

Visualizing Intergenerational Immigrant Assimilation at Work

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Are Skeie Hermansen^{1,2}

Abstract

The extent to which successive immigrant generations experience economic progress is a fundamental yardstick of assimilation and future ethnic stratification in the increasingly diverse societies of the rich West. In this regard, measuring how immigrants and local-born adult descendants of immigrants are distributed across different labor market segments provides clues about their relative assimilation into the mainstream economy. Drawing on linked employer-employee administrative data from Norway, the author uses heat plots to visualize differences in ethnic and socioeconomic characteristics of workplace contexts by immigrant background. The visualization reveals a striking overall pattern of intergenerational assimilation, whereby immigrant descendants are employed in workplaces that are more like those of nonmigrant natives in terms of immigrant concentration and, in particular, coworkers' salaries, education, and occupational task profiles compared with the immigrant generation. However, less-successful members of the second generation found in workplaces with less prestigious job characteristics still experience disproportionate levels of ethnic workplace segregation.

Keywords

immigration, assimilation, segregation, workplace, visualization

Scholars and politicians alike worry that many contemporary immigrant minorities are not successfully incorporating into the increasingly diverse societies in Europe and North America (Alba and Foner 2015). Upon arrival, immigrants often end up in labor market segments—sometimes referred to as ethnic niches in the economy—characterized by workplaces with disproportionately many immigrant-background employees and low-paid routine manual jobs that require few educational qualifications and provide few analytical job tasks (Andersson et al. 2014; Bacolod and Rangel 2017; Waldinger and Lichter 2003). Despite initial hardship, assimilation theory predicts declining labor market inequality relative to nonmigrant natives across immigrant generations (Alba and Foner 2015). In this regard, the extent to which descendants of immigrants achieve intergenerational economic progress provides a fundamental yardstick of immigrant assimilation and future ethnic stratification.

To measure access to the mainstream economy, I visualize differences in the workplace contexts in which immigrants and descendants of immigrants are employed using Norwegian linked employer-employee administrative data. Figure 1 displays heat plots of the bivariate distribution of the proportion of immigrant-background employees in the workplace along the *x*-axes and, along the *y*-axes, the

percentile-ranked workplace mean of employees' salaries (Figure 1A), years of education (Figure 1B), or analytical (Figure 1C) and manual (Figure 1D) occupational task requirements for immigrants (column 1), immigrant descendants (column 2), and nonmigrant natives (column 3). The red lines refer to the median for the variables on the *x*- and *y*-axes. The Online Supplement shows that these workplace measures are only moderately correlated. Comparing differences between immigrants and immigrant descendants allow us to assess whether there is intergenerational movement toward convergence in each workplace dimension relative to nonmigrant natives.

Figure 1A shows that immigrants are employed in workplaces with high proportions of immigrant-background employees (median = .226) and low salaries (median = .245). By contrast, descendants of immigrants have fewer immigrant-background coworkers (median = .159) but still

¹University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway

²Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden

Corresponding Author:

Are Skeie Hermansen, University of Oslo, Department of Sociology and Human Geography, 0851 Oslo, Norway; Swedish Institute for Social Research, Stockholm University, 106 91 Stockholm, Sweden.

