

Joint Center for Housing Studies

Harvard University

The Living Arrangements of Foreign-Born Households

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Introduction

Record numbers of foreign-born¹ individuals and households currently reside in the United States, substantially affecting housing demand. As of 1998, the 11 million immigrant-headed households comprised 11 percent of all households (eight percent of owners and 16 percent of renters) up from 10 percent in 1990, eight percent in 1980, and five percent in 1970. The household composition and living arrangements of these immigrants are of interest for a number of reasons:

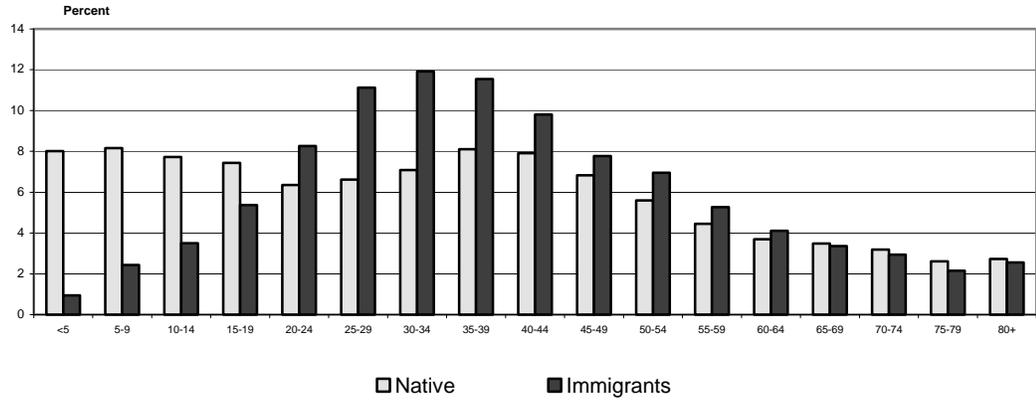
- Household composition is a significant predictor of homeownership demand. Controlling for age married couple households with children are most likely to be homeowners.
- Household size and composition may affect demand for living space (and therefore unit size and/or configuration), subject to income constraints and cultural preferences for amounts of community and personal space.
- Immigrant adults living together (beyond a spouse) are a potential source of new households.

Joint Center research finds that foreign-born living arrangements differ from those of the native-born in a number of ways. The foreign born:

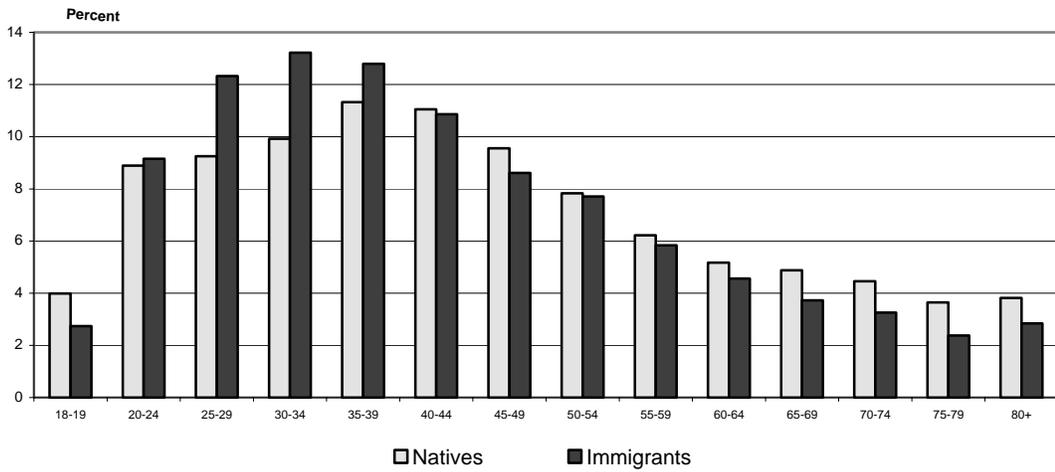
- live in larger households with more family members.
- are more likely to be married couples with children and less likely to be single-person households, even controlling for age.
- more commonly contain adults beyond the household head or a spouse. The relationship of these additional adults to the head varies by the immigrant area of origin.
- head independent households to a lesser degree than same-aged natives, particularly for more recent arrivals. With length of time in the U.S., however, headship rates for immigrants approach those of same-aged natives.

