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Residential Choices of the Newly Arrived Foreign Born: Spatial Patterns and the Implications for Assimilation

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Abstract

The preponderance of work on the assimilation of the foreign born makes only passing reference to their spatial patterns. This study uses data from the 1990 and 2000 PUMS for the Los Angeles metropolitan area, to examine the residential choices of the newly arrived (since 1985 and 1995) foreign born, and to re-examine the evidence for spatial assimilation. While the central city continues to receive lower income immigrants with lower levels of human capital there are also professionals arriving in the central city. Similarly, the suburbs, at least in this case study receive both households with lower levels of human capital and professionals. In part this may be due to the increasingly multi-nodal structure of large metropolitan areas. It appears that the spatial patterns are more complex than in the past and the central city suburban dichotomy while still relevant, may not be the best way to analyze the patterns of the foreign born. Even so it appears that socio-economic status is an important differentiator in the spatial outcomes. Money and professional status matter, as we would expect, in the spatial outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

Research with the 2000 Census has documented the increasing number of foreign born who are resident in the suburbs of the large gateway metropolitan areas. More Hispanics now reside in the suburbs than the central city (Suro, 2002), and other case studies have provided evidence of the growth of large suburban concentrations of Asian groups, immigrants from Russia and the Middle East. While this has been more true in some cities than others it is clear that the patterns of foreign born settlement including very recent arrivals are increasingly diverse. Gone are the times when immigrants mainly arrived in the urban center and only slowly moved to the suburbs.

Most of the work, with a few notable exceptions has examined the foreign born in total without differentiating between newly arrived and long term residents. Given the very large number of arrivals in the 1980s and again in the 1990s, it is worthwhile re-examining the patterns of very recent foreign born arrivals. What do these distributions tell us about the changing structure of American metropolitan areas and about assimilation of these newcomers? In this paper which takes an initial look at Los Angeles we find that the patterns are contested and the messages about assimilation mixed.

We find that immigrants are arriving directly to the inner city communities and to suburban communities, and while there is some indication of a separation by socio-economic status it is not a simple division into more and less advantaged in the locational choices that they make. It is a reasonable hypothesis to argue that the choices reflect the increasing multi nodal structure of large cities like Los Angeles where once suburban cities may now be more like inner cities of old. While some immigrants are by-passing traditional inner city entry ports and moving directly to the suburbs, as Alba, Logan and Leung (1994) found, there is still truth to the notion that more wealthy immigrants with greater human capital follow a path to mixed/white suburbs. And, "if they are poor and recently arrived, they live in neighborhoods that are overwhelmingly minority and mainly black and Hispanic" and in the inner city (Alba et al. 2000: 617). Because the large metropolitan areas in the United States have become increasingly multi-nodal the spatial outcomes are as much an outcome of the structure of the city as of the immigration flows themselves.

The work which is reported in this paper uses both maps and regional analysis to examine the outcomes in the late 1980s and 1990s, periods of intensive foreign born migration into American urban areas and especially to Los Angeles.

PREVIOUS STUDIES AND INTERPRETATIONS

There is a contested debate about what is happening to the new immigrants- whether they are assimilating and how. Alba et al. (1995) concluded that immigrants in greater New York were not forming suburban enclaves but rather moving to mixed areas and forming multi-ethnic neighborhoods. Mere residence in suburban areas results in more exposure to whites than does central city residence, given that 71 percent of all whites live in the suburbs. Additional research suggests that recent immigrants (based on 1990 data) were "more inclined to settle outside of urban enclaves than were immigrants of previous eras" (Alba et al., 2000, 458). Putting aside the point that immigrants from earlier eras could not move to suburbs because the present urban structure did not exist much before the 1960s and 70s, it is still an important observation. In addition, there is also evidence from studies of five major U.S. metro areas in 1990, that residential segregation from native-born whites appears to be more a function of socio-economic and racial/ethnic status than immigrant status (Galster et al., 1999).

Much of this research is an outgrowth or is structured within Massey's (1985) observation that suburban relocation is a distinctive stage associated with improved housing conditions and neighborhood amenities as well as residence in predominantly white areas. From this starting

point, recent studies have tested the relevance of some of the model's basic assumptions including ethnic integration in suburban areas, the desire on the part of immigrants to move to the suburbs as their socioeconomic status improves, and the role of the central city as the first destination for new immigrants. Clark (1998) showed that there is a significant probability of moving to the suburbs with increased income, education, language fluency and citizenship status.

There is a division between those who see suburbanization as an indication of assimilation and those who question whether increased minority presence in the suburbs will lead to assimilation with native-born whites. One view, represented by studies by by Allen and Turner (1997), Alba and Nee (1997) and Clark (1998) tend to argue that overall the tendency to suburbanize is a measure of increased association with the majority culture. Alba and Nee (1997) note that "exposure to non-Hispanic whites through their neighborhoods increases rather predictably with improvements in English language proficiecny, income, education and with the movement to the surburbs".

In contrast Logan et al. (2002b) demonstrated an increasing trend towards more concentrated suburban ethnic enclaves for Hispanic and Asian groups in metro areas already characterized by large numbers of Hispanics and Asians. "Where most minority group members live, and where consequently they are a more substantial share of the suburban population…segregation is higher, more unyielding over time, and minority population growth is more likely to be associated with the creation or intensification of ethnic enclaves" (Logan et al., 2002b).

Some even question whether higher socioeconomic status will necessarily bring immigrants to the suburbs. In a series of studies of the greater New York City region, Rosenbaum and her colleagues (Rosenbaum et al., 1999; Rosenbaum and Friedman, 2001; Rosenbaum and Schill, 1999) found that skin color acted as a barrier to better neighborhoods for foreign-born as well as native-born individuals, regardless of socioeconomic status. Research in Canada also found that while socioeconomic status successfully explained the residential mobility of European immigrants over time, it failed to explain the experience of black and Asian immigrants living in Toronto and Vancouver (Fong and Wilkes, 1999). Still, as the research will show in this paper differentiating between the city and suburb is still an important empirical predictor of higher household income (Alba et al., 2000).

At the same time, living in ethnic neighborhoods, especially in the suburbs, may indicate a preference for living with co-ethnics rather than constraints on residential location (Logan et al. 2002a). Ethnic social networks are not as geographically restricted for new immigrants as they

were in the past, and as we have noted, more recent immigrants enter the country with high human capital, incomes, and even professional jobs. Today, most groups have both the "immigrant enclave" (driven by constraint) and the "ethnic community" (driven by preference) options (Logan et al., 2002a: 315). It is possible that we are witnessing multiple paths to incorporation and to focus on a city suburban dichotomy may well be misleading.

This review raises questions which are at the heart of understanding the process of assimilation and spatial change in the urban mosaic. To provide some substantive analysis of this question we examine both 1990 and 2000 data on the recent foreign born to ask whether the geographic patterns we see are signs of "incipient spatial assimilation" (Alba and Nee, 1997).

DATA AND QUESTIONS

To pursue these questions it is possible to use the Public Use Micro data Samples (PUMS) initially for 1990 and now for 2000. The PUMS data are a 5 percent sub sample of the long form of the Census and contain socio-economic data on households and individuals in the households. The data includes place of residence (abroad or within the PUMA structure of metropolitan areas. PUMAs are geographic units of 100,000 persons or more and there are approximately 90 of them in the five county Los Angeles metropolitan region – the case study for this initial analysis of spatial patterns. Because the PUMA's vary geographically we calculate weighted rates of residential choice per 100,000 weighted populations per PUMA.

To examine the question of incipient spatial assimilation of the recent foreign born we employ a three pronged approach. We use (a) maps of the relative strength of the recently arrived foreign born population and of the distributions by professional occupations and income, (b) of the changing distributions over time, and (c) a discriminant analysis of the spatial choices of the recent foreign born.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

(a) Geographic patterns

The following analyses are placed in the context of the Los Angles metropolitan area which is subdivided and categorized into three areas: inner core, communities and cities within Los Angeles County, and the suburban counties (Figure 7).

