Immigration and the Changing Landscape for Local Service Delivery
Demographic Shifts in Cities and Neighborhoods

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As immigration has risen over the past 40 years, many communities across the United States have been changed in some way by their immigrant populations. Immigrants make up growing shares of business owners, workers, and parents across many cities and rural areas, while children of immigrants[1] make up growing shares of school populations. Some communities have been experiencing high levels of immigration for decades and others are facing new influxes of immigrant communities. In many communities, the mix of national origins of immigrants has been shifting.

These changes—increasing numbers, geographic dispersion, and increasing diversity—have been playing out very differently across US cities and rural areas. And even within cities, different neighborhoods often see different types of fluctuations in the numbers, national origins, languages, and other characteristics of their immigrant populations over time.

Such trends affect the strategies that policymakers at all levels adopt for effective service delivery. While much of the current research on service delivery to immigrant populations describes barriers and strategies as if they work the same across neighborhoods and communities, these immigration trends suggest the need for a more-nuanced approach. Local strategies for serving immigrant populations that may have worked 10 years ago, 5 years ago, or even last year may not be the right strategies for the immigrants arriving today or next year. Preparing for ongoing shifts, driven by immigration, in the characteristics of service populations requires ongoing data collection, flexibility, and preparation.

In this brief, we outline some of the demographic changes in the US immigrant population and then provide examples of how national trends play out across select US cities and across different neighborhoods within those cities. We end by highlighting the implications of these trends for service providers and for policymakers who wish to support their work.

Review of National Trends: Growing Numbers, Dispersion, and Increasing Diversity

The most evident shift over the past several decades has been the growth in the population of US immigrants and children of immigrants—particularly the growth in numbers of immigrants from Mexico. The number of immigrants grew from 14 million in 1980 to 41 million in 2012, rising from about 6 percent of the US population to about 13 percent (see figure 1). At the same time, children of immigrants grew from 13 percent of all US children from birth to age 17 in 1990 to 24 percent of all children in 2011.[2]
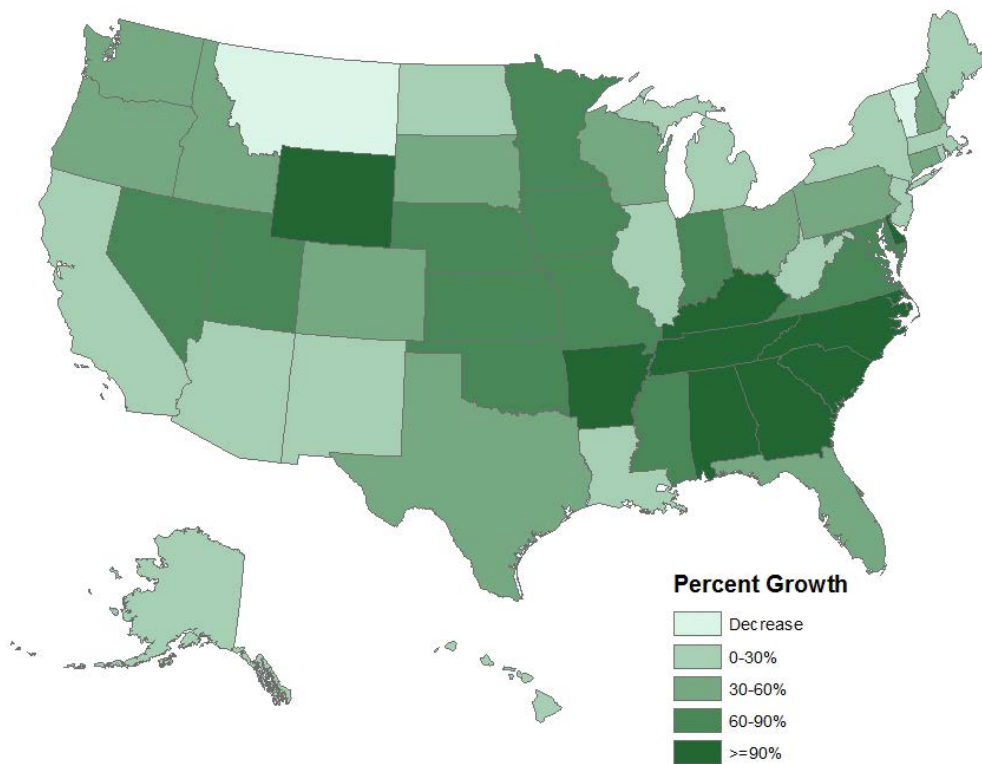
Growing immigration has meant rising immigrant shares of the population in traditional immigrant destinations such as California and New York, as well as dispersion of immigrants to new states and communities across the United States. Figure 2 shows states that have experienced the greatest percentage growth in children of immigrants between 2000 and 2011 (this closely mirrors the share of states with the fastest growth in the percentage of immigrants overall). The fastest growth was mostly seen in the US Southeast—states such as Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, and the Carolinas.