¹ For the purpose of this note, “Foreign-born” and “immigrant” are used interchangeably to refer to all people who are not U.S. citizens by birth.

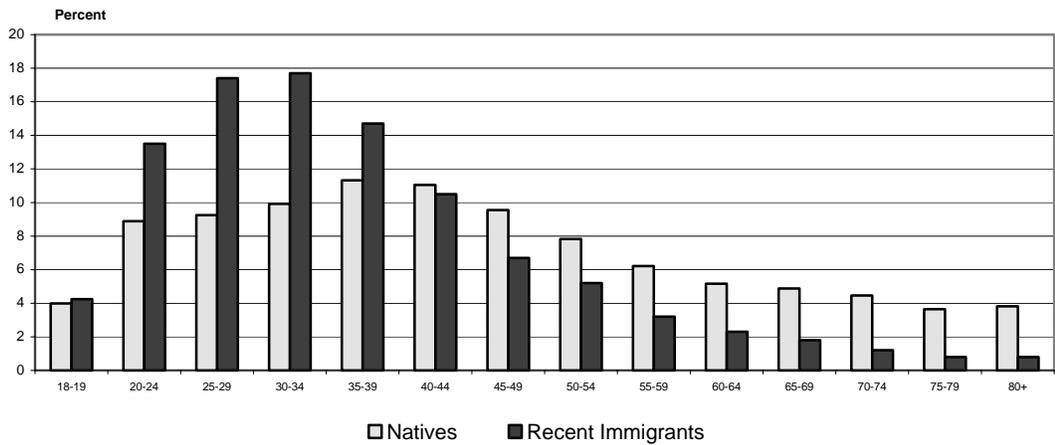
Age Distribution by Nativity: 1998



Adult Age Distribution by Nativity: 1998



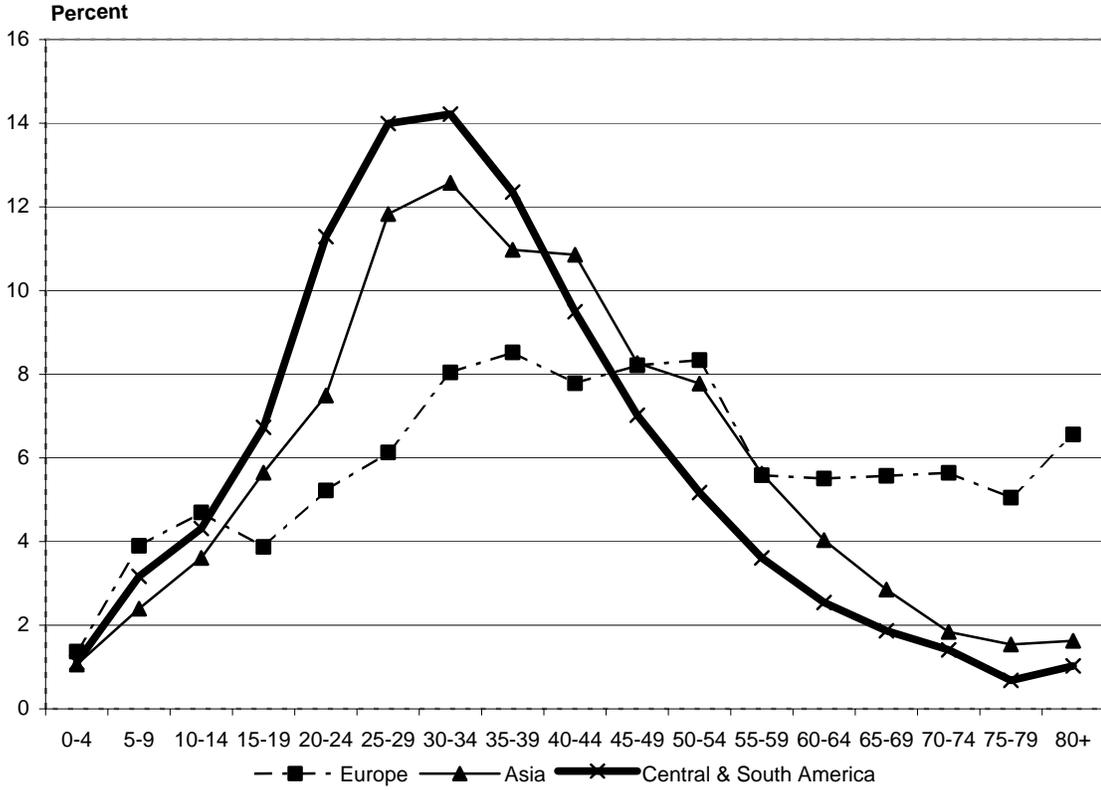
Recent Immigrant Adult Age Distribution by Nativity: 1998