There is no question that in total the recent foreign born have much higher rates of settlement in the more central residential neighborhoods. Rates of more than 10,000 are scored for the most central areas – rates which reflect very large numbers of new residents (Figure 1a). However, it is also clear that not all the arrivals are centrally focused and indeed many concentrations are outside the City of Los Angeles. Concentrations in the San Fernando Valley[1] in Orange County and in many locations in suburban cities are notable. Perhaps the greatest concentration is in the City of Glendale – a formerly suburban city within the metropolitan structure.

The patterns derived from the 2000 data are similar (Figure 1b) although there is a notable decline in the intensity of central locations. Overall, the number of recent foreign born arrivals declined by about 200,000 (see Table 1) but even so the decline in intensity of locations per 100,000 persons is striking. There are fewer high intensity PUMAs but at the same time no great increase in the PUMA intensities across the five county region. Overall, continuing central choices but at a lower intensity. Table 1 illustrates the decline in the inner core concentration and an increase in the county suburbs. As a result there is a wider dispersion of the newly arrived.

This is further supported by the ethnic origin analysis. The analysis by ethnic origin shows the expected Mexican origin concentrations to the east of the central city and Central American and Koreans with concentrated locations in the central city (Figures 2a and b). Even at this elementary level we can see that the patterns are more contested than a simply city suburban dichotomy.[2] That immigrants are both arriving centrally and at distributed locations is consistent with the Alba et al (1994) "by-passing" hypothesis but also consistent with historical observations of initial arrivals in central city locations. The question which emerges naturally is what are the patterns by language, education, income and occupation? To keep the presentation manageable we report the locational patterns by income and professional occupations.

The distribution of professional occupations is the clearest evidence of a bifurcation of the recent arrivals with human capital and those without previous education and skills. As others have observed, those with higher levels of human capital are likely to seek out suburban locations and this is clear for recently-arrived professional foreign-born immigrants (Figure 3a and 3b). The evidence of successful upward mobility, whether or not it involved assimilation, is further emphasized by

[1] The San Fernando Valley is actually formally part of the City of Los Angeles but is suburban in character.

[2] The argument that Los Angeles is unusual is no longer a counter to these patterns – Washington DC and many other large metropolitan areas are increasingly exhibiting multi-nodal forms.

the patterns of the wealthiest newcomers who settle in suburban and wealthy communities. The evidence from the 2000 data on the top income earners is a striking representation of how the most recent foreign born are transforming communities, central and suburban alike (Figures 4a and 4b). The patterns for education and language (not shown here) are more complex and confused and reflect the way in which the immigrant process is played out for those who, while educated, may not be able to translate those skills to higher income and better suburban residential locations.

To extend the analysis of patterns we examine the distribution of recently arrived Mexican professional immigrants (Figures 5a and 5b). To a very notable extent both groups occupy residential locations outside of the most inner city locations – clear evidence of the ability of new arrivals to translate greater human capital into suburban locations and away from the most densely settled housing of the inner city. At the same time it is important to note that the concentration in suburban Orange county is both suburban and reflects a former urban node within the urban structure.

The maps provide a pictorial representation of the patterns of recent arrivals and reiterate the finding that multiple processes are at work in creating patterns of residential settlement for the foreign born. While the maps tell part of the story, a simple table of the changes of the numbers of foreign born over time adds to our interpretation of the patterns of the foreign born and whether there is evidence of assimilation.

A simple division of the five county region into an urban core, a surrounding suburban/city ring and a low density suburban county ring provides a structure to analyze changes over time (Figure 7). In the late 1980s about a third of all new immigrants arrived and settled in the most central core PUMAs. A decade later only a quarter of all new immigrants entered the central core (Table 1). The outer region got a quarter of new immigrants in the five year interval, 1985-1990, but a decade later, 34 percent of new immigrants went directly to the most outer urban ring. Evidence of assimilation, perhaps or perhaps not , but it is clear that the old paradigm of only central city initial locations is not even close to reality. It is as true for Mexican new immigrants as for immigrants as for immigrants as a whole, a confirmation that both higher income households and lower income households are making diverse choices across the residential fabric.

What of the patterns of the new immigrants? Are they living alone or together with other groups? What are the inter-relationships with different ethnic groups – are they living together or concentrated?

(b) Changing distributions

Again the evidence is conflicted – there is evidence of both concentration and dispersal. While some groups are clearly heavily concentrated, others are dispersed and overall the patterns favor inter-mixing rather than separation – an outcome in favor of insipient assimilation.

Some PUMA's have high levels of concentration – these are often the enclaves that are so frequently cited in studies of "ethno-burbs" but what of the overall distribution. By plotting the full distribution it is possible to sketch out a fuller understanding of the patterns of concentration and deconcentration over the PUMAs. For nine ethnic groups in Figure 6 there are in essence two structures. While recent immigrants from Mexico, Central America, Korea, Europe and the Philipines show a tendency to spread across the residential fabric, others exhibit strong reverse J shaped curves with very large numbers of PUMS with few foreign born arrivals in the interval 1985-1990. For Iran (including arrivals from Armenia), China, Japan and Vietnam, many PUMAs have none of these ethnic residents in this first period of arrival. A decade later there are far fewer PUMAs with no foreign born residents. While a large proportion of PUMAs still have small numbers of new foreign born arrivals, many PUMAs have at least some new foreign born residents.

At the same time, an inter-correlation table demonstrates a tendency to own ethnic concentration (Table 2). China/ Taiwan and Vietnam show very high levels of cross PUMA association. But apart from this ethnic concentration many groups have only modest levels of association across the PUMAs. Koreans and Central Americans have one of the higher associations as do Philipines and Central Americans. Clearly, there is increasing inter ethnic residential associations, at least at the PUMA level and some of these groups are coming into contact with one another.

(c) Differentiating the choices of the recently arrived foreign born

What is the geographic pattern of the newly arrived foreign born? To what extent can we explain and relate the distribution of the newly arrived foreign born based on human capital (education, occupation and income) to geographic location. Does the data support our hypothesis of increasingly complex patterns of newly arrived settlement?

A discriminant function of the approximately 9000 households in our data set provides some preliminary evidence on settlement patterns

and the question about residential choices. Income is a continuous variable and college level education, professional occupation and speak English well, are binary measures. We examine the choice of three regions, inner core, communities and cities within Los Angeles County, and the suburban counties (Figure 7). The question which underlies the analysis is whether we can use a combination of income, occupation and education to discriminate the recently arrived foreign born households across these geographic regions. Following the hypothesis of increasing suburbanization with increased human capital we would expect that the most suburban locations would be receiving those new immigrants with most human capital.

The linear discriminant functions provide a useful context for understanding the choice patterns (Table 3). Overall, the model accounts for a little more than 60 percent of the cases, that is, we are able to correctly allocate a little less than two thirds of the cases based on income, education, occupation and language. In this sense, though the results are still modest, it is clear that human capital indeed matters in the choices that the newly arrived foreign born make. The choices are consistent with other research which has emphasized the "by-passing" of the central city. At the same time, that 40 percent of the cases are not correctly assigned stresses the mixed nature of the findings in this initial analysis.

The coefficients show that indeed lower incomes (the lower value on income can be interpreted as a measure of its power in the discriminant function) are associated with inner core households. The coefficients for income increase for each of the geographic setting suggesting it matters more for the outer suburbs. However, although the coefficient is negative for professionals in the inner core it is strongest in the county cities and suburbs. Similarly English has a larger coefficient in the county communities. These findings in fact emphasize that the newly arrived foreign born are accessing locations outside of the inner core but are not moving to what we think of as the ex-urban distributed communities in the suburban counties.