Figure 1. Number of immigrants in the United States (left) and their share of the overall US population (right), 1980–2012
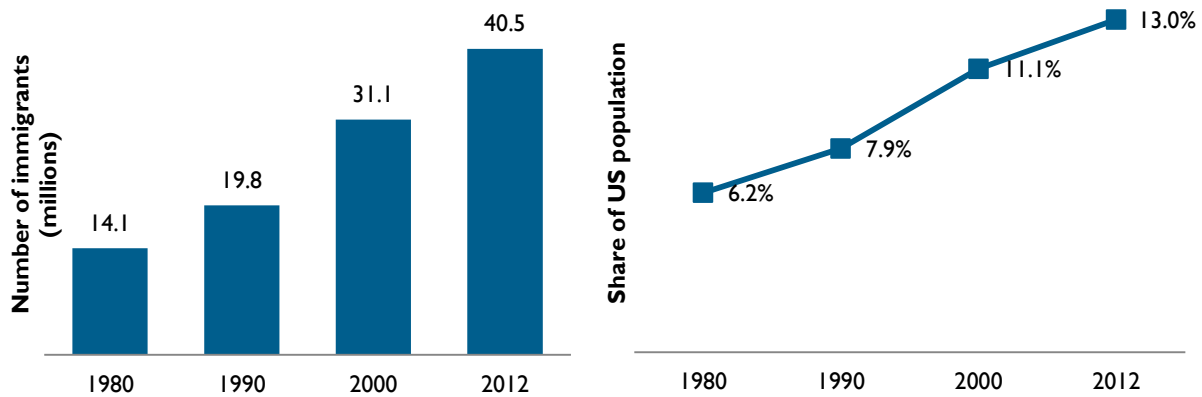
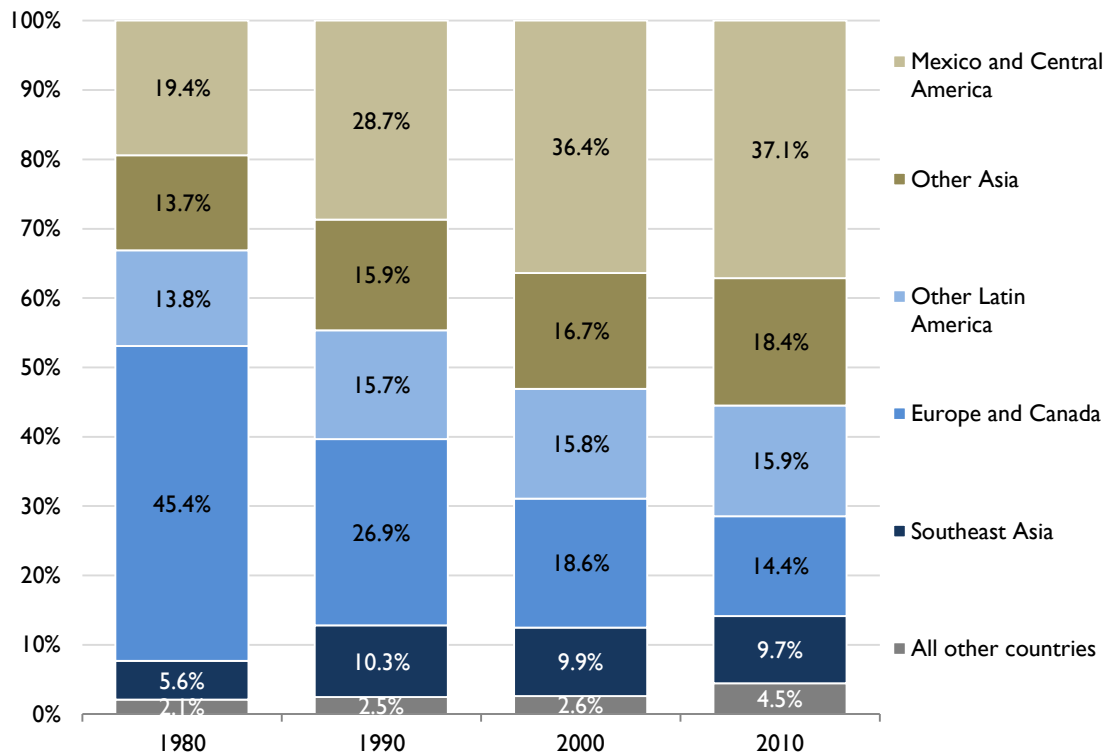*Source:* US Census 1980, 1990, 2000; 2012 American Community Survey three-year data.

