The Use of Rental Housing Assistance by Immigrants in the United States and New York City

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Abstract

The large influx of immigrants to the United States and New York City from poorer countries has sparked considerable debate as to whether immigrants are becoming a "public charge" to American society. Most arguments have centered around immigrants' use of cash assistance programs. This article compares immigrants' receipt of rental housing assistance with that of native-born Americans.

Bivariate analyses reveal that immigrants, as a group, are no more likely than native-born households to use any form of rental housing assistance. Indeed, in most instances immigrants are *less* likely than native-born households to receive assistance, with two exceptions: immigrants who have been in the United States since 1970 and immigrants from the former Soviet Union in New York City. Multivariate analyses reveal similar results, except that immigrants who have been in the United States since 1970 are no more likely than other immigrants to receive housing assistance when we control for other factors.

Keywords: Immigration; Low-income housing; Rental housing

Introduction

Over the past two decades, immigration has had a profound effect on the composition of the U.S. population, especially in metropolitan areas such as New York City. The large influx of immigrants, as well as the fact that many immigrants are migrating from poorer countries, has sparked considerable debate among politicians, academicians, and the public as to whether immigrants are becoming a "public charge" to American society. Many Americans do not want immigrants entering the country unless they can financially support themselves.

The empirical foundation for fears about immigrant dependency on public assistance is not entirely firm. Some analysts who have examined census data from 1980 and 1990 find that use of public assistance among immigrants is greater than that of native-born Americans and that this disparity has increased over time. They attribute these increases, in part, to a reduction in the skill levels of new arrivals. Other researchers, however, have found contrary results suggesting that immigrants either do not utilize assistance programs more than native-born households, or that higher use rates exist only for certain groups such as refugees or elderly immigrants or for certain programs such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

Recent legislation reflects the debate over whether immigrants have higher rates of public assistance use than native-born Americans, as well as some policy makers' concerns that immigrants may be attracted to the United States by the prospect of receiving social welfare. In 1996, as part of its effort to reform the nation's welfare system, Congress enacted rules that would limit the ability of legal immigrants who have not become citizens to participate in a variety of social welfare programs.

Although most arguments surrounding immigrants and their utilization of social welfare programs center on income transfer programs, several of the restrictions on legal immigrants contained in the new welfare reform law also apply to rental housing assistance. To date, however, virtually no empirical research has analyzed patterns of rental housing assistance receipt among immigrants, much less determined whether foreign-born residents participate in rental housing programs at a higher rate than their native-born counterparts.

This article seeks to fill this research void by comparing the receipt of rental housing subsidies by foreign- and native-born Americans. We analyze the use of rental housing assistance both for the United States as a whole and for the city of New York, using data from the March 1997 Current Population Survey (CPS) and the 1996 panel of the New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey (HVS), respectively. We organize our analysis around achieving four objectives. First, we address whether immigrants, overall, are more likely to use rental housing assistance than native-born households. Second, we disaggregate immigrants on the basis of their place of birth to determine whether immigrants from refugee-sending countries have greater rates of housing assistance use than native-born households. Third, in the national analysis we examine the use rates of immigrants by their year of entry into the United States to see whether immigrants who have lived in the country for a longer period of time have greater use rates than their native-born counter-

parts. Finally, for New York City we disaggregate housing assistance based on whether it comes from entitlement or nonentitlement programs and then compare the use rates of foreign- and native-born households to see whether these rates differ by the type of rental housing assistance being used.

In the first part of this article, we review the academic and political debates concerning immigrant use of income transfer programs. In the second part, we survey the limited literature concerning immigrant participation in housing subsidy programs and set forth the hypotheses that we will examine here. The third and fourth parts describe the data we use and our analytical methods, respectively. Finally, we discuss our results.

Immigrants and the social welfare system

In recent years, the extent to which immigrants to the United States use the social welfare system has received considerable attention. Indeed, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) substantially limits the rights of many noncitizen immigrants to receive government assistance. Under this act, commonly called the 1996 welfare reform law, aliens who arrive legally after August 22, 1996, must wait a minimum of five years to apply for "means-tested public benefits"; refugees, however, may receive assistance upon arrival.[1] Most resident aliens who entered the country before August 22, 1996, are also ineligible for benefits unless they have worked 40 quarters or 10 years and have not received assistance during that period.

The restrictions on access by immigrants to many social welfare programs reflects a growing concern among some Americans with both the growth and composition of recent immigration to the United States. During the 1980s, legal immigration to the United States totaled 7.3 million (U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service 1992), a substantially higher number than in recent decades. In addition, many of the countries from which immigrants have arrived in recent decades are much poorer than the countries that dominated immigrant flows in the early- to mid-1900s. Some scholars argue that the increased flow of immigrants from poorer areas is producing a more needy immigrant population (Borjas 1995; Borjas and Hilton 1996; Borjas and Trejo 1991; Trejo 1992).

[1] Additional restrictions on the ability of legal immigrants to qualify for public assistance arise from the requirement that agencies administering means-tested benefit programs "deem" the income of the alien's sponsor to be the alien's income.

Using census data, Borjas (1995) finds that welfare participation rates[2] in 1990 were greater for immigrant households than for native-born households (9.1 percent versus 7.4 percent). Moreover, the rates of welfare use among recent cohorts of immigrants were significantly greater than those of previous cohorts (Borjas 1995; Borjas and Hilton 1996; Borjas and Trejo 1991). Borjas and his colleagues also have shown that immigrant cohorts that have arrived since 1965 are more likely to assimilate into welfare use than earlier cohorts of immigrants.

It is not surprising that immigrants' welfare use increases after the first five years in the United States. Even before welfare reform, immigrants were expected to make little use of the social welfare system during their first five years in the country in order to obtain citizenship. Furthermore, under some programs the immigrant's sponsor's income is deemed to be available to the immigrant, thereby reducing his or her likelihood of eligibility. Nevertheless, according to Borjas (1995) the fact that welfare participation rates of immigrant groups remain high after they have been in the United States for more than 20 years provides strong evidence for his welfare assimilation hypothesis. Since Borjas (1995) only controls for age, cohort, and years since migration (and not for other demographic characteristics such as education and race), it is not surprising that he finds such strong support for the welfare assimilation hypothesis. In a footnote in the same article, Borjas (1995) shows that after controlling for such demographic characteristics, immigrants have a much lower rate of assimilation into welfare.

Other researchers contend that the majority of today's immigrants come to the United States with economic needs that are no different than those of earlier waves. For example, Bean, Van Hook, and Glick (1997) and Fix, Passel, and Zimmerman (1996) find that most immigrants use social welfare programs at rates comparable to native-born households, controlling for the influence of other factors. According to one study (Fix, Passel, and Zimmerman 1996), poor immigrants are actually significantly less likely than poor native-born Americans to use public assistance.

The controversy surrounding immigrants' use of welfare typically concerns only specific groups of immigrants. Refugees and elderly immigrants, for example, comprise a disproportionate share of immigrants on welfare. Although they constitute 21 percent of all im-

[2] A household was deemed as participating in welfare programs if it received public assistance income, which included cash receipts under such programs as Aid to Families with Dependent Children, SSI (which includes old-age assistance, aid to the blind, and aid to the permanently and totally disabled), and general assistance.

migrants, refugees and elderly immigrants account for 40 percent of all immigrant welfare recipients (Fix, Passel, and Zimmerman 1996). Immigrants legalized under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 also seem to have higher rates of welfare use than native-born Americans (Fix, Passel, and Zimmerman 1996).

Researchers who contend that there has not been a decline in the "quality" of immigrants entering the United States suggest that the main reason for the greater use of social programs among refugees and elderly immigrants is based simply upon need. Refugees entering the United States are fleeing persecution, have fewer economic or family ties in the United States, and often suffer from physical or mental ailments. Recognizing the needs of these individuals, Congress has exempted refugees from any kind of waiting period for means-tested cash assistance programs so that they can receive assistance upon their arrival in the United States. Elderly immigrants may use SSI benefits at a disproportionate rate because they have not worked enough quarters in covered occupations within the United States to qualify for Social Security and Medicare (Fix, Passel, and Zimmerman 1996).