Space and location clearly matter and this study provides some greater specificity on the nature of suburban choices. They are clearly a part of the choice set of the newly arrived foreign born who have the human capital and income to enable these choices. While it is too soon to abandon a central city/ suburban dichotomy it is clear that the patterns are becoming more fragmented. The residential patterns are clearly in flux and the data here suggests that the even notions of ethnic concentrations in particular suburbs may give way to much more dispersed patterns of residential choice.

OBSERVATIONS

As immigrants continue to arrive in large numbers they will transform the suburbs just as they have already transformed the inner city areas of many of the large immigrant cities. The old notion of a gradation from poor inner city to wealthy suburbs will need to be re-evaluated especially for the newly arrived foreign born. From the analysis discussed in this paper, it is clear that the residential choices of the newly arrived foreign born has changed from 1985-90 to 1995-2000. Their concentration in the inner core has decreased resulting in a wider dispersion of the newly arrived foreign born. This is further made evident by a decrease in the inner core concentration by origin of the newly arrived foreign born. In addition, we also see professional immigrants continuing to settle away from the inner core but across an increasingly wider region of the suburban area. At the same time as we see these increasingly diverse patterns departing from traditional assimilation processes, socio-economic status and the presence of certain ethnic group concentration continue to play a role.

The newly arrived foreign born residential selections are less "classic" than arrivals in the 1960s and 1970s into North American cities when arrival was much more likely to be in central city locations. Even though there is still a tendency for new arrivals to be separated by human capital it is tendency rather than a strongly supported finding.

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TABLE 1: Residential choices of the foreign born, 1990 and 2000

(a) aggregate choices

	1990		2000	
	Total	Mexican	Total	Mexican
Inner Core	367,043	149,974	228,539	118,699
Suburbs	486,419	194,158	388,685	167,594
County Suburbs	312,053	173,667	317,688	189,907
Total	1,165,515	517,799	934,688	476,200

(b) Proportional distributions

	Total	Mexican	Total	Mexican
Inner Core	31.5	29.0	24.4	24.9
Suburbs	41.7	37.5	41.6	35.2
County Suburbs	26.8	33.5	34.0	39.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE 2: Ethnic Inter-correlation across PUMAs in the Los Angeles Metropolitan Region

	Iran	Cent. Am.	Mexico	China	Taiwan	Japan	Korea	Phil.	Vietnam
Europe	0.48	0.19	-0.25	-0.08	-0.1	0.19	0.22	0.29	0.1
Iran		0.02	-0.15	-0.08	-0.08	0.05	0.24	0.28	-0.05
Cent. Am.			0.45	0.07	-0.14	-0.1	0.48	0.43	-0.02
Mexico				0.07	-0.16	-0.21	-0.04	-0.01	0.06
China					0.78	0.23	0.04	0.14	0.64
Taiwan						0.35	0	0.07	0.5
Japan							0.13	0	0.09
Korea								0.48	0.11
Phil.									0.04

TABLE 3: Discriminant Model and Classification

Linear Discriminant Functions by Geography

Variable	Inner Core	Suburbs	County Suburbs
Constant	-.62	-1.04	-.97
Income	-7.71	11.60	12.50
Professional	-.33	.19	.08
College	1.09	.76	.76
English	1.51	2.06	1.92

