

**Assimilation and Economic Performance: The Case of Federal Indian Policy**

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In truth, the ultimate point of rest & happiness for them [the Indians] is to let our settlements and theirs meet and blend together, to intermix, and become one people.

-Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Hawkins  
February 18, 1803<sup>1</sup>

Circumstances ... render it impossible that you [the Indians] can flourish in the midst of a civilized community. You have but one remedy within your reach. And that is, to remove to the west.

- Andrew Jackson to the Cherokees  
April 9, 1835<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the nineteenth century, Federal Indian policy oscillated between two extremes positions. George Washington and his immediate successors endorsed a program of “civilization.” Federal Indian agents proffered rights to permanent settlements, domestic animals, household tools, and instruction in husbandry with the eventual goal of assimilating tribes into the burgeoning agricultural society of the newly united states. However, the inexorable westward movement of the frontier, the accompanying desire for new farm lands, and the discovery of valuable resources within tribal territories<sup>3</sup> contributed to a growing white resentment of Indian land title. With the passage of the 1830 Indian Relocation Act, Andrew Jackson orchestrated the wholesale abandonment of civilization programs and instead became an avid proponent of removal. Eastern tribes were to be relocated (forcefully, if necessary) to uninhabited land west of the Mississippi River. Their territories were then

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *Jefferson and the Indians: The Tragic Fate of the First Americans* by Anthony F. C. Wallace (Harvard University Press, 1999)

<sup>2</sup> "To the Cherokee Tribe of Indians East of the Mississippi River" *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, Volume: IX, 1835. Probable Date April 9, 1835.

<sup>3</sup> The 1828 discovery of gold on Cherokee lands in Georgia was perhaps one of the earliest and most famous examples.

opened to white settlement. Isolation on reservations was the predominant philosophy until 1887 when Congress passed the General Allotment Act. More commonly known as the Dawes Act, it marked a yet another dramatic shift in Indian policy and a return to past practices of assimilation and civilization. The Act called for all Indian lands to be allotted to individual Indians in severalty. Supporters believed land ownership would encourage Indians to adopt a settled agricultural lifestyle (Salisbury & Deloria, 2008).

Critics of assimilation policies decried their role in the destruction of native cultures and fault them for contributing to the economic and social problems facing American Indians today. Contemporary proponents of assimilation, such as the Lake Mohonk Conference of the Friends of the Indian, largely believed it would genuinely improve Indian welfare (Harmon, 2003). While scholars have often been interested in the impact of Federal policy on current levels of economic development among Indian tribes, none have explicitly examined the influence of Federal assimilation policy on the long run economic development.<sup>4</sup> In this paper, I take advantage of tribal-level variation in the application of Federal policies to estimate the effect of assimilation on long run economic performance. The overarching goals of Federal policy were often elucidated with specific legislation and clearly visible government action. Implementation, however, was rarely universal. Tribes were located throughout the continent in a wide variety of economic and political environments. The status quo tended to remain in effect until some impetus forced the application of the new policies. By the end of the nineteenth century, tribes throughout the United States had differential exposure to assimilation and isolation policies. For example, while some reservations had

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Dippel, 2012, Wolfe, et al., 2012, Cookson, 2010, Anderson and Parker, 2009 for works that examine the impact of other Federal laws on tribal development.

their land allotted shortly after the passage of the Dawes Act, others had yet to begin the process when the Federal government officially ended the practice in 1934.

To quantify the impact of such policies on tribal-level assimilation, I introduce a novel measure of assimilation: the relative prevalence of traditional Indian verses European-influenced names. Watkins and London's (1994) study of immigrant families in the early twentieth century suggests that a, “change in naming patterns may parallel other cultural transformations... [and] may be an early sign of cultural assimilation.” Case studies of American Indians suggest that naming patterns are indicative of broader social change. After examining naming traditions among tribes in the Sierra Nevada foothills, Dick Bissonette (1999) found that “naming practices and associated customs can contribute insights into the often piecemeal process of acculturation.” In particular, she found that naming patterns changed with increased exposure and interaction with whites and that these changes were often accompanied by adoption of other aspects of Euro American culture.

