



# Policy Forum

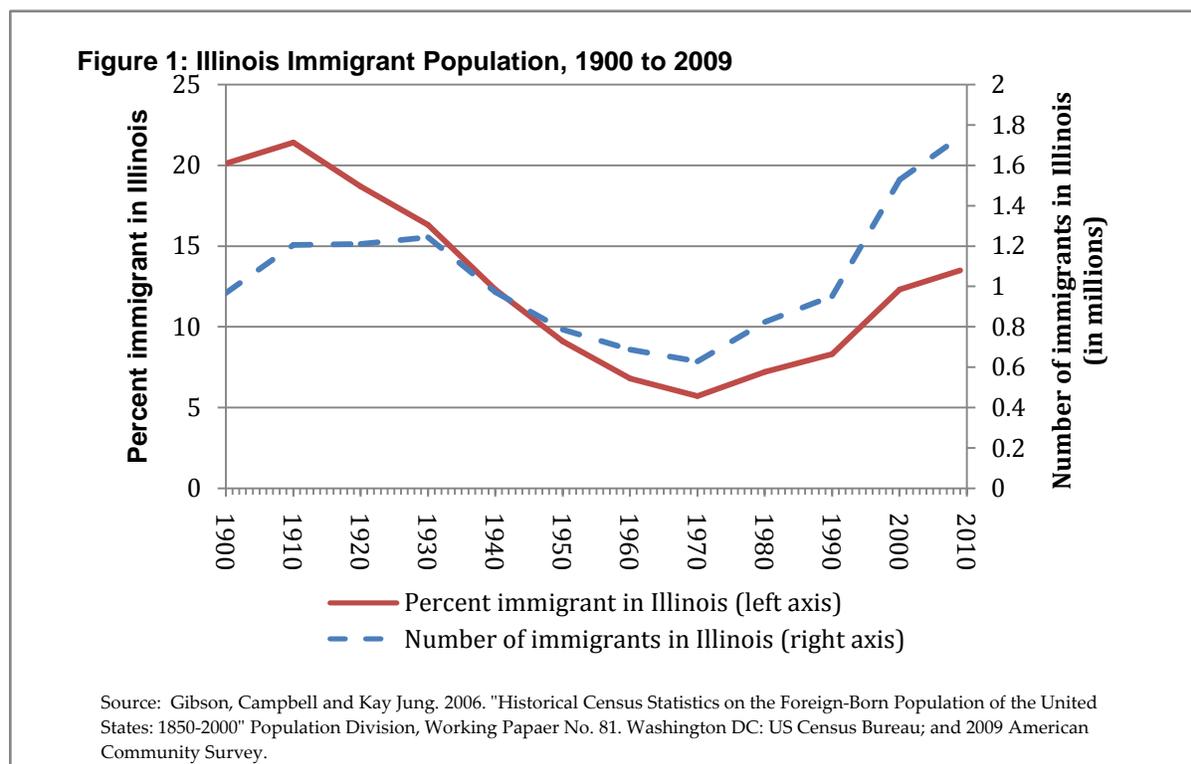
## The Demography of the Immigrant Population in Illinois\*

By Matthew Hall and Darren Lubotsky

Perhaps the most profound demographic trend over the last three decades has been the rapid growth in the immigrant population: the rise in the number of foreigners living in the U.S. is transforming communities, politics, and the economy. While overshadowed to some extent by debates over healthcare, the financial meltdown, and the Great Recession, immigration policy continues to be a highly contentious issue that cuts across traditional party lines and ideologies. In this brief

report, we offer a demographic summary of Illinois' immigrant population and how it has changed over the last two decades.<sup>1</sup>

The immigrant population in Illinois is larger, in absolute terms, today than at any point in the state's history. The dashed blue line in Figure 1 shows that an estimated 1.74 million immigrants resided in Illinois in 2009, an increase of 210,000 since the start of the new century. The solid red line in Figure 1 shows that immigrants comprised 13.5



\* We are grateful to Jonathan Stringfield for helping to prepare data for this report.

percent of Illinois' 2009 population. While the immigrant population has risen sharply since 1970, its share of the total population is lower than it was at the turn of the 20th century, when about one in five Illinoisans was born abroad.

