



# New faces in new spaces in new places: Residential attainment among newly legalized immigrants in established, new, and minor destinations



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## ABSTRACT

Immigrants at the beginning of the twenty-first century are located in a more diverse set of metropolitan areas than at any point in U.S. history. Whether immigrants' residential prospects are helped or hindered in new versus established immigrant-receiving areas has been the subject of debate. Using multilevel models and data from the New Immigrant Survey (NIS), a nationally representative sample of newly legalized immigrants to the U.S., we move beyond aggregate-level analyses of residential segregation to specify the influence of destination type on individual-level immigrant residential outcomes. The findings indicate that immigrants in new and minor destinations are significantly more likely to live in tracts with relatively more non-Hispanic whites and relatively fewer immigrants and poor residents. These residential advantages persist net of individual-level controls but are largely accounted for by place-to-place differences in metropolitan composition and structure. Our exclusive focus on newly legalized immigrants means that our findings do not necessarily contradict the possibility of worse residential prospects in new areas of settlement, but rather qualifies it as not extending to the newly authorized population.

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## 1. Introduction

Currently, immigrants live in a more diverse set of communities than at any other point in our nation's history (Massey and Capoferro, 2008; Singer, 2011). Unprecedented growth in the foreign-born population across metropolitan America—particularly in areas that did not have appreciable pre-existing immigrant populations—has been one of the most striking aspects of U.S. immigration over the past several decades (Singer, 2004). The geographic dispersal of immigrants to communities across the country has raised the question—how are immigrants in these new receiving areas being incorporated? Or as framed by Massey (2008: 351) in his edited volume on the changing geography of immigration: do “new places” mean “new assimilation”? In the realm of residential location, the answer has been mixed. While a small number of studies have found that immigrants are less residentially segregated from native-born non-Hispanic Whites in newer and emerging immigrant destinations (e.g. Alba et al., 2010; Park and Iceland, 2011), most have found the opposite and argue that

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immigrants' residential prospects are distinctly disadvantaged in new destinations as opposed to more established ones (Hall, 2013; Hall and Stringfield, 2014; Lichter et al., 2010).

This paper contributes to the discussion by analyzing the residential outcomes of the first nationally representative sample of any broad section of the U.S. immigrant population—newly legalized immigrants. The New Immigrant Survey (NIS) consists of individual-level data that are supplemented with residential addresses across over 150 metropolitan areas in the U.S. The recent availability of the geocoded NIS enables us to conduct a multi-level analysis of whether and how different immigrant receiving areas shape residential opportunity structures for newly legalized immigrants. Our work advances the existing literature on immigrant segregation, which has largely been limited to aggregate-level analyses, by incorporating multi-level models and focusing explicitly on residential attainment, defined here as the ability to attain residence in desirable neighborhoods (South et al., 2011). Doing so allows us to make explicit an implicit assumption in the existing research, namely that immigrants' location in new versus traditional immigrant receiving metropolitan areas influences the types of neighborhoods they are able to access. Much of the research on immigrant residential location has focused primarily on racial composition, e.g. distance from non-Hispanic white neighbors. We expand the focus beyond exposure to the non-Hispanic White majority to also assess immigrants' individual propensities to reside in neighborhoods characterized by varying poverty levels and by varying concentrations of other immigrants. While a focus on residential racial/nativity concentration informs us about social distance, a focus on non-racial neighborhood characteristics, e.g. poverty, tells us something about the conditions of the neighborhoods in which immigrants live.

Our analysis focuses explicitly on newly legalized immigrants. Arguably, those who have initiated the legalization process are of particular interest because they are the most likely out of the entire immigrant population to become the country's next citizens. Determining whether their patterns of residential attainment vary across destination type is a key first step in assessing whether metropolitan America is differentially integrating its newest members.

## 2. Background

A considerable amount of scholarly and popular attention has been given to the dramatic dispersal of Mexican immigrants out of gateway cities and into non-traditional, and often non-metropolitan, destinations (Hall and Stringfield, 2014; Leach and Bean, 2008; Zúñiga and Hernández-León, 2005). Notwithstanding transformative shifts in the settlement patterns of Mexican immigrants, including population increases of over 1000 percent in some new destinations, geographic diversification has actually been a much broader phenomenon characterizing the entire foreign-born population at the end of the twentieth century (Parrado and Kandel, 2008). An analysis of Latino, Asian and other immigrant groups found that, although the biggest change was for Mexicans, all groups experienced a greater diversity of destinations between 1990 and 2000 (Massey and Capoferro, 2008). Although growth rates increased most dramatically in non-urban destinations, immigration remains a decidedly metropolitan affair, with over 95 percent of immigrants residing in metropolitan areas (Singer, 2013). The result has been a movement of millions of immigrants into metropolitan areas with little prior history of incorporating newcomers (Hall, 2013; Massey, 2008).

The shift away from metropolitan areas characterized as long-standing engines of immigrant integration has raised the question of how immigrants are faring in the new immigrant destinations (Hall, 2013; Massey, 2008). One aspect of immigrant incorporation that has received considerable attention is residential location. In the highly segregated U.S. residential landscape, location is a powerful indicator and determinant of social position because so many economic and social resources are tied to one's residential location (Fischer and Tienda, 2006). Residential integration with members of the host society, a process labeled "spatial assimilation" is often considered the linchpin upon which full societal incorporation depends (Alba et al., 2000; Massey and Mullan, 1984; Timberlake and Iceland, 2007).

To date, empirical evaluations of immigrant residential situations in new versus established destinations have followed almost exclusively in the footsteps of the extensive literature on black–white racial residential segregation and have relied on aggregate-level analyses of segregation, e.g. at the city or metropolitan level, to assess variation in residential situations. Fischer and Tienda's (2006) analysis was one of the first to connect immigrant geographic diversification with patterns of racial/ethnic segregation in the case of the Latino population. Focusing their analysis on the 100 largest metropolitan areas, they found that foreign-born Latinos were more highly segregated from non-Hispanic Whites in new Latino destinations (as measured by the index of dissimilarity) but that their social isolation (as measured by the degree of potential contact, i.e. the  $P^*$  index) was considerably lower in new Latino destinations than in traditional ones (Fischer and Tienda, 2006). Subsequent studies have continued in this tradition, contrasting aggregate-level segregation measures for different groups across various destination-type typologies, and have arrived at mixed conclusions. For instance, while findings from Lichter et al.'s (2010) analysis of Latinos residing in both metro and nonmetro places echoed those of Fischer and Tienda (2006), Park and Iceland (2011) found that segregation from non-Hispanic whites was higher in established gateways than in new destinations among immigrants generally and, separately, among Latinos and Asians, irrespective of nativity. In the most comprehensive assessment so far, Hall (2013) estimated differences in metropolitan segregation levels using the index of dissimilarity for 10 different immigrant groups in the largest 100 metropolitan areas (Hall, 2013). Using both immigrant-wide and group-specific destination typologies (i.e. new Vietnamese destinations versus established Vietnamese destinations), he found that most immigrant sub-groups were more segregated from native-born non-Hispanic whites in new and minor immigrant destinations compared to more established ones.

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