Immigrants and the use of rental housing assistance

Many of the 1996 welfare reform law's restrictions on immigrant access to government assistance also apply to rental housing programs. Compared with income transfer programs, the basis for extending limitations on immigrant participation in rental housing programs takes place in an empirical vacuum. Two recent studies (Borjas and Hilton 1996; McCarthy and Vernez 1997) use data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) to compare rates of rental housing assistance use (i.e., living in public housing or receiving housing subsidies) for different immigrant groups. Both find that immigrants who are refugees have greater use rates than nonrefugee immigrants. Each of these studies, as well as studies by Carter, Schill, and Wachter (1998) and Fix, Passel, and Zimmerman (1996), find that immigrants have a slightly higher rate of rental housing assistance use than native-born Americans. None of these studies, however, used multivariate techniques to control for individual, household, or housing market characteristics.

Given that immigrants are more likely than their native-born counterparts to live in overcrowded (Krivo 1995; Myers, Baer, and Choi 1996; Myers and Lee 1996) and lower-quality housing (Schill, Friedman, and Rosenbaum 1998), it is surprising that little research has focused on immigrants' use of housing assistance. Although some immigrant groups improve their housing circumstances over time and would not need such assistance at the time they become eligible

for it, other groups—in particular Hispanics—tend to live in more crowded housing over time (Myers and Lee 1996) and therefore may be particularly likely to take advantage of housing assistance when they are able to receive it. Thus, it is important to test whether immigrants use housing assistance more than native-born households, overall, and depending upon how long they have been in the United States.

Unlike the literature on welfare use, the subject of immigrant use of rental housing assistance is complicated by the diversity of forms of benefits. Federal housing programs, including project-based rental subsidies such as the public housing and Section 8 New Construction programs, as well as demand-oriented rental assistance such as housing vouchers and certificates, are nonentitlement programs. Unlike income transfer programs such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) (now Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF[3]]) and SSI, through which all households that meet income and program eligibility standards receive assistance, roughly one of every four income-eligible renter households receives a federal housing subsidy. Therefore, long queues for rental assistance exist; in some cities, applicants must wait years before being offered an apartment or voucher.

Some forms of rental housing assistance, however, resemble an entitlement.[4] Many states, as part of their AFDC (TANF) programs, allocate a portion of a family's assistance award to housing. In addition, most states operate general assistance programs for needy individuals who do not qualify for federal programs such as TANF or SSI. These programs, frequently called "Home Relief," also often include shelter allowances as identifiable components. For example, in New York state, a public assistance grant is divided into a shelter allowance and a grant for all remaining expenses.[5] All house-

[3] Pursuant to PRWORA, TANF funds are provided to states in the form of a block grant and therefore are not technically an entitlement. It remains to be seen how states will allocate TANF grants should the demand for subsidies exceed the supply.

[4] Throughout this article, we will characterize housing allowances (such as the State of New York's shelter allowance) that are distributed as part of a household's TANF or general assistance grant as an entitlement. Since the passage of the 1996 welfare reform law, these forms of assistance are not, strictly speaking, federal entitlements. Nevertheless, during the time period of this study, these subsidies were available to all households that met income eligibility guidelines and followed program regulations.

[5] The shelter allowance is set administratively to reflect different rent levels throughout the state, whereas the other portion of the public assistance grant is uniform throughout the state. Recent litigation has resulted in a court order mandating that shelter allowances for households threatened with eviction be raised to an amount that bears a reasonable relationship to the cost of housing (Galowitz

holds that qualify under the standards of the particular program automatically are entitled to assistance and do not have to wait in a queue.

In examining the use of rental housing assistance by native- and foreign-born households, it is therefore useful to identify whether the assistance is part of an entitlement or nonentitlement program. After controlling for household- and metropolitan-level characteristics, we anticipate that immigrants will be no more likely than native-born households to receive rental housing assistance from entitlement programs (i.e., public assistance shelter allowances).[6] The one exception to this hypothesis is for immigrants entering the United States as refugees. These households may be more likely to receive rental housing assistance from entitlement programs compared with native-born Americans. Refugees may have higher rates of participation in these programs because they arrive in the United States with few resources and because of the existence of public and private organizations that resettle and assist them (Coleman 1997; Gold 1992; Lipson and Omidian 1997).

With respect to nonentitlement rental housing assistance, such as public housing or Section 8 housing vouchers, we expect that once all relevant factors are controlled, immigrants will have *lower* rates of receipt than their native-born counterparts. Immigrants who apply for these programs, particularly recent immigrants, are likely to join a lengthy queue already well-populated by native-born households and earlier immigrant arrivals.

Data

Our analysis of rental housing assistance use among foreign- and native-born households in the United States and in New York City is based principally on data from the March 1997 CPS and the 1996 panel of the HVS, respectively. Data from the March 1997 CPS are the most appropriate for this study because they are the most recent data available and, more importantly, the March 1997 CPS contains questions on rental housing assistance that are not available in the basic monthly survey. The March 1997 CPS is a na-

1999). Local public assistance providers may pay the shelter allowance on the recipient's behalf to the landlord under a practice known as vendor payments (Scherer 1998).

[6] Indeed, because of the deeming rules, we anticipate that recent immigrants actually may be less likely to receive assistance from these programs than native-born households. Unfortunately, because of data limitations we are not able to test for whether recent immigrants are less likely than native-born households to receive housing assistance as part of their public assistance benefits.

tional probability sample of 63,000 housing units located in 792 sample areas comprising 2,007 counties and independent cities, with coverage in every state as well as the District of Columbia.

The HVS is conducted every two to three years by the U.S. Bureau of the Census under contract to New York City in compliance with city and state laws regarding rent regulation. The 1996 panel of the HVS is a multistage, probability sample of approximately 18,000 housing units located throughout the five boroughs. These data are well suited for our research because they are recent and provide a large enough sample of housing units to adequately study foreign- and native-born households' use of rental housing assistance in New York City.

Our analysis uses sampling weights (scaled down to maintain unweighted cell sizes) with both the CPS and HVS data to correct for undercoverage and sampling variability between each of these two data sets and independent sources of data (e.g., the 1990 census). Our unit of analysis is the household.[7] In our analysis of the CPS, we restrict our sample to households in metropolitan areas because the majority of immigrants have settled in large cities and their suburbs (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993). Moreover, opting for this restriction makes our CPS analysis more comparable to our analysis of New York City.[8]

Our analysis is limited to renter households because they are the only ones eligible for rental housing assistance. We also limit our analysis to rental housing assistance and renter households because the only housing assistance measures available in the CPS refer to rental housing assistance. While we may be overestimating the rental housing assistance use rates of native-born households by not including homeowners, homeowners have access to substantial

[7] Household-level analyses have been criticized in the welfare literature (Fix, Passel, and Zimmerman 1996) because such analyses attribute the welfare use of native-born persons in the immigrant household to the immigrant, thereby overestimating immigrant use. When examining immigrants' use of rental housing assistance, however, the household is an appropriate unit of analysis. Rental housing assistance typically is allotted to households rather than individuals. Moreover, even if we were to perform an individual-level analysis of who *benefits* from, rather than who directly *receives*, housing assistance, we might find that native-born persons benefit more because immigrant householders often have native-born children.

[8] We realize that New York City is smaller by definition than its corresponding metropolitan statistical area (i.e., the New York primary metropolitan statistical area). However, the CPS does not identify central cities in every metropolitan area.

housing benefits in the form of mortgage interest and property tax deductions and capital gains exclusions on the sales of principal residences. These benefits of homeownership are likely to accrue disproportionately to native-born households.

We also employ contextual-level data in our analysis. A unique advantage of using data from the CPS is that the metropolitan area in which a household lives is identified.[9] We use variables measured at the metropolitan level as proxies for the supply of and demand for assisted rental housing within relevant market areas. The data and measures that we append to household records in the CPS will be explained in more detail in the measures section below. For households in the HVS, we control for their borough of residence, which is, in fact, the county in which they reside.