Source: Joint Center tabulations of the 1998 Current Population Survey.

Exhibit 2

Age Distribution of Immigrants by Area of Origin



Source: Joint Center tabulations of the 1998 Current Population Survey.

Age Distribution

Because age and household composition are so closely linked, it is important to control for age when comparing the household composition of the native and foreign-born. The median age of the immigrant population is higher than that of the native population (37 versus 34, Exhibit 1) but this is largely due to the fact that relatively few immigrants enter the U.S. as children. Solely among the adult population, immigrants have a lower median age (39 versus 42.) Recent immigrant adults--those who have entered the country since 1980—are even younger, with a median age of 34 years. Of adults who head independent households, immigrants are also younger (42 versus 47).

Immigrants from Asia and especially Latin America tend to be younger than other major immigrant groups (Exhibit 2). This younger age structure is largely attributable to the fact that immigration from these areas was greatly restricted before the Immigration Reform Act of 1965. Thus, most of these immigrants are younger, more recent arrivals. Many European immigrants, on the other hand, entered in the early part of the century and are now quite elderly.

Household Size

Overall, the foreign-born maintain notably larger households than do the native-born. The average household size for immigrant-headed households is 3.1 persons versus 2.5 for natives. This larger household size is evident for households of all ages under 65 (Exhibit 3).

Exhibit 3

Average Household Size: 1998

Age of Head	Immigrant Head	Native Head	Difference
Less than 25	2.9	2.4	.5
25-34	3.3	2.8	.5
35-44	3.8	3.2	.6
45-54	3.3	2.6	.6
55-64	2.7	2.1	.6
65 and Over	1.8	1.7	.1

Household size varies not only by age but also by area of origin. Small sample sizes limit the ability to identify precise countries of origin so the data presented here is necessarily an amalgamation of individual countries. Examining solely households with heads under age

45 (to isolate the more recent immigrant waves and control broadly for age), Latin American households, followed by Asians, are substantially larger than other immigrant groups and larger than native-born households (Exhibit 4). Even when examining only upper income households, those with incomes over \$50,000, the pattern persists.

Exhibit 4

Average Household Size of Households with Head Under Age 45 by Area of Origin: 1998

Area of Origin	Average Size	Average Size, Income>\$50,000
Latin America	3.9	4.4
Asia	3.2	3.5
Other Countries	3.2	3.7
Europe/Russia	2.9	3.2
Canada/Australia/New Zealand	2.8	2.8
Native-born	3.0	3.3

Household Composition

The larger size of immigrant households is reflected in their composition. Among family households, immigrants are more commonly married couples with children and less often-single parents or childless couples. Among non-family households, they are more often two or more unrelated people living together and less often single persons. These differences are fairly consistent across most age groups. For households with heads aged 65 and older, however, household composition is virtually the same for the two nativity groups (Exhibit 5). Note that this finding does not necessarily mean that older immigrants live in the same types of households, as do older natives, only that those who **continue to head independent households** maintain households of similar composition. It is quite possible (indeed likely) that older immigrants more commonly than natives do not **head** their own households, but live with relatives instead. This propensity is further discussed below.