**Where do Illinois immigrants live?**

Immigrants to the United States have become more geographically dispersed over the last two decades. They continue to settle in large numbers in the traditional gateway states of Illinois, California, New York, Texas, and Florida, but the share of immigrants living in these states fell from 68 percent in 1990 to 61 percent in 2009 (Illinois' share of all immigrants remained relatively stable, falling only slightly from 4.8 percent to 4.5 percent). Meanwhile, immigration to new destinations in the South, Midwest, and Northwest has increased. For example, the immigrant population increased by 506 percent in Atlanta and by 488 percent in Nashville over the 1990-2009 period.

This geographic redistribution of immigrants at the national level is mirrored by redistribution within Illinois. As shown in Map 1, immigrants are most strongly represented in Chicago and its collar counties.

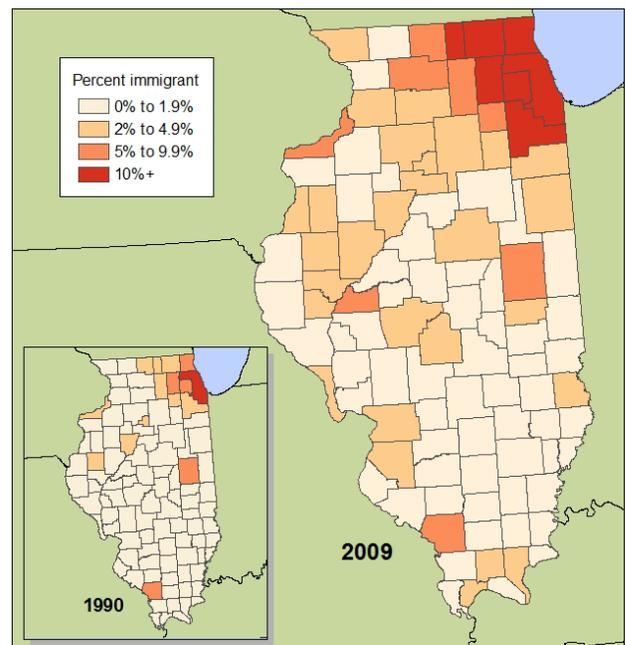
But comparing the geography of Illinois' immigrant population in 2009 with that in 1990 reveals that the current immigrant population is much more spread out across the state than it was 20 years ago.<sup>ii</sup> In 1990 Cook was the only county in the state where immigrants made up 10 percent or more of the population; by 2009, seven counties had reached that threshold. More importantly, growth in the immigrant population downstate has been large and widespread of late. Indeed, 57 of Illinois' 102 counties

saw their foreign-born populations double (or more than double) between 1990 and 2009.

Changes in migrant flows out of gateway cities like Chicago and into new destinations are driven by two types of forces: those that push migrants out of areas and those that pull migrants into other areas. Two main factors that pull people to an area are employment opportunities and comparatively low costs of living. When pull factors such as these are important, we might expect to see immigrants and natives moving to the same places.

