Residential Segregation among Nicaraguan Immigrants in Costa Rica in 2000

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The article analyzes residential segregation among Nicaraguan immigrants to Costa Rica, in three of its dimensions: non-uniformity, isolation, and agglomeration. The source of the data is Costa Rica's 2000 Population Census; hence, the study has the limitation of referring only to Nicaraguans that declared themselves as habitual residents of Costa Rica and, therefore, were part of the interviewed population.

The dissimilarity, exposure (or isolation), and spatial proximity indices were computed for the whole country (0.381, 0.134, 0.190, respectively), for the Central Region (0.473, 0.170, 0.173, respectively), for the Metropolitan Area (0.430, 0.199, 0.206, respectively), and for each "canton" (administrative unit equivalent to a municipality) in 2000. The values obtained for the set of indices were used as dependent variables for OLS models (corrected for spatial autocorrelation), in order to determine factors associated to residential segregation.

According to the values of the indices, the paper finds that residential segregation of Nicaraguans in Costa Rica is relatively moderate, very similar to that experienced by urban residents of Hispanic origin in the United States of America (US), but considerably lower than levels of segregation of African Americans compared to the white population in the big cities of the US. Additionally, there are two variables consistently correlated to the three different levels of segregation: the proportion of Nicaraguans living as squatters in the "canton" and to live in the Central Region. The study also finds that in the municipalities with the highest indices, the proportion of Nicaraguans with High School education or more, the proportion of Nicaraguans naturalized as Costa Rican citizens, and the proportion of these immigrants that live in extended households, are all lower.

The values of the isolation and spatial proximity indices suggest that there is relatively high segregation in the regions with high number of immigrants. On the other hand, the variation of the dissimilarity index - the most traditional index in this kind of research- across "cantones" implies that a certain proportion of Nicaraguans are residentially segregated in rural areas; although the numbers of immigrant population in these places are low, their characteristics agree with those of "mobile" migrants (agricultural laborers that work in seasonal crops and that live in lent dwellings), and this fact might be showing the difficult conditions of the places where seasonal migrant workers live. In this sense, this paper points out the possibility of measuring spatial segregation in rural areas, and not only in urban metropolises, using the traditional indices of this kind of analysis.