

Module: Immigrants in the U.S.

Introduction

Immigration has played a crucial role in the development and growth of our country. Over time, the regional sources and the factors motivating immigrants to enter the U.S. have changed dramatically, but two things have remained constant: 1) immigration has been crucial in determining the basic demographic features of the U.S. population as a whole, and 2) immigration has continually spurred a great deal of public debate. One of the most hotly debated topics is the ability of the immigrant population to become fully incorporated into the U.S. economy and social structure. This debate has become especially boisterous since the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act, legislation that significantly altered the size and regional origins of immigration to the U.S. In this module you will explore some of the impacts of this immigration by examining the characteristics of the foreign-born population, comparing these characteristics to those of the native born population. You will get a chance to explore where immigrants come from, how the composition of the immigrant population has changed, where immigrants settle, and what they do once they get here. Most importantly, you will have the opportunity to test some key hypotheses drawn from the most popular theory used to explain the incorporation of immigrants into the American social and economic mainstream.

Learning objectives

1. Explore the characteristics of immigrants in the U.S.
2. Develop hypotheses based on an existing theory.
3. Identify independent and dependent variables implied in an hypothesis.
4. Investigate and describe the relationship between two variables and assess whether the relationship supports or contradicts the hypothesis being tested.
5. Understand the criteria for causation and the rationale for including control variables.
6. Investigate and describe a partial relationship between two variables.

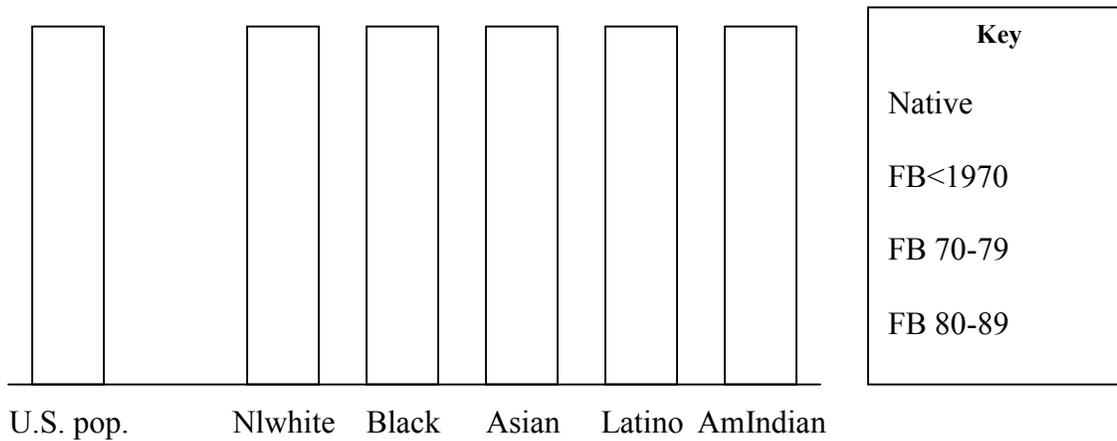
Data information

For this exercise you will use several datasets drawn from census information from the 1990 U.S. census. The data files contain information on the entire population of the U.S. as of 1990 or, in some data sets, more detailed information about specific racial or ethnic groups. Definitions for all of these variables and their categories are available on the “Important Definitions” page.

I. Describing distributions by immigrant status

- A. To set the stage for your exploration, use the data set **POPUSA9.dat** to look at the immigration status of the U.S. population as of 1990. Then do the same thing separately for each race/ethnic group. Summarize your results by completing the stacked bar chart below. Stack native-born and the three different foreign-born groups so that they sum to 100% within each group.

Immigration Status of U.S. Population by Race/Ethnicity, 1990



Questions:

1. Describe the general patterns revealed in this chart? Which groups have the highest percentages of immigrants? Which groups have the lowest percentages? Which groups have the highest concentration of recent immigrants?
2. Referring to the chart above, describe changes in the composition of the immigrant flows to the U.S. occurring in recent decades. What historical events do you think affected these shifts in immigration?

