

Immigrant Incorporation in New Destinations

Every year, thousands of people enter the United States as legal immigrants. They arrive seeking jobs, family, democracy, safety, asylum, or one of the innumerable other desires that push and pull people across the globe. But although it is challenging, successfully migrating to the United States is only the first step in a long path to fulfilling the American dream. To continue their progress—and turn their new land into their new home—immigrants must be incorporated into the society they have entered. Although incorporation exists across many domains, three of the most important are political, economic, and social. Together, these metrics serve as a fairly comprehensive measure of how well immigrants assimilate into the country as a whole. By examining these three metrics, we can better understand how different communities adapt to life in the United States, identify which communities are most vulnerable, and attempt to see why they are vulnerable in an effort to facilitate a smoother transition into American society.

Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota (the Twin Cities), and Columbus, Ohio, are home to the largest Somali communities in the United States. The political, economic, and social positions of Somalis in the

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Twin Cities are more promising than those of Somalis in Columbus, Ohio. Several Somali Americans in Minneapolis serve in local elected office, and the Twin Cities boast an impressive group of Somali American economic and intellectual leaders. There are also noteworthy examples of social inclusion and cohesive relationships between Somali and Anglo Minnesotans. In Columbus, Somali incorporation in these realms is less vibrant, and the position of Somali immigrants more stark. No Somali official has been elected at the city or state level, and the community is relatively isolated in terms of economic and social incorporation.

This book examines the question of how two midwestern urban areas with roughly similar Somali refugee populations could end up with quite different levels of Somali incorporation. Understanding the different integration outcomes in areas like Columbus and the Twin Cities is important for policy makers, scholars of immigrant incorporation, Somalis who establish roots in these areas, and residents at large. Recent attention to a few Somali links to terrorist organizations has increased the relevance of this book because of the special challenges of immigrant incorporation during times of security crisis or threat.

Case Selection and Generalizability

The two communities discussed in this book differ in their levels of Somali political, economic, and social incorporation. Somalis arrived slightly earlier in the Twin Cities area (in the early 1990s), and their population increased at a more rapid pace than in Columbus. Today, the area boasts the largest Somali community in the United States. In this book, the term “Twin Cities” is used because of the proximity of the two cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Although the majority of Somali organizations and activities occur in Minneapolis, it would be misguided to overlook the role of St. Paul, the state capital, in this portrait. The Twin Cities area has also welcomed other refugee communities, including the Hmong, since the 1970s. Although Minnesota has had some anti-immigrant and conservative politicians, the state is generally known for its progressive political traditions. At the local level, a number of very supportive elected officials in

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Minneapolis are members of the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party. Even some Republican candidates have made direct appeals for the Somali vote. Moreover, the ward-based electoral system has opened doors for Somali elected officials. Under the ward system, candidates who receive the plurality of votes in an individual ward win a seat on an elective body. Minneapolis and St. Paul also use the single-transferable vote system, allowing voters to rank their candidate choices, something civil rights theorist Lani Guinier advocates as a method for giving underrepresented groups a better chance of winning elections (McClain and Stewart 2010, 62). The regional reputation of “Minnesota Nice” has also created a welcoming environment for new citizens, at least on the surface. Although benefits for Somali immigrants have shrunk significantly since 2000, the state has a reputation for generous social service assistance (Ali 2011; Fennelly 2006b). The Twin Cities also boast a number of Somali and East African community organizations interested in advancing Somali interests or supporting the community. Finally, the union-friendly environment of the area has opened doors for the political mobilization of Somalis through labor organization and apprenticeship programs.

