

**Four ethnic groups, seven cities, and two countries:  
A comparative look at residential integration**

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*Extended Abstract*

This paper investigates ethnic residential integration in a comparative perspective. It seeks to understand how various factors contribute to the residential sorting of four ethnic groups in two different national contexts. It asks, Are there systematic cross-national differences in the process of residential integration for these groups? What are the key factors driving ethnic residential distinctiveness and are they the same across ethnic groups and across countries? To what extent are patterns the result of ethnic factors (i.e. human capital, social networks, culture) and contextual (i.e. local structure, institutional context)?

The residential patterning of ethnic groups within cities represents their degree of integration or distinctiveness in society. On the one hand, the visibility of ethnic groups within the urban area is suggestive of the salience of ethnic identities and attachments. It also bears upon the formation and intensity of group identities and other ethnic group outcomes. As a consequence, the ethnic neighborhood reinforces ethnicity. On the other hand, residential patterns also offer a window on interethnic relations and shape social interaction. Stronger attachments to ethnic communities may result in less exposure to others and more limited social interaction and English language acquisition. In other words, the neighborhood can act as a source of “closure” and social and economic exclusion.

In explaining residential patterns, we have moved beyond thinking of the ability of groups and group members as the sole determinant of immigrant and ethnic integration. Most research now recognizes the importance of the cultural and structural organization of host societies. Thus, the extent to which immigrant integration follows the assimilation, stratification

or retention model, or some combination, depends upon both ethnic factors and the social context. Our understanding of the impact of the national context on residential integration is limited and this study begins to address this gap.

Contemporary thinking on the immigrant integration process has advanced beyond straight-line assimilation theory. Contemporary patterns suggest that integration can follow different paths, expected to vary by ethnic group and by the local and national context. To elucidate these processes, four ethnic groups are analyzed, Iranians, Jamaicans, the Chinese and the Vietnamese, each in two metropolitan areas, respectively, in two countries, Canada and the US. The four contrasting groups have been selected for their differential experiences of migration, host and sending countries relations, racial grouping and cultural or religious orientation.

Iranians are considered to be a white ethnic group and would be expected to conform to an assimilationist path of integration. However, they are marked by religious diversity in both countries and their presence is partly the result of a refugee movement. The Vietnamese are also primarily refugees in both countries but their arrival in the US context contrasts greatly with their movement into Canada due to the US involvement in the Vietnam war. Also, at least for Canada, the current migration stream has diminished significantly. A second Asian group, having left their country(ies) of origin for somewhat different reasons is the Chinese. A dominant minority presence in many metropolitan areas, Chinese communities in both countries are characterized by a polarized social structure as some members have high levels of education and economic resources and others have low levels. Finally, the Jamaicans offer a contrast to the others. Their English-language ability should be a force for swift integration into both countries but their position as a Black ethnic group may suggest otherwise.

The proximity of Canada and the US in geography and experience provides the opportunity for comparative work between the two places. Their continued high rates of immigration raise similar issues of social cohesion and economic integration, citizenship, ethnic relations, social mobility and border control. Despite obvious commonalities, the US and Canada also differ in significant ways. They have undergone different historical trajectories and occupy different positions in the global political economy leading to nation-specific bilateral relationships and distinct value (political) orientations and institutional systems. In the context of these differences, group relations do not take on the same meaning or pattern within each country. The integration of ethnic groups occurs within a particular institutional and ideological milieu and cross-national comparisons allow us to highlight its relevance.

The most recent censuses in the US (2000) and in Canada (2001) provide data for the analysis including US census tract tabulations from Summary Files SF1 to SF4, and Canadian census tract tabulations obtained from Statistics Canada. All four selected ethnic groups placed in the top 25 places of birth for the foreign-born population in both countries. The high levels of urban concentration of immigrants argue for a study of selected metropolitan areas. Table 1 lists the metropolitan areas for each ethnic group in each country.

The dependent variable in the analysis is the degree of residential distinctiveness and is measured by the percentage of co-ethnic group members by census tract. Ethnic resources, the key explanatory concept, is operationalized using a number of variables, including conventional socioeconomic status indicators (i.e. income, education, employment), and acculturation indicators as well as those specifically related to the survival and growth of the ethnic community ((English language (and French for Canada), nativity, new arrivals and group size). Control variables include the neighborhood context, measured by four indicators at the tract level

(i.e. population size, new housing construction, black and/or the presence of other ethnic groups and the foreign-born population).

First, a comparison of descriptive statistics on ethnic resources and level of residential distinctiveness for the four groups across the two countries will be presented. Second, I will employ an OLS multivariate regression of ethnic residential distinctiveness on ethnic resources and the local context for each group in each metropolitan area and compare processes across countries.

This design allows us to investigate the possibility of the influence of ethnic culture on residential integration. By controlling the ethnic group across different contexts, similarities in residential outcomes may suggest that spatial proximity is valued by ethnic group members. Differences in outcomes, however, would provide support for the contention that the context is more important for how groups relate to themselves and to others.

In an initial look at residential concentration, the dissimilarity index, a statistical measure of residential segregation, is also presented in Table 1. These values reveal similarly high levels of segregation for all of the groups across metropolitan areas and countries. An examination across the columns for the same ethnic group in the metropolitan area with the largest ethnic community, segregation tends to be higher in the US. Comparing across the four groups, Jamaicans in Montreal are the most highly segregated group in Canada followed by the Iranians in Los Angeles. The results of the multivariate analysis will reveal the extent to which these differences can be explained by differences in ethnic resources and local context.

In sum, the results of this research are expected to improve our understanding of the processes and outcomes of ethnic residential integration by comparing the experiences of two different nations. The comparative perspective will shed insight into the integration experience

and its link to the structural and institutional features of the nation-state, ethnic resources and the local context.

The US and Canada share some of the same challenges to attaining social cohesion even though they have undergone separate journeys. For many developed countries, economic and humanitarian goals of the state have resulted in the continuous movement of people into their respective national borders. With no foreseeable suspension of these flows, the settlement of international migrants and the consequent social and economic interactions that are shaped by this spatial distribution will continue to be of considerable importance to these societies.

Table 1. Ethnic groups and metropolitan areas under study

<i>Ethnic Group</i>	<i>Metro Area</i>	US		Canada		
		<i>Percent of Group</i>	<i>D Index</i>	<i>Metro Area</i>	<i>Percent of Group</i>	<i>D Index</i>
Iranian	Los Angeles	32.4	.70	Toronto	48.7	.59
	San Francisco	10.2	.57	Vancouver	25.0	.57
Jamaican	New York	45.4	.66	Toronto	79.3	.44
	Miami	16.0	.53	Montreal	4.9	.75
Chinese	New York	21.8	.60	Toronto	41.8	.54
	San Francisco	20.3	.51	Vancouver	34.4	.51
Vietnamese	Los Angeles	21.3	.60	Toronto	30.6	.58
	San Francisco	13.4	.58	Montreal	19.5	.60