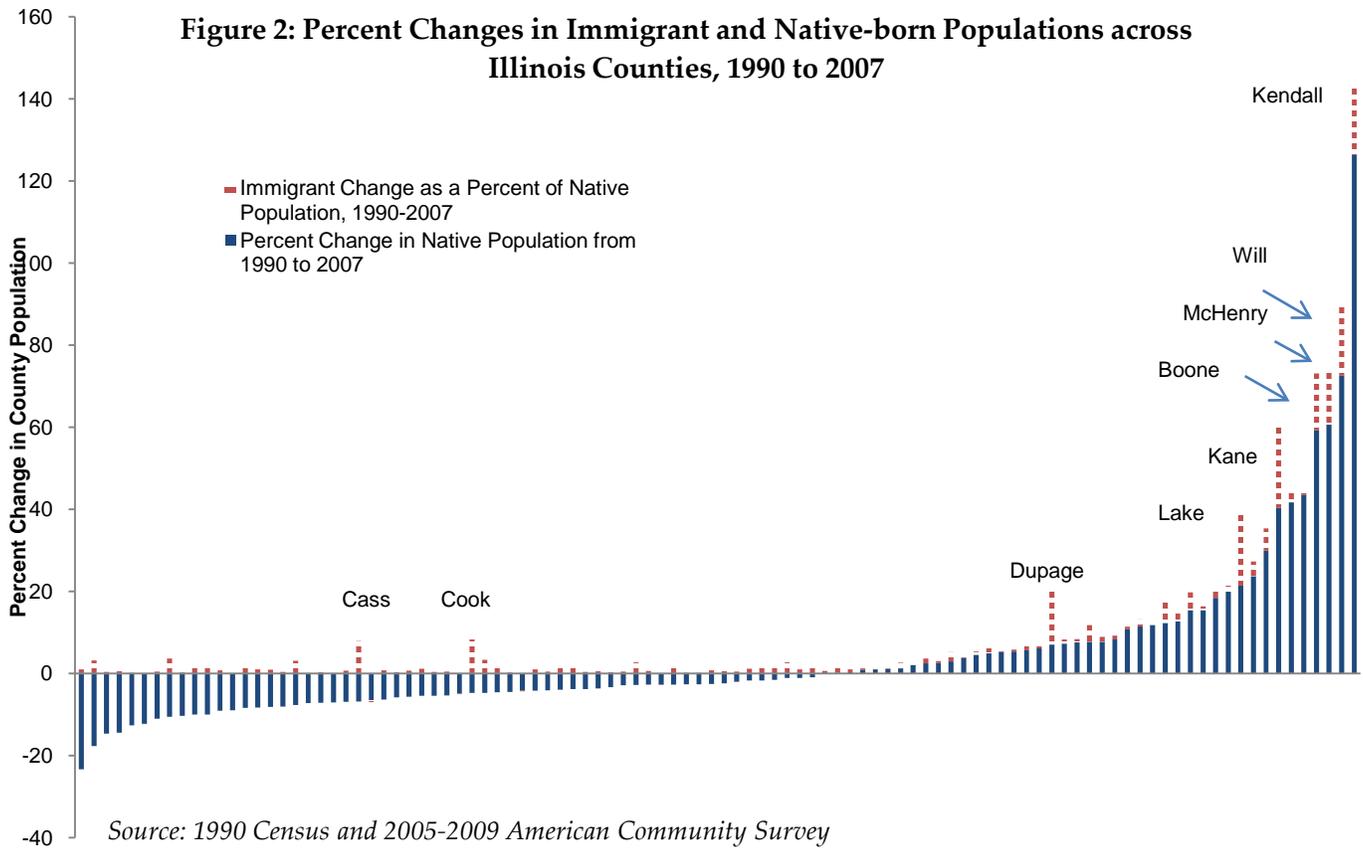
Figure 2 shows that this is indeed the case. The solid blue bars in the figure show the percentage change in the native-born population of Illinois counties from 1990 to 2009. Not all counties are labeled, but they are arrayed from left to right in order of net growth in the native-born population.

**Map 1: Illinois Counties Percent Immigrant, 1990 and 2009**



Source: 1990 Census and 2005-2009 American Community Survey

**Figure 2: Percent Changes in Immigrant and Native-born Populations across Illinois Counties, 1990 to 2007**



Counties on the left side of the figure, where the blue line extends downward, are those that experienced a decline in the native-born population over the last 19 years. The largest declines occurred in southern, largely rural counties (e.g, the native-born population of Alexander County declined by 23 percent; that of Pulaski County declined by 18 percent). The counties that experienced the largest growth in their native-born populations appear on the right side of the figure. These are largely northern counties that surround Chicago and Cook County, including Kendall (a 126-percent increase), Will (73 percent), McHenry (61 percent), Boone (60 percent), Kane (40 percent), and Lake (21 percent) counties.

The striped red bars in Figure 2 show the change in the immigrant population,

expressed as a percentage of the 1990 native-born population. The nine counties that experienced the largest growth in the immigrant population, relative to the size of the native population, are labeled in the figure. It is clear that seven of the nine (Kendall, Will, McHenry, Boone, Kane, Lake, and DuPage) are among the counties that also experienced large influxes of natives. For example, the immigrant population in Kane County grew from 26,000 people in 1990 to more than 85,000 people in 2009. This increase of nearly 60,000 represents about 20 percent of the 1990 native-born population, which was about 291,000 people.

