Immigrant Settlement Patterns in the United States in the 1990s: Can Existing Theories Explain the Changes?

By

Douglas T. Gurak
Population and Development Program
Cornell University
Ithaca, NY 14850
dtg2@cornell.edu

And

Mary M. Kritz
Population and Development Program
Cornell University
Ithaca, NY 14850
mmk5@cornell.edu

The 2000 census revealed that the foreign-born population was no longer settling and staying put in America's Gateway cities and states. The biggest change in foreign-born settlement trends in the 1990s was its large growth in the South, 91 percent compared to 58 percent for the country as a whole. Moreover, from 1995 to 2000, the South attracted more internal foreign-born migrants and received more immigrants arriving from abroad than any other region. Mexicans accounted for the bulk of this southern growth, increasing by 170 percent in the 1990s. Indeed if Texas and Florida are excluded from their usual classification as part of the South, Mexican foreign-born grew by over 1,000 percent in the rest of the region. Other groups that more than doubled the size of their populations in the South in the 1990s included Dominicans, former USSR nationals, Salvadorans, Indians and Vietnamese.

Close to 12 million foreign-born persons who arrived in the United States during the 1990s were counted in the 2000 Census. This represents a substantial increase of over 3 million persons from the 8.6 million who arrived in the 1980s and were counted in the 1990 Census. In addition to the increase in numbers, several notable changes emerged in the 90s. The flow from Europe expanded after decades of decline. The educational attainment of immigrants improved dramatically despite the growth of the relatively poorly educated inflow from Mexico and Central America. Perhaps most significant, non-traditional destinations experienced large expansions of their immigrant populations. These destinations include rural and smaller metropolitan regions in many parts of the country, and non-traditional states such as Minnesota, North Carolina, and Georgia that had not been among the leading receivers of immigrants. Perhaps the best illustration of the magnitude of the evolving settlement pattern is the declining importance of California for recent immigrants from Mexico, the largest immigrant group. According to the 1990 Census, 60 percent of persons who had immigrated from Mexico during

the prior 10 years resided in California in 1990. Only 32 percent of Mexican born persons who had arrived during the 1990s were residing in California at the time of the 2000 Census.

The 2000 U.S. county map of the percent foreign born shown in Figure 1 indicates that while the foreign-born population remained overwhelmingly concentrated in 2000 in metropolitan areas of the West, Southwest, Florida, and Northeast corridor, other multi-county metropolitan growth poles could be noted in the internal regions of the country, the largest of which were Chicago, Atlanta, Charlotte-Raleigh-Greensboro, and Detroit. But the foreign-born population of almost all metropolitan areas grew in the 1990s. An emerging trend was the increasing tendency for the foreign born to reside in smaller urban centers. By 2000 more foreign born lived in places less than a million (30.3 percent) than lived in the three Gateway areas that each had a population larger than 8 million (Los Angeles, New York and Chicago). While in 1990, those 3 Gateway areas had 30.3 percent of all foreign born, by 2000 their share had dropped to 25.2 percent. Some media images suggest a shift in the settlement pattern towards rural areas. While the rural foreign-born population did increase, from 1.3 million in 1990 to over 1.7 million in 2000, the percent of the foreign-born population residing in non-metropolitan areas declined slightly (Kritz and Gurak 2004). A broad stroke description of the evolving immigrant settlement pattern would have to be multi-dimensional. The growth is centered in smaller metropolitan areas throughout the country, but increasingly located in southern and mid-western areas outside of the traditional gateway states; while there is no relative shift towards rural settlement, the increasing size of the rural immigrant population warrants renewed attention.

These shifts in foreign-born settlement support the view, widely portrayed in recent research and the media, that immigrant dispersal picked up in the 1990s. The evolving settlement pattern may suggest a reduction in the importance of the social barriers which traditionally attracted and kept the foreign born hidden away in America's largest metropolitan areas even when unemployment rates in many of those areas were higher than in other parts of the country. Nevertheless, very little is known about the economic and social factors that are driving the foreign-born dispersal that is apparently underway.