In contrast to the Twin Cities, the Somali refugee population began arriving in Columbus slightly later (in the early to mid-1990s), with the pace of arrival increasing toward the end of this period, especially as Somalis moved from Minneapolis or other cities to Columbus as a secondary destination. Ohio is a more politically conservative state, and the political, economic, and social opportunities available to immigrant groups are somewhat limited when compared to Minneapolis. One demonstration of this can be seen in Ohio’s social service benefits, which have traditionally been less substantial than those offered by Minnesota (although, as mentioned above, benefits in Minnesota have been scaled back to levels closer to those in Ohio). Nevertheless, other structural differences in Columbus result in different—and generally poorer—outcomes for Somalis. For example, Columbus has an at-large electoral structure for the city council, making it difficult for minority communities to achieve descriptive representation. Economic organizations that encourage Somali businesses by arranging financial workshops and by making available loans that comply with Islamic law are absent in Columbus,

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although they play an important role in the Twin Cities. Columbus has its own Somali community organizations, but only a few have succeeded in achieving a stable level of organizational capacity. Along the same lines, very few community organizations without a direct connection to Somalis have any Somali members. Finally, unionization of Somalis in Columbus is low, further limiting the ability of that population to gain experience in political mobilization. In other words, the Somali Columbus community is relatively insulated and faces obstacles to political, economic, and social progress that eclipse those seen in the Twin Cities.

The cities under investigation are similar with respect to the general economic situation of Somalis. Both cities have a modest Somali middle class and a large community subsisting on the margins. Whereas both cities were initially appealing locations for Somali refugees because of low-skill job opportunities in warehouses (Columbus) and in food-processing plants (Twin Cities), chances for upward mobility are limited (Golden, Garad, and Boyle 2011; Horst 2006; H. Samatar 2005; A. Waters 2012). Somali homeownership rates are extremely low in both cities, primarily because of general economic factors and adherence with Islamic legal restrictions on interest-bearing loans (Caeiro 2004). Combined with the fact that Somalis occupy low-paying positions, there is little capacity for building equity in the American tradition. Both communities also lack adequate educational opportunities for immigrant youth (Ali 2011; Fennelly 2006b; A. Waters 2012). In the social realm, Somalis in both cities struggle as “outsiders.” They regularly face discrimination based on their religious traditions, dress, status as refugees, and skin color (Ali 2011; A. Waters 2012). As a result, the Somali communities in both areas under investigation experience challenges in terms of housing opportunities, job prospects, and overall inclusion. This de facto discrimination creates significant barriers for the community in general, and for individuals personally. Since 9/11, Somalis have also faced accusations that they are terrorists and have experienced hostility stemming from suspicions about their ties to al-Shabaab, al-Qaeda, and ISIS (Ali 2011; Elliott 2009; A. Waters 2012). The national fear of terrorist threats has increased the negative attention Somalis receive and reinforced misconceptions that Somali Americans are terrorists or sympathizers.

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Although this book focuses on Somalis in two midwestern urban areas, the findings are valuable for other American cities where Somalis and other new immigrant communities are growing. A wide range of challenges faced—and continue to face—policy makers in the two urban areas under investigation, yet this study reveals that certain political structures, economic policies, and cultural programs can make the transition for Somalis and their host communities considerably easier. To create policies that facilitate the incorporation of new immigrant communities, policy makers must first understand the ways in which such communities can benefit the host community at large. This understanding is often missing from the political discourse about new immigrant communities, which, unfortunately, is often focused on the perceived “problems” associated with new immigrants. One infamous example of this political shortsightedness was the 2002 plea from Laurier Raymond, the former mayor of Lewiston, Maine, for Somalis to stop coming to his city. That plea aside, Lewiston’s economic revival occurred in large part as a result of Somalis’ participation in the local economy. Somalis bolstered the labor force by taking low-paying jobs and renting apartments in a housing market with a surplus of vacant rental properties. Despite the challenges that Somalis once faced in Lewiston, they are now viewed as an important part of the community. A June 2014 statement by Domenic Sarno, the mayor of Springfield, Massachusetts, mirrored the unwelcoming message of Lewiston’s former mayor a few years earlier: he called on the Massachusetts congressional delegation to help him stop refugee resettlement in his community because of the alleged burden these immigrants had placed on social service delivery (Lefrak 2014). Mayor Sarno’s inability to see how new Americans could help revitalize the economy of Springfield, an economically depressed industrial hub, is a concern—especially since the city will need a large supply of blue-collar workers to launch the MGM Casino that was recently approved to be built (Lefrak 2014). The Lewiston and Springfield examples illustrate the continuing need for research that helps policy makers better understand the benefits of a new immigrant community not only to the economy but also to the political and social climates of their cities. Beyond the need for domestic policy makers to understand these issues, there is a growing desire

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among leaders in other countries with large Somali populations to understand how the Twin Cities have succeeded with Somali incorporation. Understanding the complex reality of this area's "success story" relative to other cities requires a thorough evaluation to determine what has gone right and where there is room for improvement.

