Residential instability of immigrants: Three cohorts of immigrants to Canada

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Short Abstract

Using administrative data with rich information about immigrant residential patterns over time, our study examines the residential stability of immigrants to Canada. To do so, we first assess whether new immigrants to Canada are more likely to move across census tracts or metropolitan areas relative to Canadian-born of comparable ages. Second, we document variations in residential mobility patterns by immigrant admission categories, paying close attention to differences between refugees and economic or family reunification migrants. Third, we will compare the residential mobility patterns of three cohorts of immigrants: (1) those who arrived between 1998 and 2000; (2) those who arrived between 2003-2005, and (3) those who arrived between 2008-2010. The three groups are immigrants who migrated before changes in Canadian immigration law following 9/11 attacks, those who migrate after legislative changes following 9/11 attacks, and those who arrived during the 2008 Great Recession.

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Extended Abstract

Researchers have long been interested in the residential choices and residential assimilation of immigrants (Burgess 1967; Ellis 2006; Fong and Wilkies 1999; Hoyt 1939; Moraga et al. 2017). Prior work on this topic has shown that new immigrants are more likely than the native-born population to settle in metropolitan areas and live in neighborhoods with disproportionately high shares of co-ethnics (Massey and Denton 1985). However, as the economic circumstances of immigrants improve, immigrants attain residential assimilation – they live in greater proximity to the mainstream native-born population (i.e., non-Hispanic (NH) Whites) and the spatial distribution of immigrants differs little from that of the native-born (Fong and Wilkes 1999; Logan and Alba 1993).

Inspired by this framework, existing work describe "residential assimilation" in terms of the racial/ethnic and socioeconomic characteristics of neighborhoods in which members of an immigrant group settle over time (Dawkins 2009; Massey and Denton 1985; White, Biddlecom, and Guo 1993; Zhang and Zheng 2015). These studies show that White immigrants eventually settle in neighborhoods highly populated by other NH Whites. This, however, may not be the case for contemporary immigrants who are largely racial minorities (Massey et al. 1993). Surprisingly, few studies have examined the residential stability of immigrants (exception Renaud et al. 2006). This scarcity exists although it is a well-established fact that excessive residential instability is a direct deterrent to immigrants' ability to establish social ties and "roots" in the destination communities (Mare et al. 2016) and to the socioeconomic assimilation of the next generation (South et al. 2005; Turney and Harknett 2010).

Using administrative data with rich information about immigrant residential patterns over time, our study examines the residential stability of immigrants to Canada. To do so, we first assess whether new immigrants to Canada are more likely to move across census tracts or metropolitan areas relative to Canadian-born of comparable ages. Second, we document variations in residential mobility patterns by immigrant admission categories, paying especially close attention to differences between refugees and economic or family reunification migrants. Third, we will compare the residential mobility patterns of three cohorts of immigrants: (1) those who arrived between 1998 and 2000; (2) those who arrived between 2003-2005, and (3) those who arrived between 2008-2010. The three groups represent immigrants from three distinct eras of migration: (1) immigrants who arrived prior to 9/11 attacks and ensuing changes to Canadian immigration legislation, (2) immigrants who arrived after legislative changes following 9-11, and (3) those who arrived during the Great Recession.

This body of work contributes to the immigrant assimilation literature in important ways. Most prior work relies on cross-sectional data and examines the residential patterns of immigrants with varying duration of stay in Canada (e.g., Fong and Wilkes 1999; Massey and Denton 1985; White 1988; More recent cite). Our study follows immigrants over time and uses longitudinal data on the residential patterns of immigrants to document their residential stability. Furthermore, there has yet to be a study describing variations in the residential patterns of immigrants according to their immigrant admission category (i.e., high skilled economic migrant, family reunification, and refugee). Using administrative data obtained from the Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada—the Canadian-equivalent to the Department of Homeland Security—, we can document differences in residential patterns and assess differences

in the assimilation trajectories of immigrants who migrated under different immigrant admission categories.

Data and Methods

Data. We use two linked administrative data sources for our analysis. First, the Longitudinal Administrative Dataset (LAD) is a 20% random sample of all Canadian taxfilers taken from the T1 Family Files (T1FF)[1] (Statistics Canada 2018). Once selected, the tax files of LAD respondents were linked across years to create a longitudinal profile. New tax filers were also added each year to ensure that the LAD files continue to be representative of tax filers for every year. We use the LAD to measure the residential stability of the Canadian-born population.

The second data source is the 1999-2015 Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB). The IMDB links administrative immigrant admission and tax data files obtained from the Canadian Revenue Agency (CRA) and the Immigration Refugee, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) (McLeish 2016).[2] The Immigrant Landing Files (ILF) and Non-Permanent Resident File (NRF) are administrative records about the characteristics of permanent and non-permanent residents at the time of their arrival into Canada. Excepting some slippage due to failed record linkages, the IMDB contains information on all immigrants that came to Canada between 1980 and 2015.

The pooled dataset is well-suited to measure residential stability of immigrants for several reasons. First, it contains rich information on the characteristics of immigrants at the time of their admission, including their immigrant admission category, education levels, language proficiency, year of arrival, and intended region of residence. Second, it also reports the postal code, census tract (CT), and census metropolitan areas (CMAs) of residence for each respondent at each year of tax filing. This dataset can be used to document the residential mobility of immigrants. Third, IMDB files are large in size, which allow us to disaggregate the immigrant population according to the immigrant admission category, immigrant cohort, and region of birth. For example, the IMDB reported the information of 3.8 million immigrants in 1982 and 5.2 million in 2012 (Statistics Canada 2014). Finally, these are administrative data, and it is likely that information about on several variables (such as immigrant admission category) will be more accurate than self-reports.