Analytical methods

Measures

The measure that we use to determine whether a household in the CPS receives rental housing assistance is based upon respondents' answers to the following two questions: (1) "Is this a public housing project, that is owned by a local housing authority or other public agency?" and (2) "Are you paying lower rent because the federal, state, or local government is paying part of the cost?" These questions are sequenced so that household heads who reply that they live in public housing are not asked the question about paying lower rent. Respondents who answer either of the two questions affirmatively are considered to be receiving rental housing assistance.

Although separate measures of rental housing assistance could be constructed for each household, measuring whether they live in public housing or whether they receive other housing subsidies, in our analysis we combine the two questions into one dummy variable. We do this because other researchers (Shroder and Martin 1996) have found that responses to specific housing assistance questions, such as those contained in the CPS, often produce inac-

[9] For households living in metropolitan areas with a population of less than 100,000, the metropolitan area is not identified. In total, 241 metropolitan areas are identified within the CPS data. Identifiers cannot be assigned to fewer than 4.5 percent of all renter households living in metropolitan areas.

curate estimates of the true number of households receiving specific types of housing assistance.[10]

The HVS offers a slightly different basis upon which to create measures of rental housing assistance. Housing units in the HVS sample are address-matched against administrative records to determine whether they are public housing units. Therefore, the Census Bureau, rather than the survey respondent, determines whether the housing unit is public housing. Nevertheless, respondents still are asked whether any part of their monthly rent is paid by government programs. Unlike those in the CPS, however, the question asks respondents to identify which government program paid for part of the monthly rent (e.g., Section 8 certificate or voucher program; public assistance shelter allowance program; another federal housing subsidy program; or another state or city housing subsidy program).

From the HVS we develop two sets of dependent variables. First, we measure rental housing assistance as a dummy variable indicating whether the household lives in public housing or receives any other form of housing assistance from the government. This measure is comparable to the one that we construct from the CPS data. The second set includes two dummy variables. The first measures whether the household receives subsidies from the public assistance shelter allowance program. The second variable indicates whether the household lives in public housing or receives subsidies from the Section 8 certificate or voucher program, or any other federal, state, or local housing subsidy program. We divide the HVS data on rental housing assistance into these two dummy variables so that we can examine the variation among households in the receipt of entitlement rental housing assistance (e.g., public assistance shelter allowances) versus nonentitlement assistance (e.g., public housing). In previous research, this distinction has not been made.

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[10] For example, survey respondents often mistake the term "living in public housing" for receiving housing subsidies, thereby producing an estimate of residence in public housing that far exceeds the estimate derived from administrative records. Indeed, the study by Shroder and Martin (1996) shows that a large number of false positives exist in response to the question on public housing and a large number of false negatives are present in response to the question on other subsidy assistance.

Despite these results, it is likely that we can gauge the *total* level of housing assistance use fairly well by relying on a dummy variable that measures whether a household receives either type of assistance. Indeed, from the March 1997 CPS we find that 4.98 million households receive some form of rental housing assistance. This estimate comes close to the estimate of 4.90 million households generated from "A Picture of Subsidized Households in 1997," an administrative database maintained by HUD that explicitly identifies households living in public housing or receiving rental housing subsidies.

Although the HVS has slightly more detailed data on rental housing assistance than the CPS, the reverse is true when it comes to measuring a householder's nativity status, the central independent variable in our analysis. The CPS asks respondents about their place of birth, the year in which they entered the United States, and their parents' place of birth. We construct three sets of variables measuring nativity status from these variables. The first is a dummy variable indicating whether the householder is foreign born. Individuals born in the United States are considered native born, while those born outside the 50 states to parents who also were born outside the 50 states are considered foreign born.[11] We consider respondents born in Puerto Rico as native born.[12] The second set of variables measures nativity status by the year of entry of the householder. We classify householders into five categories depending on whether they are (1) native born; (2) foreign born and entered before 1970; (3) foreign born and entered between 1970 and 1979; (4) foreign born and entered between 1980 and 1989; or (5) foreign born and entered since 1990.

The third set of variables measuring nativity status is comprised of three dummy variables indicating whether a household is (1) native born; (2) born in a refugee-sending country; or (3) born in a non–refugee-sending country. In the CPS analysis, we consider the former Soviet Union, Vietnam, Cuba, Laos, Afghanistan, and Cambodia as refugee-sending countries. Between 1981 and 1996, each of these countries sent at least 16,000 refugees (or 1,000 per year), and at least two-thirds of immigrants admitted to the United States from these countries were refugees (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1998). Moreover, these countries sent 77 percent of all the refugees that were admitted to the United States during the 16-year period.[13]

The HVS supplies information about respondents' and their parents' places of birth but offers no information about when a house-

[11] We use the terms foreign born and immigrant interchangeably even though we realize that the CPS and HVS do not distinguish whether foreign-born householders are immigrants or nonimmigrants.

[12] Although sometimes a distinction is made between island-born Puerto Ricans and those born in the mainland United States (see Jensen 1988; Schill, Friedman, and Rosenbaum 1998), in this article such a distinction is not useful because the eligibility rules for rental housing assistance for Puerto Ricans are exactly the same regardless of where they were born.

[13] This type of methodology for assigning refugee status to foreign-born individuals in a survey sample has been used elsewhere (see Bean, Van Hook, and Glick 1997; Borjas 1995; Fix and Passel 1994). One potential drawback of this procedure is that we may not accurately classify individuals who are foreign born but who emigrated during an earlier period of time when refugees did not comprise a disproportionate share of the flows from these countries.

holder entered the United States. This is a drawback of these data compared with data from the CPS.[14] From the HVS we create two sets of nativity status variables: (1) a dummy variable indicating whether the householder is foreign born (using the same definition as above); and (2) place of birth dummy variables indicating whether foreign-born households emigrated from a refugee-sending country. Here, we define immigrants migrating from the former Soviet Union as coming from a refugee-sending country.[15]

Besides nativity status, the other individual-level independent variables we use to explain variation in the use of rental housing assistance among households are economic, demographic, and social characteristics. It is important to control for such factors because they might influence a household's receipt of rental housing assistance. For example, households with more economic resources, such as total household income, would be less likely to qualify for and receive housing assistance. Householders with more education also are expected to be less likely to receive housing assistance because educational status serves as a rough proxy for labor market potential. Older householders may be more likely to receive assistance because they typically have had a longer period of time to wait in the queue for assistance.

A household's family structure and the sex of the householder also influence a household's receipt of rental housing assistance. Households headed by single females with children under the age of 18 are expected to qualify for and use rental housing assistance at a greater rate than married-couple households. Given the racial disparity in the propensity to live in public housing (HUD 1997; Schill and Wachter 1995), race also is an important factor to control for in examining a household's use of rental housing assistance.

The final independent variable that we create at the individual level measures whether a household is "eligible" for rental housing

[14] One limitation of both the CPS and the HVS is that they lack questions on the English proficiency of foreign-born individuals. Because this factor may be important in determining immigrants' access to housing assistance programs, it is likely that the effect of nativity status itself will be slightly overstated in the analysis of both the CPS and the HVS.