The comparative aspect of this book is both novel and immensely valuable for those who wish to understand immigrant incorporation. Minneapolis is viewed around the world, particularly in Scandinavian countries where the Somali diaspora is growing, as a model for Somali integration. Other American mayors, such as the mayor of Portland, Oregon, have visited Minneapolis to learn about policies that can help their cities better address the needs of Somali immigrants. The interest in Minneapolis is important, but challenges to Somali incorporation remain in the Twin Cities that are overlooked by those who view it purely as a Somali-immigrant success story. This study sheds light on the successes *and* on the areas for improvement in the Twin Cities. On the other hand, examining Columbus allows policy makers, scholars, and stakeholders an opportunity to understand how immigrant incorporation has unfolded in a very different political and public-policy climate.

This book assesses the political, economic, and social variations between the Columbus and the Twin Cities to examine how culture and history influenced the incorporation of Somali immigrants and recommends policy changes that can advance the incorporation of Somalis in both areas. Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative data, this two-case ethnographic study on a relatively understudied community establishes a new stream of research. The findings provide a template for scholars and policy makers examining other cities with large refugee populations. Along the same lines, this project offers a model that can conceivably be applied in a larger study that includes multiple cases. As such, it demonstrates the importance of a number of indicators of political incorporation, indicators that could be used in a large-N quantitative study of political incorporation in American cities and towns. The research for this investigation of two Somali communities relied heavily on fieldwork, participant observation, and interviews with Somali residents and policy makers who have sought to increase Somali incorporation in these commu-

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nities since the population expanded in both areas in the mid-1990s. Particularly when quantitative data were unavailable, these interviews provided essential information necessary to assess the degree to which Somalis have been incorporated. The use of interpretive methods is common in the subfield of racial and ethnic politics, “center[ing] on approaches to political understanding that aim to clarify or illuminate meaning and/or significance of political phenomena” (Schmidt 2015, 367). The voices and perspectives of Somalis in this study complement the data collected in each city and the existent scholarly literature on immigrant incorporation in urban America. Better understanding immigrant incorporation in contemporary urban areas allows policy makers, scholars, and immigrant community leaders the chance to observe the challenges and opportunities new groups face. These observations, in turn, hold the promise that policy can be developed that supports the incorporation of immigrants and benefits the community at large.

Examining the political, economic, and social incorporation of Somalis is a usefully broad method of evaluating various areas of immigrant incorporation. Although they overlap in a variety of ways, these three measures of incorporation provide a robust assessment of the Somali experience in their two largest American destination communities. Examining all three variables is essential, because omitting any one would paint an incomplete picture of the context of Somali incorporation. For example, examining only the political context for Somalis would risk undervaluing the role that local foundations can play in supporting the Somali community (a measure of social incorporation). Similarly, overlooking the ways in which Islamic legal restrictions on interest-bearing loans are related to economic advancement (a measure of economic incorporation) would lead to a failure to understand the ways in which homeownership and home equity are traditionally connected to political opportunities in the United States and, ultimately, political incorporation. Although electoral structures, the number of elected and appointed officials, and governing coalitions are important measures of political incorporation, they are not sufficient to understand the Somali experience in the contemporary urban context. Other factors, such as union influence, party outreach, Somali voting trends, bureaucratic

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outreach, and the influence of community groups, help contextualize Somali political incorporation.

