

Enclaves and Assimilation in the Age of Mass Migration: Evidence from Ethnic Catholic Churches

Abstract:

Many immigrants to the United States in the early twentieth century lived in ethnic enclaves. We study the economic and cultural effects of living in an enclave by comparing neighborhoods designated to receive an ethnic Catholic church with similar other neighborhoods matched on baseline characteristics. We focus on Polish Catholic immigrants, who organized communal life around the church. For this group, a new church opening increased enclave size. After a church opening, existing Polish Catholic residents experienced falling income scores and rising concentration in manual occupations. Communal ties strengthened with residents more likely to marry other Polish Catholics and give Polish names to their children. Many of these effects persisted to the second generation and are not observed for Polish Jews or non-Polish Catholics. In contrast, Italian Americans were less focused on the church, and we do not find effects of new Italian Catholic churches on the growth of Italian enclaves or on the pace of Italian assimilation.

This job is joint work with Ran Abramitzky and Leah Boustan.

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