Figure 2. Percentage growth in the number of children of immigrants by state, 2000–2011

Percent Growth
- Decrease
- 0-30%
- 30-60%
- 60-90%
- >=90%

Source: US Census 2000; 2011 five-year estimates from the American Community Survey.

At the same time that immigration has been rising, the country has seen growing diversity in the national origins of immigrants in the United States. Figure 3 below show the national origin composition (combined into rough categories by world region) of the immigrant population in the United States. While the largest trend here is the declining share of immigrants who were born in Europe and the increasing share born in Mexico or Central America, there has also been an increase in the share of immigrants from South America and the Caribbean, from Asia, and from other parts of the world.

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Figure 3. US immigrant population by world region, United States, 1980–2011

|	Mexico and Central America	Other Asia	Other Latin America	Europe and Canada	Southeast Asia	All other countries
1980	19.4%	13.7%	13.8%	45.4%	5.6%	2.1%
1990	28.7%	15.9%	15.7%	26.9%	10.3%	2.5%
2000	36.4%	16.7%	15.8%	18.6%	9.9%	2.6%
2010	37.1%	18.4%	15.9%	14.4%	9.7%	4.5%

Source: US Census 1980, 1990, and 2000; 2011 five-year estimates from the American Community Survey.

Diverse Implications at the City Level

These overall trends have played out very differently in cities across the United States. Some cities that had few immigrants in the 1970s and 1980s saw a large influx of Mexican immigrants. Others also saw a new influx of immigrants, but from diverse origins. Still others had a steady history of immigration but saw shifts in the national origin of the populations arriving over the past several decades. Each of these patterns has different implications for the range of institutions working to provide services to the individuals in their communities, such as schools, health care providers, and social service agencies. Here, we present information from a selected set of cities to illustrate how these national trends affect different cities in very different ways.

For example, Raleigh, North Carolina is a relatively new immigrant destination that has seen large growth in its Mexican and Central American populations over the past several decades. The Mexican immigrant population in Raleigh grew from less than 50 in 1980 to over 24,400 in 2000 to about 40,900 in 2011.. The Central American population similarly grew from only about 100 in 1980, to 26,900 in 2000, to about 48,900 in 2011.[3] Raleigh also has a diverse immigrant population anchored in part by highly skilled immigrants drawn by the universities, colleges, and research organizations in the area. Figure 4 shows the geographic distribution of the top five national origin groups in Raleigh in 2000 and in 2011, and the distribution of immigrants from all other world regions. As shown by the red dots, Raleigh had a sizable Mexican immigrant population in 2000, but by 2011 the Mexican immigrant population shifted, both spreading into new communities farther south as well as filling in greater density in some neighborhoods with already high Mexican immigrant populations. The map also shows strong growth in the number of immigrants from other parts of the world in most parts of the city.