Exhibit 5: Households by Age and Family Type: 1998

	Number (Thousands)		Distribution of Households Within Age Group		Percentage Point Difference in Distribution Between Native- and Foreign-Born
	Native-Born	Foreign-Born	Native-Born	Foreign-Born	
Less than 25	4,842	594	100.0	100.0	
Single Person	1,147	104	23.7	17.5	6.2
Married With Kids	692	119	14.3	20.0	-5.7
Married Without Kids	510	52	10.5	8.8	1.8
Single Parent	982	71	20.3	12.0	8.3
Other	1,511	248	31.2	41.8	-10.5
25-34	16,509	2,526	100.0	100.0	
Single Person	3,266	413	19.8	16.3	3.4
Married With Kids	6,123	1,114	37.1	44.1	-7.0
Married Without Kids	2,310	339	14.0	13.4	0.6
Single Parent	2,852	330	17.3	13.1	4.2
Other	1,958	330	11.9	13.1	-1.2
35-44	21,131	2,813	100.0	100.0	
Single Person	3,758	295	17.8	10.5	7.3
Married With Kids	9,969	1,624	47.2	57.7	-10.6
Married Without Kids	2,320	268	11.0	9.5	1.5
Single Parent	3,326	410	15.7	14.6	1.2
Other	1,758	216	8.3	7.7	0.6
45-54	17,546	2,002	100.0	100.0	
Single Person	3,821	299	21.8	14.9	6.8
Married With Kids	4,169	766	23.8	38.3	-14.5
Married Without Kids	6,284	515	35.8	25.7	10.1
Single Parent	1,166	149	6.6	7.4	-0.8
Other	2,106	273	12.0	13.6	-1.6
55-64	11,824	1,248	100.0	100.0	
Single Person	3,062	239	25.9	19.2	6.7
Married With Kids	464	127	3.9	10.2	-6.3
Married Without Kids	6,666	679	56.4	54.4	2.0
Single Parent	147	23	1.2	1.8	-0.6
Other	1,485	180	12.6	14.4	-1.9
65 and Over	19,862	1,635	100.0	100.0	
Single Person	9,166	757	46.1	46.3	-0.2
Married With Kids	91	12	0.5	0.7	-0.3
Married Without Kids	8,415	690	42.4	42.2	0.2
Single Parent	35	1	0.2	0.1	0.1
Other	2,155	175	10.8	10.7	0.1
All Ages	91,714	10,818	100.0	100.0	
Single Person	24,220	2,107	26.4	19.5	6.9
Married With Kids	21,508	3,762	23.5	34.8	-11.3
Married Without Kids	26,505	2,543	28.9	23.5	5.4
Single Parent	8,508	984	9.3	9.1	0.2
Other	10,973	1,422	12.0	13.1	-1.2

Source: Joint Center tabulations of the 1998 Current Population Survey.

Immigrants of differing areas of origin also vary in their household composition. Of households with heads under age 45 (Exhibit 6), Asian and European immigrants are more commonly single person households than are other immigrants, perhaps reflecting a greater likelihood of being a student or young professional and/or mirroring their higher incomes which allow for independent living. Latin American immigrants have the highest share of married couples with children—over half of younger Latino households are of this type. Latinos also have the highest share of single parents. Conversely, married couples without children and single person households are relatively rare. Asians are rarely single parents, due to the significantly lower divorce rates of Asians—both native and foreign-born—even after controlling for age. The large percentage of Latino households with children no doubt reflects the higher fertility rates of Latino women. In 1997, the fertility rate of Hispanic women was 102.8 live births per thousand women aged 15-44, compared with just 60.1 births per thousand for Non-Hispanic women. Mexican fertility was especially high at 116.6 births per thousand. Immigrants from Canada/Australia/New Zealand are the least likely of all groups to maintain households with children (especially married couples with children). They also maintain a high share of non-family households, many of whom are unmarried couples.

Presence of Additional Adults

Immigrant households tend to be larger not only because they are more commonly families with children and less commonly singles, but also because they contain additional adults (beyond a spouse). While 23 percent of native households under age 45 contain an adult who is neither the household head or a spouse, 33 percent of immigrant households contain such a person.

