



RECENT INTRASTATE NET MIGRATION FLOWS OF THE ELDERLY IN CALIFORNIA

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Intrastate movement of the elderly has received little attention in migration literature.¹ Yet, such movements are important, for most elderly migrants relocate within their state of origin.² This study, utilizing data from the Bureau of the Census' public use microdata sample, explores what has been a neglected scale of migration through a reconstruction of California's major internal streams of elderly net migration for the period from 1975 to 1980.

Most studies of elderly migration flows have focused on interstate movements.³ This situation exists primarily because, as Bohland and Treps have noted, origin/destination data collected by the census have been published only at the state or census region level.⁴ As they further note, however, reliance upon these published data sources ensures continuing ignorance of major aspects of elderly migration systems. Such ignorance limits the ability of local communities to anticipate and plan for important shifts in their population structures, which, in turn, trigger shifts in tax bases and consumer patterns, as well as in demands for housing and social services. Many

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California communities, in particular, face major, potential elderly migration impacts because this state has more elderly persons than any other.

Data Base and Methodology

The data used to identify the migration streams are a 2.5 percent sample of individual responses to census questionnaire items. This information is found in unpublished form on computer-readable magnetic tapes at the California Census Data Center (Sacramento), which holds the public access copy of the state's public use microdata sample. The data tabulation unit used by the Bureau of the Census for this sample does limit the spatial detail available to researchers, since only counties of 100,000 population are reported individually. Smaller counties are lumped together into county groups, which function as additional data units. In the case of California, this pattern of aggregation does not create a major problem because many of the state's counties meet the minimum size criterion. Aggregation reduced the available data units from an initial fifty-eight counties for the state to thirty-six counties and county groups, a number considered to be adequate for capturing the main dimensions of the intrastate migration system.

The specific questionnaire item which produced information on migration streams reports a county resident's place-of-residence at a date five years previously. Although these data allow identification of a move from one location to another, they do suffer some shortcomings as a source of migration information. In particular, critics have noted that (1) multiple moves within the five-year period are not identified, (2) persons who moved within the five-year period but died before the census are not counted, and (3) data do not include institutionalized per-

sons.⁵ As a consequence under-reporting occurs. Nevertheless, as the purpose of this study was not to project numbers of migrants, but rather to identify the major streams of net movement, these data were considered adequate. Estimates of the relative value of flows are considered reliable.

Data on all intrastate movements of sample respondents age sixty-five years and older were obtained through a request to the California Census Data Center. They were inserted into a 36-by-36 cell matrix summarizing the flows from each county or county group to all other counties or county groups and then converted to net migration values. Although the movement of elderly migrants can be specified by this matrix, an analysis of all intrastate flows between all counties and county groups would produce a complex and confusing spatial pattern. In this study, a reduction has been sought by focusing on the state's primary out-migration sources and on the migration streams which linked those sources to specific destinations. In this way the major migration streams which account for the bulk of California's recent elderly net migration can be isolated. Net migration patterns, rather than gross migration patterns, are described because they identify the resultant population shifts brought about by the overall movement.

Net Migration Patterns

The major in-state sources and destinations of elderly migrants were determined by examining each data unit's overall migration balance. The spatial patterning of the leading in- and out-migration centers suggests a strong flow of elderly migrants from north to south in the state, as most of the major net out-migration units are found in northern California and most of the major net in-

migration units are located in the far south. An important exception to this apparently simple regional pattern is the presence of the foremost net out-migration unit, Los Angeles County, in southern California. Furthermore, the fact that the two leading net out-migration counties are Los Angeles County and San Francisco County, respectively, suggests that there is also an important urban dimension to the migration pattern.

The spatial patterning of the state's net out-migration counties and county groups suggests that three primary source regions can be identified. The first of these is Los Angeles County, a highly urbanized, relatively densely populated county that, by itself, produced 35 percent of the state's elderly net out-migrants (Figure 1). The second source region consists of San Francisco and Alameda Counties, which constitute the older, urban core of California's Bay Area metropolitan cluster (Figure 2). This region produced 15 percent of the state's elderly net out-migrants. The third important source region is composed of nearly all the counties and county groups located in the northern third of the state (Figure 3). With the exception of Sacramento County, members of this regional grouping are either smaller metropolitan or nonmetropolitan counties. This region contributed 29 percent of the state's elderly net out-migrants. Altogether these three source regions account for 79 percent of the total intrastate net migration identified by the sample.