Cook County is of great interest simply because three out of four immigrants in Illinois reside there. The native-born population of Cook County declined by

**Table 1: Characteristics of Illinois and US Immigrants, 2009**

	Illinois	U.S
% arrived during 2000s	28.4	31.6
% arrived during 1990s	31.4	27.9
% English proficient	44.8	48.0
% naturalized	45.0	43.7
% undocumented*	29.6	28.7
Top Countries of Origin		
#1	Mexico(39.8)	Mexico (29.8)
#2	Poland (8.2)	Philippines (4.5)
#3	India (6.5)	India (4.3)

Sources: 2009 American Community Survey; \*Passel and Cohn 2011

about 210,000 people between 1990 and 2009, a decline of about five percent. But the immigrant population increased by about 362,000 people during this time, so the county population increased overall. The rising immigrant population in Cook County reflects, in part, the strong pull that existing immigrant communities have in drawing new immigrants. Poles who move to the U.S., for example, are especially drawn to the large Polish community in Chicago.

This pattern wherein natives leaving an area are replaced by immigrants, so that the overall population remains largely unchanged, is also seen in many smaller communities throughout the state. Notice in Figure 2 how many of the counties that experienced a decline in native population also experienced a rise in the immigrant population. A prominent example is Cass County in western Illinois. In 1990, about 13,000 people lived in Cass County, which put it at about the 20th percentile of county population in Illinois. Between 1990 and 2009, about 900 natives left Cass. Meanwhile, the immigrant population increased from just 86 people in 1990 to over 1,100 in 2009. A strong “pull” factor in this case is the large Cargill hog processing

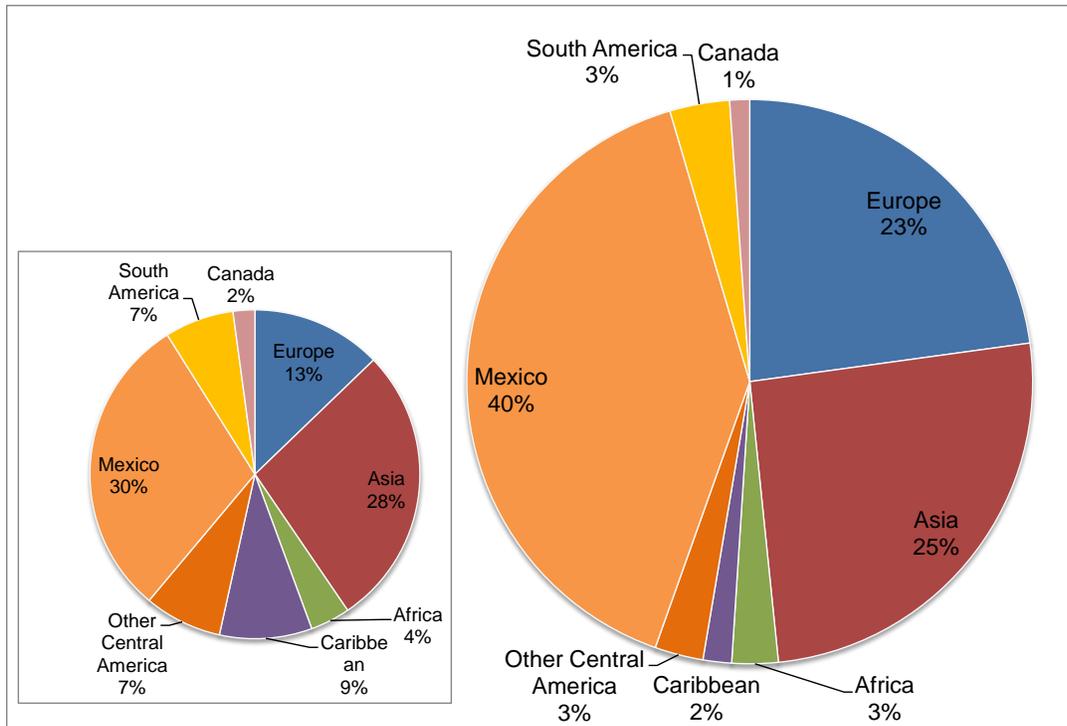
plant, where many of the immigrants are employed.<sup>iii</sup>

### **How do Illinois’ immigrants compare to the native-born and immigrants in the rest of the United States?**

In this section we assess how similar Illinois’ immigrant population is to the native-born population and to immigrants in other states across a range of dimensions. Immigrants’ employment, earnings, national origin, and other characteristics enter into public debates about immigration policy and the impact of immigrants on the economy and society in many different ways. Our goal here is to bring to light many of the basic facts about the Illinois immigrant population.