Previous scholarly literature assumed that after an initial period of transition, new immigrant groups would eventually surmount the barriers to political, economic, and social integration (Park 1928)—the classic, romanticized narrative of nineteenth-century European immigration to the United States. In contrast to the European experience, Somalis came to the United States primarily as part of the fallout from a civil war, often carrying religious and cultural beliefs that have complicated the process of assimilation. Some Somalis have also experienced the impediment of limited English-language skills. Furthermore, American misconceptions about Somalis have created an additional hurdle for their full inclusion in society. The fact that Somalis have settled in several nontraditional or “new” immigrant destinations (e.g., Columbus, Ohio, and Lewiston, Maine) makes examining the factors that help with incorporation particularly compelling. The implications of policies that encourage or impede Somali incorporation in midsize cities are relevant for Somalis and other new immigrant groups with characteristics that differ significantly from the local culture and religious norms in their receiving communities. Minneapolis and St. Paul are considered midsize cities, and they have a history of welcoming immigrant groups. At the same time, their experience with new immigrant communities is just one factor that contributes to Somali incorporation. A range of other factors influence the relatively greater degree of incorporation as well as the ongoing challenges of this community in the Twin Cities. The research underlying this book is unique because it reveals the factors that support or impede Somali incorporation; moreover, the findings described herein provide the basis for specific policy recommendations that can increase incorporation in the cities under investigation and beyond. These findings can potentially help cities domestically and abroad reap information about the incorporation of new immigrant communities under different political, economic, and social conditions. Attention to the social incorporation of an immigrant community during times of suspected terrorist links is also a unique contribution of this book. As concerns about global terrorist threats increase, it is imperative that governments create policies that target

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terrorist groups without discriminating against a community based on ethnic group affiliations. This is a challenge for all governments, but one where American policy makers in particular have fallen short, with the treatment of Japanese Americans and German Americans during World War II serving as notable examples.

Theoretical Underpinnings: Comparative Research, the “Context of Reception,” and State Culture

Employing a comparative method to understand how urban areas or nations address political challenges is not new. In the domestic literature, Rufus P. Browning, Dale Rogers Marshall, and David H. Tabb’s (1984) study on racial and ethnic coalitions in ten California cities was a seminal contribution. They discovered that minority group mobilization at the local level could lead to incorporation in city governance and, ultimately, to governmental responsiveness to minority residents’ concerns. In her book *Mayors and Money* (1992), Ester Fuchs explores how political and economic decisions in New York and Chicago during the 1970s led to vastly different results. In Chicago, fiscal collapse and bailout were avoided because of governance and structural factors that New York lacked. The absence of such conditions in New York resulted in a fiscal crisis in the city in the 1970s. My book *Mayors and Schools* (2006) includes a similar methodology for understanding school-reform outcomes in two different midwestern cities—Chicago and Cleveland. In this case, divergent structural factors related to school governance resulted in different outcomes for minority communities served by the schools. In *Black Atlantic Politics* (2002), William E. Nelson Jr. adopts a comparative, transatlantic approach to understand how the slave trade and contemporary policies affect blacks in today’s Boston and Liverpool, England. Examining cities with some general similarities but also important differences can aid in understanding the implications of policy choices. This is important for not only scholars of urban, racial, and ethnic politics but also policy makers, who are often forced to rapidly make decisions that have an impact on the lives of urban residents.

On the international front, one of the most important scholarly contributions to comparative migration research is Irene Bloem-

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raad's *Becoming a Citizen* (2006). By examining the citizenship process for labor migrants and refugees in the United States and Canada, Bloemraad demonstrates that government policies affect immigrant incorporation. Canada's immigrant incorporation outcomes are significantly better than those of the United States as a result of the former's multicultural and interventionist immigrant policies. More specifically, Canada's active support of the naturalization process contributes to higher rates of citizenship and retention of cultural identity. A government-led effort to increase naturalization is not a major priority of the U.S. system; rather, the cultural assimilation of newcomers is encouraged. Bloemraad also finds that the Canadian system is more conducive to formal immigrant political representation, something much less prevalent in the United States. These findings are particularly relevant to this book in terms of electoral opportunities for new immigrant communities in the two regions under investigation. Although each city is part of the same nation, differences in local political structures lead to a range of political outcomes. Examining these differences is important, but it is also critical to consider national factors in the United States that create challenges for new Americans.

Like the studies highlighted above, this book identifies factors that contribute to different incorporation levels in an effort to offer specific policy recommendations. Both regions have histories of relative homogeneity and roots in European immigration. Columbus and St. Paul are also state capitals. In both cities, Somalis are concentrated in low-wage and low-skill jobs. Both areas appear to have high levels of residential and economic segregation, such as Somali businesses and shopping being isolated in certain areas of the city. In assessing these differences, the "most similar design" or "Mill's method of difference" is used, which consists of comparing very similar cases that differ only in the dependent variable (Etzioni and DuBow 1970).