The net migration which occurred between each of these primary source regions and remaining counties and county groups was calculated from the migration matrix described above, and the major destinations associated with each source region were identified. A major destination was considered to be any county or county group which received at least 3 percent of a source region's total

net out-migration. A 3 percent threshold ensures that only the upper half (or less) of the destinations for each source are identified, focusing attention on the major flows.

In each case, when the major destinations and the associated net migration volumes were mapped, clear-cut out-migration fields were apparent. The great majority of Los Angeles County net out-migrants remained in southern California, moving to nearby suburban counties (Figure 1). Southern counties captured over 90 percent of this source's net out-migration. The pattern for the San Francisco-Alameda source region was a bit more complex (Figure 2). As was the case with Los Angeles County, the bulk of the net out-migrants moved to nearby counties with growing suburban communities. A significant minority, however, abandoned the local metropolitan region and moved considerable distances to destinations in southern California. About 67 percent of the source region's net out-migrants relocated to Bay Area destinations, while an additional 20 percent went south. In contrast to the Los Angeles and San Francisco-Alameda source areas, the out-migration field of the northern source region was dominated by long-distance movement (Figure 3). The majority of its net out-migrants, 81 percent, relocated in southern California.

Discussion of Findings

It is clear from this reconstruction of California's major internal elderly migration flows that two spatial trends were dominant during the study period: (1) a "Sunbelt"-type stream, as many elderly left northern counties and resettled in the far south, and (2) a net outward movement within the state's two major metropolitan regions, as many elderly left the older urban cores and

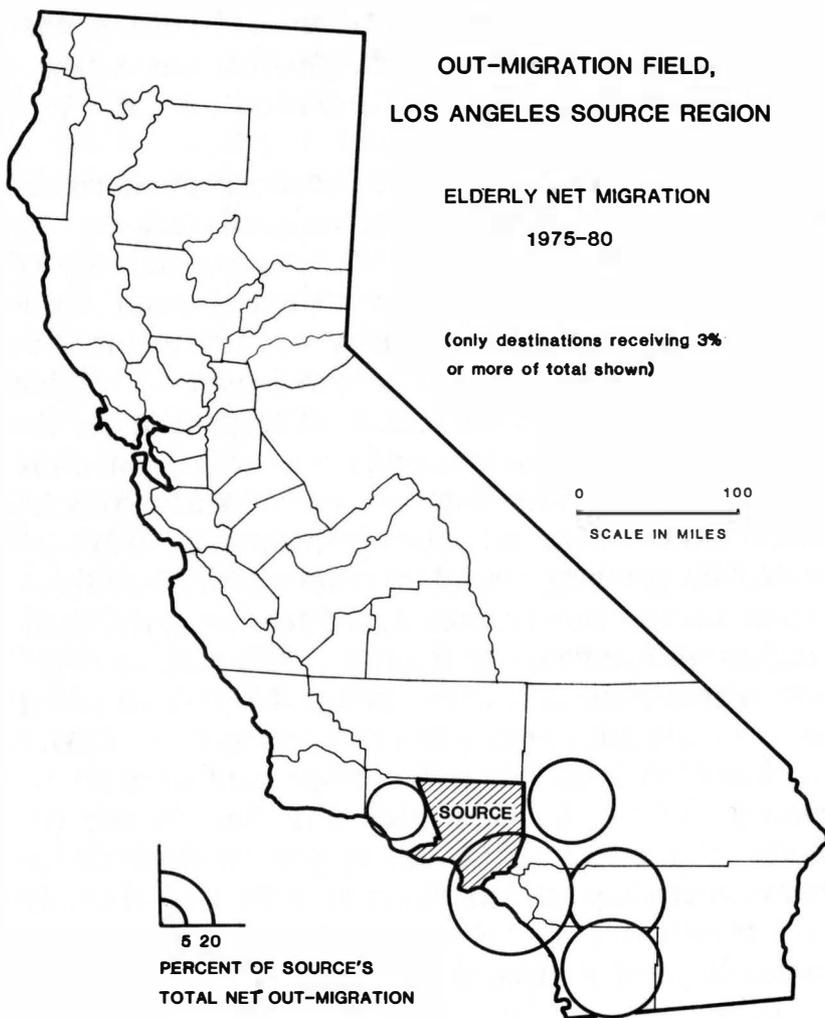


Figure 1

relocated in suburban counties. These intrastate flows closely parallel and mirror trends reported at the national scale.

