

Doctor of Sociology

Rather Christophe than Mustapha: Understanding and Responding to Ethnic Discrimination in the Rental Housing Market.

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Abstract

Discrimination undermines the foundations of democracy and human rights, which rest on the fundamental principle that all individuals are equal before the law. Ethnic discrimination in the rental housing market not only violates the fundamental human rights to equal treatment and adequate housing, but also adversely impacts individual lives and poses a threat to social cohesion. While previous research has extensively focused on exposing and documenting rental discrimination through the field experimental method of correspondence testing, this dissertation moves beyond that focus by examining how measured discrimination can be understood and counteracted. Concretely, two overarching research questions are explored: (1) How can rental discrimination be understood based on the social context and invisible identity signals? And (2) How do different – and often opposing – perspectives (government, supply- and demand-side) respond to discrimination?

By applying a mixed-methods approach - integrating correspondence tests, survey experiments, semi-structured in-depth interviews and content analysis of policy documents and discrimination reports - this dissertation contributes to the literature on three levels. On a methodological level, ways to refine and guarantee both internal and external validity of correspondence tests are proposed, as the foundational assumptions it relies upon are found to be challenged. On a theoretical level, it takes a step toward bridging the gap between discrimination research and policy research by introducing a temporal framework to analyze local anti-discrimination policies and related actions. On a policy level, this dissertation argues in favor of - and proposes clear recommendations for - a strong and clear anti-discrimination policy. These recommendations are structured around four key dimensions that, when implemented in conjunction, have the potential to effectively counter discrimination: moving beyond solely anti-discrimination policy, implementing tailored awareness-raising efforts, regulating the market beyond awareness-raising efforts, and ensuring active monitoring mechanisms.