

ADVANCING IMMIGRANT INCORPORATION IN AUSTIN, TX



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REPORT FOR THE CITY OF AUSTIN

RUTH ELLEN WASEM
AARON ESCAJEDA
ANA PEREZ
MICAELA MCCONNELL
TANIA URUCHIMA



TEXAS LBJ School

The University of Texas at Austin
Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs



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Austin is one of the fastest-growing cities in the United States and is identified as an emerging gateway for immigrants. The single largest source country for immigrants to Austin continues to be Mexico, but immigrants from Asia are increasing in numbers and relative proportion. Immigrants from Africa doubled over the past decade and make up 4 percent of the foreign-born population. In other words, Austin's foreign-born residents are increasingly diverse.



Austin is among cities that have embraced the "welcoming communities" movement. Welcoming communities seek to have longtime residents and recent immigrants work together to create stronger communities. A growing body of research shows that immigrant incorporation policies yield positive outcomes for both native-born and foreign-born residents of a city.

This report serves to inform the City of Austin as it advances its immigrant incorporation efforts.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RESEARCH



There is considerable scholarship on the racial and economic segregation of Austin over the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century. Immigrants are arriving to a city that has a deep history of residential segregation, and they are pushing a few of these boundaries.

The report is the culmination of several phases of research and analysis.

The initial phase draws on the New American Economy (NAE) Cities Index because it provides a baseline to compare the largest 100 U.S. cities based on their immigrant integration scores.

The report focuses on a subset of U.S. cities that are similar to Austin on key economic and demographic factors. We further investigate the immigrant incorporation policies of successful peer cities.

Another phase is the socioeconomic analysis of the foreign-born population in Austin. We utilize the 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) Five-Year Estimates to identify census tracts with concentrations of foreign-born residents and analyze key traits.

In asset mapping Austin's immigrant neighborhoods, we overlay census tracts with selected community assets, attributes, and incidents.

Key Findings

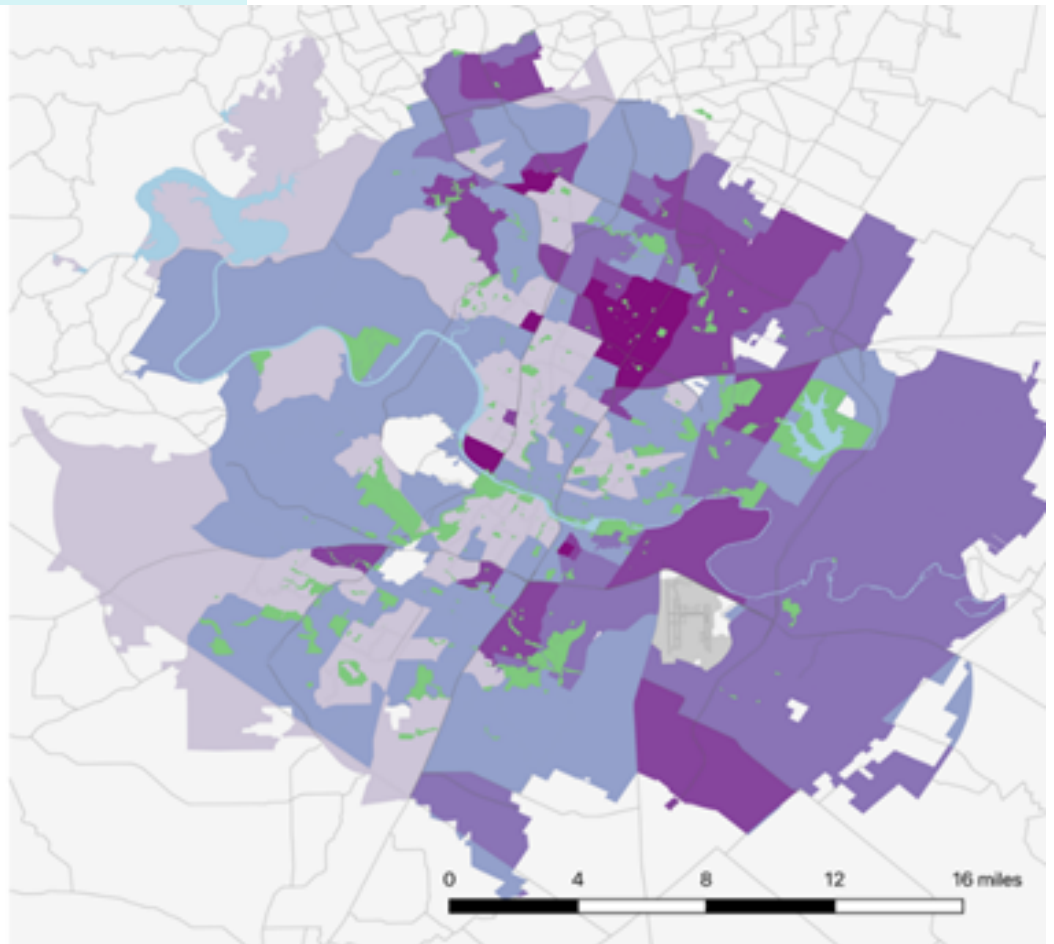
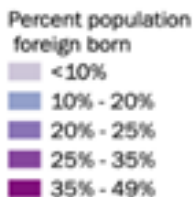
Austin's three-year trends on the NAE indices show consistent improvement overall, ranking 43rd out of the 100 largest cities in 2020. The overall scores increased from 2.6 and 2.7 in 2018 and 2019, respectively, to 3.03 in 2020, out of a possible score of 5. Indices of legal support, government leadership and community are driving Austin's ranking.