The demographic profile of Illinois’ immigrant population is, in fact, quite representative of the nation’s total immigrant population. As shown in Table 1, 28 percent of immigrants living in Illinois in 2009 arrived to America during the 2000s and an additional 31 percent arrived during the 1990s. Nationwide, 32 percent of immigrants arrived during the 2000s and 28 percent during the 1990s. In both Illinois and the nation, close to half of the foreign-born population speak English fluently (i.e.,

**Figure 3: World Region of Birth for Illinois and all U.S. (in smaller box) Immigrants**



report themselves as speaking English exclusively or speaking it “very well”). Nearly half (45 percent) of the foreign-born in Illinois, and 44 percent nationwide, are naturalized citizens, with the full set of voting, public benefit, and employment rights that accompany naturalization. Direct data is not collected on whether those who are not American citizens are in the United States legally, so legal status has to be estimated based on other data and characteristics. Recent estimates by Passel and Cohn (2011) indicate that about 30 percent of the foreign-born in Illinois reside here illegally, which is nearly identical to the estimated percentage nationwide.<sup>iv</sup>

Immigrants tend to move to areas in the United States where other people from their home country already reside. Compared to immigrants nationwide, those in Illinois are more likely to be of Mexican or European origin. Figure 3 shows the distribution of source countries of immigrants in Illinois

and the nation. Forty percent of immigrants in Illinois hail from Mexico; 25 percent are from Asia; 23 percent are from Europe; and small percentages come from other Central American countries, the Caribbean, South America, and Canada. The three largest sending countries for Illinois’ immigrant population are Mexico, Poland (8.2 percent of all Illinois immigrants) and India (6.5 percent of all Illinois immigrants).

As the geography of the Illinois immigrant population changed over the last few decades, so too did its composition. The left side of Table 2 compares socioeconomic characteristics of immigrants in 1990 and 2009. The share of immigrants without a high school diploma fell from 32 percent in 1990 to 31 percent in 2009, and is thus considerably higher than the 10 percent drop-out rate among the native-born in Illinois. Mirroring trends among the native-born, the percentage of immigrants with a college degree rose from 21 percent 1990 to

**Table 2: Socioeconomic Characteristics of Illinois Immigrants and Natives, 1990 and 2009**

	Immigrants		Natives	
	1990	2009	1990	2009
% without high school diploma	41.9	30.6	21.6	9.9
% with college degree	20.8	28.0	21.1	31.1
% in poverty	13.4	14.4	11.7	13.2
Median household income*	\$49,200	\$51,000	\$52,500	\$54,200
% employed	63.5	60.8	63.2	64.8
% labor force employed	92.7	90.2	93.5	89.4
Median age	37.0	34.6	32.0	40.9
% male	50.7	51.1	48.1	49.0
% married	57.5	62.3	41.7	45.6
Average household size	3.3	3.4	2.6	2.5

Notes: \* in real 2009 dollars; Source: 2009 American Community Survey

28 percent in 2009. The presence of highly skilled immigrants is sometimes forgotten in debates about U.S. immigration policy, which tends to focus on low-skilled, predominately Mexican immigrants. In Illinois, there are now essentially equally large shares of low-skilled (without high school) and high-skilled (college or more) immigrants, an underreported trend that is happening nationwide. ▽ Illinois' immigrants in 2009 are younger than they were in 2009, slightly more likely to be male and married, and have very slightly larger households than in 2009.

Despite Illinois immigrants' lower rate of high school completion, their success in the labor market mirrors that of natives. In 2009, 61 percent of immigrants in Illinois were employed, compared to 65 percent among natives. The four-point difference reflects the fact that a larger share of immigrants choose not to participate in the labor market (i.e. they are not employed and not looking for employment). Among those who participate in the labor market, 90 percent of immigrants are employed (i.e.

the unemployment rate is 10 percent) and 89 percent of natives are employed (i.e. the unemployment rate is 11 percent). Median household income in 2009 was \$51,000 among immigrants and \$54,200 among natives. Adjusted for inflation, both immigrant and native families experienced about a \$2,000 increase in their household income between 1990 and 2009. The poverty rates in 2009 were 14 percent for immigrants and 13 percent for natives, in both cases, slightly higher than they were in 1990, reflecting the recession.