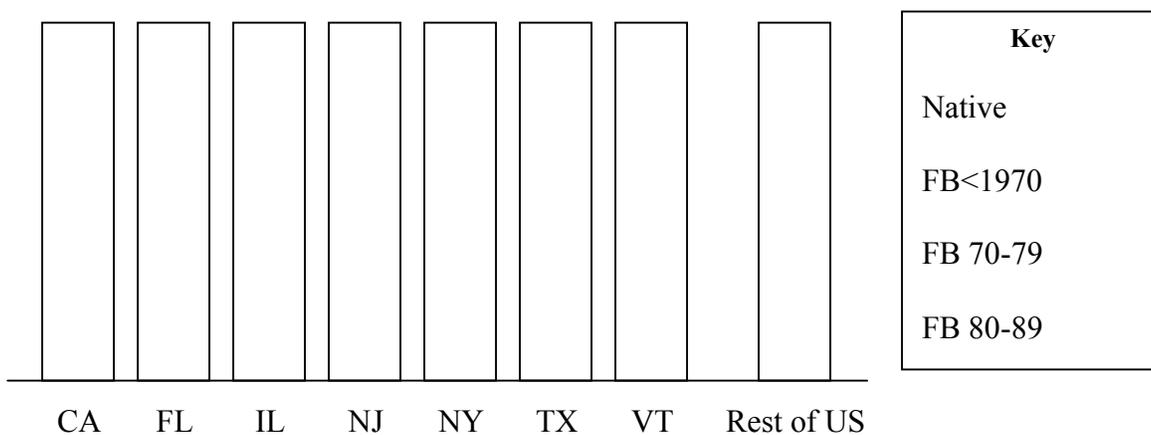
Part II

Immigrant settlement patterns

Because immigrants are not distributed evenly across all geographic areas of the country, immigration tends to have an especially large impact on certain geographic areas. We know, for example, that immigrants have historically settled in large metropolitan areas, especially in areas with established networks of earlier immigrants from similar regions of the world.

- B. Investigate the impact of these settlement patterns on the population of selected states. Use the dataset *IMMUSA9.dat* to look at the immigrant status distribution in selected states in 1990. Use your results to complete the following stacked bar chart.

Immigration Status by State, 1990



Questions:

1. Briefly describe how the concentration of immigrants varies across the states in this dataset and how these state-specific concentrations compare to the rest of the U.S. Which states have the largest percentages of immigrants overall? What factors might help to explain the disproportionate concentration of immigrants in certain states?
2. Based on the distribution of early and later immigrants revealed in this chart, does there appear to be a shift in where immigrants settled prior to 1970 versus where they settled after 1980? What might account for this shift?

Bonus question: Is there a danger in using these 1990 numbers to draw conclusions about changing settlement patterns? Explain.

Part III

Immigrant language skills, earnings and the assimilation perspective

A vast majority of immigrants come to the United States to take advantage of the great economic opportunities our country has to offer. In this problem you will explore the extent to which immigrants have been able to reach economic parity with native-born populations. You will also have the opportunity to test hypotheses drawn from the most popular explanation for native/immigrant differences in earnings.

A good deal of literature has documented the disadvantages faced by immigrants in terms of occupational attainment, earnings, housing, and a wide range of other outcomes. The most popular theory used to explain this disadvantage is the assimilation perspective. In a nutshell, the assimilation perspective assumes that immigrants earn less, occupy less prestigious jobs, and live in poorer neighborhoods than do native-born residents simply because they enter the U.S. without the language skills, education, and cultural awareness needed to compete effectively for these resources. According to this perspective, immigrants gain these skills as they spend more time in the U.S. and, as a result, tend to become more similar to native-born residents in terms of earnings, occupation, and residential outcomes. In the problems below, we will test some of the key hypotheses implied in this brief statement, focusing specifically on earnings differences between native-born residents and various groups of immigrants.

- C. One of the central hypotheses drawn from the assimilation perspective is that immigrants' earnings will increase towards that of the native-born residents as they spend more time in the U.S.

Use the dataset **WKIM9-35.dat** to compare the earnings of native-born residents and immigrants entering the U.S. at different times. Use your results to complete the table below, filling in the percentage of each group that falls into each earnings category.

Earnings	Native-born	FB < 1970	FB 1970-90	FB 1980-90
More than \$50,000				
\$35,000-50,000				
\$25,000-35,000				
\$15,000-25,000				
Less than \$15,000				
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

