

Racially diverse US neighborhoods undergoing re-segregation

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Racially segregated neighborhoods in the United States persist for many social and economic reasons. Yet new research shows that many racially diverse neighborhoods—seemingly a sign of progress in racial equality - are, in fact, segregating over time. These findings suggest greater racial segregation in U.S. neighborhoods within the next two decades.

"Neighborhoods in many major metropolitan areas of the U.S. appear integrated, simply because different races are present," said American University Sociology Assistant Professor Michael Bader. "But these [neighborhoods](#) are not the portrait of long-term, racially integrated neighborhoods. Stabilizing such neighborhoods should be a policy priority."

Bader examined more than 10,000 neighborhoods in Los Angeles, Chicago, New York and Houston, and their surrounding suburbs. Mining 40 years' worth of census data from 1970 to 2010 and considering geographic, historical and demographic factors, he found neighborhoods fragmented into 11 different trajectories of racial change.

Bader plotted when and how fast racial change occurred, uncovering a pattern of "steady re-segregation" for 35 percent of all neighborhoods in the four cities, or about 4,000 neighborhoods.

From white flight to white avoidance

There are some signs of racial integration in U.S. neighborhoods. Today, one in 100 neighborhoods is all-white. More than at any time in the post-Civil Rights era, whites are more likely to live in neighborhoods with people of color. Many people of color move into all-white neighborhoods.

Achieving long-term, stable integration in U.S. neighborhoods remains elusive. Bader finds that white flight, the exodus of whites from racially mixed urban regions to the suburbs and a prevalent occurrence through the 1970s, has been replaced with white avoidance.

"Blacks and Latinos are open to moving to different neighborhoods. Whites are largely unwilling," Bader said. "Whites are OK if integration comes to them, but they don't actively seek it out."

Whites, though they are accepting of living in integrated neighborhoods, avoid moving into neighborhoods that tilt more greatly toward any one group, Bader explains. As white families move out of racially diverse neighborhoods to take new jobs, to downsize, or for other reasons, they are unlikely to be replaced by white families. Black, Latino or Asian families move in. This process repeats, and over time, neighborhoods become segregated.

In particular, white avoidance appears to cause segregation in neighborhoods made up of whites and blacks. White avoidance, as well as the historical legacy of discriminatory housing practices, sees blacks concentrated into small areas of cities and inner-ring suburbs. White avoidance continues a cycle of disinvestment in [black neighborhoods](#).

Turning around a trend

The research points to a bright spot: Racially diverse neighborhoods are thriving in suburbs of the four cities. For example, suburban cities such

as Bound Brook, New Jersey, Aliso Viejo, Calif., Naperville, Ill., and Sugar Land, Tex., are all places where whites, Latinos, Asians, and blacks continue to live near one another, as they have for several decades.

"Racial diversity is thriving in suburban, multiethnic neighborhoods because whites willingly move into those neighborhoods and their numbers are decreasing at a slower rate compared with neighborhoods experiencing steady re-segregation," Bader said.

Because it takes 20 to 30 years for some integrated neighborhoods to re-segregate, it's not too late to turn around the trend.

Policies that ensure minorities can enter all-white neighborhoods will produce only modest gains toward integration, especially since many minorities have already gained footholds in majority white neighborhoods, Bader said. Policies must also encourage whites to consider living in integrated neighborhoods, particularly neighborhoods where the share of blacks is growing.

Some of Bader's policy recommendations center on attracting prospective home buyers to integrated neighborhoods. The large number of multiethnic neighborhoods shows this would be possible. Local government councils should market integrated neighborhoods, and real-estate companies should suggest neighborhoods that home seekers might not know about or consider on their own. Sustained investments in integrated neighborhoods would also prevent the boom-and-bust cycle that drives gentrification and displacement.

"Just as importantly, whites' perceptions about living in integrated neighborhoods must change," Bader added. "We could learn a lot by studying how multiethnic neighborhoods in the suburbs maintain racial diversity."

"The Fragmented Evolution of Racial Integration Since the Civil Rights Movement" is published online in *Sociological Science*.

More information: Michael Bader et al. The Fragmented Evolution of Racial Integration since the Civil Rights Movement, *Sociological Science* (2016). [DOI: 10.15195/v3.a8](https://doi.org/10.15195/v3.a8)

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