

# Neighborhood Ethnic Composition and Contacts with Neighbors:

## Taking into account length of residence and selection effects

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The association between local ethnic composition and social cohesion has received widespread scholarly attention. Existing research consistently reports negative associations between neighborhood-level ethnic diversity and neighborhood cohesion indicators (Dinesen, Schaeffer, and Sønderskov 2020). This finding has been attributed to coordination and cooperation dilemmas in contexts involving different ethnic groups, which consequently result in an individual retreat from neighborhood life. However, there are still very few studies that aim at establishing the causal role of ethnic composition. Assessing causality is complicated by the fact that households select their area of residence based on a variety of expectations and opportunities that might also affect their readiness to engage with neighbors. Furthermore, selection processes are temporally complex and can be thought of sequential moves into and out of certain neighborhoods.

To address these issues, this study examines trajectories of individual contact experiences with neighbors by asking a clearly defined causal question: “What is the effect of *moving to*, and *staying in*, a neighborhood with a given ethnic composition for a pre-specified period on individuals’ contacts with neighbors?”

Using the German Socio-Economic Panel, merged with fine-grained data about German neighborhoods, I focus on households that recently moved into a new neighborhood, and adjust for variables that might cause selective in-mobility. Furthermore, I use inverse probability weighting to adjust for potential causes of out-mobility throughout the study period.

I find that, irrespective of ethnic composition, households experience a substantial increase in perceived contact quality with neighbors and the probability to visit neighbors after staying in a neighborhood for five years. Through this increase, households in ethnically diverse neighborhoods reach the same level of neighborhood contacts as those in less diverse neighborhoods. These findings suggest that ethnic neighborhood diversity does not limit close contacts with neighbors and are at odds with theoretical accounts that suggest “hunkering down” of individuals in diverse contexts.

Dinesen, Peter Thisted, Merlin Schaeffer, and Kim Mannemar Sønderskov. 2020. “Ethnic Diversity and Social Trust: A Narrative and Meta-Analytical Review.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 23 (1): 441–65. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-052918-020708>.