

# Neighborhood Attainment, Individual Status, and Internal Migration in the United States

**Shih-Keng Yen**

Department of Sociology

Texas A&M University

[skyen@tamu.edu](mailto:skyen@tamu.edu)

**Ernesto F. L. Amaral**

Department of Sociology

Texas A&M University

[amaral@tamu.edu](mailto:amaral@tamu.edu)

# Research question

- How does the interaction between neighborhood status and individual status influence geographic mobility?
- Residents tend to move out of low-status neighborhoods (Lee et al. 1994)
  - Residents leave neighborhoods with poor reputations (Permentier et al. 2009)
- Residents tend to leave a community when they are disadvantaged in relation to neighbors (low individual status) (Galster and Turner 2017)

# Neighborhood status vs. individual status

- Firebaugh and Schroeder (2009)
  - Residents in low-status neighborhoods may have high individual status in relation to neighbors
  - Residents in high-status neighborhoods may have low individual status in relation to neighbors

# Four possible hypotheses

- Hypothesis 1: **Relative income model**
  - Living in low-status neighborhoods matters less when individual status is high (Distante 2013; Kim 2020; Luttmer 2005)
  - Residents in low-status neighborhoods are less likely to move if they have higher individual status
- Hypothesis 2: **Residential attainment model**
  - People do not want to live in low-status neighborhoods, especially when their individual status is high (Alba and Logan 1993; Leibbrand, Alexander, Massey et al. 2019; Rossi 1955; Rossi and Shlay 1982)
  - Residents in low-status neighborhoods are more likely to move if they have higher individual status

# Four possible hypotheses

- Hypothesis 3: **Status signaling model**

- Low individual status matters less when neighborhood status is high (Bagwell and Bernheim 1996; Brodeur and Flèche 2019; Marsh and Gibb 2011)
- Residents with low individual status are less likely to move when neighborhood status is high

- Hypothesis 4: **Relative deprivation model**

- Low individual status become more unbearable when living in higher status neighborhoods (Bernburg, Thorlindsson and Sigfusdottir 2009; Kuhlmann 2020; Runciman 1966)
- Residents with low individual status are more likely to move when neighborhood status is high

# Data

- American Community Survey (ACS) 2019
- Household heads at least 25 years old and living in metropolitan areas one year ago
- Dependent variable
  - Lived in the same census tract (did not move)
  - Moved between census tracts and within county (moved within-county)
  - Moved between counties (results not shown)

# Models

- Multinomial logistic regressions with state fixed-effects and census tract clustered standard errors
- Control variables
  - Individual level: gender, age, race/ethnicity, level of education, marital status, children presence, nativity, whether living in a Metropolitan Division one year ago
  - Census-tract level: population (log), % non-Hispanic white, % same level of education, age structure

# Measuring status

- **Neighborhood status**

- Census tract
- Comparison function (Jasso 2001)

$$Z_j = \ln \frac{x_j}{E(X)}$$

- Neighborhood median family income
- Four groups
  - Very low neighborhood status
  - Low neighborhood status
  - High neighborhood status
  - Very high neighborhood status

- **Individual status**

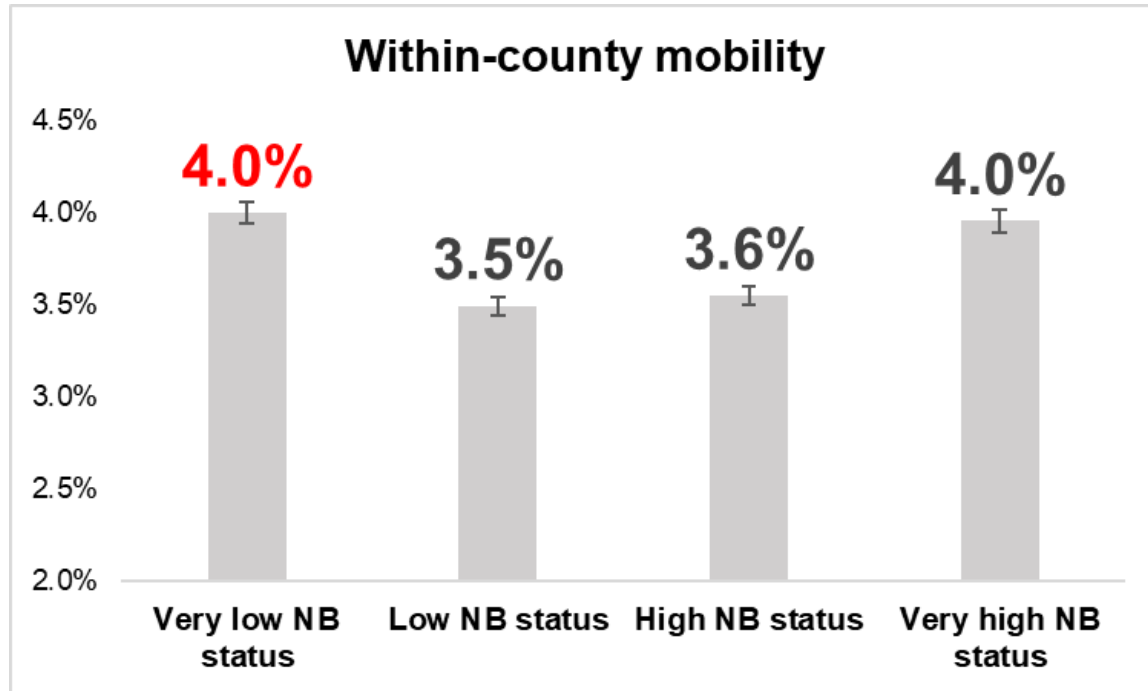
- Status function (Jasso 2001)

