nevertheless, there have been several gaps resulting from a lack of established definitions of vacancy and abandonment. With the increase in foreclosure-related research resulting from the mortgage crisis, it is pertinent that consistent definition of terms is used in order to accurately assess the effect of each (Whitaker and Fitzpatrick 2011). Similarly, social capital studies have developed theoretically in order to more accurately define neighborhood characteristics. With Sampson's theory of collective efficacy, links between physical neighborhood conditions, health, crime, and a host of other neighborhood effects can become more comprehensively understood. By focusing strictly on vacant housing and collective efficacy, the study of neighborhood effects in the context of the post-mortgage crisis can be provide a more accurate understanding of how cities are being impacted at the neighborhood-level. Particularly in the case of the Inland Empire, San Bernardino provides a context that is relevant to today's pressing problems regarding neighborhood revitalization in America's poor and disinvested inner-ring suburbs.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Overview**

As previously noted, there are numerous studies looking at physical neighborhood characteristics and their effect on social capital, particularly looking at the effect the mortgage crisis had on the neighborhoods most inflicted. Nevertheless, there has yet to be a focused study on neighborhoods in the Inland Empire. Along the same lines as other social capital studies, a mixed-methods approach using descriptive statistics, regression, and thematic narratives was used to get a comprehensive evaluation of collective efficacy. In addition, observations made during the day in the selected neighborhoods were done to provide a visual and contextual supplement to the quantitative survey data and qualitative interview data collected in each neighborhood. In order to contextualize the case of San Bernardino, descriptive statistics were pulled from the Census Bureau and California Department of Finance. Demographic and vacancy rate data from 2000 to 2010 were analyzed longitudinally to assess the overall changes in the city. By comparing these descriptive statistics to California's, the case was made that San Bernardino is an appropriate area to study in terms of vacant homes and neighborhood effect relative to the State.

### **Vacancy Regression**

Using data from the American Community Survey and the Social Explorer software, 148 census block groups that were more than half within San Bernardino city limits were identified. All neighborhood block groups were compared by vacancy rate and median income in a scatter plot to determine whether there is a strong correlation between the two variables. The same process was done to compare vacancy rate to percentage of African American residents as well as percentage of Latino residents residing in each census block group.

## **Neighborhood Selection**

In order to select neighborhoods to look at, I examined all neighborhood block group vacancy rates within San Bernardino using Social Explorer. From there, I selected two neighborhoods, Central and Northwest San Bernardino, based on differing vacancy rates and other similar attributes, such as income, number of households, etc. (See Table 1 on page 27) Both neighborhood demographics were analyzed with their corresponding census block group as noted in Social Explorer. Although the demographics did not truly reflect all the residents that were studied, this data provided the most accurate and comparable data available to evaluate the overall demographics in the neighborhood area. In each neighborhood, I conducted in-depth analysis through surveys, observations, and semi-structured interviews.

## **Collective Efficacy Survey**

A modified version of questions used in the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods, most notably used by Sampson et. al (2013), served as the measure of perceived neighborhood collective efficacy. All these questions use a five-point Likert scale. The survey also recorded demographics, including: gender, employment status, race, education attainment, number of years lived in the community, and nativity (foreign-born or not). At the end of the survey, respondents were asked to list any community groups they may be a part of. A sample survey is included in the Appendix. I surveyed the present head of the household at the identified neighborhoods door-by-door for several days during the months of January, February, and March 2016, until I obtained sample sizes of at least ten in each neighborhood.

Adapted from Weffer et. al.'s (2014) methodology, the survey questions were scored on a 1 to 5 scale, with total efficacy scores calculated as means, with 1 indicating the highest collective efficacy and 5 indicated the lowest collective efficacy. The demographic indicators

listed above, as well as, the number of vacant homes in the respective census block group as indicated in the 2014 American Community Survey, will serve as the independent variable on the collective efficacy score. The survey data was then analyzed using descriptive statistics in order to determine any differences with types of neighborhoods concerning collective efficacy.

### **Semi-structured Interviews**

In order to add more depth to the quantitative survey data, three semi-structured interviews were conducted with one or two residents in each neighborhood that I surveyed. The interview questions aimed at understanding residents' feelings about and perception of neighborhood trust, social control, and concerns in general. Long-term residents, in particular, offered insight on changes in the neighborhood over time. Interviewees were chosen based on availability and preference was be given to long-term residents. Interviews were conducted in residents' homes, recorded using an electronic voice recorder, and lasted about 15 minutes. Spanish interviews took place as needed. Afterwards, the recordings were transcribed, analyzed, and coded into reoccurring themes by hand. The results from the interviews were compared between the neighborhoods in order to determine if there are significant differences in lived experiences.

### **Field Observations**

Lastly, I conducted a series of nonparticipant and quasi-participant observation sessions and took in-depth field notes at the chosen neighborhood block groups. In addition to the qualitative interviews, observation field notes highlighted characteristics and activities occurring the neighborhood at the time of observation that were not mentioned by residents. Each neighborhood being studied was observed during similar times in the day in an effort to get a comparable experience. Field-notes included neighborhood activities, such as, children playing

in the streets, neighbor interactions with one another, neighbor interactions with me, etc. All the field-notes were compiled and thematic material was compared across between the two neighborhoods in order to assess whether or not vacant homes is a strong signal for neighborhood efficacy.