[15] The reason for this definition is that the HVS does not indicate the exact country in which an immigrant was born except for households from the Dominican Republic and the former Soviet Union. All of the other countries are grouped into larger geographic aggregations. For purposes of the HVS sample, we only characterize households from the former Soviet Union as refugees. Although this method would be problematic if applied to the national sample, between 1982 and 1994 approximately 75 percent of all individuals from the former Soviet Union who came to New York City were refugees, and refugees from the former Soviet Union accounted for 63 percent of all refugees to New York City during this period (New York City Department of City Planning 1996).

assistance. To create this proxy for eligibility, we use data from the fiscal year 1997 Income Limits issued by HUD. This data set lists for each metropolitan area the income limits (by dollar amount and family size) that are used to determine the income eligibility of applicants for federal housing programs. We consider a household to be eligible for rental housing assistance if its income falls below the limit defined as 50 percent of the median family income for its family size and metropolitan area.[16] Although technically a household is eligible for rental housing assistance if its income is less than 80 percent of the area median income, income targeting rules in existence in 1996 and 1997 make the 50 percent threshold more realistic. In the HVS, a household's income is compared with one set of thresholds computed according to family size, whereas in the CPS, a household's income is compared with a set of thresholds computed for the specific metropolitan area. We expect that this eligibility variable will strongly predict a household's use of rental housing assistance. After controlling for this variable in our multivariate analysis, we expect the effect of the income variable will indicate whether the poorest households are still significantly more likely to use rental housing assistance even after we take into account their eligibility status.

We also add metropolitan-level variables in our analysis of the CPS data to control for housing market characteristics. The probability that a household would receive rental housing assistance is likely to be influenced by the characteristics of the housing market in which it is located. In metropolitan areas with high poverty rates, the competition for assisted rental housing is likely to be intense, thereby reducing the likelihood that a particular household would receive a nonentitlement subsidy. On the other hand, this effect could be offset because local governments in areas with persistently high poverty rates might be more aggressive in pursuing federal housing subsidies and building assisted rental housing. It is therefore important to simultaneously control for differences in the supply of assisted rental housing across metropolitan areas. We do this by estimating the proportion of housing in a metropolitan area that is federally subsidized.[17]

[16] The defined limits are subject to specified adjustments for areas with unusually high or low incomes. It should also be noted that eligibility requirements are not perfectly uniform across housing assistance programs. Although most housing assistance is provided by HUD programs that adhere to these eligibility requirements, the shelter allowance component of AFDC did not, and some state programs likely do not use the same income eligibility standards.

[17] Housing subsidies also may be provided by state and local governments. Unfortunately, however, data constraints do not permit us to control for the supply of this form of housing assistance.

To measure the poverty rate in each metropolitan area, we use the most recent state and county income and poverty estimates issued by the U.S. Bureau of the Census in 1993. To measure the supply of assisted rental housing within metropolitan areas, we develop a per capita measure of federally assisted rental housing in the area, using data from two separate databases. The numerator of this measure, the number of federally assisted rental housing units, is obtained from "A Picture of Subsidized Households in 1997," a data file that includes approximately 4.5 million HUD-subsidized housing units and 0.3 million housing units that have received Low-Income Housing Tax Credits.[18] To standardize this measure across metropolitan areas, we divide the total number of subsidized rental housing units within each metropolitan area by its 1997 population[19] and multiply the final number by 1,000. Thus we obtain a rate of subsidized rental housing units per 1,000 individuals for each metropolitan area as our indicator of the supply of rental subsidized housing.

Because the HVS data are representative of one housing market, that of New York City, we need not control for metropolitan characteristics in the multivariate analysis of rental housing assistance use there. Nevertheless, in this analysis we control for the borough in which households live because the geographic dispersion of immigrants is uneven across New York City's five boroughs. Using these borough dummy variables also allows us to control for unobserved social class differences that may exist among immigrants across these geographic areas.

Methods

We use descriptive statistics to compare the receipt of rental housing assistance and the economic, demographic, social, and metropolitan characteristics of foreign- and native-born households. For the

[18] We take the number of subsidized housing units in each census tract and aggregate them to the metropolitan level. About 19 percent of subsidized housing units have no addresses and therefore cannot be placed in tracts. In aggregating the data to the metropolitan level, we used metropolitan definitions determined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which also were used in the March 1997 CPS. For New England, we used New England County Metropolitan Area definitions rather than the New England Metropolitan Statistical Area definitions because we could not obtain data at the census town and place levels.

[19] We obtain estimates of population for metropolitan areas in 1997 by aggregating the county-level population (obtained from the U.S. Bureau of the Census Estimates of the Population of Counties for July 1, 1997) to the metropolitan level using the 1993 OMB metropolitan definitions. Ideally the denominator used to compute this variable would be the number of households in the metropolitan area, but these data are not available for 1997.

United States, we compare foreign- and native-born households' use of either public housing or other forms of rental housing assistance. With respect to New York City, we do the same analysis, and also compare foreign- and native-born households' use of entitlement versus nonentitlement housing assistance. To examine the relationship between nativity status and the use of rental housing assistance, we specify several logistic regression models that estimate the following logit specification of P_i, the probability that household i receives any form of rental housing assistance (for the United States and New York City); the probability it receives entitlement housing assistance (New York City); or the probability it receives nonentitlement housing assistance (New York City), where $0 < P_i < 1$:

$$\log\left(\frac{P_i}{1 - P_i}\right) = \alpha + \sum_j \beta_j \mathrm{N}_{ji} + \sum_n \beta_n \mathrm{X}_{ni} \qquad (1)$$

The vector N represents the nativity status of the householder. In the regression estimated for New York City and the most basic regression for the United States, this vector collapses into one variable indicating the nativity status of the householder (which equals one for foreign-born households and zero for native-born households). We also estimate a logistic regression model for the United States using a vector of dummy variables indicating the year that immigrant households entered the country.[20] For native-born households these variables are set to zero.

We also specify regression models for the United States and New York City where we use a vector of place of birth dummies for foreign-born households (i.e., whether or not they come from refugee-sending countries) to represent their nativity. The reference group in these models is native-born households. The vector X measures the control variables used in the analysis (i.e., race, age of the householder, household type, presence of children, education and income of the householder, and the characteristics of the area in which the householder lives).

[20] It would have been preferable to use the double cohort method (see Myers and Lee 1996) to assess immigrants' use of rental housing assistance over time. In order to do so, we would need data at two points in time, ideally separated by 10 years. However, the CPS did not begin asking respondents about their immigration experience in the March survey until 1994. Before 1994, immigration questions were posed to respondents on occasion (e.g., 1988), but they were not asked in the March survey, which contains the housing assistance questions, thereby making it impossible to employ the double cohort method. Therefore, we use year of entry dummy variables to assess immigrants' use of rental housing assistance over time, recognizing the limitations of such an analysis and being cautious in our interpretation of the results.

Results

Bivariate analysis

Table 1 compares the use of housing assistance by foreign- and native-born renter households. With respect to the United States, foreign-born households, as a group, are significantly less likely than native-born households to use any form of housing assistance. The findings in table 1 also suggest that foreign-born households that have been in the United States longer use housing assistance more than native-born households and those that have entered recently find themselves at the bottom of the queue for rental housing

Table 1. **Housing Assistance Utilization of Native- and Foreign-Born Renter Households in the United States and in New York City**

	Percent			
	Foreign Born			
Characteristic	Total	From Non–Refugee-Sending Country	From Refugee-Sending Country[a]	Native Born
United States				
Receipt of any form of housing assistance	11.33***	10.55***	17.71	14.09
Entered before 1970	18.03*	—[b]	—[b]	
Entered between 1970 and 1979	13.76	—	—	
Entered between 1980 and 1989	10.96***	—	—	
Entered since 1990	6.93***	—	—	
N	2,453	2,185	268	10,759
New York City				
Receipt of housing subsidies[c] or living in public housing	9.75***	8.80***	18.35	21.63
Receipt of public assistance shelter allowance	7.40	7.09	10.22**	6.62
Receipt of any form of housing assistance	16.76***	15.47***	28.57	27.64
N	3,438	3,097	341	5,319

Sources: March 1997 Current Population Survey and 1996 New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey.
Note: Statistics are weighted.
[a]In the United States, households from the former Soviet Union, Vietnam, Cuba, Laos, Afghanistan, and Cambodia are characterized as coming from refugee-sending countries. In New York City, households from the former Soviet Union are characterized as coming from refugee-sending countries.
[b]Because of insufficient cell sizes for foreign-born households from refugee-sending countries, data for housing assistance broken down by year of entry are not shown.
[c]Includes federal Section 8 certificates or vouchers and other federal, state, or city housing subsidies (excluding public assistance shelter allowance).
*$p < 0.10$. **$p < 0.05$. ***$p < 0.01$. Indicates difference between the foreign-born group and the native-born group is significant.

assistance.[21] Immigrant householders who entered before 1970 are significantly more likely to receive some form of rental housing assistance than native-born households. Foreign-born households whose householder entered during the 1970s are not statistically more likely than native-born households to receive assistance. Immigrants who entered the country since 1980, however, are significantly less likely than native-born households to use rental housing assistance. Interestingly, immigrants from refugee-sending countries are not significantly more likely than native-born households to use assistance.