$$S_{ij} = \ln \frac{1}{1 - r_{ij}}$$

- Family income
- Quintile groups



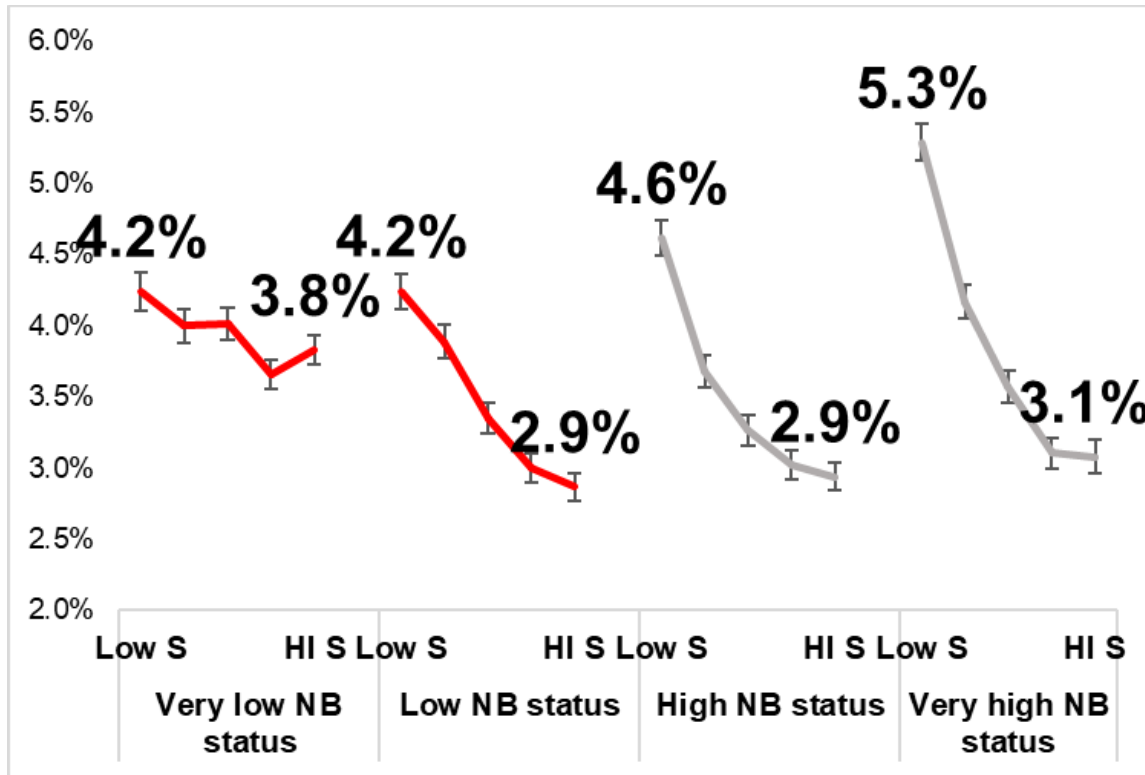
# Neighborhood status and within-county mobility



Living in very low and very high status neighborhoods are the most likely to move within-county