The analysis has two core sections. In the first section we describe the characteristics of areas which experienced changes in immigrant settlement during the 1990s and develop a typology of types of areas. The goals of this section is both to provide a descriptive grounding for an emerging settlement pattern and provide us with a basis for the specification of a parsimonious set of types of destinations for immigrants. This analysis will utilize aggregate data on 263 labor market regions (LMRs) from the 1990 and 2000 5% PUMS files. The LMRs are described in more detail below. Suffice it to say that they provide us with consistent geographic units for both the 1990 and 2000 5% PUMS files. The second section examines the relative power of competing theoretical frameworks in accounting for the settlement choices that internal foreign-born migrants made in the 1990s.

Spatial assimilation theory leads us to expect that the foreign born will migrate away from Gateway cities of entry as they learn English, become more acculturated, and acquire information about economic and social opportunities elsewhere in the United States. Spatial network theories, in contrast, draw on dual labor market theory to argue that today's foreign born coming from Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, Asia and Africa occupy insular labor

market niches that get reproduced in other places as saturation crowds out competing migrants in gateway areas. Economic theories, on the other hand, identify the importance of labor market structure and trends in shaping in- and out-migration of geographic units.

These theoretical perspectives will be used to guide the analysis. A set of explanatory variables will be used that allow us to measure the three dimensions suggested by these theories and to assess their relative importance for the patterns underway. Spatial assimilation theory emphasizes the acculturation dimension and can be modeled by considering the extent to which migration to non-traditional locations is a function of English language skills, length of U.S. residency and citizenship. A secondary mode of evaluating the applicability of this theoretical perspective involves the assessment of returns to human capital in gateway and non-traditional destinations for members of specific foreign-born origins. A finding that the growth of non-traditional settlement areas is being driven by internal migration of foreign born from elsewhere in the United States would also support spatial assimilation theory.

The evaluation of spatial network theory involves at least two strategies. First, the operation of strong networks implies that the size and composition of specific origin groups at earlier points in time, such as 1990 or 1995, will be strong predictors of the size and composition of new arrivals to non-traditional destinations. Second, network theory predicts that the new arrivals will be similar in terms of human capital and occupational niches to both their predecessors in the destination locations and to same-origin populations in major gateway areas. In addition, this theory would not lead us to expect returns to human capital for foreign-born residents of non-traditional destinations that differ from those in gateway areas.

Support for economic theories, on the other hand, would be provided if it is found that areas that experienced the highest foreign-born growth rates in the 1990s had lower rates of unemployment, higher rates of job growth and higher average median incomes. We will be able to construct aggregate context measures for LMRs in 1990, 1995 and 2000. This will permit us to evaluate the relative importance of labor market structures for the foreign-born in-migrations.

In order to analyze the evolving settlement patterns of immigrants we will use a set of geographic units that covers the entire United States, both rural and metropolitan, and that is essentially identical for both 1990 and 2000. These geo-recodes pertain to both the 1990 and 2000 5% PUMS files and to both residence at the time of the Census and five years prior. Since the LMR coding is central to the viability of this paper, we provide some background to their creation. They were first used in a paper on migratory responses to recent immigration presented at the 2004 PAA meetings (Gurak and Kritz 2004).

For studies of the settlement and migratory behavior of diverse foreign-born populations, the 5 percent PUMS files need to be used because they possess distinct advantages. They are large enough to have sufficient cases of recent immigrants in a wide range of locations and they have a potentially useful measure of geography, the Public Use Microdata Area or PUMA, that covers the entire country. We therefore clustered PUMAs into what we term labor market regions (LMRs) that are strongly influenced by the boundaries of LMAs (Tolbert and Killian 1987). The specification of the 1990 LMRs involved classifying PUMAs on the basis of the conformity of their constituent counties to those making up the LMAs using the PUMS-A County Equivalency Files and the documentation for the PUMS-L