To calculate the distribution of name types, I have gathered the names and locations for the approximately 260,000 American Indians enumerated in the 1900 United States Census. While the 1890 Census was the first census to enumerate American Indians, the schedules no longer exist. The 1900 census is the earliest surviving census to enumerate all American Indians (Bennett, 2000). I then categorized first names into two groups. First, I identified traditional European names (e.g. John Smith). Second, I classify the remainder of the names as those of native origin. These names largely fall into types. The first are phonetic spellings of traditional Indian names (e.g. Caw Naw Wee Li). The others are translated versions of traditional names or descriptive names (e.g., Rabbit Coon). Then, using the 1900 county-level location, I link the location of each person to current day

reservation or Oklahoma Tribal Statistical Area (OTSA) present within the same county. I then calculate a tribal area specific fraction of European names as a measure of assimilation in 1900. Utilizing the 2011 American Community Survey, I then estimate the relationship between assimilation in 1900 and a variety of measures of economic development in 2011. I find that 1900 levels of assimilation impact levels of reservation income today. The pattern follows an inverted “U” shape, with higher levels of assimilation leading to initially higher levels of income. Eventually, however, the effect diminishes.

## **2. Background on Federal Indian Policy and Assimilation**

Perhaps reflecting the often hostile nature of early interactions with certain Indian tribes, President George Washington’s Indian policy was developed in cooperation with Secretary of War Henry Knox. Its goals were simple: acquire Indian lands in an orderly, low cost, and morally sound manner. War was to be avoided; “civilizing” the Indians was to be encouraged. To further this end, Congress established the factory system, or a series of trading posts to encourage cordial white-Indian relations. The posts exposed Indians to American trade goods in hopes that they would develop a taste for manufactured products; the traders would gain access to valuable furs. Continuing with a colonial-era tradition of proselytizing activity, missionaries and conversion to Christianity were also an explicit part of Knox’s plans (Knox, 1789). In time, government officials hoped that the Indians would voluntarily settle on individual farms and make additional land available for white settlement (Washburn, 1989).

“Civilizing” the Indians had its roots in the notion that Indians existed at a lower level of human development but, with proper training, were capable of advancement. Thomas

Jefferson shared this belief and continued within Washington's framework. He championed vocational training for Indians, appointing agents to teach Indian men the intricacies of farming and animal husbandry. Women were to be taught spinning and weaving. Treaties between the Federal government and tribes began to reflect these priorities. An 1808 treaty with the Osage, for example, calls upon the United States to provide, "a black-smith, and tools to mend their arms and utensils of husbandry, and engage to build them a horse mill, or water mill; also to furnish them with ploughs (Kappler, 1904)."

Of course, only tribes that were in the territory of the United States, particularly those on the ever-changing frontier, were exposed to the factory system, Indian agents, and their lessons in farming. The nations of the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole, for example, were located in the southeastern United States and inhabited land that directly abutted the expanding territory of cotton cultivation. Their location made them a prime target for missionaries, traders, and Indian agents. They quickly became known as the so-called "Five Civilized Tribes" due to their successful adoption of the agents' and traders' lessons and their embrace of western ways (Frank, n.d.). They also engaged in another of Jefferson's strategies for assimilation: intermarriage. In an address to an Indian delegation, Jefferson predicted, "You will unite yourselves with us... You will mix with us by marriage. Your blood will run in our veins will spread with us over this great island (Washburn, 1989, p 36)." According to an early census, 181 whites had married into the Cherokee Nation by 1835 (Wishart, 1995).<sup>5</sup> The Cherokee government had no objections to such marriages. Jane Ross, the daughter of Cherokee Principle Chief John Ross, married Return J. Meigs, the eponymous

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<sup>5</sup> If there was at most one intermarried white per Cherokee household, then just under 7 percent of the Cherokee's 2,669 households contained a white person.

grandson of an Indian agent appointed to the Cherokee Nation and the son of her father's business partner.