But as shown later, this relationship is contingent on individual status

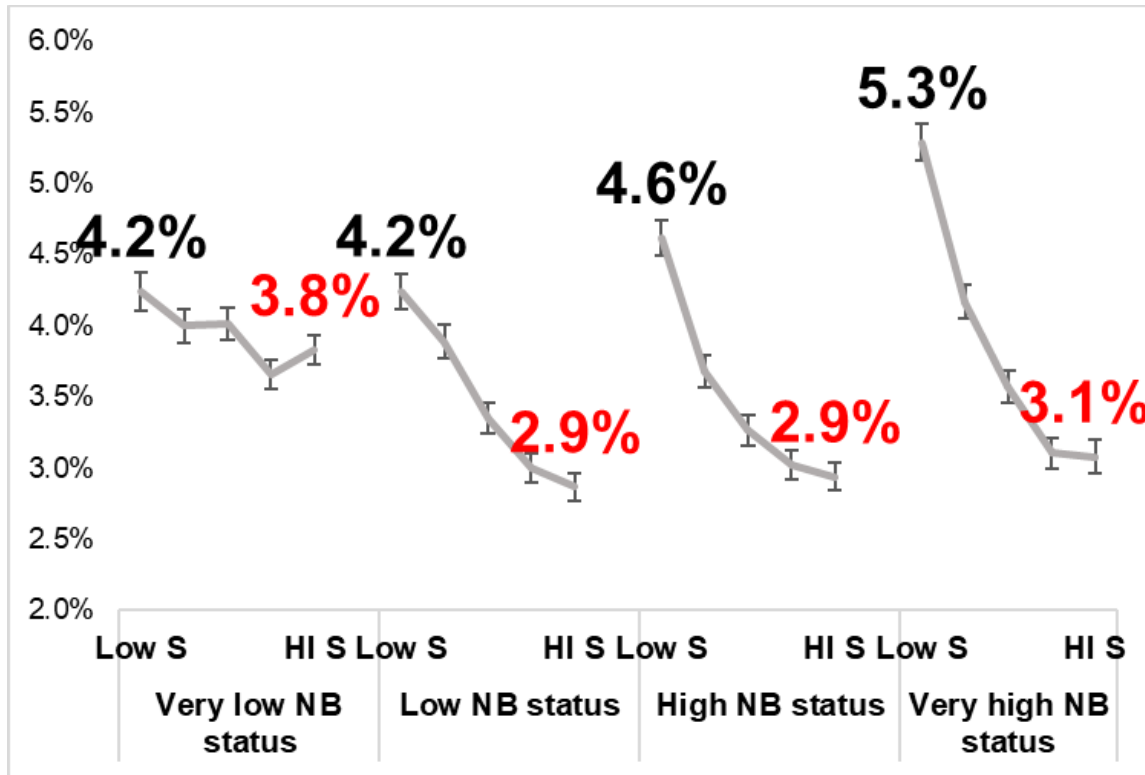
# Hypothesis 1 – Relative income



Living in low-status neighborhoods are **less likely** to move as individual status rises, especially when neighborhood status is not the lowest