Figure 4. Map of the foreign-born population in Raleigh, NC, 2000 (left) and 2011 (right)
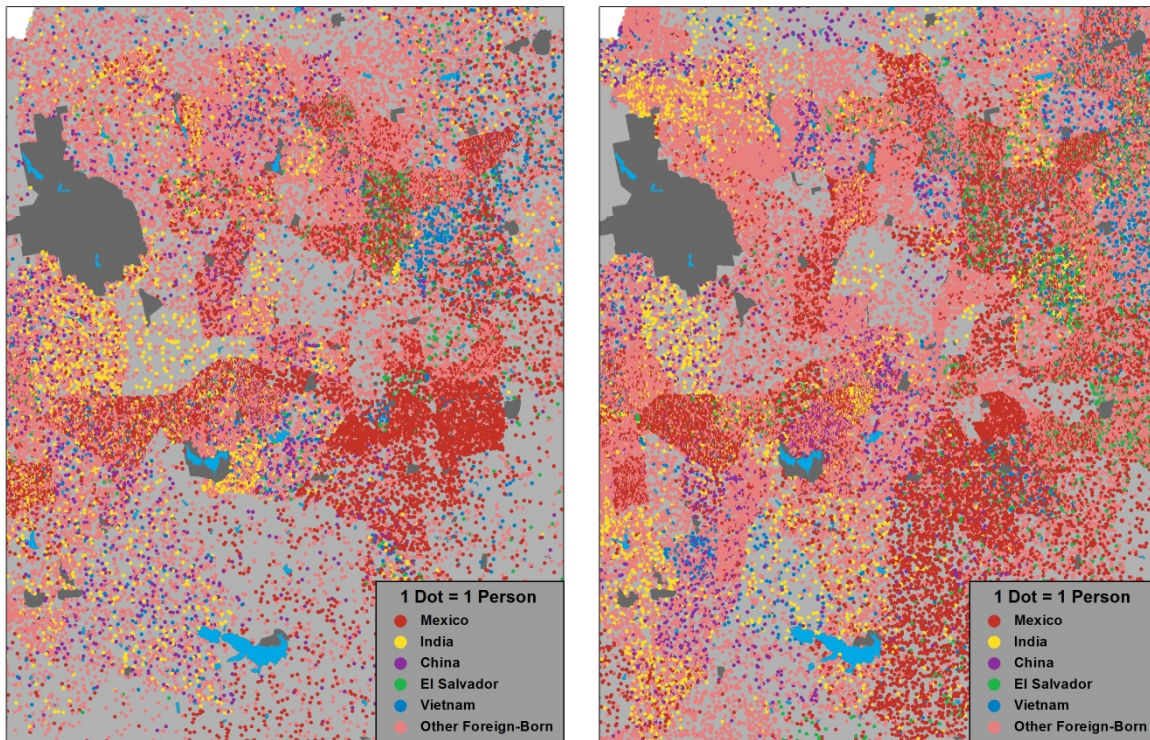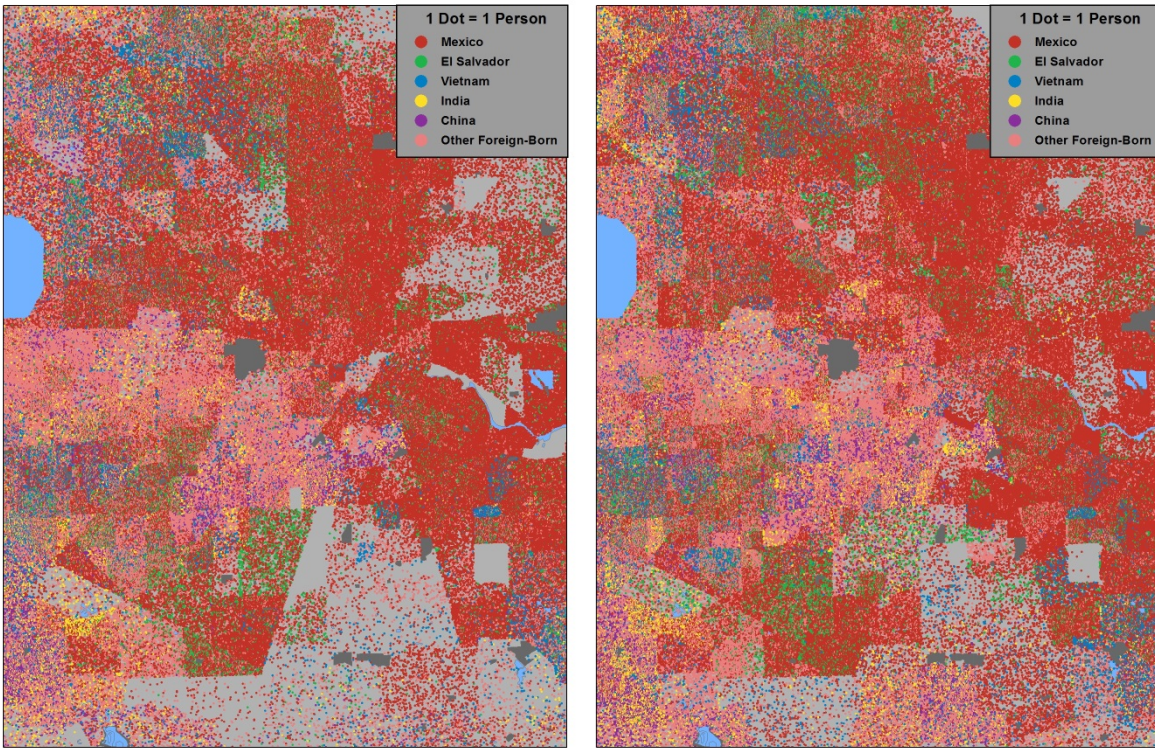