The 1828 discovery of gold in the Cherokee Nation exposed weaknesses in Federal hopes for civilization and subsequent land sessions. Civilization proceeded at much slower pace than the expansion of white settlement. The clamor for land, particularly in the South, was becoming increasingly hard for the government to ignore, and white settlers took to simply ignoring Indian claims to land. Additionally, the seamless blending of acculturated Indians and whites required both the Indians to wish to be "civilized" and the whites to accept their presence on Indian-owned land within their states (Washburn., 1989). Alignment of both factors proved elusive, and the lure of great gold wealth on Indian lands exposed fracture lines in the policy. The election of Andrew Jackson as president ushered in a dramatic shift. He supported ameliorating the increasing tensions by simply removing all Indians east of the Mississippi under the auspices of the 1830 Indian Removal Act. In 1834, an Indian Territory (roughly corresponding to present-day Oklahoma) was established as a destination for displaced tribes. Once tribes were removed, whites would be free to peacefully expand into the newly vacated Indian lands (Satz, 2002). The watchword of Federal policy was now isolation instead of incorporation.

Decades of legal and military conflict followed. First, the Five Civilized Tribes objected to their removal. The Cherokees and Creeks were removed under military supervision by a series of deadly and forced marches collectively referred to as the Trail of Tears.<sup>6</sup> Eastern tribe after eastern tribe was then relocated to the Indian Territory. As the U.S. gained additional western territories through the Texas Annexation (1845), the Mexican

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<sup>6</sup> The complex and protracted struggles of these five tribes to resist removal is documents in Foreman (1974).

Cession (1848), and the treaty with Great Britain for Oregon (1846), white settlers began to increasingly push west of the Mississippi and the doctrine of isolation to reservations was expanded to include the various Plains and western tribes. Some of tribes and bands mounted a stiff resistance to their concentration on reservations. A series of Indian Wars, at their most intense between 1860 and 1890, ensued (Anderson & Chesney, 1994). A centralized assimilation policy was pushed aside as Federal efforts were focused on isolating the Indians and protecting settlers.

Once tribes were confined to reservations, a combination of Christian concern and the ever-present white desire for more land turned Federal attention again towards assimilation. Christian reformers began to meet annually for discussions of Indian policy at Lake Mohonk, New York. These reformers seemed fervently believe that private land ownership, destruction of tribal bonds, hard work, and Christianity were the keys to a successful Indian future (Bobroff, 1994). In contrast to Washingtonian philosophy of a gradual civilization, postbellum reformers wished to acculturate the Indians as quickly as possible. Edmunds (2004) outlines the multipronged approach taken. Children were removed from their home (sometimes involuntarily) and enrolled in Federally-run boarding schools. Trennert (1988) documents the process of assimilation, which often included a prohibition against native dress and languages. Additionally, certain tribal dances and other practices were outlawed on reservations in an attempt to suppress Indian culture. The goal, as Indian Commissioner Thomas J. Morgan affirmed, was that, “The Indians must conform to the ‘white man’s ways’ peaceably if they will, forcibly in they must (Washburn, 1989, 61).”

In 1887, Senator Henry Dawes, who routinely attended the meetings at Lake Mohonk, sponsored the General Allotment Act. This act intended to finally fulfill the goal of

transforming all Indians into yeoman farmers. All land then held by tribes would be distributed in severalty to tribal members. Each family would receive land worth the value of 160 average acres. Single adults would receive the equivalent of 80 acres, while single children would be allotted 40 acres. With their private land, each Indian family expected to settle down into the farming lifestyle.

The Dawes Act provided a variety of methods for Indian lands to be transferred to white hands. Any tribal land remaining after allotment would be opened for white settlement. To prevent unscrupulous whites from obtaining the allotted land, it was initially to be held in trust by the Federal government for 25 years. However, that provision was quickly weakened to allow land to be leased to whites. Shortly thereafter, the provision against sale was lifted altogether for Indians deemed “competent and capable.” The bar for this appears not to have been very high.