### What does this mean for public policy?

Our review of the demography of the Illinois immigrant population highlights three important facts about immigration in Illinois: the spread of immigrants to new destinations; the disproportionately high share of high school dropouts in the immigrant population; and large shares of the immigration population struggling to speak and understand English. Each of these has important implications for

thinking about the immigration process and potential policy options.

As a long-standing immigrant hub, Chicago has many institutional resources, such as ethnic communities, religious and civic organizations, multilingual educational and service programs, and an existing population that is familiar with the diversity and challenges that a large immigrant population brings. These resources help to make the city an engine of immigrant incorporation.

By contrast, Illinois' new immigrant destinations lack many of these assets and will be confronting immigration issues for the first time. In some areas, immigration is slowing down a long-term population decline. More commonly, immigration to Illinois is speeding up the growth of counties to which natives are also moving. Population growth, whether it is by natives or immigrants, puts pressure on public services, such as schools and hospitals. This process is easier to manage, however, when job growth is robust and the tax base is expanding. Nevertheless, there is nothing inherently different about immigrant inflows into new destinations today and the inflows to Chicago and other areas during previous immigration waves.

Despite large and growing numbers of high-skilled immigrants in the state, the disproportionately large number of very low-skilled immigrants triggers fears that the job prospects and earnings of the most vulnerable native workers will be harmed. While researchers continue to debate the precise size of these effects, the range of estimates in the literature indicates that low-skilled immigration has a fairly small effect (if any) on the earnings of low-skilled native workers.<sup>vi</sup>

In fact, it is remarkable how cities throughout the nation are able to successfully absorb large flows of immigrants. There are a few reasons for this. Immigrants are consumers and their arrival increases the demand for goods and services and, as a consequence, the local demand for labor. In addition, firms in areas that experience an inflow of low-skilled immigration appear to adapt by using more labor-intensive processes. Finally, immigrants and natives tend to work in different industries and occupations, which mitigates the impact of immigration on natives' labor market outcomes.

The final fact we highlight is that a high fraction of immigrants have poor English-language ability. This trait limits immigrants' employment and educational opportunities, narrows housing options, strains the formation of relationships with non-immigrants and complicates the delivery of public goods and services. The importance of facility with English is likely to remain vitally important in the future. Hence, finding better ways to improve English-language abilities, especially for immigrant children, is crucially important for improving outcomes among disadvantaged immigrants and the second generation.

## About the Authors

**Matthew Hall** joined the Institute of Government and Public Affairs and the Department of Sociology at University of Illinois at Chicago in 2010 after completing his Ph.D. in Sociology and Demography at Penn State. Hall is a social demographer whose research focuses on immigrant incorporation, residential sorting, and the consequences of immigration, with a particular focus on movement to new destination areas. He has published in journals such as *American Sociological Review*, *Demography*, *Social Forces*, and *Urban Studies*.

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***Policy Forum*** is an occasional publication of the Institute of Government and Public Affairs at the University of Illinois. It examines crucial issues facing the state of Illinois.

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<sup>i</sup>In this report we use the terms “immigrant” and “foreign born” interchangeably to refer to individuals living in the United States, regardless of legal status, who were born in another country. Because Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens, they are not immigrants.

<sup>ii</sup>Our data for 1990 come from the 1990 decennial Census. Data labeled as 2009 refer to pooled samples of the 2005 through 2009 American Community Surveys.

<sup>iii</sup>Leif Jensen, “New Immigrant Settlements in Rural America: Problems, Prospects, and Policies,” Carsey Institute Reports on Rural America 1, 3 (2006).

<sup>iv</sup>Jeffrey S. Passel and D’Vera Cohn, “Unauthorized Immigration Population: National and State Trends,” Pew Hispanic Center (2011).

<sup>v</sup>Matthew Hall, Audrey Singer, Gordon De Jong, and Deborah Graefe, “The Geography of Immigrant Skills,” Brookings Institution (2011).

<sup>vi</sup>See for example David Card, “Is The New Immigration Really So Bad?,” *Economic Journal* 115, 506 (October 2005), F300-F323.