Beyond the comparative approach, another important concept applied in this book is the "context of reception" developed by Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut (2006). Migrants arrive in new destinations with human capital that influences their experiences as they assimilate. Human capital is just one of the factors that is important in the context of reception, or the conditions under which assimilation

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takes place. This context is determined by the policies of the receiving government, labor-market factors, and the character of the new ethnic community (139). In many respects, these conditions parallel the analysis of Somali political, economic, and social incorporation used in this book. More specifically, the policies of the receiving government align with political incorporation, labor-market factors reflect economic incorporation, and social incorporation can be evaluated through the lens of the human capital of the Somali community. Such political, economic, and social conditions shape this examination of the context of reception in Columbus and the Twin Cities.

Finally, this study takes advantage of the research on state culture to better position the two cases in a national context. The classic works of Daniel Elazar on state culture and Robert Putnam's state social capital analysis, for example, contextualize Ohio and Minnesota in useful ways. Elazar's *Exploring Federalism* (1987) offers a detailed analysis of state culture across the United States. In his book, Elazar distinguishes between three types of political cultures: moralistic, traditionalistic, and individualistic. Each of the three typologies differs in terms of the conceptions about the role of government and the individual in society.

According to Elazar, moralistic states include government structures that support the public good and where citizen participation is of paramount importance. Traditionalistic states view the relationship between the government and citizens hierarchically, with the government in the preeminent position. The government is tasked with providing stability, and citizens are expected to abide by established rules. Finally, the individualistic state falls somewhere between the moralistic and traditionalistic. Under the individualistic model, the government's role is to support the marketplace and advance individual and private interests. Citizens are neither expected to be active participants in the political sphere (moralistic), nor are they seen as subordinate to the government (traditionalistic). Rather, the individual has the freedom to be active or not in the political process. As Chapters 2 and 3 discuss, Elazar classifies Ohio as an individualistic state, whereas Minnesota is considered moralistic.

Putnam is best known for his research on social capital. In *Bowling Alone* (2000), his classic text on the subject, he argues that the United

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States has experienced a dramatic decline in social capital since the 1960s and 1970s. Putnam defines social capital as “connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (19). He finds the decline in social capital troubling and observable through such measures as a decline in union participation, a drop in PTO meeting attendance, and an erosion of membership in political parties, among other indicators. For the purposes of this book, his findings on social capital in the fifty states are more important. Putnam creates a comprehensive Social Capital Index based on a fourteen-point analysis of community networks and social trust, including such measures as volunteering for activities, attending public meetings, and serving as a leader in an organization. In this index, Minnesota is designated as “very high” in social capital, while Ohio falls in the middle. Interestingly, Putnam then examines a range of policy areas across the states to illustrate that the results of his Social Capital Index align with the results from other national studies. The policy areas he discusses include, for example, children’s welfare, education, public safety, general health, and fewer violations of tax law. For the purposes of this project, and in line with Putnam’s findings, Minnesota consistently outperforms Ohio in all the policy areas he explores.

Midwestern Migration

To appreciate the difficulty of the journey from the northeastern coast of Africa to the midwestern United States, one must first understand the political, economic, and social situations of the Somali refugees. In 1960, Somalia was carved out of former Italian and British colonies. During the Cold War, it served as a proxy for the United States and for the Soviet Union in the bitter battle to control the strategic Horn of Africa (International Crisis Group 2008). While he was in power from 1969 to 1991, long-time leader Mohamed Siad Barre’s kinship group benefitted from widespread corruption fueled by foreign aid, which inspired frustration and envy among rival groups. Siad Barre’s brutal suppression of uprisings in turn led to his eventual ouster in January 1991 (International Crisis Group 2008). The

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ensuing vacuum was rapidly filled by rival “political faction leaders-turned-warlords” (International Crisis Group 2008).

