



The Housing Choices of Immigrants, 1986

Introduction

One out of every six people in Canada is an immigrant. In recent years, immigration to Canada has increased substantially—from less than 90,000 per year in the mid 1980s to a planned level of 250,000 in the 1992-1995 period. There has also been a pronounced shift away from European immigrants towards immigrants from other regions, particularly Asia. Given an ageing population and an expectation of slower population growth in the future, immigration levels are likely to remain high.

The housing demand generated by immigrants will reflect not only the actual numbers admitted to Canada but also the particular housing choices they make. This *Research and Development Highlights* presents some findings from a recent study of immigrant housing choices. How do these tendencies differ from those of the non-immigrant population? Do they evolve as the length of time lived in Canada increases? These are the questions addressed below.

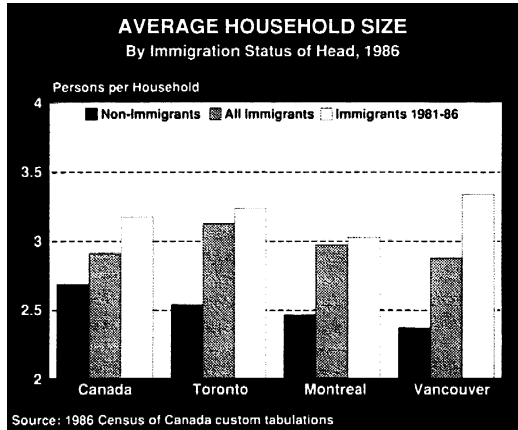
The Data

Custom tabulations of 1986 census data were obtained by CMHC from Statistics Canada. According to the census definition, an immigrant is someone born outside Canada who was not a Canadian citizen at birth but who has been granted the right to live in Canada permanently. Tabulations were based on a 20% sample (one in five households).

Although the study focused on Canada as a whole, separate analyses were also conducted for the three largest metropolitan areas—Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. These three cities alone attracted two-thirds of recent immigrants to Canada.

Findings

Housing Choices



Household size

In 1986, households headed by immigrants were on average larger than those headed by non-immigrants—2.9 persons versus 2.7 persons. Households headed by recent immigrants who arrived in Canada between 1981 and 1986 were larger still—3.2 persons. Differences between immigrants and non-immigrants were even more pronounced in the three major cities. In Vancouver, households headed by recent immigrants were a full person larger than those headed by non-immigrants.

Household formation (Headship rates)

Household headship rates describe the proportion of the population heading households in each age group. These rates provide an indication of the propensity of the population to form households. Data from 1986 show that headship rates of immigrants in general and recent immigrants in particular are lower in most age groups than the rates of non-immigrants. The basic national pattern was also present in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. The lower headship rates for immigrants are consistent with the larger immigrant household sizes noted above.

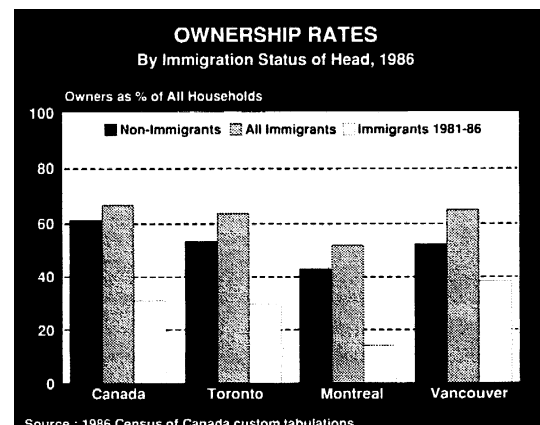
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Household composition

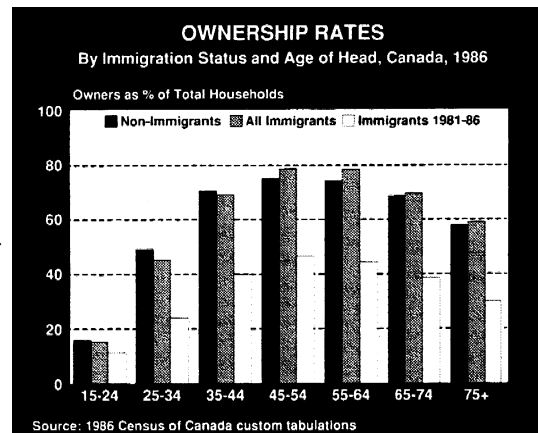
In 1986, a higher proportion of immigrant households than of non-immigrant households were families: moreover, among family households, a higher proportion of immigrant households were couples with children and multiple-family households. The national pattern was repeated in each of the three major urban centres. Again, these findings are consistent with the higher average size of immigrant households described above.