Percent of cases correctly predicted = 60.4

Figure 1a. Recent Foreign-born Residential Choices, 1985-1990

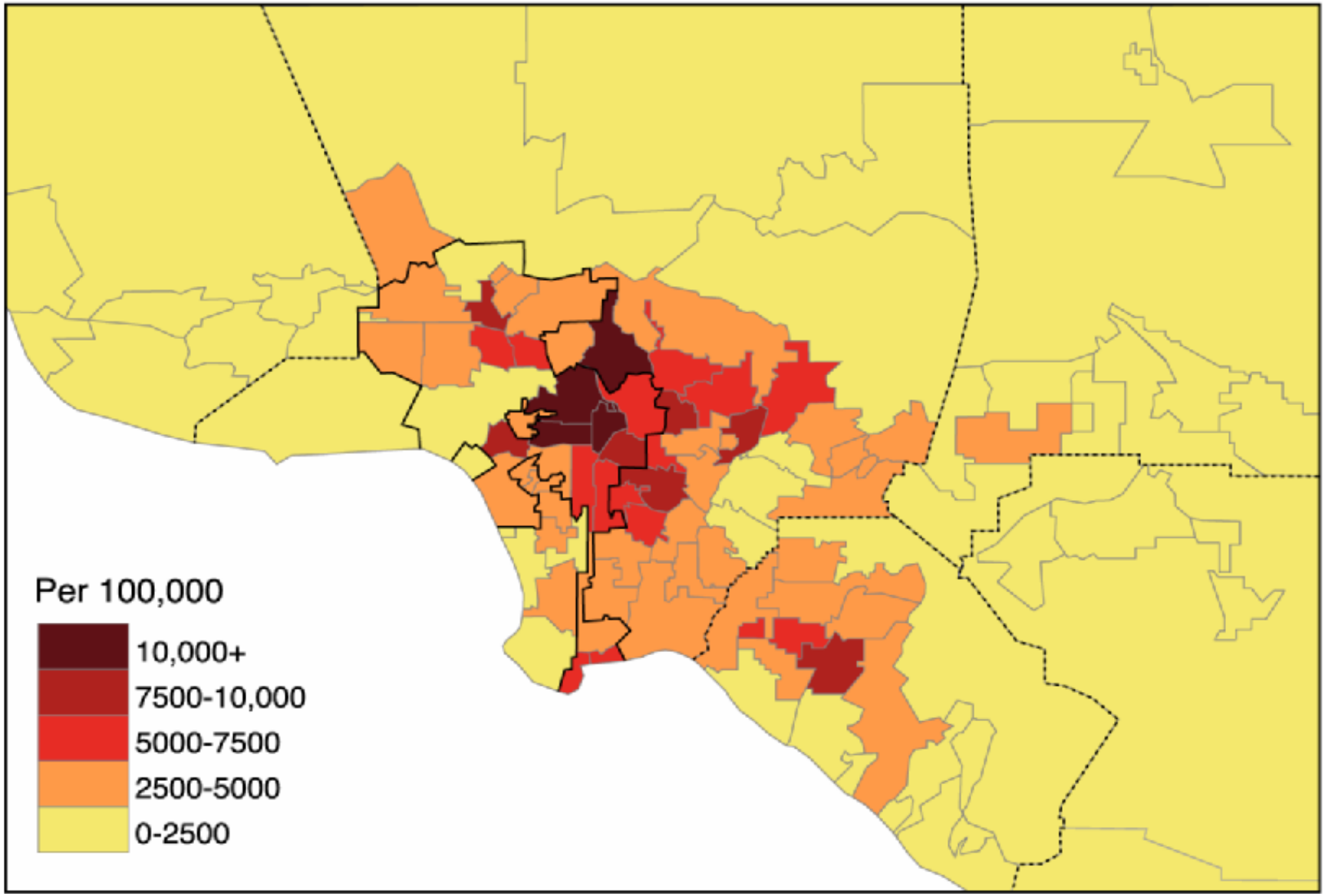

Figure 1b. Recent Foreign-born Residential Choices, 1995-2000

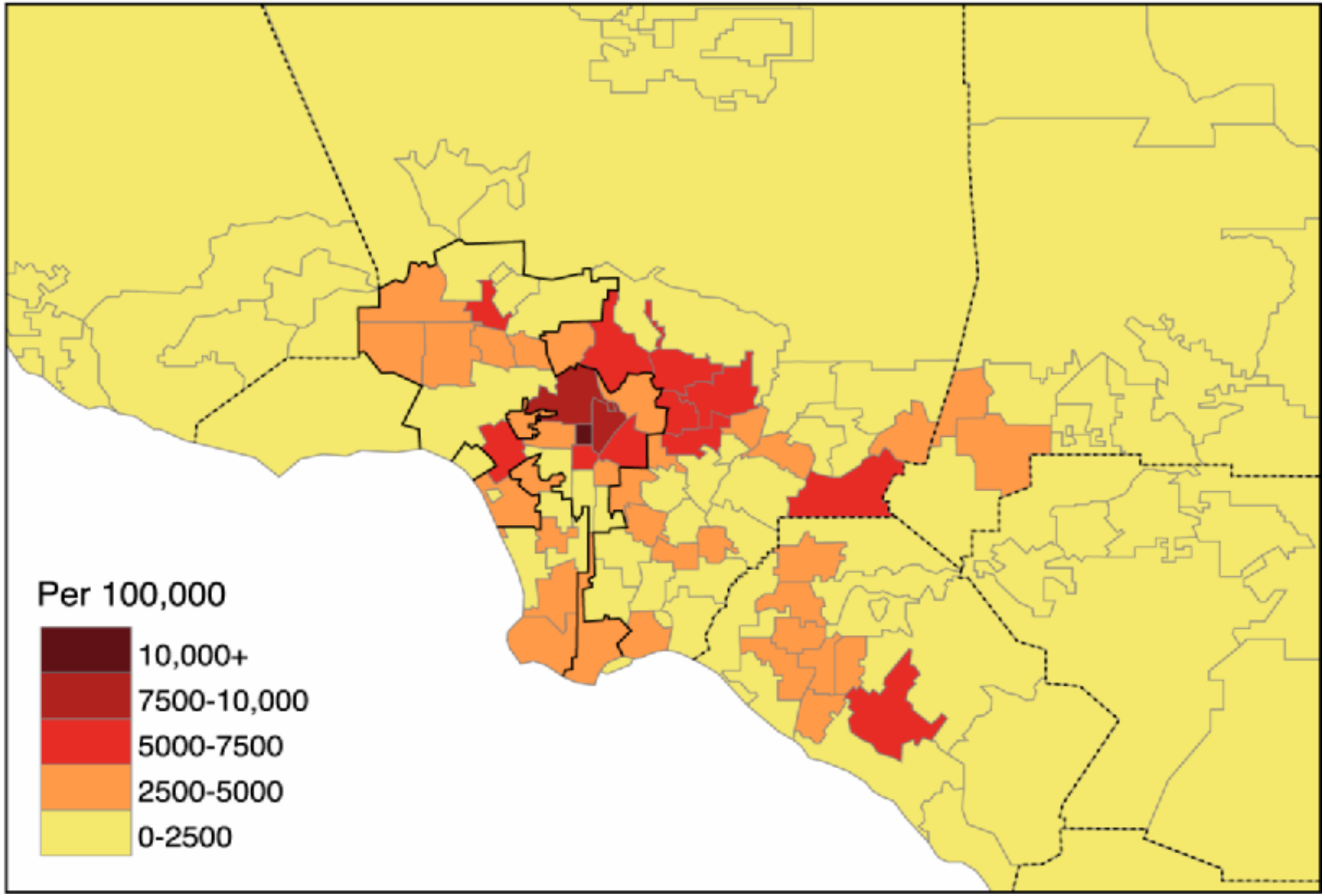

Figure 2a. Recent Foreign-born Residential Choices by Origin, 1985-1990