As Carlson (1981) documents, the Dawes Act proved disastrous for Indian farming. Many reservations, despite their lack of traditional fee simple private property, had functioning land tenure systems and growing agricultural bases. In a sample of reservations, Carlson found that acreage under cultivation was growing at a rate of 10 percent a year before allotment. Following implementation of the Act, progress shuddered to a stop. Furthermore, the Act introduced a complicated system of property rights, with land tied up in long-term leases and trusts. Additionally, unclear inheritance laws contributed to a rise of trust-encumbered small parcels that inhibited economic growth and development. The process of allotment was also tedious and resource intensive. Every acre of tribal land had to be surveyed, mapped, and evaluated before it could be allotted. Additionally, because of the permanent nature of allotment, correctly ascertaining tribal citizenship was often a lengthy

and time-consuming process. Allotment was eventually acknowledged to be a failure and was discounted during the Indian New Deal in the 1930s. At this point, however, only certain reservations had undergone the process.

Despite the failure of allotment, some evidence indicated that assimilation on net could have benefitted tribes. Using Canadian census data, Kuhn and Sweetman (2012) found aboriginals whose ancestors intermarried and who did not live on reservations had higher levels of labor market success in 1990. They argue that this was most likely due to assimilation into Canadian society. Hacker and Haines (2006) find further evidence that some types of assimilation were beneficial. Using data on infant mortality rates from the 1900 U.S. Census, they find childhood mortality rates were lower in Indian families that who were of mixed Indian and white ancestry or whose mother spoke English. However, if a family had undergone allotment, mortality rates for children were higher. On net, however, the average family benefitted from allotment.

### **3. Data Construction and Analysis**

To measure the extent to which tribes were exposed to assimilationist policies, I constructed a measure of the degree to which names exhibited acculturation to European naming standards. I first collected the names, locations, and birth years of all people whose race was recorded as “Indian” in ancestry.com’s index of the 1900 U.S. Census. I then excluded all Indians living in Alaska and Hawaii. Federal rules and regulations governing the indigenous populations of these areas differ from those in the contiguous 48 states. 236,420 Indians remained. I next utilized a database of popular baby names culled from census data<sup>7</sup> and a soundex matching system to link first names from the Indian sample to the name

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<sup>7</sup> Available at: <http://drupal.org/project/namedb/>

database. Names not present in the database were designated as being of Indian origin. For names that were of an ambiguous background, I utilized second names (either middle or last) to ascertain their origin. For example, “Lee” can either be a traditional Indian name (e.g., Lee Lo Ko Lum) or a European name (e.g., Lee Abrams). If the first names was missing or illegible, I categorized based on the middle and/or last names. 22.30 percent of names were categorized as Indian and the remainder as European.

To examine the link between assimilation in 1900 and tribal economic development today, I utilized tribal-level economic data collected by the 2011 American Community Survery (ACS). The ACS includes 249 Indian reservations and Oklahoma Tribal Statistical Areas (OTSA).<sup>8</sup> I link locations from the 1900 U.S. Census to their current tribal area. Using counties as the basis for matching, 186,925 people in 1900 lived in 142 of areas which still have some tribal jurisdiction today. The remaining 49,495 lived in areas that were either not under tribal jurisdiction in 1900, have since lost reservation status, or had an inconclusive location.

I then used these 2011 locations to calculate the level of assimilation present in 1900 for each jurisdiction. Calculations for a sample of reservations are in Table 1. 83 percent of the sample linked to a current tribal area had European names. A smaller percentage of those who were not linked (75.1%) reported European names. Summary statistics for the linked areas presented in Table 2. They have a respectable mean income of \$50,000, but an exceptionally high unemployment rate of 16.4%.

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<sup>8</sup> Tribal land in Oklahoma was allotted. Despite being home to a large fraction of the U.S. Indian population, only one reservation is located in the state. Federally-recognized tribes instead are in OTSA's, over which they have limited jurisdiction. These areas generally correspond to the tribe's pre-allotment territories.