The Sunbelt bias of much of the migration of the elderly at the national level is well-known and has been

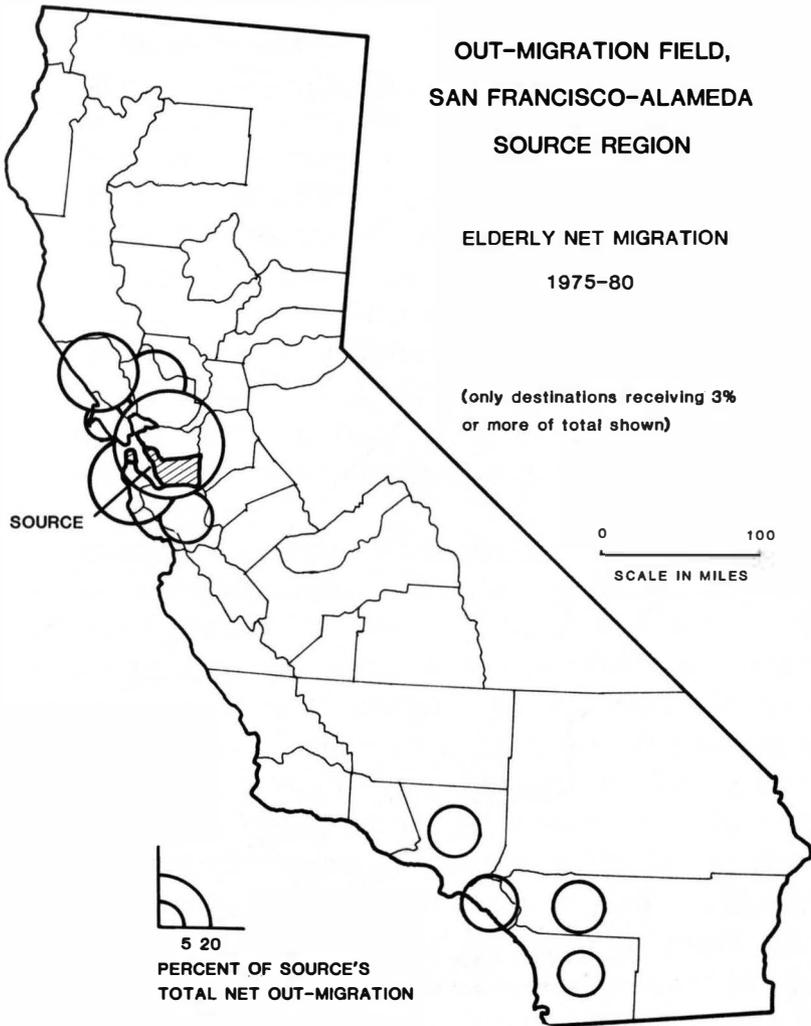


Figure 2

documented.⁶ For example, Biggar found that, between 1965 and 1970, 58.2 percent of all elderly interstate migrants were bound for Sunbelt states.⁷ In the case of California, 79 percent of the elderly net migrants from the three primary source regions resettled in southern coun-