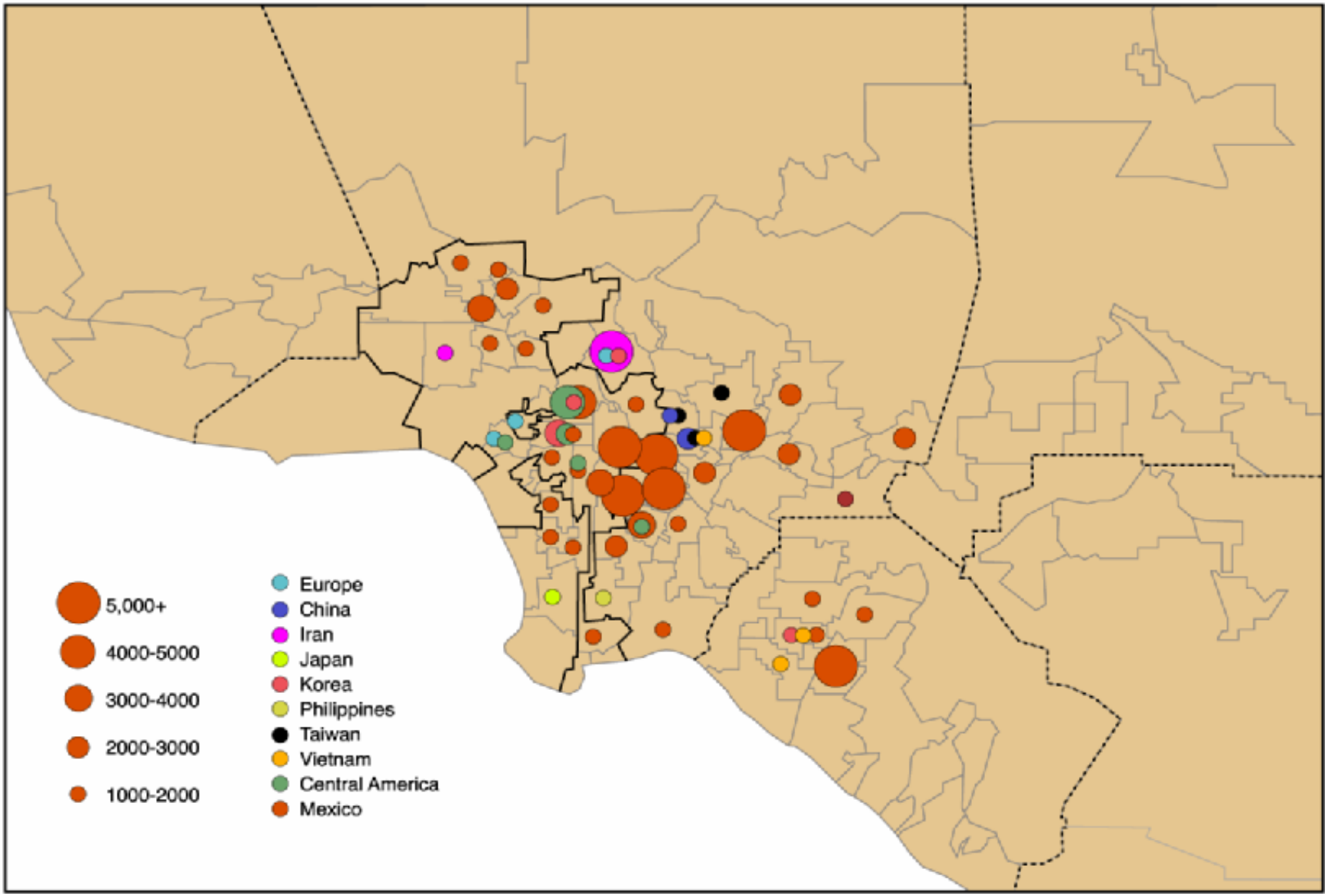

Figure 2b. Recent Foreign-born Residential Choices by Origin, 1995-2000

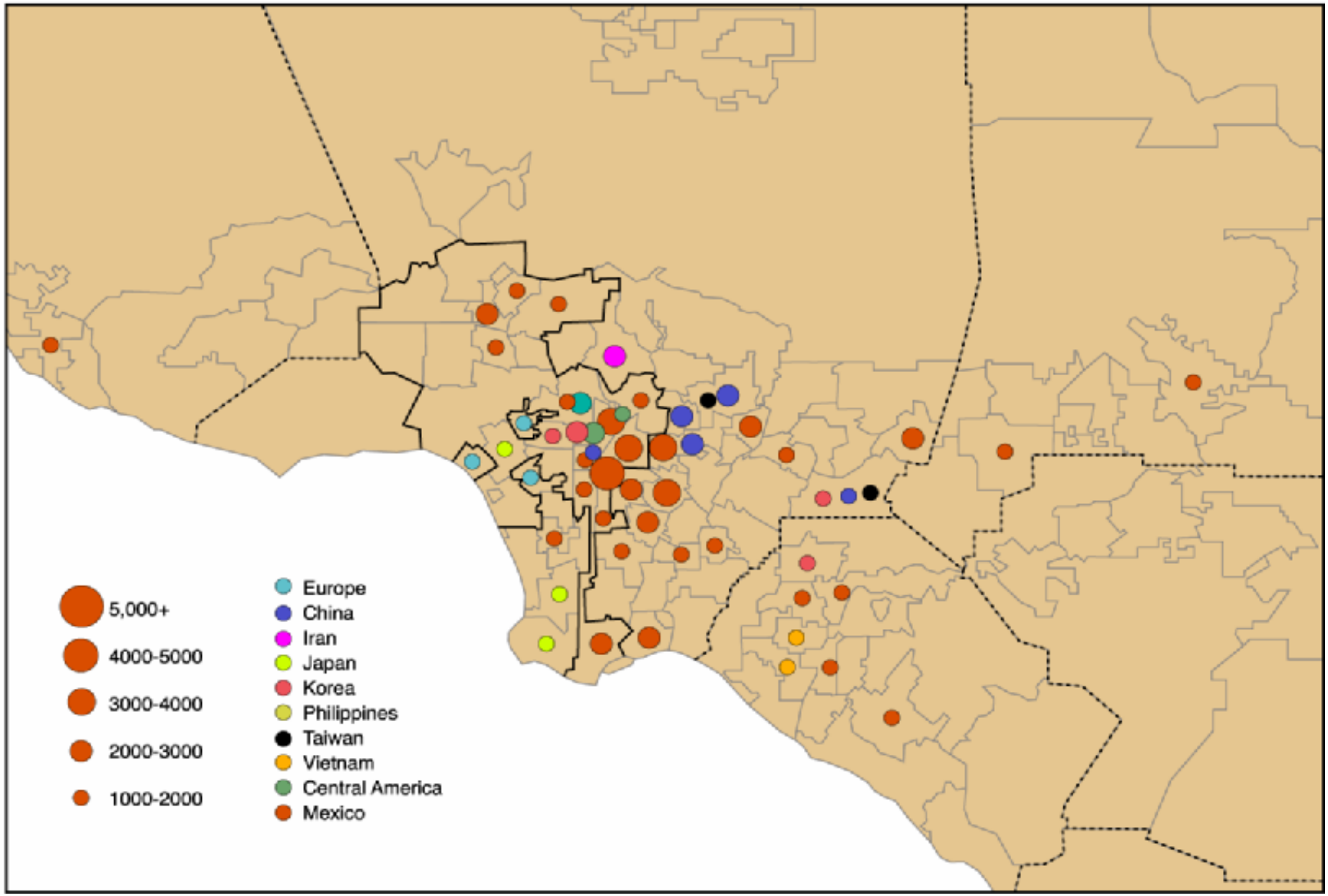

Figure 3a. Residential Choices of Recent Foreign-born Professionals, 1985-1990

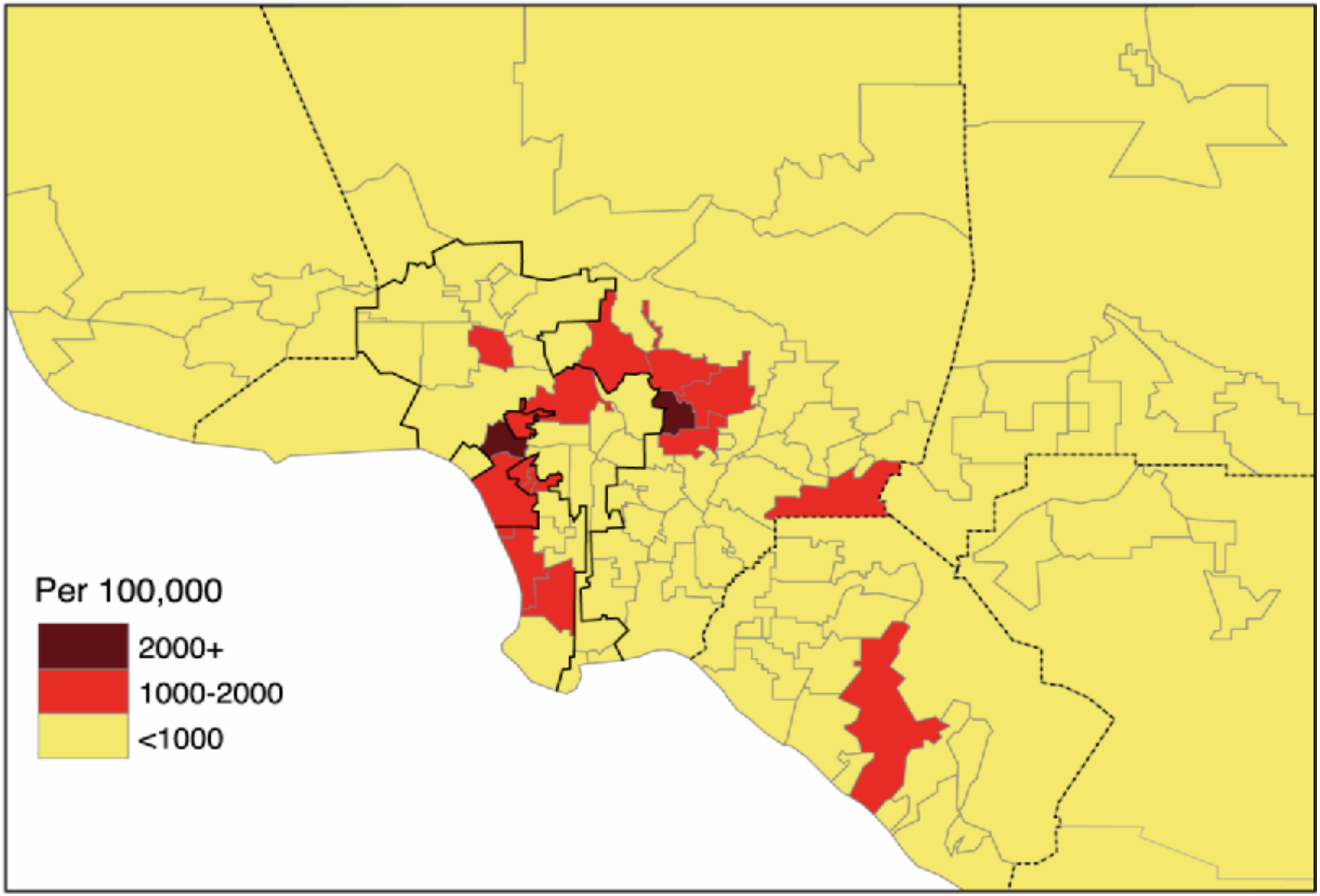

Figure 3b. Residential Choices of Recent Foreign-born Professionals, 1995-2000