The findings in table 1 for New York City lend further support to this queuing hypothesis. Foreign-born renter households are significantly less likely than native-born renter households to receive housing subsidies or live in public housing, assistance that is provided through nonentitlement programs. Yet, there are no statistically significant differences between immigrants and native-born households with respect to their receipt of public assistance shelter allowances, assistance that is provided as part of an entitlement program. Overall, when the two forms of housing assistance are combined, immigrant renter households are significantly less likely than native-born households to receive any form of housing assistance.

Although immigrants from the former Soviet Union, the main country sending refugees to New York, are not significantly more likely than native-born renter households to receive nonentitlement assistance, they are significantly more likely than native-born households to receive entitlement-based assistance. Foreign-born renter households from non–refugee-sending countries exhibit the same patterns in their use of housing assistance as foreign-born renter households, overall.

Table 2 provides the same comparisons as shown in table 1, but the sample is restricted to include only those households eligible for housing assistance. Overall, the results are consistent with table 1 and show that immigrants who are likely to have the greatest need for rental housing assistance are, on the whole, less likely to receive

[21] Without longitudinal data, however, it is hard to determine with certainty whether housing assistance use rates increase over time or whether the results reflect permanent differences in cohort characteristics. We suspect that our results reflect immigrants' time in the United States. Although it is likely that the more recent cohorts of immigrants contain more illegal immigrants than previous cohorts, which may reduce their rates of welfare use, it is not clear whether the newer cohorts would use housing assistance less than previous cohorts. Policies governing the allocation of housing assistance have been unclear with respect to illegal aliens and their enforcement largely nonexistent (Samuel 1995).

Table 2. **Housing Assistance Utilization of Native- and Foreign-Born Renter Households in the United States and in New York City with Incomes not in Excess of 50 Percent of the HUD-Adjusted Area Median Family Income**

	Percent			
	Foreign Born			
Characteristic	Total	From Non–Refugee-Sending Country	From Refugee-Sending Country[a]	Native Born
United States				
Receipt of any form of housing assistance	18.46***	17.08***	28.04	28.87
Entered before 1970	30.30	—[b]	—[b]	
Entered between 1970 and 1979	22.57***	—	—	
Entered between 1980 and 1989	17.52***	—	—	
Entered since 1990	11.46***	—	—	
N	1,229	1,075	154	4,221
New York City				
Receipt of housing subsidies[c] or living in public housing	17.57***	15.95***	28.38***	39.02
Receipt of public assistance shelter allowance	14.26	13.97	16.25	12.95
Receipt of any form of housing assistance	31.02***	28.98***	44.62*	50.71
N	1,605	1,396	209	2,396

Sources: March 1997 Current Population Survey and 1996 New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey.
Note: Statistics are weighted.
[a]In the United States, households from the former Soviet Union, Vietnam, Cuba, Laos, Afghanistan, and Cambodia are characterized as coming from refugee-sending countries. In New York City, households from the former Soviet Union are characterized as coming from refugee-sending countries.
[b]Because of insufficient cell sizes for foreign-born households from refugee-sending countries, data for housing assistance broken down by year of entry are not shown.
[c]Includes federal Section 8 certificates or vouchers and other federal, state, or city housing subsidies (excluding public assistance shelter allowance).
*$p < 0.10$. **$p < 0.05$. ***$p < 0.01$. Indicates difference between the foreign-born group and the native-born group is significant.

assistance compared with their native-born counterparts. Whereas table 1 indicates that foreign-born renter households in the United States who entered before 1970 are significantly more likely than native-born households to receive assistance, table 2 shows that the difference disappears when only eligible households are considered. Moreover, foreign-born renter households in New York City from the former Soviet Union that are eligible for assistance are significantly *less* likely than native-born households to receive nonentitlement assistance and are statistically no different from their native-born counterparts in their receipt of entitlement assistance.

As noted earlier in this article, the use of rental housing assistance by foreign-born households is likely to be determined by the interplay of economic, demographic, and social characteristics of individuals as well as metropolitan characteristics that shape the demand for housing assistance and the supply of assistance that is available to households. As the first two columns in table 3 indicate, foreign-

Table 3. **Household and Metropolitan Characteristics of Foreign- and Native-Born Renter Households in the United States and New York City**

	Percent of Households			
	United States		New York City	
Characteristic	Foreign Born	Native Born	Foreign Born	Native Born
Race/Ethnicity				
White, non-Hispanic	22.97***	67.60	27.49***	44.31
Black, non-Hispanic	9.21***	22.43	21.56***	29.80
Puerto Rican	0.11***	3.04	0.55***	22.18
Non–Puerto Rican Hispanic	46.70***	5.06	33.80***	2.46
Asian	20.68***	0.95	15.98***	0.78
Other	0.33***	0.92	0.62	0.46
Household Characteristics				
Age of householder				
Under 35 years	41.28	42.88	31.21	31.31
35 to 64 years	47.56***	44.16	53.86***	49.45
65+ years	11.16**	12.96	14.94***	19.24
Couple-headed household	49.68***	27.45	43.19***	25.63
Female householder	42.82***	52.73	52.22***	59.61
Presence of children under 18	48.42***	35.70	27.48***	22.73
Education				
Less than high school	38.58***	18.76	33.75***	26.76
High school degree	21.43***	31.48	27.52	27.65
College and more	39.99***	49.76	38.73***	45.59
Total household income (median)[a]	$21,250	$26,250	$23,000	$22,920
Eligible for housing assistance	50.08***	39.23	47.40	45.90
From refugee-sending country[b]	10.93	NA	9.94	NA
Metropolitan Characteristics				
Mean:				
Subsidized households per 1,000 population	18.30***	16.41	NA	NA
Poverty rate	17.89***	14.76	NA	NA
N	2,453	10,759	3,755	5,761

Sources: March 1997 Current Population Survey and 1996 New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey.
Notes: Statistics are weighted. NA = not applicable.
[a]Significance test not conducted for this variable.
[b]In the United States, households from the former Soviet Union, Vietnam, Cuba, Laos, Afghanistan, and Cambodia are characterized as coming from refugee-sending countries. In New York City, households from the former Soviet Union are characterized as coming from refugee-sending countries.
*$p < 0.10$. **$p < 0.05$. ***$p < 0.01$. Indicates difference between foreign- and native-born households is significant.

born renters in the United States are significantly more likely to be non–Puerto Rican Hispanic or Asian, have less than a high school education, be eligible for housing assistance, and live in poorer metropolitan areas with more subsidized housing than their native-born counterparts. Similar differences in individual-level characteristics also are found in New York City (columns 3 and 4 of table 3).

Multivariate analysis

Our bivariate analysis indicates that when all forms of rental housing assistance are considered, overall, foreign-born renter households use housing assistance at significantly lower rates than native-born renter households in the United States and New York City. Because the economic, demographic, social, and metropolitan characteristics of foreign-born renter households differ from native-born renter households, a more complete analysis requires the use of multivariate techniques. In this section, we present the results of several logistic regression models for the United States and New York City that seek to explain the variation in renter households' use of housing assistance.

In each of the logistic regression models (tables 4–6), variables for the economic, demographic, and social characteristics of households usually have the expected effects and are statistically significant. Households that are eligible for rental housing assistance and those that have a less educated or female householder or have children under the age of 18 are significantly more likely to receive housing assistance. Couple-headed households and those with greater total household income are significantly less likely to receive rental housing assistance. The latter effect for income is only significant in the models for the analysis of the United States. The finding suggests that renter households with less income are significantly more likely to receive housing assistance, even after controlling for the fact that these households are more likely to be eligible for assistance.