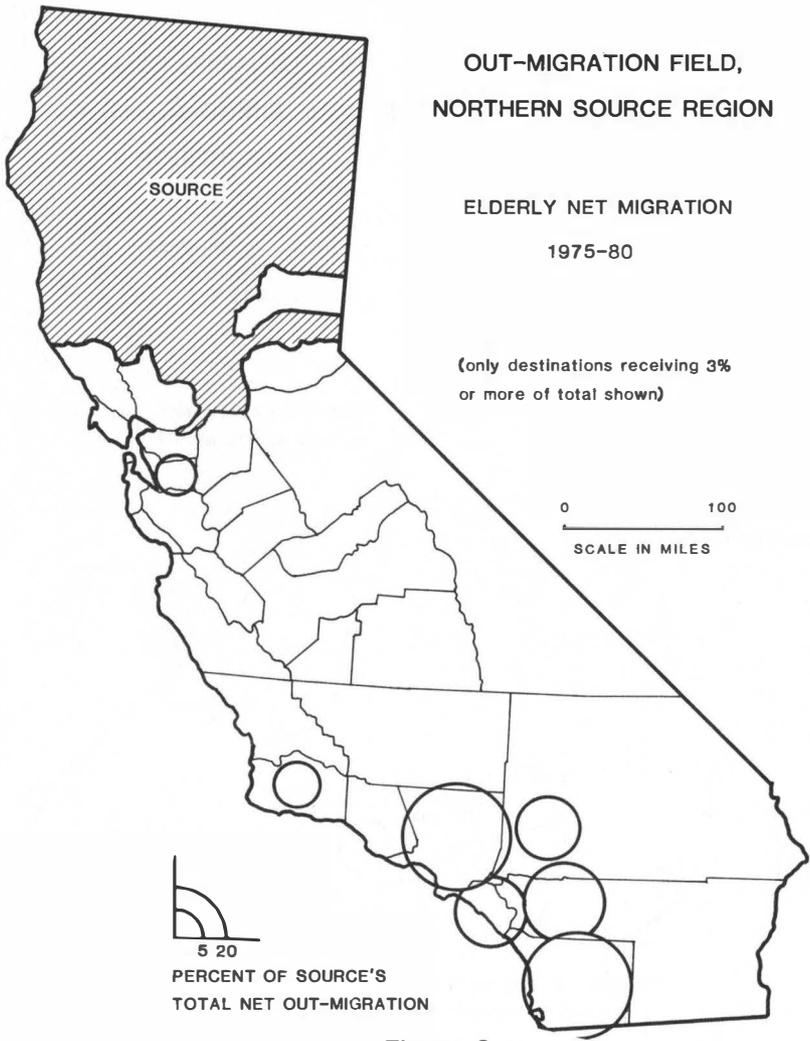


Figure 3

ties, that is, in warmer, "Sunbelt" locations. Of course, the significance of this state figure is somewhat confounded by the fact that one of the source regions is, itself, in the south. Nevertheless, when only the two northern source regions are considered, it is noteworthy

that 61 percent of their net out-migrants were southward bound.

This southern flow is congruent with data from several Bureau of the Census Annual Housing Surveys which report "wanting a change of climate" as a reason for moving often specified by elderly migrants.⁸ A composite total of 39 percent of respondents to those surveys gave "change of climate" as their primary reason for moving, which made it the second ranking reason, following "to be closer to relative," reported by 43 percent. Although the surveys focused on interstate migrants, it seems reasonable to expect climate-oriented intrastate migration within states which possess their own areas of climatic contrast.

The general migration of elderly to the suburbs and beyond at the national level is also well documented.⁹ For example, this trend has been effectively described by Golant, using aggregate census data on previous place of residence, by residential category, for elderly movers for the 1970-75 period.¹⁰ He demonstrated that the dominant pattern of residential category change for the nation's elderly was from central city locations to suburban and nonmetropolitan locations. Furthermore, he found that a large majority of elderly movers remained within the same metropolitan region. Clearly, the net out-migration systems of the Los Angeles and San Francisco-Alameda source regions mirror this dominant national pattern. Presumably, they also reflect the effects of the same "push" and "pull" factors Golant identified as important in shaping the national urban decentralization pattern, including, among other factors, unacceptable social changes occurring in central cities, perceptions of central cities as unsafe locations, problems of maintaining the older structures prevalent in central cities, perceptions of suburbs as

safer and less congested, and the high probability that one's children or other relatives will be in the nearby suburbs.¹¹

It is not clear which of the two trends was dominant within California. Strictly speaking, there were more intrastate elderly migrants moving from city to suburbs than from north to south. As noted above, however, the southern location of Los Angeles County eliminates any potential for a clearly identifiable Sunbelt migration stream from that source region. It seems likely that many of Los Angeles County's elderly out-migrants were encouraged to stay within the metropolitan region because of its warmer climate. Thus, simply dividing the state's elderly migrants into an urban-to-suburbs stream and a Sunbelt stream, and then comparing the relative numbers found in each, is likely to be misleading. In fact, comparison of net out-migration rates for the three source regions indicates that migrants leaving the northern source region were the ones most strongly motivated to move; and most of them went south. Specifically, the northern source region had a net out-migration rate, based on the public use microdata sample, of thirty-two per thousand elderly in the base population, compared to rates of sixteen per thousand and thirteen per thousand for the San Francisco-Alameda and Los Angeles source regions respectively. It thus appears that within California, the Sunbelt exerts a stronger pull than do the suburbs.