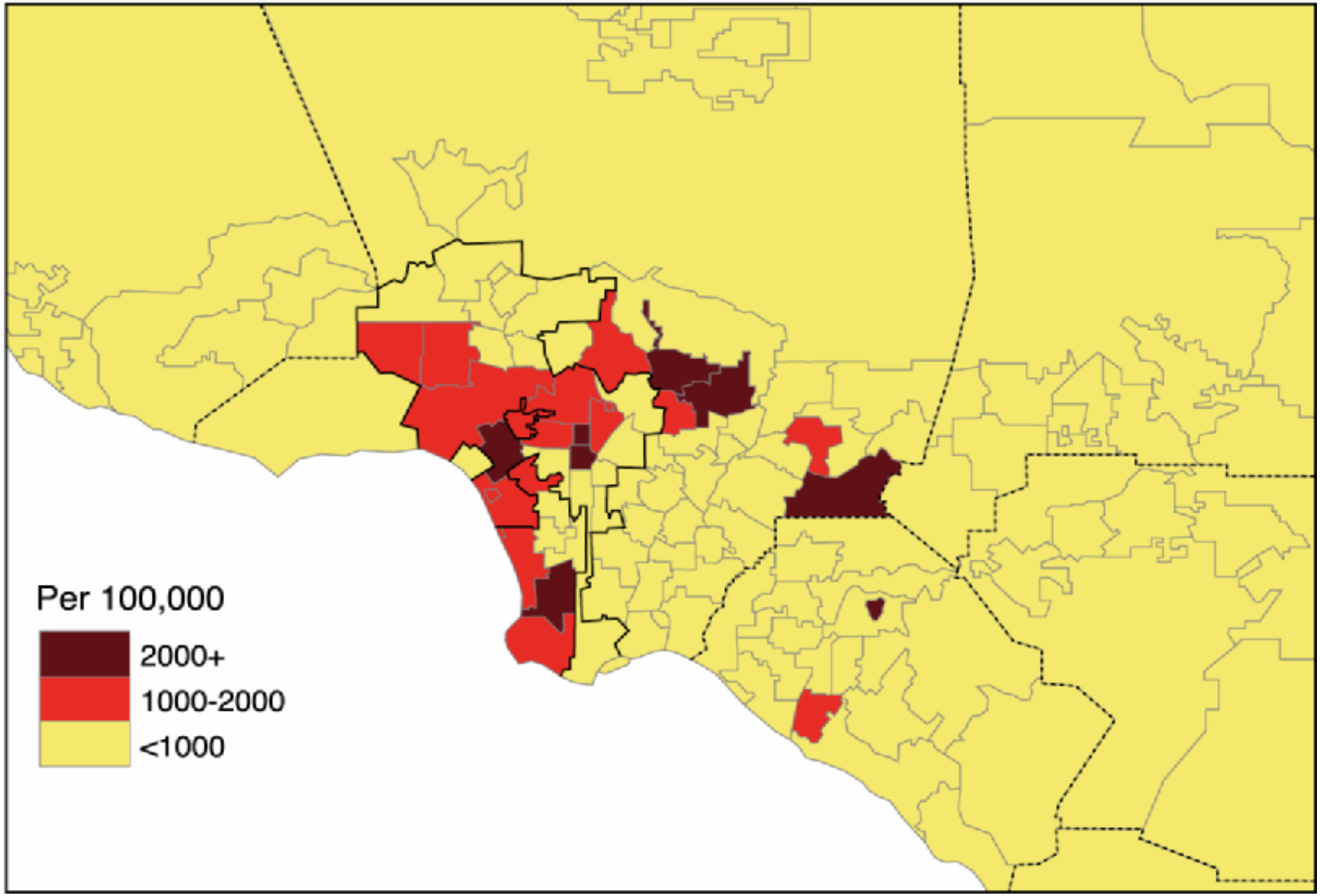

Figure 4a. Residential Choices of the Recent Foreign-born by Proportion in the Top Income Quartile, 1985-1990

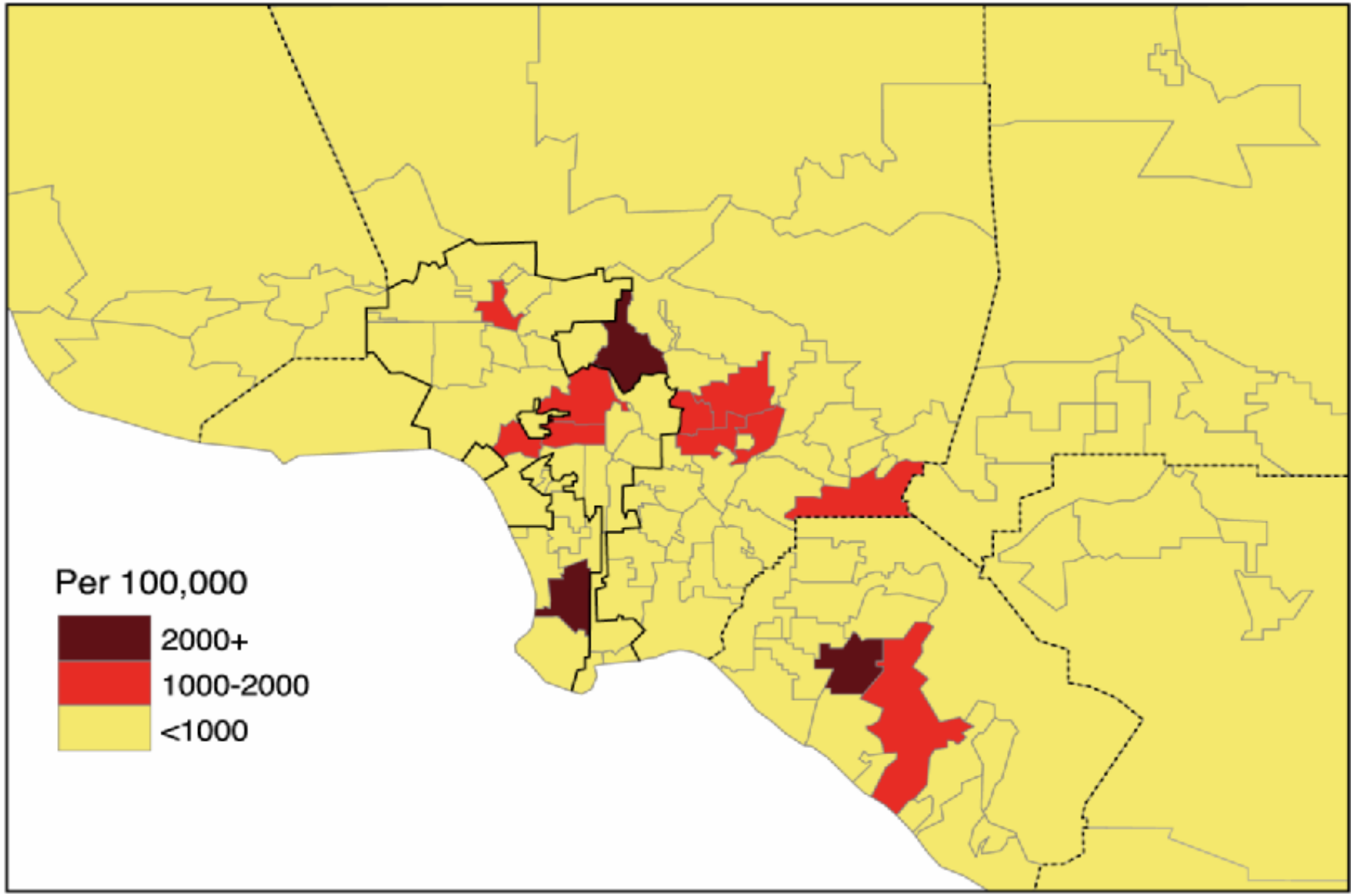

Figure 4b. Residential Choices of the Recent Foreign-born by Proportion in the Top Income Quartile, 1985-1990