Source: US Census 2000; 2011 five-year estimates from the American Community Survey.

In contrast, the pattern in Houston, Texas, (figure 5) shows a large, steady, Mexican immigrant poulation, but also increasing numbers of immigrants from a diverse set of sending countries. The Mexican immigrant population in Houston grew by more than 136,000, or 30 percent, between 2000 and 2011, while the population from Vietnam grew by 40 percent, the population from China grew by 59 percent, and the population from India grew by 72 percent.

The Minneapolis–St. Paul (Twin Cities) metropolitan area shows yet a third pattern—ongoing broad diversity in the national origins of its immigrant population. Minneapolis–St. Paul has a smaller Mexican immigrant population than many other US metropolitan areas but saw substantial growth in this population between 2000 and 2011, as well as steady growth in its already large Southeast Asian population and very rapid growth in the East African population. The map of the Twin Cities' foreign-born population (figure 6) in 2000 and in 2011 shows this growth in the Mexican immigrant population (red dots), Indian population (yellow dots), and East African population (blue dots), representing the Somali and Ethiopian refugee communities. The East African population more than doubled over this period— growing from about 16,700 in 2000 to about 39,300 in 2011—while those born in Southeast Asia grew from 53,600 to 63,700 in the same period.

Figure 5. Map of the foreign-born population in Houston, TX, 2000 (left) and 2011 (right)

Source: US Census 2000; 2011 five-year estimates from the American Community Survey.