This difference is primarily due to immigrants' increased propensity to live in extended families. Immigrants are more than twice as likely (24 percent versus 11 percent) to have an extra adult relative in the household. Natives are slightly more likely to have an adult non-relative—most commonly an unmarried partner. Other types of non-relatives however, such as housemates or boarders, are more common in immigrant households.

Latino households are most likely to include an additional adult (38 percent of households), followed by Asians (31 percent), Canadians/Australians/New Zealanders (30 percent), and Europeans (22 percent). The relationship of these other adults to the household

Exhibit 6: Immigrant Living Arrangements Differ from Native-Born

(Percent)

Households Under Age 45	Immigrants by Place of Birth					
	<u>Native-born</u>	<u>Immigrant</u>	<u>Europe/ Russia</u>	<u>Asia</u>	<u>Canada/ Australia/ New Zealand</u>	<u>Latin America</u>
Household Composition						
Single-person	19.3	13.8	17.7	17.8	14.4	8.0
Married Couple with Children	39.5	47.8	44.2	45.6	33.2	53.5
Married Couple without Children	12.1	11.2	16.0	13.6	22.0	9.3
Single Parent	16.9	13.7	9.5	6.8	10.3	17.2
Other	12.2	13.5	12.6	16.2	20.1	12.0
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Joint Center tabulations of the 1998 Current Population Survey.

Presence of Other Non-Spouse Adults:						
With Any Adult	23.1	33.1	22.3	30.9	29.8	37.8
With Adult Relative	17.6	29.7	21.6	32.0	15.3	34.4
With Adult Non-Relative	7.9	7.9	4.8	6.5	10.3	10.8
With Parent	2.2	6.7	5.6	9.7	2.1	5.8
With Adult Sibling	1.7	7.3	2.1	7.2	0.0	8.8
With Adult Other Relative	1.4	7.5	3.3	7.9	0.0	9.0
With Adult Unmarried Partner	5.4	3.5	1.9	2.1	5.2	4.6
With Adult Child	6.8	8.3	5.6	4.5	8.5	10.9

Note: Some adult non-relative categories not listed included in total but not listed separately.

Source: Joint Center tabulations of the 1998 Current Population Survey.

head varies somewhat according to the immigrant area of origin (Exhibit 7). Almost one in ten Asian immigrant headed households also contain a parent of the head², significantly higher than other immigrant groups. Asians also have notable shares with adult siblings and adult “other relatives” (not a parent, sibling, or adult child). Asians very rarely have unmarried partners present. Among Latinos, over 10 percent of households contain adult children. Adult siblings and adult other relatives are also present in about nine percent of households.

Headship Rates

Immigrants add to the nation’s households both by forming households immediately upon entry into the U.S. and then by re-forming households as they remain in the country over time. The extent to which populations head independent households is reflected by their headship rate--the number of households in a particular age group divided by the population in the same age group. This number is roughly the inverse of the average household size within an age category³.

Exhibit 8 contrasts headship rates for the native and immigrant populations as of 1998. The native-born population has sharply increasing headship rates from ages 15-29, a time when young people are moving out of their parents' home or forming their own households after college. Headship grows more moderately for the 35-54 year old age group. Marriage, divorce, remarriage, cohabitation, moving into or out of a relative’s home is all affecting this rate. After ages 55-59, however, headship begins to rise more sharply, undoubtedly reflecting deaths of spouses or other housing partners. A household of a married couple both ages 65 would contribute a headship rate of 0.5 (1-household/2 people), while a household of one widow would contribute a headship rate of 1 (1-household/1 person). In almost every age group, the headship rate for immigrants is lower than for the native-born, corresponding with larger immigrant household sizes.

Because immigrant age and length of time in the U.S. are so closely correlated however, this overall pattern of immigrant headship combines and blurs the experiences of

² Does not include “in-laws” which are categorized as “other relatives.”

³ The headship rate is not exactly the inverse of the average household size because the two ratios use different estimates for the size of the population. Headship rates use the total population, including people living in group quarters and other non-households settings. Average household size uses only population living in households.