**Support relative income model**

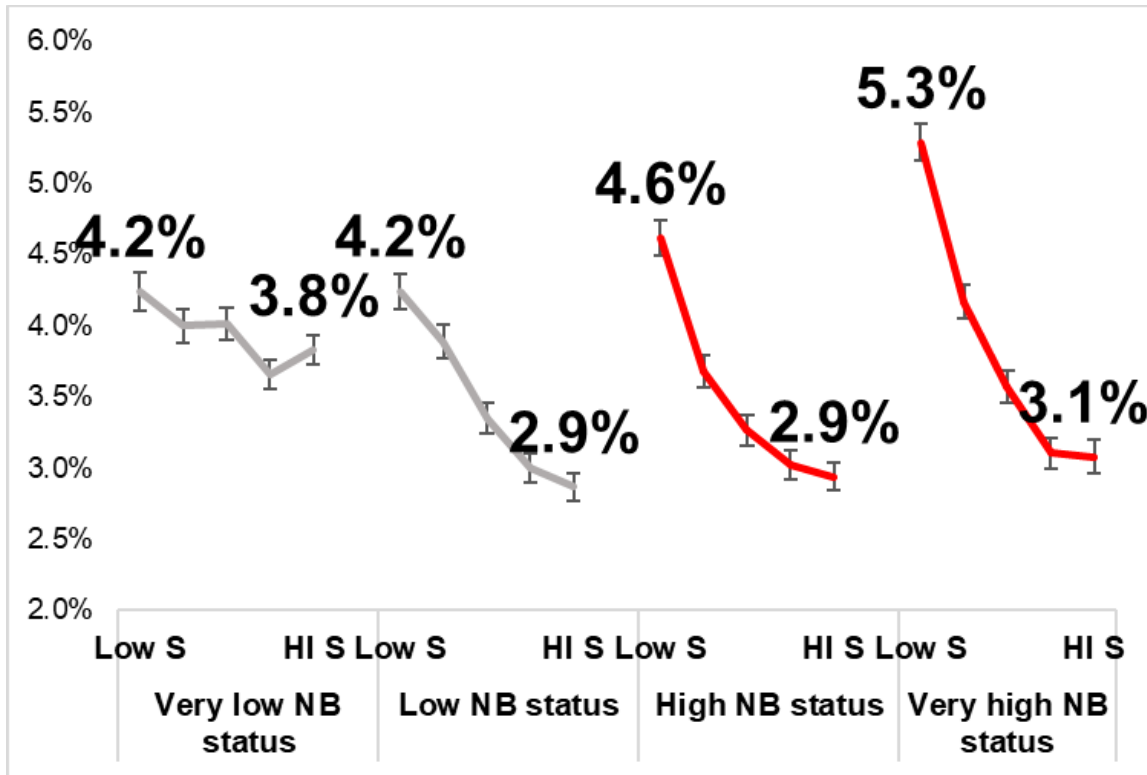
# Hypothesis 2 – Residential attainment



Among those with the highest individual status, residents in very low-status neighborhoods are **more likely** to move

**Support residential attainment model**

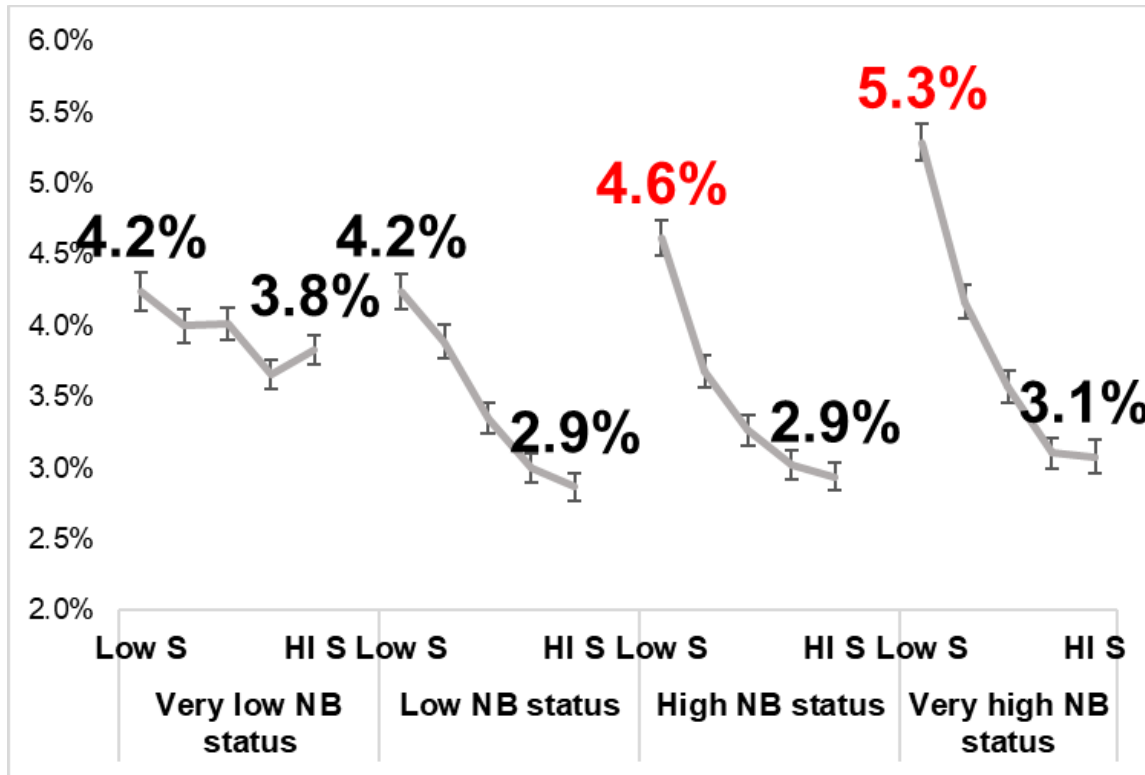
# Hypothesis 3 – Status signaling



Residents with low individual status are **not less likely** to move when living in good neighborhoods

**Does not support status signaling model**

# Hypothesis 4 – Relative deprivation



Residents with low individual status are **more likely** to move when neighborhood status is high

**Support relative deprivation model**

# Final considerations

- The effect of neighborhood status on geographic mobility is largely contingent on individual status
- Next steps
  - Housing and within-tract mobility
  - Neighborhood status and individual status after moving