With respect to age, we find in the national analysis that households with an older householder are significantly more likely to receive housing assistance than those with a younger householder. In the models for New York City, however, the findings are less straightforward. In tables 4 and 5, the effect of the householder being age 65 or older on the log odds of housing assistance use is insignificant. Yet, when we examine the models in table 6, where we disaggregate housing assistance on the basis of whether it is coming from an entitlement or nonentitlement program, we find that age is significantly and positively related to the log odds of receiving

housing assistance from nonentitlement programs, but that age is negatively and significantly related to the receipt of assistance from entitlement programs.

Considering that households must wait in a queue to receive housing assistance from nonentitlement programs, age in the model may be a proxy for time since arrival, or at a minimum, time since applying for assistance. The fact that age is negatively related to the receipt of assistance from entitlement programs may reflect the fact that the youngest households need this type of assistance the most because of their lack of human capital (i.e., job tenure, skills) and their inability to acquire decent-paying jobs. It is worth noting that the effects of age found in table 6 do not change when we control for whether the household lives in a rent-controlled unit, the units most likely to contain older individuals (models not shown but available from the authors on request).

With respect to the metropolitan-level variables, as we expected, the number of subsidized housing units per 1,000 individuals in the household's metropolitan area (i.e., a proxy for the supply of subsidized housing units) has a significant and positive effect on a household's chances of receiving rental housing assistance. The variable we use as a proxy for the demand for subsidized housing units, the metropolitan-level poverty rate, is significant and negatively related to a household's log odds of receiving housing assistance. The finding is consistent with our expectation that households will have a lower probability of receiving rental housing assistance in areas where there is likely to be an especially heavy demand for subsidies.

With respect to the borough dummy variables in the New York City analysis, we find that for the most part a household living in Brooklyn or Queens is significantly less likely to receive rental housing assistance than a household living in Manhattan. Staten Island households are not significantly different from their Manhattan counterparts in their odds of receiving housing assistance. In the model (column 1 of table 6) for the receipt of assistance from entitlement programs (e.g., public assistance shelter allowance), we find that renter households from the Bronx are significantly more likely than Manhattan households to receive housing assistance.

Table 4 presents the logistic regression coefficients for models predicting renter households' receipt of some form of housing assistance. The first two columns present models for the United States and the third column presents the model for New York City. Columns 1 and 3 use a dummy variable to indicate the householder's nativity status. In column 2, three dummy variables indicate foreign-born householders' year of entry into the United States. The results in column 1 indicate that foreign-born renter households, as

a group, are significantly less likely than native-born renter households to receive any form of housing assistance in the United States, controlling for economic, demographic, social, and metropolitan characteristics. The exponentiated value of the coefficient in column 1 indicates that foreign-born households are 0.70 times as likely as native-born households to receive any form of rental housing assistance (exp (–0.3545) = 0.702). In New York City, the same result holds. Column 3 reveals that foreign-born households are 0.52 times as likely as native-born households to receive any form of rental housing assistance (exp (–0.6452) = 0.5246).

Table 4. **Logistic Regression Coefficients of Models Predicting Renter Households' Receipt of Any Form of Housing Assistance**

	Receiving Any Form of Housing Assistance		
	United States		New York City
Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)
Household Characteristics			
Nativity (1 = foreign born)	−0.3545***	—	−0.6452***
	(0.1000)		(0.0848)
Nativity by year of entry (reference group native born)			
Entered before 1970	—	−0.0900	—
		(0.1657)	
Entered between 1970 and 1979	—	−0.2261	—
		(0.1654)	
Entered between 1980 and 1989	—	−0.3557***	—
		(0.1373)	
Entered since 1990	—	−0.7735***	
		(0.1744)	
Race/Ethnicity (reference group white, non-Hispanic)			
Black, non-Hispanic	0.8410***	0.8358***	1.3100***
	(0.0693)	(0.0694)	(0.0869)
Puerto Rican	0.8426***	0.8366***	1.0882***
	(0.1450)	(0.1449)	(0.1045)
Non–Puerto Rican Hispanic	0.2899**	0.2917**	0.9377***
	(0.1146)	(0.1151)	(0.1190)
Asian	0.3587**	0.4325**	−0.4282*
	(0.1736)	(0.1759)	(0.2367)
Other	0.4261	0.4186	1.3369***
	(0.2832)	(0.2833)	(0.3822)
Age of householder (reference group <35 years)			
35 to 64 years	0.3501***	0.3291***	0.2721***
	(0.0659)	(0.0664)	(0.0759)
65+ years	1.0893***	1.0472***	0.0636
	(0.0814)	(0.0936)	(0.1045)
Couple-headed household	−0.2465***	−0.2254***	−0.3983***
	(0.0783)	(0.0786)	(0.0825)
Female householder	0.2529***	0.2483***	0.5983***
	(0.0664)	(0.0665)	(0.0727)
Presence of children under 18	0.5656***	0.5680***	0.6688***
	(0.0706)	(0.0707)	(0.0764)

Table 4. **Logistic Regression Coefficients of Models Predicting Renter Households' Receipt of Any Form of Housing Assistance** *(continued)*

	Receiving Any Form of Housing Assistance		
	United States		New York City
Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)
Education (reference group college or higher)			
Less than high school	0.5261***	0.5219***	0.8145***
	(0.0754)	(0.0755)	(0.0829)
High school diploma	0.1544**	0.1526**	0.2588***
	(0.0727)	(0.0727)	(0.0837)
Total household income (logged)	−0.4656***	−0.4700***	0.0057
	(0.0422)	(0.0423)	(0.0158)
Eligibility (total household income less than 50 percent of the median)	0.8811***	0.8858***	1.8076***
	(0.0911)	(0.0912)	(0.0826)
Metropolitan characteristics			
Subsidized households per 1,000 population	0.0273***	0.0275***	NA
	(0.0036)	(0.0036)	
Poverty rate	−0.0363***	−0.0368***	NA
	(0.0065)	(0.0065)	
Borough (reference group Manhattan)			
Bronx	NA	NA	0.0643
			(0.0911)
Brooklyn	NA	NA	−0.1400
			(0.0859)
Queens	NA	NA	−0.6991***
			(0.1064)
Staten Island	NA	NA	−0.1815
			(0.2054)
Intercept	1.0622**	1.1244**	−3.7161***
	(0.4633)	(0.4649)	(0.2034)
Model Chi-Square	2,187.059***	2,198.104***	2,879.846***
Degrees of freedom	17	20	19
N	13,212	13,212	8,756

Sources: March 1997 Current Population Survey and 1996 New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey.
Notes: Statistics are weighted. NA = not applicable.
*$p < 0.10$. **$p < 0.05$. ***$p < 0.01$.

The results in column 2 of table 4 show that households with foreign-born householders who entered the United States since 1980 (i.e., the most recent arrivals) are significantly less likely than native-born households to receive rental housing assistance once we control for all relevant factors. There is, however, no statistically significant difference in the log odds of use between households who arrived in the United States before 1980 and native-born households. Thus, the results here suggest that the overall finding that immigrants are less likely to receive housing assistance compared with their native-born counterparts is driven by the most recent cohorts.

Table 5 disaggregates the analysis of renter households' receipt of any form of housing assistance by immigrant householders' place of birth (i.e., whether they come from a refugee-sending country). Once again, native-born households form the reference group in this analysis. Column 1 presents the logistic regression model for the United States. Households with householders from non–refugee-sending countries are significantly less likely than native-born households to receive any form of rental housing assistance, controlling for economic, demographic, and social characteristics. Householders from refugee-sending countries, however, are statistically no different than native-born households in their log odds of receiving rental housing assistance. Therefore, after controlling for other characteristics that influence a household's log odds of receiving housing assistance, we find that these results are consistent with those from our bivariate analysis.

