

New study reveals socioeconomic changes in the nation's neighborhoods over time

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Jeffrey Timberlake, a University of Cincinnati associate professor of sociology, is photographed in Cincinnati's Over-the-Rhine neighborhood in 2010. Credit: Lisa Ventre/University of Cincinnati

As the nation endured two brutal recessions and the housing bubble crisis in this century's first decade, emerging research indicates that the

Northeast and western sections of the nation fared better than the Midwest and the South in terms of changing socioeconomic status. Overall, however, the average change across the nation was relatively positive, with growing numbers of Americans achieving college degrees and working professional jobs. Jeffrey Timberlake, a University of Cincinnati associate professor of sociology, and Alan Grigsby, a UC doctoral student, will present preliminary findings from a new study at the annual meeting of the Population Association of America, which takes place April 30-May 2, in San Diego, California.

The UC study also found that changing neighborhood [socioeconomic status](#) during the 2000s was sensitive to the percentage of blacks and Asians in the neighborhood, with higher percentages of blacks in [neighborhoods](#) leading to below-average improvements in neighborhood socioeconomic status and higher percentages of Asians leading to above-average change.

"It may be that Asians are settling in areas experiencing higher economic growth, so the rising socioeconomic status isn't necessarily linked to race as much as that this particular population segment could be riding a wave of settling into areas growing in prosperity," explains Timberlake. "Newer areas of Chinese settlement in New York and Los Angeles would be good examples. While it's not necessarily true that Asians 'cause' neighborhoods to do better, they may be settling in areas that have grown tremendously in terms of property values and family income."

As expected, the examination found a strong, negative relationship between high numbers of home foreclosures and neighborhood change. "The [housing bubble](#) crisis was really a dual crisis," says Timberlake. "There was a deep, economic recession that brought on unemployment and foreclosures and a housing bubble where housing prices were overinflated. Unemployment and foreclosure became related in

neighborhoods, so neighborhoods experiencing the worst unemployment in the 2000s also experienced the highest foreclosures and the most negative change over time," Timberlake says.

The study found that neighborhoods that started out in the 2000s with high numbers of vacancies also improved in socioeconomic status over time, as well as neighborhoods that drew growing numbers of immigrants over time. The authors also found that predictably, neighborhoods in principal cities experienced more of a drop in socioeconomic status than neighborhoods in the suburbs.

Using data from the 2000 U.S. Census and the 2008/2012 U.S. Census American Community Surveys, the researchers examined approximately a decade of change in socioeconomic status by combining five measures of neighborhood socioeconomic status:

- Percentage of residents not in poverty;
- Percentage of residents with a four-year college degree;
- Percentage of residents in the highest-prestige occupational category - residents with professional or technical occupations;
- Percentile category of household income; and
- Percentile category of median home value.

The study examined 66,000 tracts in approximately 940 metropolitan and micropolitan areas.

"We were looking at how high or low those distributions were in each neighborhood and measuring how those factors may have changed over time - which neighborhoods gained more in resources and which ones lost them," Timberlake explains.

Timberlake adds that more research is needed to explore whether the bursting housing bubble blew up harder in the South than in other

sections of the country, after the South grew very quickly over the past few decades. He also says that although some regions improved over others, the nation fared pretty well overall. He also cautions that change in neighborhoods shouldn't be confused with inequality at any given moment. "All we were measuring was neighborhood change, so if residents lived in a high-status neighborhood and the neighborhood got a little poorer, it still meant people were living in a high-status neighborhood," says Timberlake.

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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