In any case, there is a concentration of elderly net migration flows into and out of a limited set of California counties, with a consequent concentration of local impacts. The potential local effects of elderly in- or out-migration are diverse, ranging from increases in basic income via transfer payments to retirees, to increases in

demands for social services. It is generally assumed that an increased elderly population means greater social service consumption, although Crown has shown that in some situations elderly in-migrants generate more income than costs.¹² On the other hand, selective out-migration of affluent elderly may undercut local tax bases. The local nature of impacts will depend on the number of migrants, their characteristics, and the direction of net movement. This study has not attempted to specify those migration impacts, but it has identified the places in California most likely to feel their weight.

This reconstruction of intrastate net migration flows of elderly persons has permitted a look at a scale of events which has been very little studied. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that California's experience closely mirrors the dominant national patterns, with major migrant streams apparently reflecting strong desires for improved comfort, increased access to amenities, and an overall enhancement of the quality of life.¹³ In California, these goals are being sought in the nearby suburbs or in suburban environments in the state's warmer, southern region, producing net shifts in elderly population to those locations.



NOTES

1. J. R. Bohland and L. Treps, "County Patterns of Elderly Migration in the United States," in A. M. Warnes, ed., *Geographical Perspectives on the Elderly* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1982), pp. 139-158, p. 142.
2. S. M. Golant, "Spatial Context of Residential Moves by Elderly Persons," *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, Vol. 8 (1978), pp. 279-289, p. 285.

3. See, for example, R. F. Wiseman, *Spatial Aspects of Aging*, (Washington, D.C.: Association of American Geographers, Resource Paper No. 78-4, 1978); J. C. Biggar, "The Sunning of America: Migration to the Sunbelt," *Population Bulletin*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (1979); and C. B. Flynn, "General Versus Aged Interstate Migration, 1965-70," *Research on Aging*, Vol. 2 (1980), pp. 165-176.
4. Bohland and Treps, op. cit., footnote 1, p. 142.
5. S. M. Golant, "Central City, Suburban, and Nonmetropolitan Area Migration Patterns of the Elderly," in S. M. Golant, ed., *Location and Environment of Elderly Population* (Washington, D.C.: V. H. Winston & Sons, 1979), pp. 37-54; A. Lenzer, "Mobility Patterns Among the Aged," *Gerontologist*, Vol. 5 (1965), pp. 12-15.
6. Golant, 1979, op. cit., footnote 2, p. 287; Biggar, op. cit., footnote 3.
7. Biggar, op. cit., footnote 3, pp. 14-15.
8. L. H. Long and K. A. Hansen, "Reasons for Interstate Migration," *Current Population Reports*, Series P-23, No. 81 (1979), pp. 20-21.
9. R. F. Wiseman and M. A. Virden, "Spatial and Social Dimensions of Intraurban Elderly Migration," *Economic Geography*, Vol. 53 (1977), pp. 1-13; Golant, 1979, op. cit., footnote, 5; C. F. Longino, Jr., "Residential Relocation of Older People: Metropolitan and Non-metropolitan," *Research on Aging*, Vol. 2 (1980), pp. 205-216.
10. Golant, 1979, op. cit., footnote 5, pp. 42-43.
11. Golant, 1979, op. cit., footnote 5, p. 48.
12. T. O. Graff and R. F. Wiseman, "Changing Concentrations of Older Americans," *The Geographical Review*, Vol. 68 (1978), pp. 379-393, p. 380; Golant, 1979, op. cit., footnote 5, p. 37; S. L. Barsby and D. R. Cox, *Interstate Migration of the Elderly* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1975), preface; R. Perlman, "Social Services and Population Redistribution," in B. J. L. Berry and L. P. Silverman, eds., *Population Redistribution and Public Policy* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy of Sciences, 1980), pp. 228-252,

- p. 228; W. H. Crown, "The State Economic Impacts of Aged and Non-aged Migration," *Gerontologist*, Vol. 25 (1985), p. 257.
13. E. S. Lee, "Migration and the Aged," *Research on Aging*, Vol. 2 (1980), pp. 131-135.