To evaluate the impact of assimilation on subsequent economic development, I estimate

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Fraction European}_{1i} + \beta_2 X_{2i} + \varepsilon_i.$$

$\beta_1$  is the economic outcome of interest for reservation  $i$  in 2011, *Fraction European* refers to the percent of European names on that reservation's location in 1900, and  $X_2$  represents a vector of controls, including regional fixed effects. Regressions are weighted by the 1900 population of each tribe.

Results are reported in Table 3. The dependent variable in Columns 1 and 2 is the natural log of reservation mean income. The coefficient on European naming fraction and its square are both significant at the 1 percent level. The results indicate that increasing assimilation is associated with higher levels of per capita income today. However, the impact will diminish. When regional fixed effects are included, the results are attenuated only slightly. The results for the natural log of median income, reported in columns 3 and 4, and the unemployment rate follow a similar pattern.

These results suggest that assimilation was beneficial to a point. Extremely high rates of assimilation may have a negative impact on economic development today. Table 1 suggests why this pattern might hold. The Pine Ridge and Rose Bud Reservations both report 100 percent European names. However, these two reservations are among the poorest counties in the United States today. The reason for both may be connected. The presence of European names at these reservations was likely not a choice made by individuals. Instead, as part of a strict policy of assimilation, names were often assigned to individuals. This forced assimilation of the later area, as opposed to the relatively voluntary assimilation of the earlier era, may be associated with worse economic outcomes.



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**Table 1: Sample of Fraction of European Names, 1900<sup>a</sup>**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>2011 Reservation</b>	<b>States</b>	<b>Fraction Names European in 1900</b>	<b>N</b>
1	Spirit Lake Reservation	ND	0.37	1010
2	Samish TDSA	WA	0.37	2357
3	Kaibab Indian Reservation	AZ	0.38	1186
4	Maricopa (Ak Chin) Indian Reservation	AZ	0.41	540
5	Zuni Reservation and Off- Reservation Trust Land	NM--AZ	0.43	16453
6	Acoma Pueblo and Off- Reservation Trust Land	NM	0.44	50
7	Crow Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land	MT	0.47	1362
8	Leech Lake Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land	MN	0.47	89
9	Fort Mojave Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land	AZ--CA--NV	0.50	821
10	Bois Forte Reservation	MN	0.52	349
11	Turtle Mountain Reservation and Off- Reservation Trust Land	MT--ND--SD	0.55	956
12	Cheyenne-Arapaho OTSA	OK	0.56	817
13	Wind River Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land	WY	0.56	1739
14	Fort Yuma Indian Reservation	CA--AZ	0.56	612
15	Umatilla Reservation	OR	0.57	994
16	Sac and Fox/Meskwaki Settlement	IA	0.58	376
17	Yavapai-Prescott Reservation	AZ	0.61	54
18	Mille Lacs Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land	MN	0.61	111
19	Caddo-Wichita-Delaware	OK	0.63	863

<sup>a</sup> Source: Author calculations. See text for details.

OTSA

49	Santa Rosa Rancheria (Kings County)	CA	0.81	43
50	Paiute (UT) Reservation	UT	0.82	22
51	Dresslerville Colony	NV	0.84	55
52	Fond du Lac Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land	MN--WI	0.84	354
53	Prairie Island Indian Community and Off- Reservation Trust Land	MN	0.84	25951
54	Reno-Sparks Indian Colony	NV	0.85	856
55	Allegany Reservation	NY	0.85	20
56	Yomba Reservation	NV	0.85	374
57	Taos Pueblo and Off- Reservation Trust Land	NM	0.85	517
58	Spokane Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land	WA	0.86	1137
59	Lac Courte Oreilles Reservation and Off- Reservation Trust Land	WI	0.86	56
60	Lower Brule Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land	SD	0.86	7
61	Eastern Cherokee Reservation	NC	0.86	5331
62	Sac and Fox Nation Reservation and Off- Reservation Trust Land	NE--KS	0.86	1611
63	South Fork Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land	NV	0.87	1004
64	Ho-Chunk Nation Reservation and Off- Reservation Trust Land	WI--MN	0.87	23
65	Woodfords Community	CA	0.87	238
66	St. Croix Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land	WI	0.87	31
67	Forest County Potawatomi Community and Off- Reservation Trust Land	WI	0.88	8
68	Ely Reservation	NV	0.88	257