(http://www.lapop.lsu.edu/ftp.html). About one third of the LMRs were perfect matches with LMAs. Another third had at least 50 percent consistently classified. The remainder, mainly in the rural areas of the west had a lower level of consistency. The LMAs were created with the ability to cluster counties in any manner that did not produce a LMA too small and thus in conflict with confidentiality standards. The 1990 LMRs deviate from that pattern because the county composition of PUMAs constrains the ability to match LMAs exactly and because many PUMA boundaries changed between 1990 and 2000. Nonetheless, the LMRs we eventually specified form reasonable regions and the decision rules underlying their formation are strongly based on the LMAs. There are 394 LMAs and 341 1990 LMRs. These LMRs, however, are not those utilized in this paper. Because of PUMA boundary changes in 2000, further collapsing of units was necessary to produce a set of LMRs with identical boundaries in 1990 and 2000.

Achieving the goal of producing LMR specifications with identical geographic boundaries for 1990 and 2000 proved more elusive than we had hoped would be the case. This would have been straightforward if PUMA boundaries had remained constant between 1990 and 2000. Not surprisingly, they did not. It had been known for some time that a new mode of spatial organization was being implemented by the Census Bureau. Rather than simply having PUMAs dividing up the territory (with sub-PUMAs in dense metropolitan areas), the entire country was organized into Super-PUMAs that were themselves made up of PUMAs. In many cases the underlying PUMAs remained identical to the 1990 PUMAs, but, in other cases, they changed when it was deemed necessary to form more meaningful Super-PUMAs or when tougher confidentiality constraints so dictated. When the 2000, 5 Percent, PUMS was released in stages during the Fall of 2003, the files were accompanied by detailed maps, available as PDF files, that made it clear that PUMA boundaries had changed.

In some states, such as Kentucky and Arizona, every 2000 PUMA was identical to its 1990 counterpart. In others, such as Alabama and Colorado, significant deviations occurred. We embarked on a tedious coding operation attempting to match 1990 LMRs with collections of 2000 Super-PUMAs and PUMAs. The detailed 2000 maps made this effort possible. Once again, a perfect LMA-LMR (1990) and LMR (2000) match was possible for New Jersey (including overlaps with Rockland County in New York and the Philadelphia region). Very good matches were possible in key states such as California, Texas, Florida, New York, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Ohio and in quite a few other states. Nonetheless, the process of finding matches required quite a few aggregations and deviations from the 1990 LMR boundaries in most states. A few additional aggregations were necessitated because of Census Bureau aggregations of some PUMAs in their coding of MIGPUMAs (PUMAs of residence in 1995 for those who had moved). In the end, we have 263 LMRs with essentially identical boundaries in 1990 and 2000. In Colorado, Georgia and Texas people living in a few low population counties are inconsistently classified in 2000 relative to 1990. These inconsistencies can be eliminated, but the effort to do this without needlessly throwing away context information requires more time than has been available. For the present we utilize an indicator variable, denoting when such inconsistencies exist, to estimate any biasing effects.

The analysis will be multilevel and focus on modeling the destination choices of foreign-born migrants in the 1990s as functions of individual human capital and acculturation status, origin and previous U.S. region of residence and LMR economic conditions.