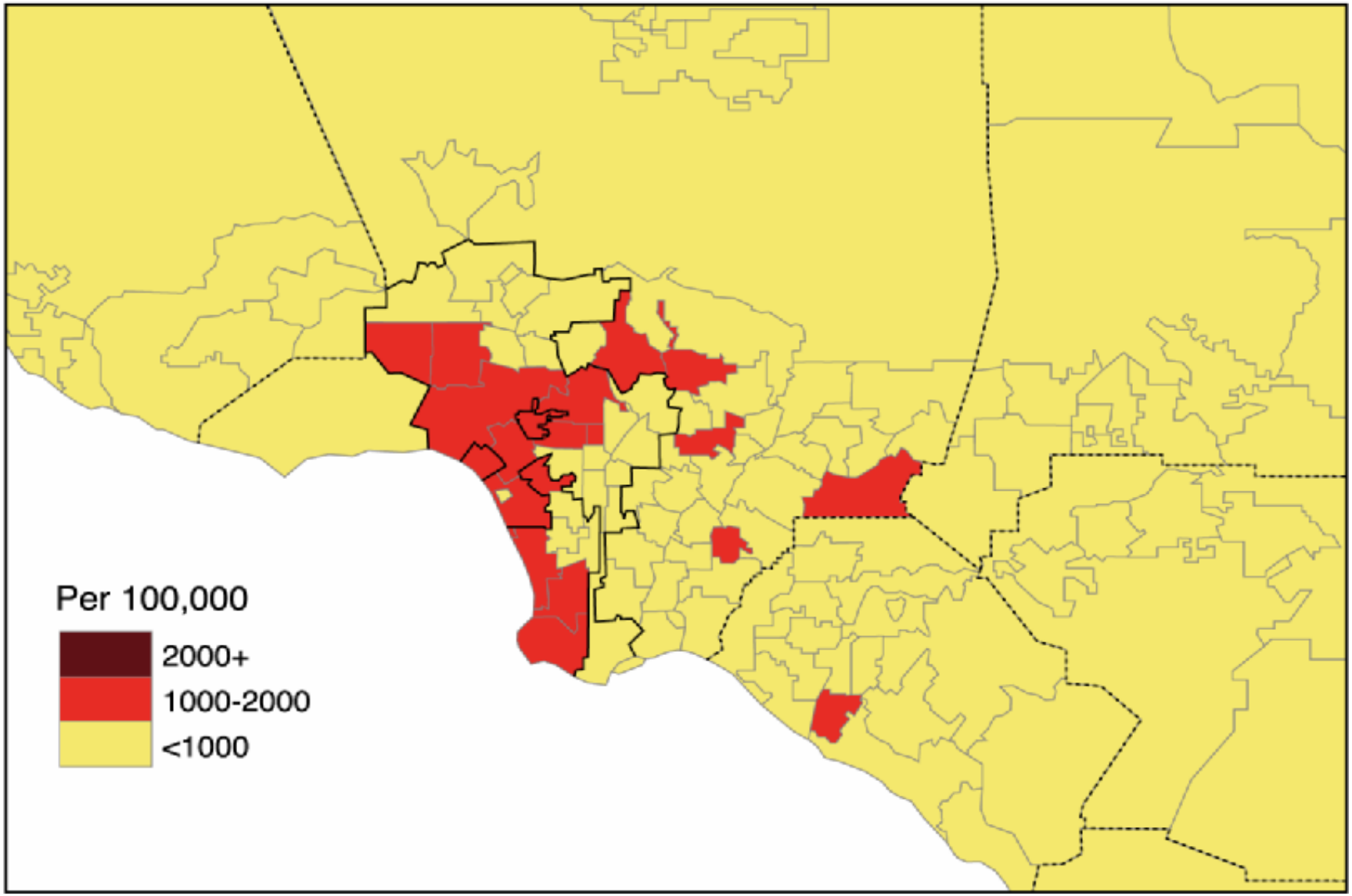

Figure 5a. Mexican-born Professionals Arrived, 1985-1990

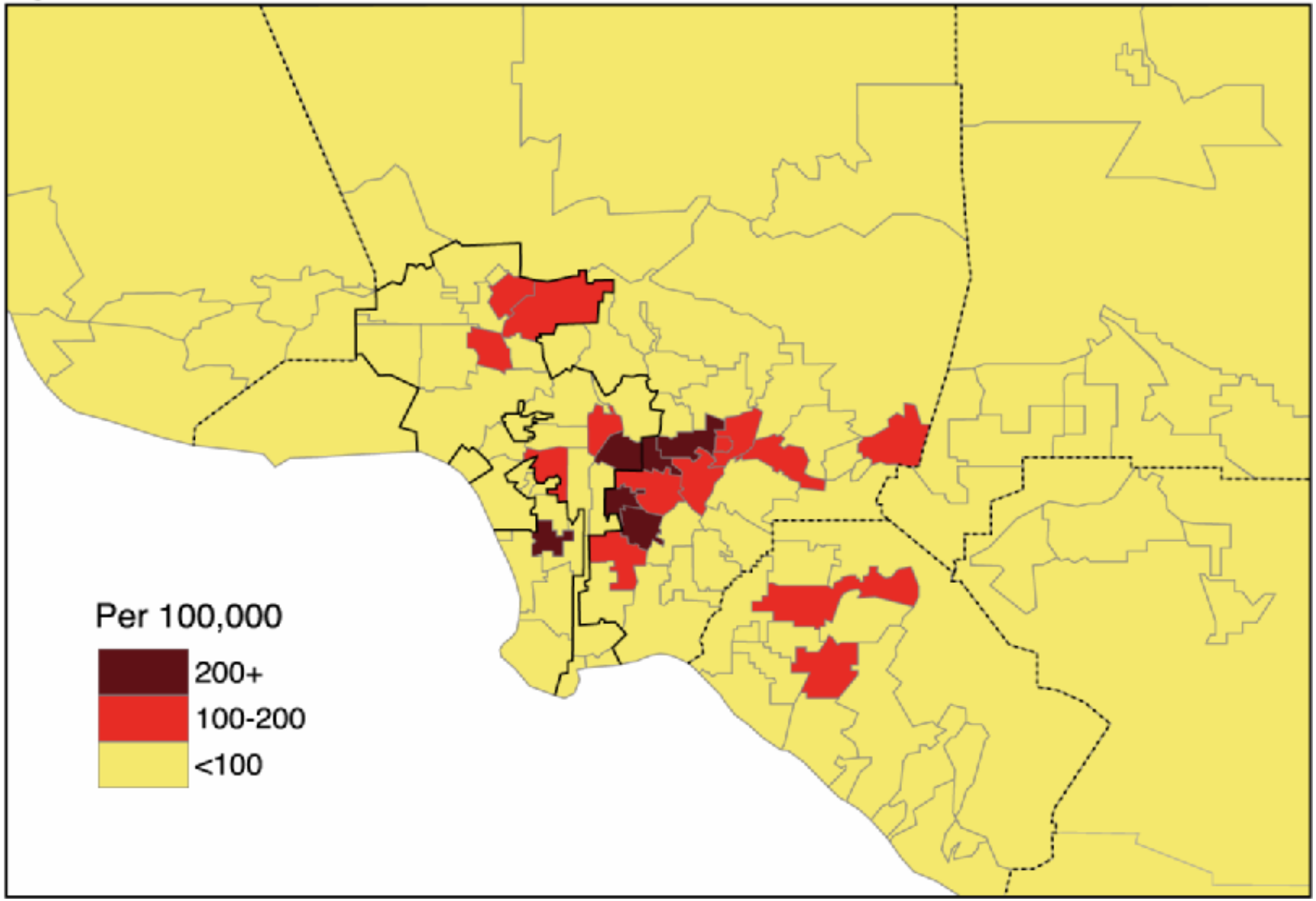

Figure 5b. Mexican-born Professionals Arrived, 1995-2000

