

**Discriminations in Access to Housing:
A Test on Urban Areas in Metropolitan France ***
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The measurement of discrimination in access to housing covers both challenges relating to knowledge for research and essential challenges relating to the very design of public policies. In this area, the most widely used method is that of “testing”, which consists of comparing the answers obtained in response to a property advertisement by two applicants who are similar in all respects except for the characteristic the effect of which is to be tested. This method has been applied in the United States since the 1980s and has provided a wealth of experimental evidence of discrimination in access to housing, particularly ethno-racial discrimination, which is the most studied form of discrimination. With the proliferation of the internet and property advertising sites, the correspondence test, which consists of sending fictional application emails, has become the most efficient way to carry out tests on the housing market.

Methodology

We measure and interpret discrimination in access to rental housing in the private sector using a test covering large French urban areas. Three forms of discrimination are investigated: age (discrimination against young people), origin (using the name and distinguishing between Maghribi and West African) and the type of residence of the applicant (low-cost housing or social housing) at the time of making contact. Our protocol consisted of sending five fictitious applications (all the applicants being French) in response to a selection of 5,000 advertisements for private rental housing spread throughout the 50 largest urban areas in Metropolitan France. This results in an experimental database (DALTON, TEPP-CNRS) of 25,000 observations.

Main results

The statistical analysis of this database leads to several interesting conclusions.

- We do not identify discrimination based on the applicant’s age.
- We find a positive effect of living in low-cost or social housing while looking for an apartment in the private rental sector – which signals an improvement in the applicant’s standard of living and a higher ability to pay rent.
- We identify significant discrimination based on origin, which penalises applicants whose forenames and surname evoke a Maghribi or African origin. Relative to the reference applicant assumed to be of French origin, Sébastien Petit, the Maghribi applicant Mohamed Chettouh has a 26.7% lower chance of success in his application for housing. This discrimination is very marked for advertisements from private owners and is also very marked for advertisements from estate agents. It is only slightly mitigated when the applicant adds a signal of quality by stating that he is a civil servant.
- Discrimination is patently clear in a small number of urban areas. The ten of them where there is most discrimination are not the largest or smallest ones. None of them are regional capitals. They are all prefectures or sub-prefectures. Their size is close to the median size of large urban areas and they are dispersed across Metropolitan France.

Conclusions

The results of this study call for an in-depth consideration regarding the regulation of the property market and the various tools that can be used to combat discrimination in access to housing. These public policy tools range from a reminder of the rule of law to concrete measures aimed at making the law more effective.