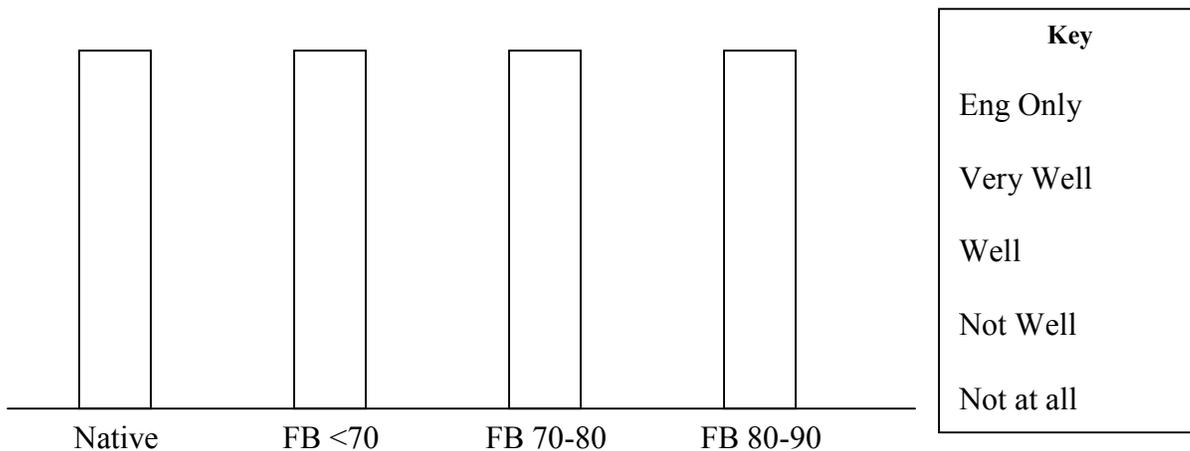
Questions:

1. What is the independent variable implicated in the hypothesis you are testing? What is the dependent variable?
2. Note that for this test we are using a dataset that contains only those age 35-44 who work full-time. Why is this important for our test?
3. Which group has the largest percentage in the highest income category? Which group has the lowest percentage in this top category? Which group has the highest percentage of workers in the lowest income category?

4. In general, which group seems to have highest overall earnings, native-born residents or immigrants who entered the country before 1970? Is this difference consistent with the assimilation perspective? How would you explain this difference?

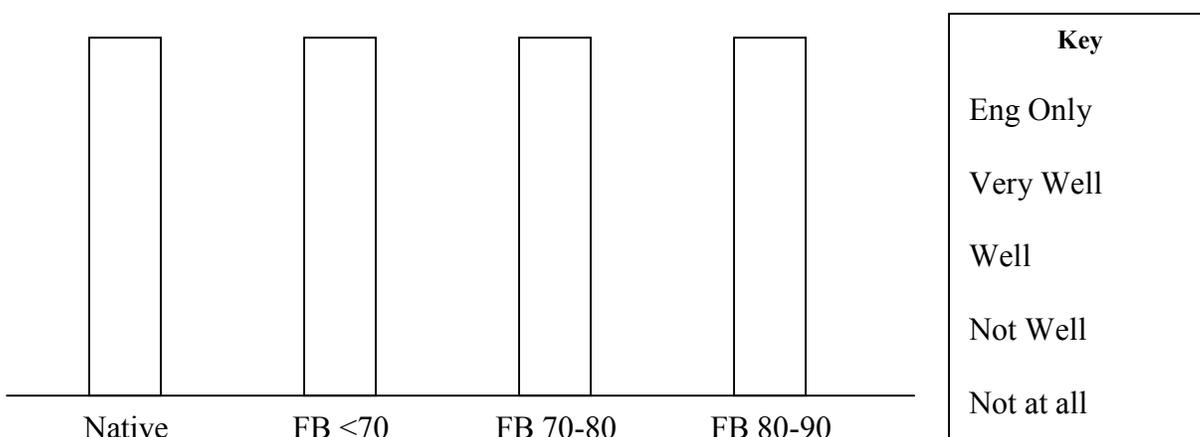
D. The assimilation perspective assumes that the lack of English language ability contributes to the relatively low earnings of recent immigrants. Use the dataset *ENGASN9.dat* to look at English language ability by immigrant status among Asian residents of the U.S. Use the results to complete the following stacked bar chart:

English language ability by Immigration Status of Asians, 1990



Repeat this process for Latinos using the dataset *ENGLAT9.dat*.

English language ability by Immigration Status of Latinos, 1990



Questions:

5. Describe the distribution of English language proficiency across different immigrant statuses (i.e., recency of entry). How does the pattern differ for Asians and for Latinos?

6. The assimilation perspective assumes that the longer an immigrant is in the country, the more proficient their English skills become. Is the pattern revealed in the charts you just created consistent with this assumption? If not, provide some explanations for why the assumptions might break down.
7. Compare the distribution of earnings and the distribution of English language skills by immigrant status. Based on this comparison, do you think that differences in English language ability can effectively explain the differences in earnings you observed in part C?

E. Another central argument drawn from the assimilation perspective suggests that immigrants may earn less than native-born individuals because they have lower levels of education. Using the same dataset, **WKIM9-35.dat**, figure out a way to test this hypothesis. Create a concise table or graph to summarize your key findings and provide a written description. Make sure to describe whether or not the test supports the assimilation perspective.