By 1992, the combination of drought and the political, economic, and social collapse in Somalia resulted in the death of twenty-five thousand Somalis (Healy and Bradbury 2010). In 1992, the United States led an attempt to protect food provisions for famine victims and to eventually oust the dominant faction leader, Mohamed Farah Aidid. Yet the United States withdrew in late 1993 after a botched military operation resulted in the deaths of eighteen U.S. service members—a tragedy that horrified the American people, haunted American military forces, and inspired the film *Black Hawk Down* (2001).

In 1991, thousands of Somalis fled their home country to seek refuge. Many traveled to refugee camps in Kenya and were later assigned to new refugee resettlement locations in the United States and other nations by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). For those assigned to the United States, the State Department coordinates with UNHCR to connect refugees with the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. From there, ORR works with voluntary agencies in different geographical areas in the United States to resettle refugees. Many voluntary agencies are religious-based organizations, including Jewish Family Service, Lutheran Social Services, Catholic Charities USA, or Arrive Ministries, in the case of the Twin Cities. These organizations assist with an array of services, including English-language education, housing, health care, and general acclimation for the first ninety days a refugee is in the country (DeRusha 2011). Voluntary agencies have played an important role in immigrant resettlement since the late 1800s (Forrest and Brown 2014).

In the early 1990s, cities commonly associated with the relocation of Somalis included Minneapolis, Minnesota; Norfolk, Virginia; and Seattle, Washington. By 1994, Columbus, Ohio, was another popular destination city. As time passed, some refugees migrated to secondary locations as they learned of new opportunities in other American cities. The process of secondary migration has been, and remains, very common among Somalis. What are easy to overlook

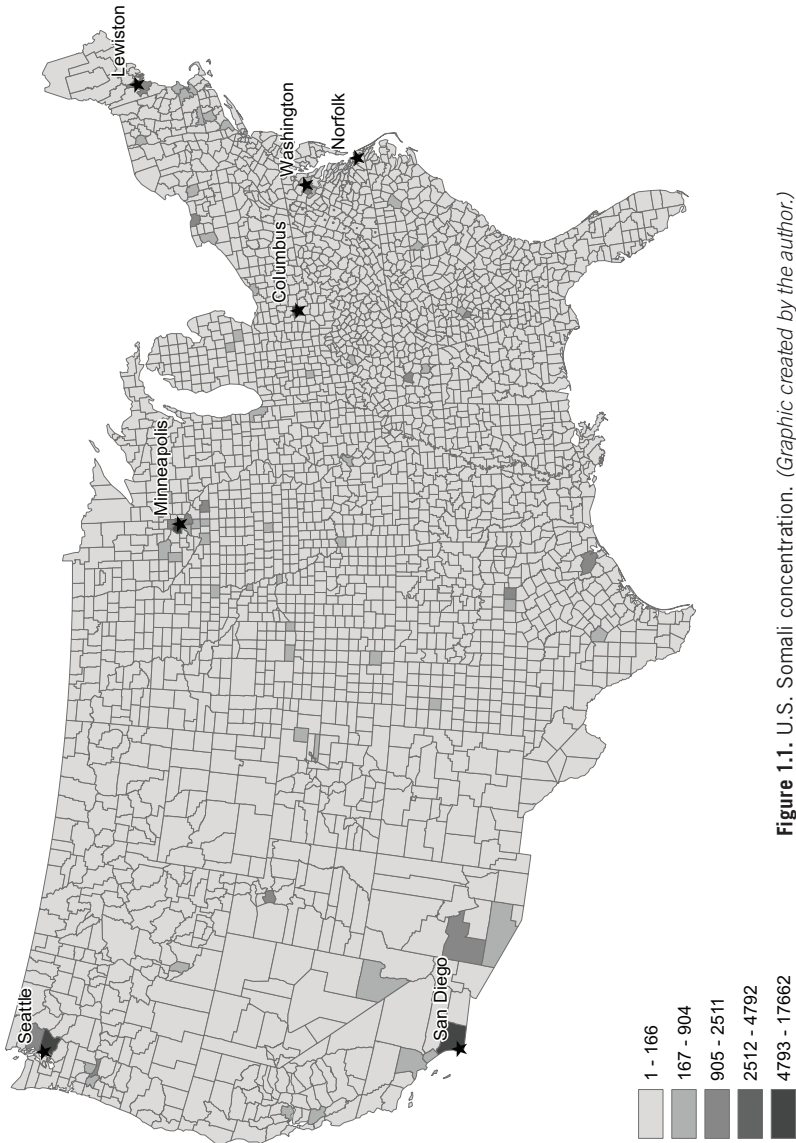
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are the costs associated with leaving their initial placement cities. Beyond the fact that moving can be costly, federal benefits do not follow refugees if they leave their assigned homes in the United States. In other words, for poor refugees, such as Somalis, mobility comes at a considerable price.