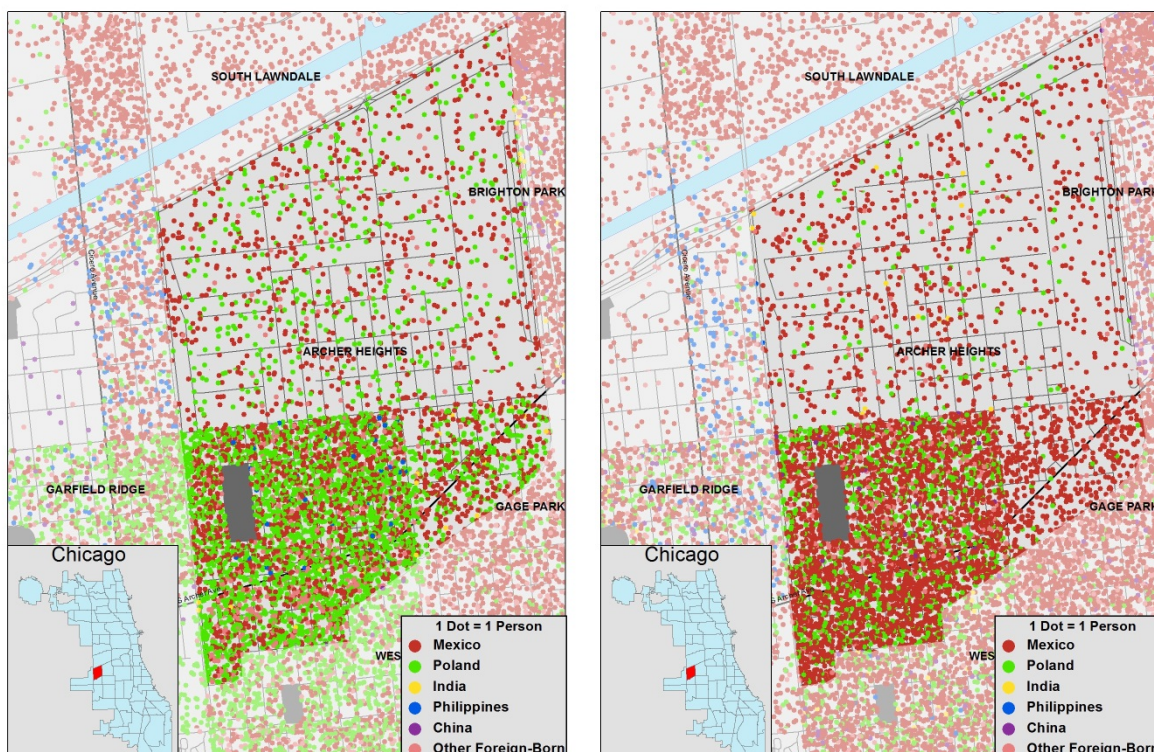**Figure 6. Map of the foreign-born population in Minneapolis–St. Paul, MN, 2000 (left) and 2011 (right)**
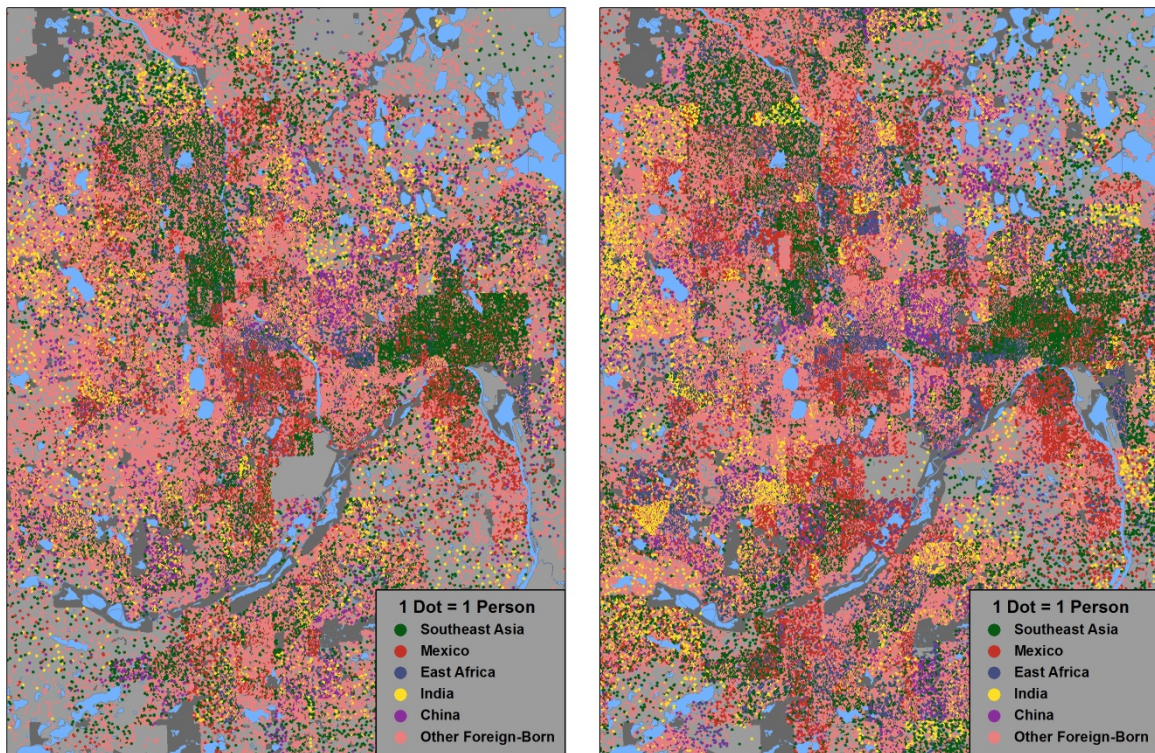
Source: US Census 2000; 2011 five-year estimates from the American Community Survey.