Table 5. **Logistic Regression Coefficients of Models Predicting Renter Households' Receipt of Any Form of Housing Assistance by Place of Birth**

	Receiving Any Form of Housing Assistance	
Variables	United States	New York City
Household characteristics		
Nativity by place of birth (reference group native born)		
Foreign born from non–refugee-sending country	−0.4304***	−1.0655***
	(0.1041)	(0.0953)
Foreign born from refugee-sending country[a]	0.1642	1.2209***
	(0.1926)	(0.1600)
Race/ethnicity (reference group white, non-Hispanic)		
Black, non-Hispanic	0.8492***	1.6616***
	(0.0694)	(0.0957)
Puerto Rican	0.8433***	1.3281***
	(0.1449)	(0.1099)
Non–Puerto Rican Hispanic	0.3087***	1.5390***
	(0.1146)	(0.1326)
Asian	0.2899	0.1625
	(0.1762)	(0.2461)
Other	0.4334	1.7736***
	(0.2832)	(0.3890)
Age of householder (reference group <35 years)		
35 to 64 years	0.3482***	0.2556***
	(0.0660)	(0.0767)
65+ years	1.0747***	0.0424
	(0.0925)	(0.1061)
Couple-headed household	−0.2446***	−0.4817***
	(0.0783)	(0.0837)
Female householder	0.2530***	0.5991***
	(0.0664)	(0.0735)
Presence of children under 18	0.5644***	0.6723***
	(0.0706)	(0.0772)

Table 5. **Logistic Regression Coefficients of Models Predicting Renter Households' Receipt of Any Form of Housing Assistance by Place of Birth** *(continued)*

Variables	Receiving Any Form of Housing Assistance	
	United States	New York City
Education (reference group college or higher)		
Less than high school	0.5282***	0.8861***
	(0.0754)	(0.0841)
High school diploma	0.1551**	0.3291***
	(0.0727)	(0.0846)
Total household income (logged)	−0.4650***	0.0123
	(0.0423)	(0.0161)
Eligibility (total household income less than 50 percent of the median)	0.8790***	1.7613***
	(0.0912)	(0.0834)
Metropolitan characteristics		
Subsidized households per 1,000 population	0.0277***	NA
	(0.0036)	
Poverty rate	−0.0374***	NA
	(0.0065)	
Borough (reference group Manhattan)		
Bronx	NA	0.0358
		(0.0925)
Brooklyn	NA	−0.2564***
		(0.0882)
Queens	NA	−0.7543***
		(0.1084)
Staten Island	NA	−0.1095
		(0.2086)
Intercept	1.0657**	−3.9543***
	(0.4641)	(0.2106)
Model Chi-Square	2,196.048***	3,037.141***
Degrees of freedom	18	20
N	13,212	8,756

Sources: March 1997 Current Population Survey and 1996 New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey.
Notes: Statistics are weighted. NA = not applicable.
[a]In the United States, households from the former Soviet Union, Vietnam, Cuba, Laos, Afghanistan, and Cambodia are characterized as coming from refugee-sending countries. In New York City, households from the former Soviet Union are characterized as coming from refugee-sending countries.
*$p < 0.10$. **$p < 0.05$. ***$p < 0.01$.

Column 2 of table 5 shows the results of the logistic regression model predicting renter households' receipt of any form of housing assistance in New York City, disaggregating foreign-born households on the basis of whether they come from a refugee-sending country. As in the model for the United States, renter households with householders from non–refugee-sending countries are significantly less likely to receive any form of housing assistance than native-born households. Immigrants from the former Soviet Union, the only refugee-sending country that we can control for, however,

have significantly greater log odds of receiving housing assistance than native-born New Yorkers.

Taken together, the results in columns 1 and 2 of table 5 lend support to the hypothesis that most immigrants are less likely than native-born renter households to rely on rental housing assistance programs. The fact that in New York City households from the former Soviet Union have greater rates of rental housing assistance use than native-born households is consistent with the hypothesis that refugees are more likely to receive assistance than native-born households. The fact that this result differs from the nonsignificant finding in the bivariate analysis (table 1) is probably attributable to the fact that we are controlling for race in the multivariate analysis.

The fact that immigrants from refugee-sending countries are neither more nor less likely than native-born households to receive rental housing assistance in the analysis for the United States, but are significantly more likely than native-born households to receive assistance in New York City, may reflect the fact that refugee resettlement agencies differ in their administration of assistance among refugee groups. Although the Refugee Act of 1980 mandates that the U.S. government assist all refugees in their resettlement and provides the funds to do so equally, refugees from the former Soviet Union, particularly Soviet Jews, appear to have more advantages when it comes to resettlement than other refugee groups. Gold (1992) finds that the resettlement agencies providing services to Soviet Jews are highly centralized and integrated, long established, funded by both public and private sources, and few in number. By contrast, the agencies serving Vietnamese refugees are decentralized, have smaller professional staffs, and often have financial problems. Laotians likely have had a harder time with their resettlement in the United States as well, because no Lao community support systems existed when these refugees entered the country during the 1970s (DeVoe 1997). Therefore, it is not surprising that the coefficient for refugee-sending countries in New York is significant and positive but insignificant in the analysis for the United States.

When we disaggregate housing assistance on the basis of whether it is provided as part of an entitlement or nonentitlement program, we find that this distinction is important in understanding immigrants' use of rental housing assistance. Table 6 presents the logistic regression coefficients for models predicting renter households' receipt of a public assistance shelter allowance (i.e., from an entitlement program) and their receipt of other housing subsidies or residence in public housing (i.e., nonentitlement assistance). These models are estimated only for New York City because the data on

rental housing assistance in the CPS does not allow us to disaggregate on the basis of whether the assistance is from an entitlement or nonentitlement program. Columns 1 and 3 of table 6 report the results for each of the models using the nativity dummy variable; columns 2 and 4 report the results using the place of birth dummy variables (i.e., whether immigrants come from refugee-sending countries).

The results in column 1 of table 6 reveal that foreign-born renter households, as a group, are not statistically more or less likely than native-born renter households to receive a public assistance shelter allowance. However, when we disaggregate nativity status by immigrants' place of birth (i.e., column 2), we find that foreign-born renter households with householders from the former Soviet Union, the main country sending refugees to New York City, are significantly more likely than similarly situated native-born renter households to receive a public assistance shelter allowance.

Turning to column 3 in table 6, we find that foreign-born households are significantly *less* likely than native-born households to receive other housing subsidies or live in public housing (i.e., housing assistance from nonentitlement programs). In column 4, when we disaggregate immigrants by their householder's place of birth, we find that households with householders from non–refugee-sending countries are significantly less likely than native-born households to receive assistance from nonentitlement programs. However, householders from the former Soviet Union are once again significantly more likely than native-born households to receive this type of rental housing assistance.

Taken together, the results from table 6 do not support the hypothesis that immigrants, as a group, are more likely to receive housing subsidies or shelter allowances compared with similarly situated native-born households. To the contrary, when we control for a variety of household characteristics, in many instances, particularly with respect to nonentitlement programs, immigrants to New York City have significantly lower use rates than native-born renter households. Furthermore, the group of foreign-born households that has significantly greater log odds of participation in both types of housing programs is immigrants from the former Soviet Union,[22] most of whom have entered the United States as refugees and are likely to have benefitted from the extensive social, fraternal, and religious networks in New York City that provide them with advice

[22] We estimated separate specifications of our models that showed that immigrants from the Dominican Republic are significantly more likely than native-born households to use housing assistance from entitlement programs, although there was no statistically significant difference with respect to nonentitlement programs.