Exhibit 7

Immigrant Adults Residing Together are a Potential Wellspring of New Households
 Percent of households under age 45 containing an adult other than head or spouse: 1998

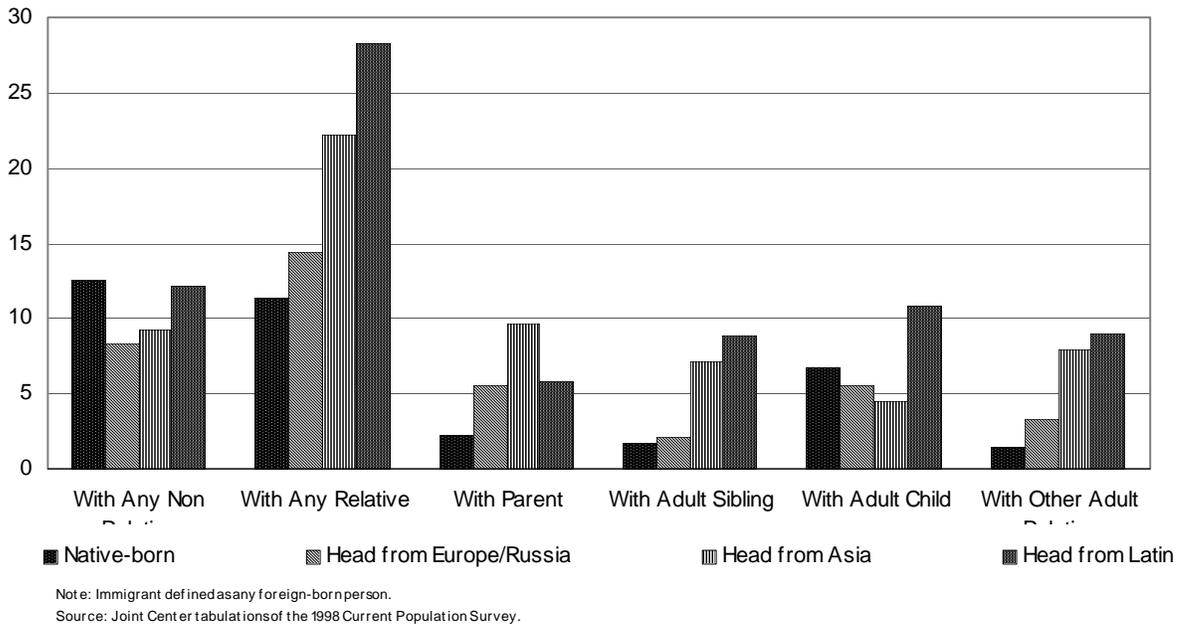
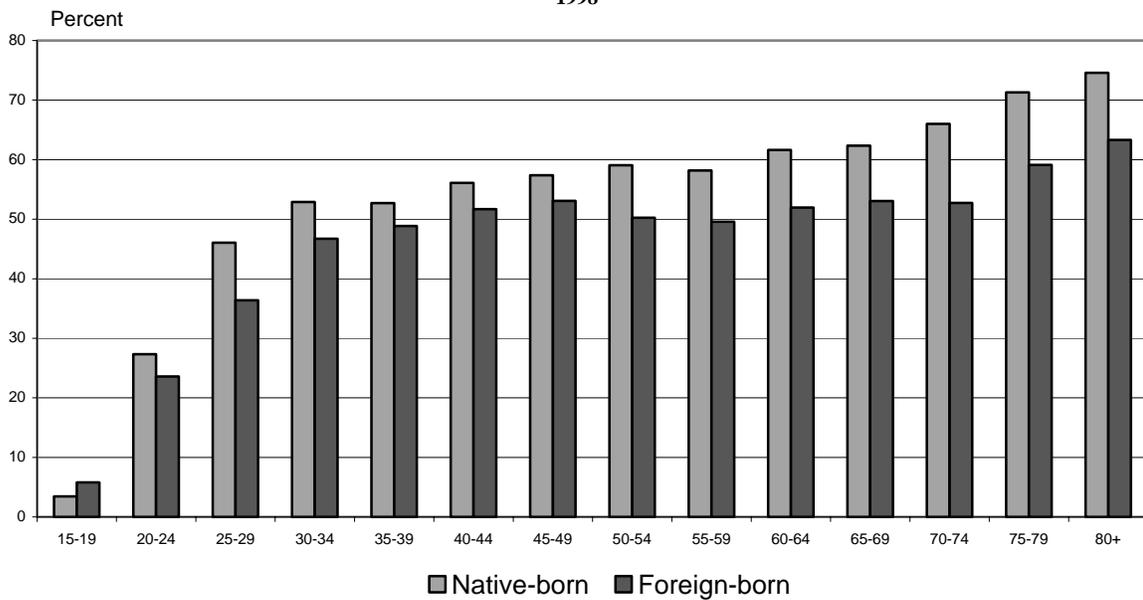