Neighborhood Dynamics

These diverse types of shifts in the numbers, composition, and distribution of immigrants across cities imply that even within the same city, different neighborhoods are experiencing different types of changes in their immigrant populations, in ways that strongly affect the skills and resources required of service providers. To highlight how shifting demographics at the city level can affect different neighborhoods in different ways, we focus on two neighborhoods in Chicago—a city that has long absorbed large numbers of immigrants—that have seen two different types of shifts in their immigrant populations.

The Archer Heights neighborhood (figure 7), for example, next to Chicago's Midway Airport, shifted from having a large Polish immigrant community in 2000 (making up 49 percent of all immigrants in the neighborhood) to having a primarily Mexican immigrant population in 2011 (making up 75 percent of all immigrants in the neighborhood).

Figure 7. Map of the foreign-born population in the Archer Heights neighborhood of Chicago, 2000 (left) and 2011 (right)

Source: US Census 2000, and 2011 five-year estimates from the American Community Survey.

The Near South Side neighborhood, meanwhile, saw a sizable influx of immigrants from a diverse set of countries. As shown in figure 8, between 2000 and 2011 the Chinese, Indian, and Filipino populations all grew in this area, as did the number of immigrants from countries not in the top five immigrant groups in Chicago. These two distinct patterns, in two different neighborhoods in the same city, require quite different adjustments by service providers in the area.

