

Research Spotlight: Maria Krysan

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Racial residential segregation and the housing search process

Journalists and policymakers often point out that Chicago is one of the most racially segregated cities in the United States. The city's long history of residential segregation is tied to complex issues, such as discrimination in housing policies by landlords, real estate agents, and most recently the mortgage industry. Yet many observers often argue that, "people simply want to live with people like them." In other words, communities self-segregate.

IGPA Expert Maria Krysan (right) studies housing policy, racial attitudes, and residential segregation in the Department of Sociology at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Her research has consistently shown that self-segregation by minorities is a myth. The "why" of segregation is much more complex.



"We find that in recent years, when people are asked to create their ideal neighborhood, diversity is preferred by many people of all races and ethnicities. Diversity is clearly valued, but is not reflected in practice," Krysan said. "What happens between the intention and the end result?"

The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has called for research examining the preferences, decisions and external factors that influence individuals as they search for housing. Although past research has explored in detail the preferences people have in terms of the racial and ethnic composition of their neighborhoods, until now, no academic research exists about the racial and ethnic composition of where people search.

In an article in Springer's *Population Research and Policy Review*, Krysan and colleagues Esther Havekes and Michael Bader contribute the first data that examine where people say they want to live, where they search, and where they end up living. The results reveal once again that there is much more to segregation than individuals simply choosing where to live.

Study Approach

The researchers analyzed a subsample (N=382) of the respondents in the 2004-2005 Chicago Area Study to understand the matches—or mismatches—between preferences about ideal neighborhood racial composition, search locations, and neighborhood outcomes. The data came from a random sample of people aged 21 and older who live in households in Cook County (which includes the city of Chicago) who were interviewed in their homes between August 2004 and August 2005. The survey touched on a variety of topics related to neighborhoods, preferences, and housing searches, including (1) a measure asking people to create a neighborhood with their ideal racial/ethnic composition; (2) a map showing 41 communities throughout the Chicago metropolitan area that they used to identify communities where they searched during the previous ten years; and (3) their current residence (so that the researchers could use U.S. Census data to determine the racial/ethnic composition of their current neighborhood).

Results

The researchers found that whites, blacks and Latinos all prefer to live in diverse neighborhoods. Whites report a desire to live in a neighborhood with the largest percentage of their own group. Yet at 47 percent, white respondents' ideal neighborhood in this study is not quite majority-white. Blacks and Latinos also created ideal neighborhoods where their own group was the largest. But at 37 and 32 percent, respectively, their own group was also not the numerical majority.

All groups say they want to live in diverse neighborhoods. But they don't end up doing so.

Although whites report wanting to live in a neighborhood where their group is not quite the majority, they end up searching in neighborhoods that are on average 68 percent white. Perhaps not surprisingly, their current neighborhoods reflect the fact that they searched in these communities: the average white searcher in this study lives in a neighborhood that is 74 percent white.

In contrast, black and Latino residents search in areas that match their desired, diverse neighborhood. However, they end up living in neighborhoods in which they are the majority group. Blacks search in neighborhoods that are 40 percent black, but end up in neighborhoods that are 66 percent black. Latinos search in neighborhoods that are 32 percent Latino, but end up in neighborhoods that are 51 percent Latino. The figure above illustrates these trends.

Why is this the case? Logistic regression analyses reveal that mismatches are associated with both a lack of information and inadequate finances, but also may be due to socially desirable responding for whites in particular. Yet this is just the tip of the iceberg.

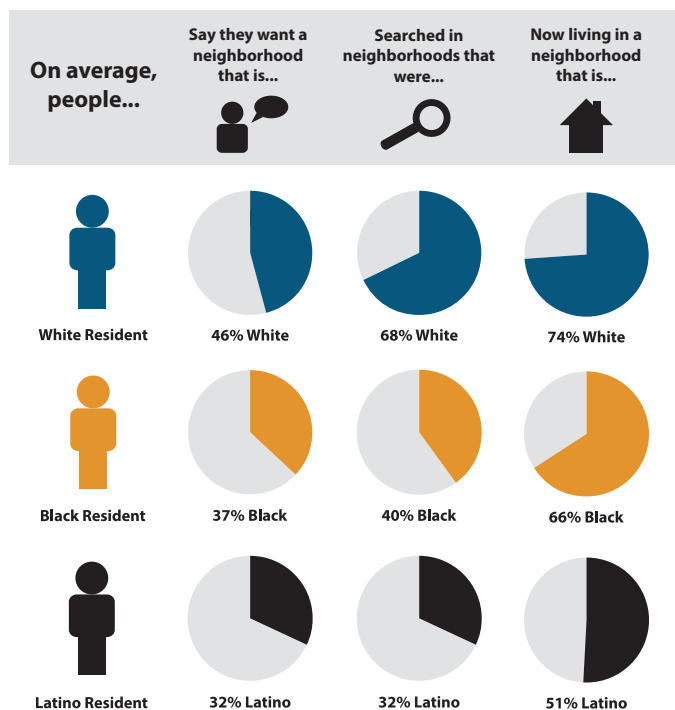
"The question is: what happens between the search and the move that results in African Americans and Latinos living in less diverse neighborhoods than they desire and in which they search?" said Krysan. It may be that blacks and Latinos search in these communities, and they learn something about the communities that makes them undesirable. Alternatively, they may experience hostility or discrimination when searching in these neighborhoods, thus creating barriers that impede them from translating their attitudes into actions. Further study on this question is essential.

Policy Implications and Further Study

In 2013, HUD's Office of Policy Development and Research issued a five year *Research Roadmap* that highlighted the importance of—but lack of research about—the housing search process and how it relates to residential segregation and the stratification processes. The *Roadmap* points out, "HUD does not know how households search for housing and what their preferences are when searching for housing."

Understanding this critical process is foundational for a number of core HUD programs and policies, including the Housing Choice Voucher program, housing integration strategies, and discrimination testing and enforcement. Further study is needed to understand the specific mechanisms that are impeding the search process from matching residents with their preferences.

"There are communities across the nation that want to foster inclusiveness," Krysan said. "This study calls into question the often-repeated idea that minorities self-segregate. So, policies that break down whatever barriers there are to living where one wants to live can play a role in breaking down the stubborn pattern of segregation that continues to persist."



The Institute of Government and Public Affairs (IGPA) is a public policy research organization at the University of Illinois. The IGPA mission is to inform the public policy discussion through non-partisan, evidence-based research and public engagement in Illinois. Maria Krysan is a professor of sociology at the University of Illinois at Chicago specializing in racial residential segregation and racial attitudes. She can be reached at krysan@uic.edu or (312) 996-5575. To learn more, visit igpa.uillinois.edu.