Table 6. **Logistic Regression Coefficients of Models Predicting Renter Households' Receipt of Public Assistance Shelter Allowance and Other Housing Subsidies (or Residence in Public Housing) Using Nativity Status and Place of Birth**

	New York City			
	Receipt of Public Assistance Shelter Allowance		Receipt of Other Housing Subsidies or Residence in Public Housing	
Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Household characteristics				
Nativity (1 = foreign born)	0.2060	—	−0.8513***	—
	(0.1284)		(0.0942)	
Nativity by place of birth (reference group native born)				
Foreign born from non–refugee-sending country	—	−0.0120	—	−1.2165***
		(0.1401)		(0.1054)
Foreign born from refugee-sending country[a]	—	1.2916***	—	0.9460***
		(0.2460)		(0.1785)
Race/ethnicity (reference group white, non-Hispanic)				
Black, non-Hispanic	0.1231	0.4099**	1.5713***	1.8626***
	(0.1461)	(0.1653)	(0.0968)	(0.1052)
Puerto Rican	0.3598**	0.5886***	1.2042***	1.4209***
	(0.1668)	(0.1811)	(0.1131)	(0.1191)
Non–Puerto Rican Hispanic	0.4039**	0.8241***	1.0122***	1.5330***
	(0.1722)	(0.1994)	(0.1380)	(0.1507)
Asian	−1.0410***	−0.6230	−0.1263	0.3673
	(0.3842)	(0.3967)	(0.2832)	(0.2915)
Other	0.1751	0.5377	1.5595***	1.9181***
	(0.6341)	(0.6373)	(0.4069)	(0.4159)
Age of householder (reference group <35 years)				
35 to 64 years	−0.2544**	−0.2710***	0.4987***	0.4923***
	(0.0999)	(0.1002)	(0.0837)	(0.0843)
65+ years	−2.3005***	−2.3172***	0.8512***	0.8472***
	(0.2499)	(0.2504)	(0.1116)	(0.1127)
Couple-headed household	−0.4343***	−0.4926***	−0.2849***	−0.3514***
	(0.1316)	(0.1332)	(0.0906)	(0.0915)
Female householder	0.4696***	0.4549***	0.5108***	0.5109***
	(0.1215)	(0.1218)	(0.0797)	(0.0804)

Table 6. **Logistic Regression Coefficients of Models Predicting Renter Households' Receipt of Public Assistance Shelter Allowance and Other Housing Subsidies (or Residence in Public Housing) Using Nativity Status and Place of Birth**
(continued)

	New York City			
	Receipt of Public Assistance Shelter Allowance		Receipt of Other Housing Subsidies or Residence in Public Housing	
Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Presence of children under 18	0.6630***	0.6526***	0.3728***	0.3765***
	(0.1020)	(0.1022)	(0.0817)	(0.0823)
Education (reference group college or higher)				
Less than high school	0.6098***	0.6434***	0.5618***	0.6107***
	(0.1237)	(0.1241)	(0.0892)	(0.0898)
High school diploma	0.1456	0.1879	0.2129**	0.2693***
	(0.1325)	(0.1330)	(0.0906)	(0.0912)
Total household income (logged)	−0.0100	−0.0069	0.0136	0.0189
	(0.0209)	(0.0212)	(0.0172)	(0.0175)
Eligibility (total household income less than 50 percent of the median)	1.9336***	1.8675***	1.4636***	1.4165***
	(0.1505)	(0.1507)	(0.0906)	(0.0913)
Metropolitan characteristics				
Borough (reference group Manhattan)				
Bronx	0.2251*	0.2033	0.0246	0.0057
	(0.1354)	(0.1356)	(0.0946)	(0.0957)
Brooklyn	0.1943	0.1322	−0.2058**	−0.2962***
	(0.1306)	(0.1322)	(0.0908)	(0.0927)
Queens	−0.4853***	−0.5125***	−0.5977***	−0.6334***
	(0.1744)	(0.1753)	(0.1156)	(0.1172)
Staten Island	−0.4458	−0.3889	−0.0287	0.0368
	(0.4185)	(0.4200)	(0.2154)	(0.2183)
Intercept	−4.4817***	−4.6375***	−4.1871***	−4.4018***
	(0.2914)	(0.3009)	(0.2263)	(0.2332)
Model Chi-Square	1,034.187***	1,057.448***	1,967.178***	2,072.823***
Degrees of freedom	19	20	19	20
N	8,756	8,756	8,756	8,756

Source: 1996 New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey.
Note: Statistics are weighted.
[a]In the United States, households from the former Soviet Union, Vietnam, Cuba, Laos, Afghanistan, and Cambodia are characterized as coming from refugee-sending countries. In New York City, households from the former Soviet Union are characterized as coming from refugee-sending countries.
*$p < 0.10$. **$p < 0.05$. ***$p < 0.01$.

and access to rental housing assistance. Therefore, the finding is not surprising.

Policy implications

The 1996 welfare reform legislation reflects a concern among many Americans that immigrants to the United States overuse the nation's social welfare system and may even be attracted to the country because of the prospect of receiving public assistance. Our results, however, suggest that whatever validity these concerns have with respect to income transfer programs, they are misplaced with respect to immigrant utilization of rental housing subsidies. For both the United States as a whole and for New York City, one of the nation's leading destinations for immigrants, we find that immigrants, as a group, have a *lower* probability of receiving rental housing assistance than native-born households. Contrary to what we would have expected if immigrants were being drawn to the United States by the prospect of receiving housing subsidies, those who arrived most recently had the lowest likelihood of receiving assistance. Although immigrants who entered the United States before 1970 are significantly more likely than native-born renter households to use housing assistance (table 1), once we limit our analysis to only those households that are eligible for assistance, we find that this significant difference disappears (table 2).

The lower rates of rental housing assistance receipt among immigrants, particularly recent arrivals, likely are a function of the way housing subsidies are allocated in the United States. Most housing subsidies are not entitlements; instead they are awarded to a relatively small proportion of eligible households. Because applicants typically must wait for long periods of time before they receive a subsidized housing unit or rent voucher, householders who arrive later, such as immigrants, must join the end of a long queue.

The queuing explanation is buttressed by two additional empirical findings. When immigrants who arrived in the United States more than 20 years ago are compared with native-born households in the multivariate analysis, there is no statistically significant difference in their log odds of receiving rental housing assistance. Furthermore, in New York City, where we are able to disaggregate housing assistance into entitlement and nonentitlement programs, the probability that an immigrant will receive a shelter allowance (entitlement) is not statistically different from that of native-born households. With respect to the other housing programs such as public housing and Section 8 (both nonentitlement programs), immigrant households in New York City are actually significantly less likely than native-born households to receive this type of assistance.

The results from our analysis of immigrants from refugee-sending countries also counters the claims by many that immigrants are a "public charge." These households are no more likely than native-born households in the United States and New York City to use any form of rental housing assistance. Although households from the former Soviet Union are significantly more likely to use housing assistance from entitlement programs in New York City (table 1), when we limit the analysis to households that are eligible for assistance, this significant difference disappears (table 2). Indeed, this latter analysis shows that in New York, eligible immigrants from refugee-sending countries (i.e., households from the former Soviet Union) are actually significantly less likely than eligible native-born households to receive any form of rental housing assistance.

Rather than indicating that immigrant overuse of housing subsidies is a problem, our results suggest the opposite. America's patchwork system of rental housing assistance may actually underserve recent immigrants. Long waits for assistance among needy immigrant households may be one of the explanations for empirical findings that immigrants are more likely to live in overcrowded and inferior quality housing than their native-born counterparts (Schill, Friedman, and Rosenbaum 1998). Recent welfare reform legislation, which may make immigrants who come to the United States after August 22, 1996, ineligible for rental housing assistance for five years, may only exacerbate the problem by pushing foreign-born households further down the queue.

A newly released study by Fix and Passel (1999) reveals that welfare reform has had a chilling effect on eligible immigrants' use of nonhousing public benefits. For example, according to this study, welfare use among refugees declined by 27 percent between 1994 and 1997 despite the fact that few refugees had lost their eligibility for benefits by 1997. Such an underuse of public benefits among immigrants who are eligible and in need does not bode well for the future economic success and housing circumstances of foreign-born households in the future, especially for immigrants entering the United States after August 22, 1996.

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