Ownership rates

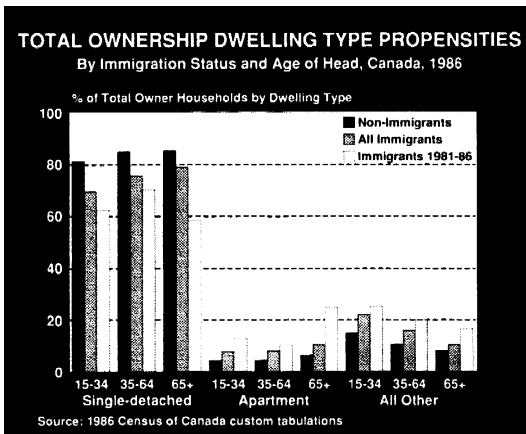
In 1986, 66.5 percent of immigrant households in Canada owned their homes, compared to 61.3 percent for non-immigrants. The ownership rate for recent immigrants was much lower at 31.2 percent. Differences between immigrant and non-immigrant ownership rates were even more pronounced in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver than in Canada as a whole.



The higher immigrant ownership rates reflected higher rates for households with heads aged 45-64. Earlier, it was noted that households headed by immigrants were more likely to be family households than were households headed by non-immigrants. This fact alone helps explain the higher ownership rates for immigrants, since family households are typically more likely to own their homes than non-family households. However, even when ownership rates for family and non-family households were examined separately, rates for middle-aged immigrants in 1986 were above those for non-immigrants.

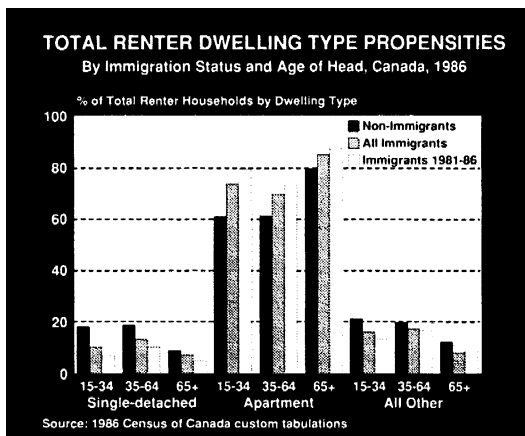


Dwelling choices



Owners

In 1986, owner households headed by immigrants were less likely to live in single-detached homes than were owner households headed by non-immigrants. Occupancy of single-detached dwellings was even lower among owner households headed by recent immigrants. The national pattern was repeated in each of the three major cities. In Montreal, occupancy of single-detached dwellings by immigrant households relative to non-immigrant households was particularly low. In contrast, differences between immigrants and non-immigrants were much less dramatic in Vancouver.



Renters

Renter households headed by immigrants were more likely to live in apartments than were non-immigrant households. The propensity was particularly strong for recent immigrants. This national pattern was also evident in Toronto and Montreal. In Vancouver, immigrant renter households were more likely than non-immigrant renter households to occupy other dwelling types, such as row, semi-detached, and duplex units.

Renter households headed by immigrants were more likely to live in apartments than non-immigrant households.

Evolution of Immigrant Housing Choices

As noted above, differences in immigrant and non-immigrant housing choices in 1986 were largest for recent immigrants. For example, headship and ownership rates of recent immigrants in 1986 were much lower than the averages for all immigrants. This finding implies that the housing choices of immigrants evolve the longer the time spent in Canada.

In fact, according to 1986 data on period of immigration, the headship rates of immigrants approximate those of non-immigrants after five to ten years in Canada. Immigrant ownership rates apparently take somewhat longer to match non-immigrant ownership rates—10 to 15 years. Among owner households headed by immigrants, the proportion occupying single-detached dwellings was higher the longer the length of residence in Canada (although single-detached occupancy remained below that of non-immigrants for all but those who came to Canada at very early ages). In short, differences between immigrants and non-immigrants appear to diminish as the number of years lived in Canada increases.

Conclusions concerning evolution of immigrant housing choices should be interpreted with caution since they were based on a single year of census data. As such, the analysis could not track the household formation and housing choices of the same group of immigrants over time; rather, the data describe the choices of different immigrant groups in 1986. The behaviour of recent and future immigrants may not evolve exactly as implied by these data.

This research highlight presents some of the findings from "Immigrant Housing Choices, 1986" by Clayton Research Associates for the Research Division of CMHC. For more information, you can obtain a copy of this report by contacting the Canadian Housing Information Centre at (613) 748-2367. All questions about the contents of this highlight may be directed to Roger Lewis, Researcher, Housing Requirements, at (613) 748-2797.

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**The Canadian Housing Information Centre
Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
Building C1-200
700 Montreal Road
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0P7
(613) 748-2367**

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