When Somali refugees first started to migrate to the United States, the majority settled in Minnesota and Virginia. The Twin Cities have a particularly positive track record with refugee resettlement as a result of the Hmong refugee establishment in the region beginning in the late 1970s (Yusuf 2012), but Somalis in Virginia found the cost of living high and had trouble finding jobs. Similarly, other Somalis who had originally settled in San Diego later migrated to the Twin Cities in search of jobs, a lower cost of living, and a vibrant Somali community. Columbus's abundance of factory and warehouse jobs, coupled with low rental rates, made the city an attractive secondary relocation destination for Somalis who were not assigned there by the ORR. Somalis who initially settled in Columbus shared news of job opportunities and housing affordability. Later, waves of secondary migrants told friends and relatives in other American cities of their improved living situations in Columbus, and the region became a popular new destination. Before long, Columbus was one of the foremost secondary destinations for Somalis in the United States.

Today, Columbus ranks second in the United States in the size of its Somali population, behind Minneapolis and ahead of such cities as the District of Columbia, Seattle, Norfolk, and Lewiston. Figure 1.1 illustrates the concentration of Somalis in the United States. The data are derived from the county-level data available through the American Community Survey estimates from 2006 to 2010. Estimates vary regarding how many Somalis have made a home in Franklin County, where Columbus is located. On the low end, the U.S. Census reports that fewer than ten thousand Somalis reside in Columbus. By contrast, the book *The Somali Diaspora* reports that roughly forty-five thousand Somalis call Columbus home (Roble and Rutledge 2008). The precise number of Somalis matters less for the purposes of this research than does the fact that a sizable population exists. The population of Somalis in the Twin Cities is significantly larger than the population in Columbus, although the exact population is again

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difficult to estimate. In describing the complication associated with Somali population estimates, Cindy Horst writes:

It is likely that official census figures greatly underestimate actual numbers, as many Somali extended families live in one house with larger numbers than allowed, so they underreport their numbers. Public school enrollment and welfare statistics suggest a range of fifteen thousand to thirty thousand Somalis in Minnesota, a number that is still growing. (2006, 8)

Tracking Somali secondary migration complicates population estimates further. Not surprisingly, many of the individuals included as respondents in this study were originally sent to a different city in the United States and migrated to Columbus or Minneapolis after hearing reports about opportunities in these destinations.

Refugees or Immigrants?

Characterizing Somalis as either refugees or immigrants is complicated. On the one hand, the majority of Somalis with roots in the Twin Cities and Columbus arrived in the United States as refugees in the 1990s. There are also many native-born Somali Americans since the population has had time to grow since the 1990s. The majority of Somalis migrated to their new American destinations as refugees but have since become citizens of the United States. The Somali scholar Ahmed Samatar writes:

A refugee . . . is an individual who is unable to find a modicum of shelter and safety in his/her homeland or decides that what is available is so unappealing and unappetizing that becoming a brittle, and at times unwanted foreigner is a preferable fate. (2008, 5; emphasis original)

For decades, thousands of Somalis have lived in squalid conditions in Kenyan refugee camps after being forced from their homes in Somalia. For those who are willing and able to build a new life outside their homeland, immigration is an option. As Samatar explains:

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The category of *immigrant* is designated to describe one who has made an autonomous and personal choice of “creative destruction” to seek membership in another society—an act that can be either temporary or could culminate in new citizenship. (2008, 5; emphasis original)

Somalis in this study are characterized as immigrants, because most made the courageous decision to become residents and/or American citizens. For many, this decision was difficult because of their love for their country of origin. At the same time, a majority of the respondents in this study identify as Somali Americans and place a very high value on civic engagement in their adopted country. Even among those firmly rooted in the United States, there is a contingent of Somalis in both cities who return to areas in Somalia to pursue humanitarian work or visit family. For Somali youth, many of whom have spent most of their lives in the United States or who are native-born U.S. citizens, ties to Somalia are often weaker. In this sense, there are generational effects within the community, which are discussed in later chapters.