Exhibit 8

Headship Rates by Age for Native and Foreign-Born Households
 1998



immigrants who have entered during different periods. Exhibit 9 shows the headship patterns of immigrants by year of entry into the U.S. The 1990 Census PUMS file is used in this analysis because of its larger sample size. For the most part, each successive immigrant wave has a correspondingly lower headship trajectory. More recent immigrant waves have successively lower overall headship peaks and they peak at an earlier age. In addition, while headship rates for the native-born are higher with each older age group, they begin to decline for recent immigrants over age 54. This difference is likely due to older recent immigrants coming to the United States to live with their families rather than to establish their own households.

While headship rates for immigrants as a whole do not equal those of the native-born for any age group, immigrants who remain in the country do make progress in headship compared to the native-born cohort of the same age. For example, immigrants who entered the U.S. in the 1970s and were aged 25-34 in 1980 had only 85 percent of the headship rates of native-born households in that same age group (younger age groups were even lower). However, by 1990, this cohort of immigrants (now aged 35-44) had attained headship rates equal to 91 percent of the native-born rate.

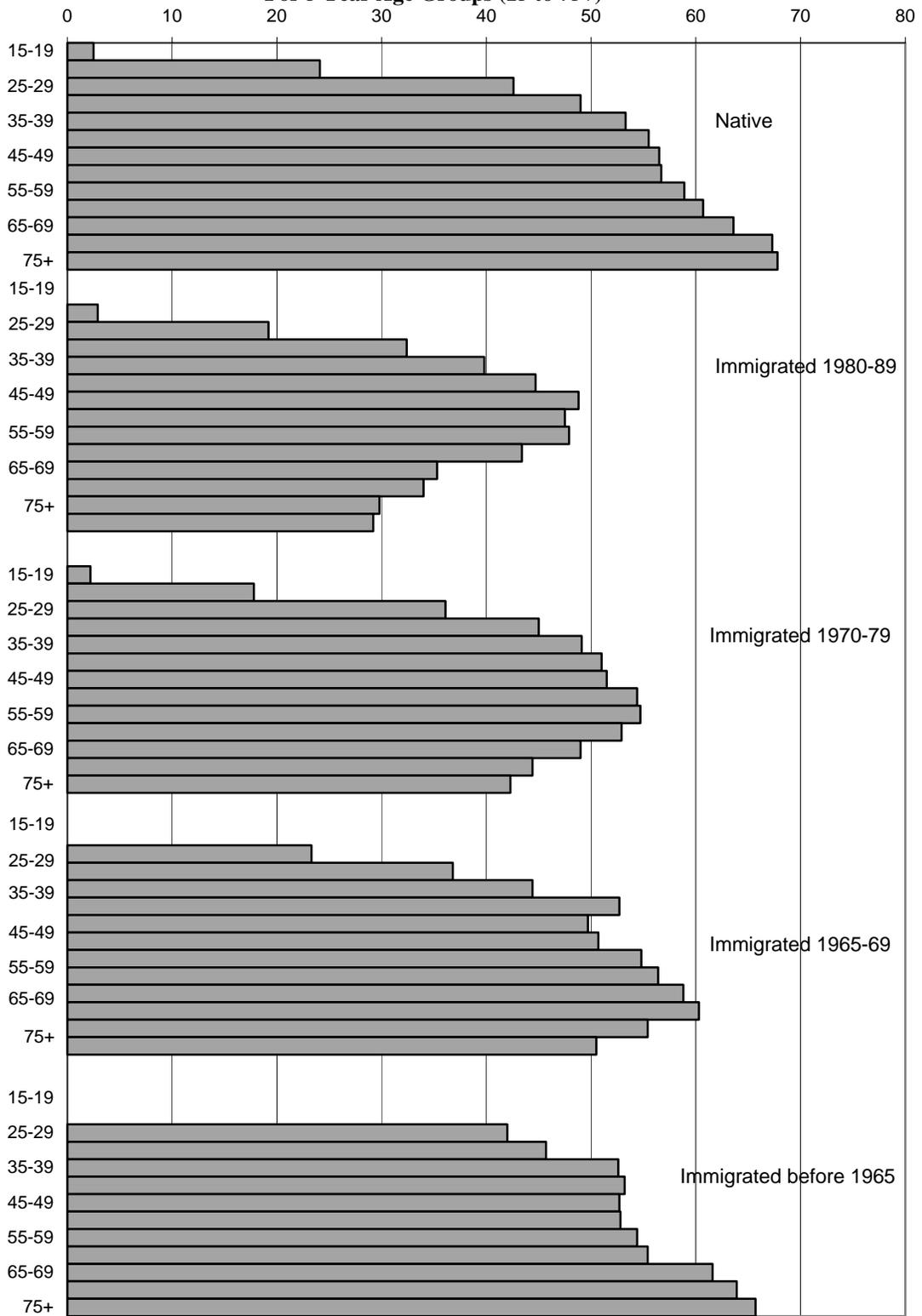
Not surprisingly, immigrants from different areas of origin have varying rates of headship. In Exhibit 10, we measure immigrant headship relative to that of same-aged native-born individuals. Among 1970's entrants aged 25-34 in 1980 and 35-44 in 1990, Asian and European immigrants generally had higher initial headship relative to same-aged native-born individuals than did Latinos. Nevertheless, most groups make progress in increasing their headship the longer that they remain in the U.S. Chinese/Taiwanese, Central Americans, and Cubans all make particularly strong progress, although they start from different initial levels.