Email: a.s.hermansen@sosgeo.uio.no



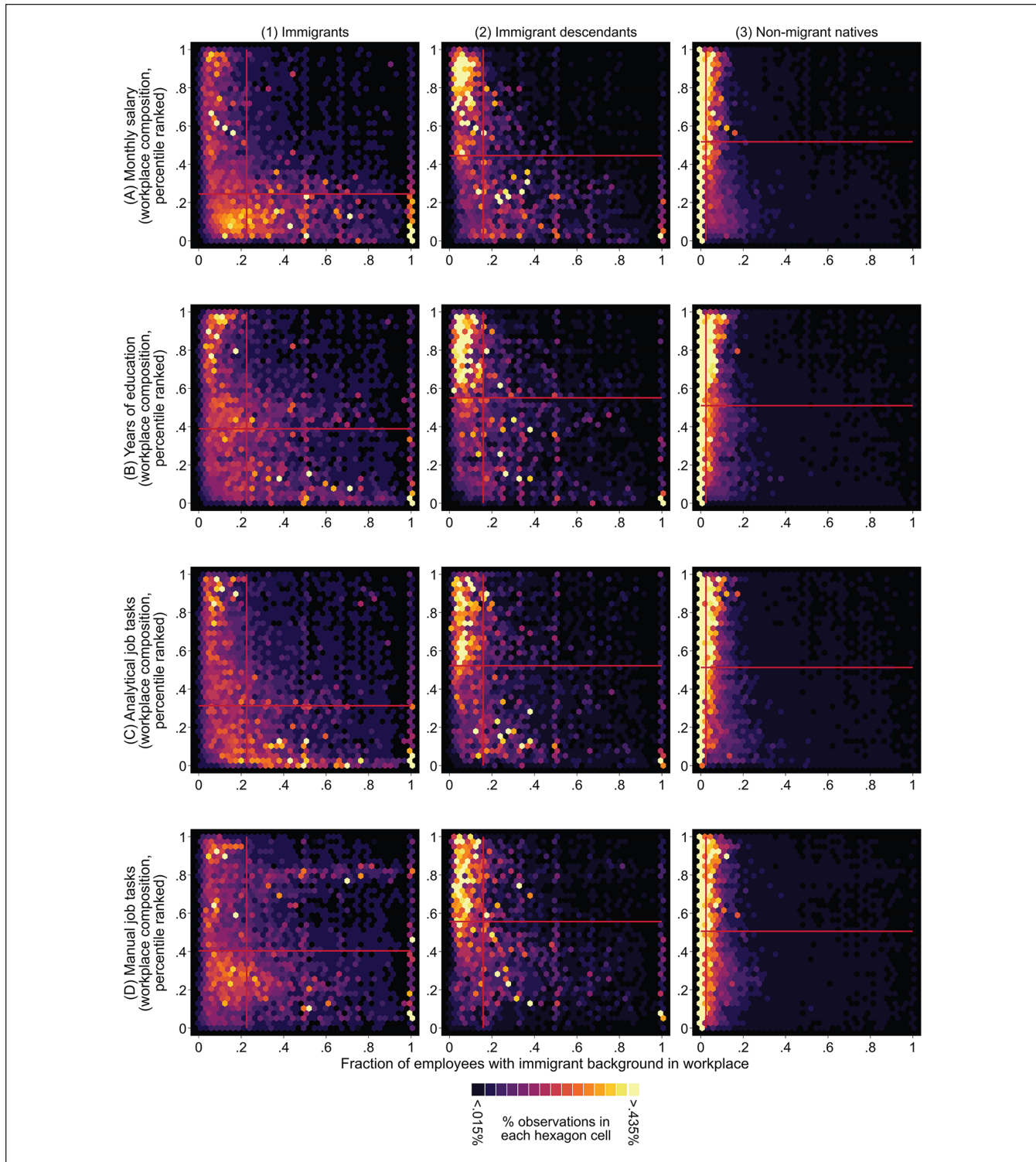


Figure I. Heat plots of the joint bivariate distribution of the proportion of employees with immigrant backgrounds in the workplace (y-axis in all panels) and, along the x-axes, the percentile-ranked workplace mean of employees' monthly salaries (A), years of completed education (B), and analytical (C) and manual (D) job tasks separately for immigrants (column 1, $n = 107,407$) and descendants of immigrants (column 2, $n = 17,833$) from non-European origin countries compared with the nonmigrant native majority (column 3, $n = 1,472,927$) using linked employer-employee administrative data from Norway. The color intensity of each hexagon cell describes the percentage of the total number of individual observations within each group in the given cell, from less than .015 percent (black), moving in .030 percent intervals, to cells with .435 percent or more (bright yellow). The vertical and horizontal red lines in each plot refer to the median for each variable on the x- and y-axis. The heat maps were produced using the Stata module `heatplot` (Jann 2019). The Online Supplement provides a detailed description of the data and variables used for the visualization.

substantially more than the nonmigrant natives (median = .058). Importantly, immigrant descendants (median = .445) have coworkers that, on average, have much higher salaries than immigrants, as indicated by the bright yellow hexagons in the upper left quadrant of column 2 in Figure 1A, and their median workplace salary is almost on par with that of nonmigrant natives (median = .513).

The remaining panels (Figures 1B–1D) reveal similar patterns, in which immigrants are employed in workplaces with less educated coworkers, who hold occupations that require less analytical but more physically demanding manual job tasks. For all socioeconomic workplace characteristics, immigrant descendants have considerably higher ranks compared with immigrants, and these ranks are on par with or even slightly higher than the medians among nonmigrant natives. The Online Supplement documents a similar picture of upward mobility across immigrant generations when broken down by country of origin.

Figure 1 reveals a striking pattern of intergenerational assimilation in the labor market, which is broadly consistent with prior research showing strong upward mobility in individual educational attainment and earnings among immigrant descendants in Norway (Hermansen 2016). As adults, descendants of immigrants are entering the mainstream economy and tend to be employed in workplaces that are considerably more like those of nonmigrant natives in terms of immigrant concentration and, especially, coworkers' salaries, education, and occupational skill profiles than what is the case for the immigrant generation. Despite overall upward mobility and increased workplace assimilation in the second generation, the figure also shows that immigrant descendants who remain in workplaces characterized by less prestigious job characteristics tend to have disproportionately many immigrant-background coworkers. The persisting ethnic workplace segregation found among immigrant descendants in the bottom rungs of the socioeconomic workplace hierarchy looks more like the pattern seen for immigrants. This implies that less successful members of the second generation still find work within ethnic niches of the labor market.

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ORCID iD

Are Skeie Hermansen  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8783-0362>

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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Author Biography

Are Skeie Hermansen is an associate professor of sociology in the Department of Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo, and a researcher at the Swedish Institute for Social Research, Stockholm University. His research interests include social stratification and intergenerational mobility, segregation across schools, neighborhoods, and workplaces, and immigrant assimilation in education and the labor market. His recent work has appeared in journals such as *Social Forces*, *Demography*, and *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.