69	Ysleta del Sur Pueblo and Off-Reservation Trust Land	TX	0.88	74
70	Prairie Band of Potawatomi Nation Reservation	KS	0.88	609
71	Quinault Reservation	WA	0.89	35
72	Coquille Reservation	OR	0.89	72
73	Menominee Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land	WI	0.89	194
74	Creek OTSA	OK	0.89	6978
75	Pawnee OTSA	OK	0.89	569
100	Hoh Indian Reservation	WA	0.93	70
101	Tulalip Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land	WA	0.93	565
102	Bad River Reservation	WI	0.93	892
103	Squaxin Island Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land	WA	0.93	517
104	Lone Pine Reservation	CA	0.93	938
105	Hannahville Indian Community and Off-Reservation Trust Land	MI	0.93	231
106	Tuscarora Nation Reservation	NY	0.93	347
107	Lake Traverse Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land	SD--ND	0.93	59
108	Santee Reservation	NE	0.94	1065
109	Bay Mills Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land	MI	0.94	552
130	St. Regis Mohawk Reservation	NY	0.99	1369
131	Eastern Shawnee OTSA	OK	0.99	133
132	Burns Paiute Indian Colony and Off-Reservation Trust Land	OR	1.00	8
133	Isabella Reservation	MI	1.00	10
134	Kickapoo (KS) Reservation	KS	1.00	39
135	Mississippi Choctaw Reservation	MS	1.00	21

136	Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land	MT--SD	1.00	3
137	Penobscot Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land	ME	1.00	17
138	Pine Ridge Reservation	SD--NE	1.00	5
139	Poarch Creek Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land	AL--FL	1.00	10
140	Red Lake Reservation	MN	1.00	24
141	Rosebud Indian Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land	SD	1.00	3
142	Standing Rock Reservation	SD--ND	1.00	10

**Table 2: Sample Statistics for 2011 Tribal Areas<sup>a</sup>**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Variance</b>
Fraction Names European in 1900	142	0.8300209	0.1552385
Mean Income	142	50072.09	26331.44
Median Income	142	38557.79	16050.91
Unemployment Rate	142	16.45563	12.26138
% Western States	142	0.3802817	0.4871744

**Table 3: The Estimated Effect of Assimilation on Long Run Economic Development**

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Independent Variables</b>	<b>ln (mean Income)</b>	<b>ln (mean income)</b>	<b>ln (median income)</b>	<b>ln (median income)</b>	<b>Unemployment Rate</b>	<b>Unemployment Rate</b>
% European Names	2.174*** (0.05)	1.529*** (0.05)	2.479*** (0.05)	1.998*** (0.05)	194.917*** (1.15)	194.917*** (1.15)
% European Names Squared	-1.259*** (0.03)	-1.127*** (0.03)	-1.403*** (0.03)	-1.303*** (0.03)	-143.706*** (0.84)	-143.706*** (0.84)
Regional Fixed Effects		Yes		Yes		Yes
Constant	10.007*** (0.02)	10.526*** (0.01)	9.585*** (0.02)	9.972*** (0.02)	-47.297*** (0.35)	-47.297*** (0.35)
Observations	186.00	925.00	186.00	925.00	186.00	186.00
R-squared	0.03	0.10	0.05	0.09	0.15	0.15

Robust standard errors are reported. Weighted by 1900 tribal populations.

\*\*\* p<0.01    \*\* p<0.05    \* p<0.1

<sup>a</sup> Source: 2011 American Community Survey and author calculations. See text for details.