Housing Impacts

Most immigrant groups maintain larger households than do natives and are, generally made up of additional family members. Holding all else equal, this would imply a greater need and demand for living space. However, not all else is equal. Immigrants generally have lower incomes than do the native-born and therefore, may not be able to afford extra space even if they desire it. Secondly, differing cultural preferences for personal and community space may mean that immigrants are content with less living area overall. Additional

Exhibit 9
Headship Rate by Immigrant Status: 1990
For 5 Year Age Groups (15 to 75+)

Percent



Source: Joint Center tabulations of the 1990 Census PUMS file.

Ratio of 1970s Immigrant to Native-born Headship Rates

Cohorts aged 25-34 in 1980 and 35-44 in 1990
(Percent)

	<u>1980</u>	<u>1990</u>
Filipino	69.8	78.4
Chinese/Taiwanese	75.4	89.6
South and SE Asian	81.2	85.3
Other Asian	70.3	76.3
Mexican	45.2	52.6
Central American	39.8	52.1
South American	43.1	51.1
Cuban	54.2	64.9
E. European	91.5	87.6
Other European	88.5	89.8

Source: Joint Center tabulations of the 1980 and 1990 Census PUMS files.

analysis, perhaps examining the independent effect of immigrant status on rooms per person after controlling for income, family type, and age would be of interest, as would qualitative research on cultural differences in preference for space. At present, national datasets do not permit substantial analysis in this regard. The American Housing Survey, which contains extensive information on housing characteristics, does not identify immigrant status. The Current Population Survey, while identifying immigrant status, has only limited housing unit information. The release of the 2000 Census should allow for greatly more detailed analysis, as well as for the identification of differences between different immigrant nationality groups.

The greater number of additional non-spouse adults living in immigrant households also suggests that they are a potential source of new spin-off households. Reasonably, immigrants could be expected to live together initially as they acclimate to a new society and gain their economic footing. Over time, though, the convergence of their headship rates on those of natives indicates the creation of new, independent households. Once again, however, immigrants' willingness and ability to form independent households is a function of factors beyond just household composition. The extent to which they create additional housing demand must be examined in light of their economic ability to support such households and their desire to head them.