Sample. Our sample is comprised of two subsamples. Analyses documenting nativity differences in residential instability rely on a sample of (1) immigrants between the ages of 25 and 54 who arrived in Canada in 1998- 2000, 2003-2005, and 2008-2010 and (2) their Canadian-born counterparts of comparable ages in each year.

We further restricted our analysis to individuals who filed taxes in 5 consecutive years. The advantage of this approach is that it shields our analysis from right censoring bias. The disadvantage of this approach is that it restricts the analysis to a very select sample. In

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[1] This is the Canadian-equivalent of the 1040 form in the United States.

[2] CRA is the Canadian-equivalent of the Internal Revenue Agency (IRS) and IRCC is the Canadian-equivalent to the Department of Homeland Security in the United States.

subsequent versions, we will relax this requirement and test the robustness of our main conclusions.

Analyses examining the residential patterns of immigrant subgroups rely on a sample of immigrants ages 25 to 54 who arrived in Canada in 1998-2000, 2003-2005, and 2008-2010. Here too, we further restricted our analysis to individuals who filed taxes in 5 consecutive years. We also excluded immigrants with missing information about year of arrival, place of birth, immigrant admission category, and education. If there are multiple tax filers within a household, we randomly selected one tax-filer.

Measures

Dependent variable

Residential instability is a categorical variable distinguishing among (1) non-movers, (2) those who moved Census Tracts but not Census Metropolitan Areas, and (3) those who moved Census Tracts but not Census Metropolitan Areas.

Census tracts (CT) are relatively stable geographic unions that usually have a population between 2,500 and 8,000 persons. They are located within Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs). CMAs have populations of at least 100,000. Approximately 70% of the Canadian population live in one of the 34 CMAs (Statistics Canada 2011).

Independent variable

Place of birth classifies foreign-born and native-born individuals into 8 categories depending on their region of birth: (1) Canadian-born, (2) Western Europeans, (3) Eastern Europeans, (4) East Asians, (5) Southeast Asians, (6) South Asians, (7) Caribbean, and (8) Africans.

Immigrant cohort categorizes immigrants into three categories depending on their year of arrival in Canada: (1) 1998-2000, (2) 2003-2005, and (3) 2008-2010.

Legislative changes and shifts in economic conditions may create marked differences in the composition of immigrants in these three cohorts. The first immigration cohort are those whose migration was governed by the 1976 Immigration Act, which declared refugees a separate category of immigration (Boyd and Vickers 2000). The second cohort came after Canada enacted the 2001 Immigration and Refugee Protection Act following the 9/11 attacks, which gave the government greater powers to detain and deport landed immigrants (Kruger et al. 2004). The last immigrant cohort migrated during the Great Recession, which had less of an effect in Canada than in the United States. The improvement in relative economic prospects of Canada may have drawn more positively selected migrants into Canada. Additionally, in 2008, the IRCC introduced the Canadian Experience Class, which made it much easier for international students and highly skilled temporary foreign workers in Canada to become permanent residents (Alboim and Cohl 2012).

Immigrant admission category categorizes immigrants into four categories depending on immigrant admission class: (1) Economic migrant – skilled, (2) Economic migrant – unskilled, (3) Family reunification, (4) Refugee, and (5) Temporary migrants.

Immigrant legal status categorizes immigrants into four categories depending on their legal status: (1) Temporary, (2) Temporary who became a Permanent resident, (3) Came as a Permanent Resident, (4) Citizenship status.

Control variables

Analysis of nativity differences in residential mobility controls for **gender**, **age**, **marital status**, **presence of children**, **annual hours worked**, **employment status**, and **household income**. Analysis of immigrant adds additional controls, including **education at landing**, **language proficiency**, **amount of experience prior to their arrival in Canada**, and **intended province**.

Methods

Our analysis is comprised of two parts. We begin by assessing whether immigrants are more likely to experience residential instability after their arrival in Canada relative to Canadian-born of comparable ages. To do so, using life tables, we estimate the number times of foreign-born from different regions have moved (1) CMAs and (2) CTs but not CMAs in the first 5-years and compare it with the corresponding number of moves that Canadian-born of comparable ages have made in the same time.

Once these patterns are established, we document variations in residential mobility patterns of immigrants according to their admission categories, arrival cohort, and legal status. Using life tables, we document variations in the cumulative percentage of foreign-born individuals who have (1) moved CTs but not CMAs and (2) CTs and CMAs within 5 years of arrival in Canada by immigrant admission category, arrival cohort, and legal status. We also run discrete-time multinomial logistic regression to predict the competing odds of (1) moving CTs but not CMAs, (2) moving CTs and CMAs, and (3) not moving. For these analyses, the file will be organized in person-year files. Right censoring will occur at 5 years of arrival and after their first transition. Our decision to focus on the first 5 years of immigrant arrival occurred because preliminary analyses showed virtually no difference in cumulative share of individuals who moved CTs or CMAs at 5 and 10 years after their arrival in Canada.

Preliminary results

We find considerable instability amongst newcomers to Canada. This instability is relatively short-lived, with steady but gradual declines in residential instability. This stability increases not only over time within cohorts, but also across cohorts (each cohort moves less than its predecessor cohort). For the Canadian-born, there is no initial similar spike in instability at time of entry into our sample, but there is the same decline in mobility across cohorts. We will discuss possible explanations for these declines (population aging, increased homogeneity across labour markets, increase in information about potential destinations, etc.), and offer insights for future research.

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