Austin, however, falls below the median on civic participation, livability, and job opportunities. Austin's naturalization rate of 68.5 percent is one of the lowest rates among its peers. Austin's subpar score of 2 on job opportunities sounds an alarm for the city, especially given the city's overall record of prosperity and economic growth. Median wages in the construction sector in Austin (\$32,960), for example, fall below state (\$34,980) and national (\$43,000) levels.

The densest area of foreign-born population centers around the intersections of North Lamar and Rundberg Lane. There are a few other pockets with 35-49 percent foreign-born residents in west Austin. Nonetheless, most immigrants live in east Austin and south Austin near the airport.

Percent Foreign Born, by Census Tract

Austin, Texas



The starkest contrast among foreign-born neighborhoods comes when those census tracts with higher percentages of the foreign born who were born in Asia are compared with those who were born in Latin America. Asian immigrants are overwhelmingly living in west Austin, the historically white and wealthier half of the city.



Affordable housing continues to be one of the most pressing issues facing Austinites—native or foreign born. Foreign-born residents experience rent burden at a rate 4.8 percent higher than native-born residents. The census tracts identified as most vulnerable to housing displacement align with those census tracts with high foreign-born concentrations.

The asset mapping illustrates a “crescent moon” of assets, attributes, and incidents along the heavily populated central corridor of Austin, bending toward west Austin. Whether it is the location of affordable housing units, hospitals, fire stations, or public libraries, the patterns mirror the longstanding racial and economic divides in the city.

RECOMMENDATIONS



These empirical analyses undergird policy options the City of Austin might take to foster vibrancy, resilience, and economic potential in immigrant communities. The report focuses on five policy areas that the City of Austin can advance if prioritized and acted upon:

- 1) leadership and governance;
- 2) civic engagement and inclusivity;
- 3) economic prosperity and job growth;
- 4) livability; and
- 5) community resilience.

The recommendations are gleaned, in part, from our study of comparable cities.

The recommendations are as follows:

- Austin formally establishes and staffs an office charged with immigrant affairs and incorporation.
- Austin continues to support naturalization with additional resources and available coursework aimed at the English language proficiency and civics education required to qualify for naturalization, and develops initiatives to encourage civic participation across all communities.
- Austin explores policy options to remedy its comparative low wages in key sectors of the economy, continues to collaborate with its public universities and colleges and other non-governmental organizations to deliver workforce development programs, and ensures information about requirements for starting businesses are accessible in immigrant communities.
- Austin continues to leverage all the policy tools available to develop and preserve affordable housing and ensures that immigrant neighborhoods are factored in—and immigrant voices included—as priorities are set and plans are executed.
- Austin uses community and neighborhood risk factors that encompass immigrant populations to identify at-risk parts of the city, locates assets and resources where people are most vulnerable in places convenient and appropriate, and establishes community hubs as public spaces that bring agencies and neighborhood groups together to provide specialized services agilely as needs ebb and flow.

A nighttime photograph of a city skyline, likely Austin, Texas, with numerous skyscrapers illuminated by warm yellow and white lights. Some buildings feature blue and red neon accents. The lights are reflected in a body of water in the foreground, creating a blurred, shimmering effect. The sky is a deep twilight blue.

For the complete report, go to
<https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/handle/2152/86821>

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