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Figure 8. Map of the foreign-born population in the Near South Side neighborhood of Chicago, 2000 (left) and 2011 (right)
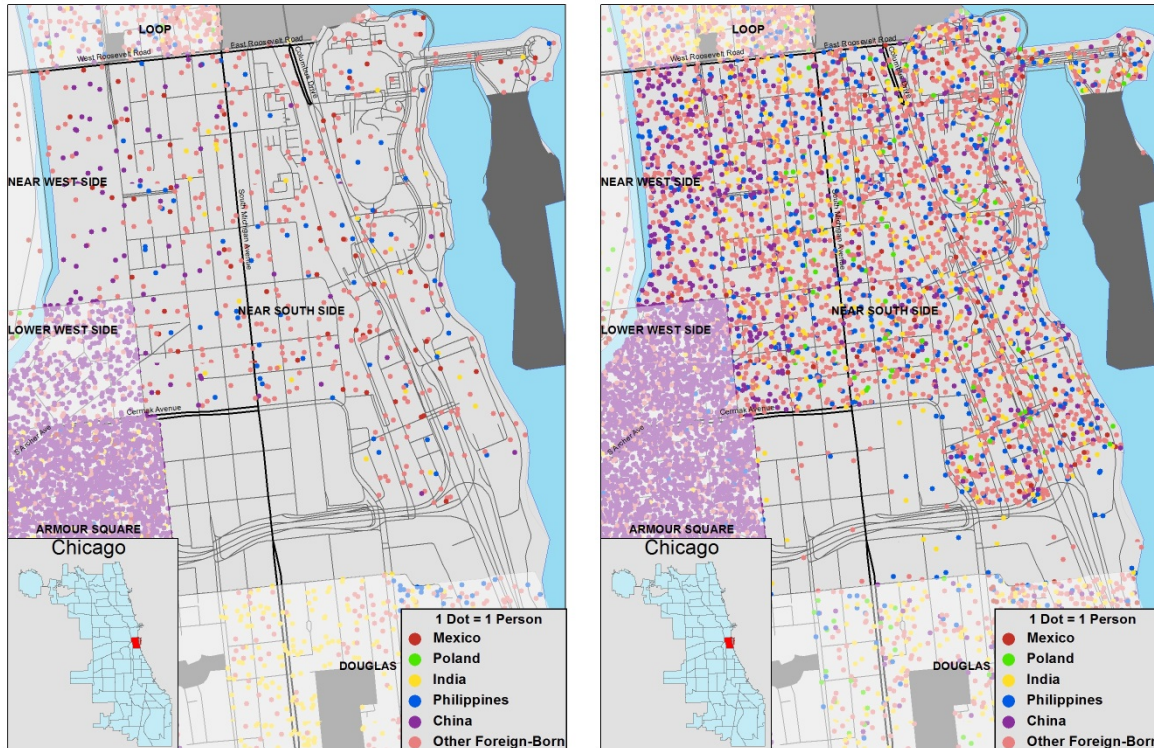
Source: US Census 2000; 2011 five-year estimates from the American Community Survey.

Implications

Trends in immigration—growth, dispersion, and diversification—play out differently across US cities and communities. Each type of shift in immigrant characteristics in a community brings different challenges for service delivery, such as

- learning to communicate across new languages or increasing numbers of languages;
- working with different cultural and religious beliefs;
- meeting different needs for economic, social, education, or other supports;
- including families with different types of immigration and legal status;
- identifying different strategies for reaching families; and
- identifying and developing relationships with different community leaders.

Serving immigrant populations as these numbers, countries of origin, and settlement patterns continue to shift requires concerted effort. Models for promising practices for serving immigrant families are available from prior research and from a diverse set of technical assistance providers in different social service arenas. But these models too often assume that a single strategy can work for all immigrant groups, across US cities and neighborhoods, over time. As the examples above illustrate, population characteristics are dynamic, and strategies must be continuously updated to meet new realities.

- One key to this process is ensuring that policymakers and service providers alike **keep up to date about the nuanced characteristics of immigrant communities,** finding out from where immigrants are arriving, their characteristics, what resources are already in place, the ongoing needs exist in each community, and how to best tailor service provision to each community.

- Although predicting the future of immigration flows is nearly impossible, given shifting political and economic forces worldwide and shifting US immigration policy, it is important to **keep on**

top of immigration trends as best possible to help in preparing for service delivery as new immigrants move in and current immigrants redistribute across neighborhoods.

- These ongoing dynamics require that programs **have flexible systems and approaches,** so that strategies adopted when one immigrant group resides in the neighborhood can be adapted when another immigrant group (or several immigrant groups) moves in.

- Constantly changing immigrant populations across cities and neighborhoods require state agencies and central administering bodies to **make sure community programs have access to a range of resources and strategies** to support the shifting immigrant community.

Notes

1. We define "children of immigrants" as children who have at least one foreign-born parent.

2. Authors' tabulation of US Census and American Community Survey data.

3. These figures from 1980 rely on an earlier definition of the boundaries of the Raleigh metropolitan area, and so are not strictly comparable to the numbers from 2000 forward.