General Social Services for Refugees

The social service benefits available to refugees include a combination of federal benefits and a range of state, local, and nonprofit benefits, depending on the state and locality where a refugee establishes roots. Several key national events have influenced refugee resettlement in the United States. The overarching pattern involves a relatively open process in the mid-twentieth century, with major changes beginning in the 1980s that have restricted social service benefits for refugees, particularly as a result of welfare reform and changing attitudes in the wake of the terrorist attacks of 2001.

After World War II, the 1949 guidelines established by the United Nations (UN) Geneva Conventions created general humanitarian standards for working with refugees. The United States accepted these guidelines and started receiving refugees through an ad hoc process. In 1980, during President Jimmy Carter’s administration, the Refugee Act created a clearer and more comprehensive system of

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benefits for refugees. Together with the Hart-Celler Immigration Act of 1965, which abolished a quota system and significantly broadened immigration from Asia and Africa, the Refugee Act established a new and more humanitarian system of refugee resettlement (Ali 2011, 88).

The mid-1980s marked the beginning of the erosion of refugee support and social service benefits (Ali 2011, 88). The nation's welfare policies came under attack during President Ronald Reagan's administration, and refugees did not escape the misperception that they too were abusing the public assistance program, much like the infamous "welfare queens" Reagan bashed. The conservative assault on publicly financed social services continued and was ultimately embraced by Democrats, who supported the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) in 1996 (Fennelly 2006a, 31). This law shifted the administration of welfare benefits from the federal government to the states. Reductions in federal funds to the states created a situation in which states were incentivized to reduce benefits for different categories of immigrants (31). The PRWORA also established a five-year lifetime limit on welfare benefits for all recipients (Ali 2011, 91). Another provision stated that noncitizens, including refugees, were eligible for welfare benefits only during their first five years in the United States—regardless of whether they received those benefits for the entirety of that duration (91). This seemingly small provision created a two-tiered system of benefits that would negatively affect new refugees.

In 1997, refugees experienced another blow. Most refugees are deeply committed to helping family members left behind in their homeland. Beyond remittances that provide some financial support to loved ones, there is often the hope of family reunification in the United States. After a year in the United States, refugees become permanent residents and are eligible for citizenship. Among the provisions of the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act was the new rule that nonrefugee immigrants could remain in the United States only if they were "sponsored" by a family member, friend, or employer (Ali 2011, 93). Sponsors would be responsible for all financial needs, and the newcomer would forfeit access to welfare benefits for their first five years in the country (93). For former refugees who could get a family member into the United

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States, their desperation for their loved ones' safety prompted them to sign virtually any document that would keep their relatives in the country legally, regardless of whether they had the means to support another person (Twin Cities community member interview, May 31, 2014). The economic strain this has placed on already financially strapped families is considerable.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, also negatively affected refugee policies in the United States. A new federal program, the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS), required men from Arab and Muslim countries to register with the federal government and agree to annual government interviews (Ali 2011, 95). Somalis were categorized within this system, and the new guidelines created tremendous stress and anxiety in their community, particularly for those who had experienced horrific governmental abuse in their homeland (Twin Cities community member interview, June 1, 2014). NSEERS was implemented at the same time that the number of refugees admitted to the United States was being curtailed. To make matters worse, the federal government cut cash benefits for refugees from thirty-six months to eight months of coverage (Ali 2011, 97; Fennelly 2006b). Today, responsibility falls on state and local governments, voluntary agencies, and individual families to provide adequate economic safeguards for new arrivals. Depending on the state and nonprofit community, a range of benefits are available to the small number of new refugees who arrive in the United States today. Even a state like Minnesota, known for its progressive social service benefits, had imposed significant benefit reductions since 2000. Between state and federal cuts, the United States has entered a new, less generous era in refugee social service benefit provisions.