REFERENCES

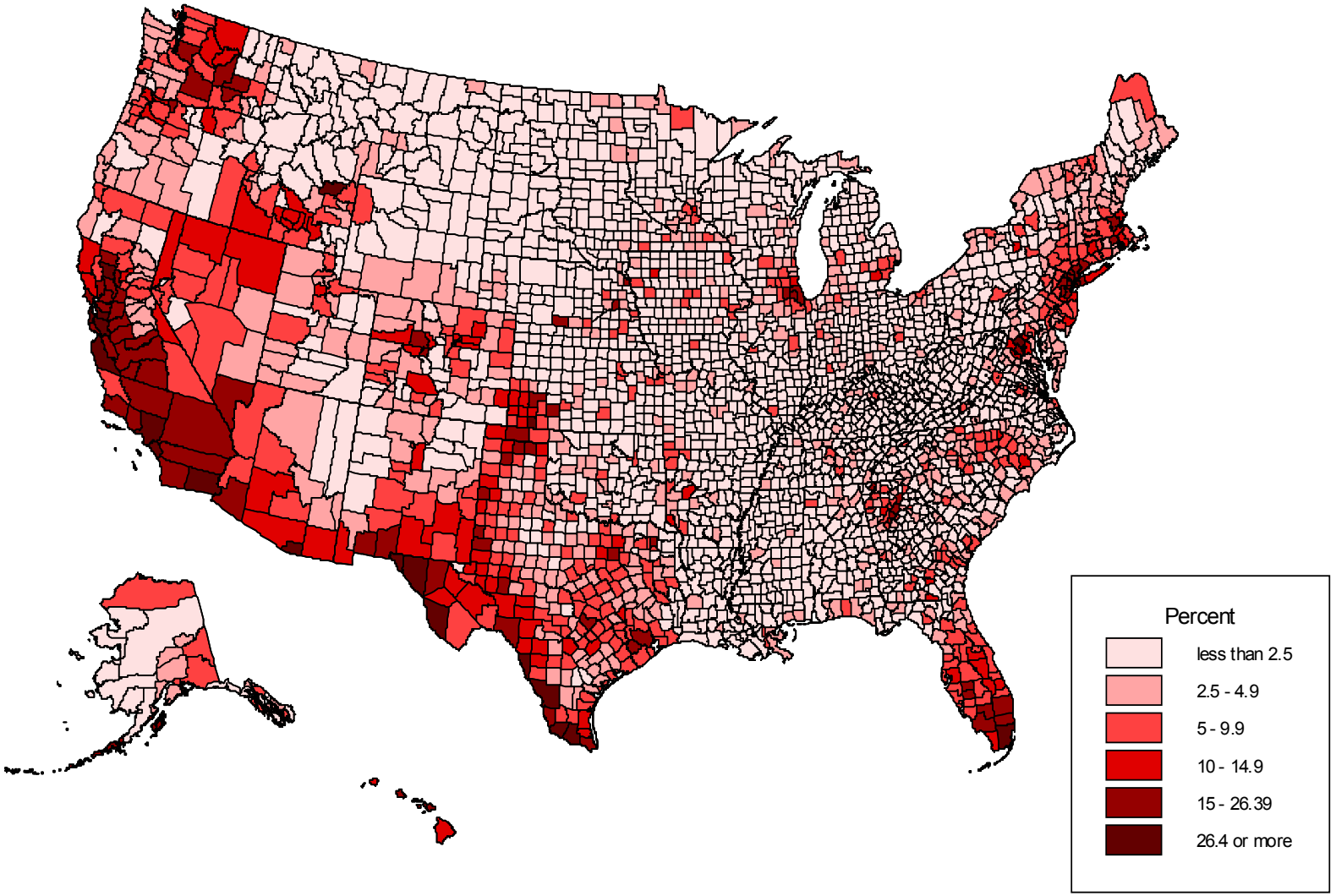
Gurak, Douglas T. and Mary M. Kritz. 2004. "Do the Native Born and Foreign Born Show Differential Migratory Responses to Immigration and Labor Market Conditions?" Paper presented at the annual meetings of the Population Association of America, Boston, April 1-3.

Kritz, Mary M. and Douglas T. Gurak. 2004. ***The American People: Immigration and a Changing America.*** New York and Washington DC: The Russell Sage Foundation and Population Reference Bureau.

Tolbert, C.M., II and M.S. Killian. 1987. ***Labor Market Areas for the United States***. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Services.

Figure 9

Foreign-Born Composition of U.S. Counties, 2000



Note: The highest percent in any county was 50.9.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000 stf3 files accessed online at http://www.census.gov.