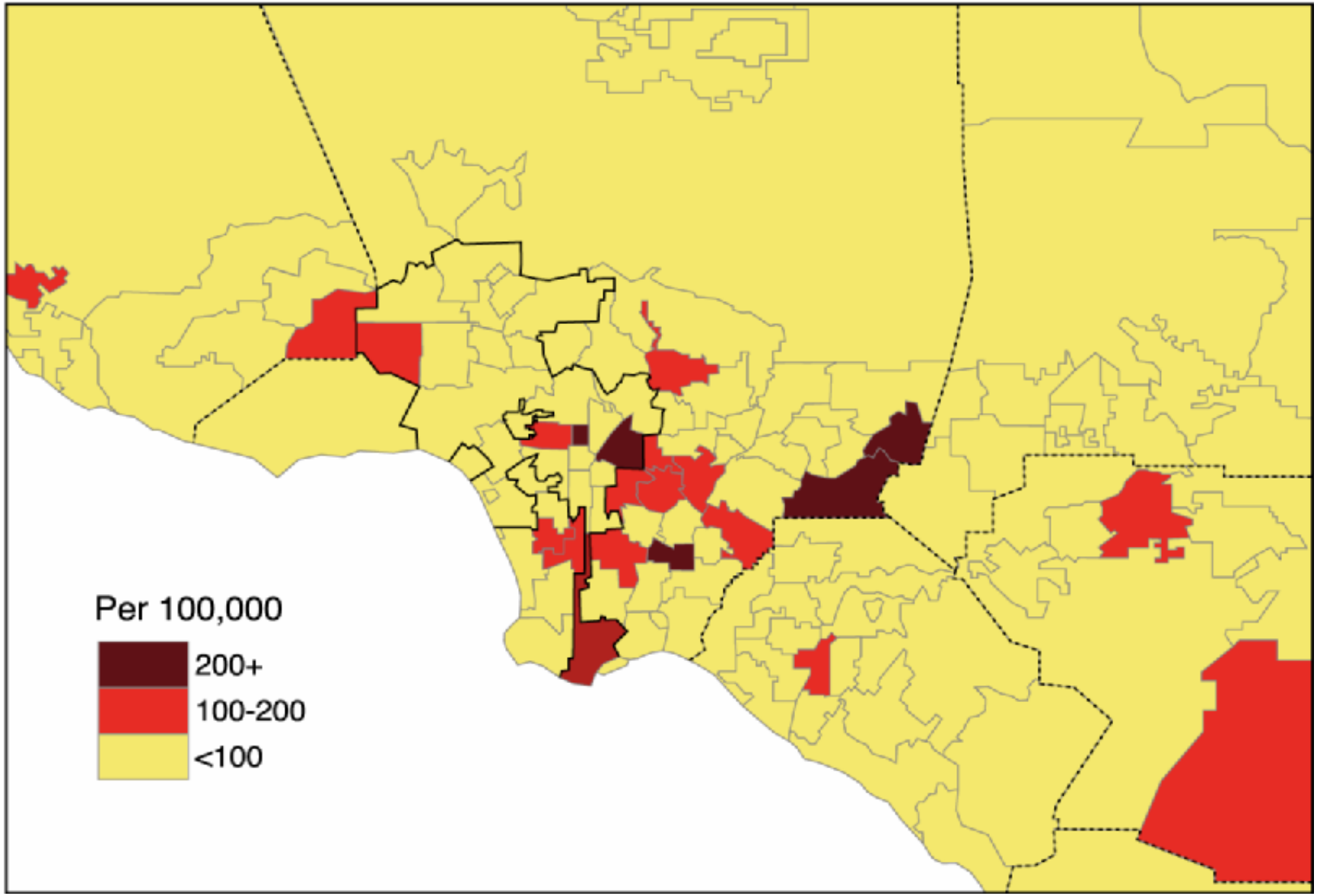

Figure 6. Distribution of Households by Ethnicity per 100,000.

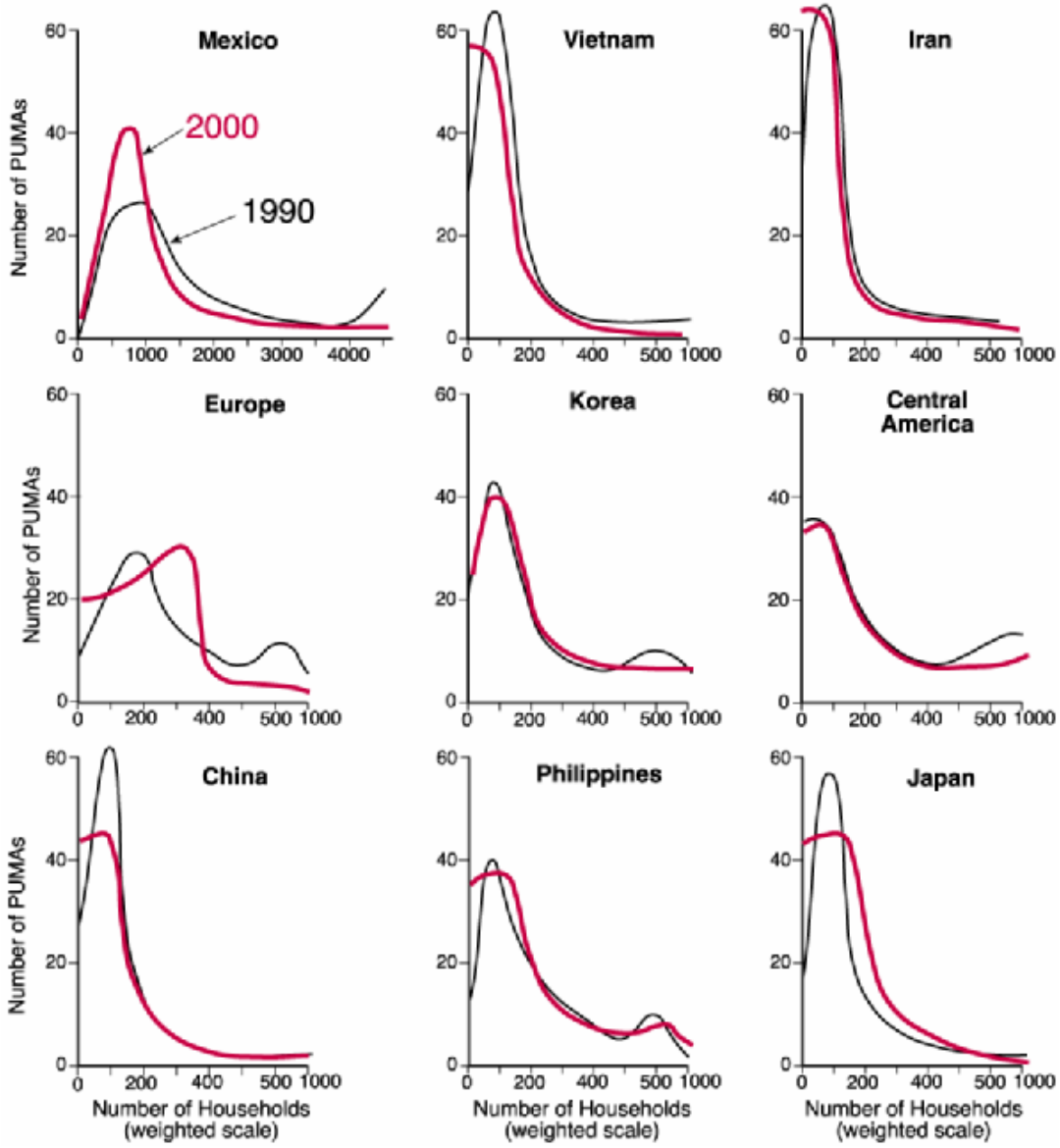

Figure 7. Geographic Structure of the Los Angeles Metropolitan Region