

Return Migration to the Midwest

An Analysis of Midwestern and Wisconsin Domestic Migration Patterns
from 2006-2010 and 2011-2015

“The Homecoming of 30-year-olds and 75+-year-olds to the Midwest”

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Executive Summary

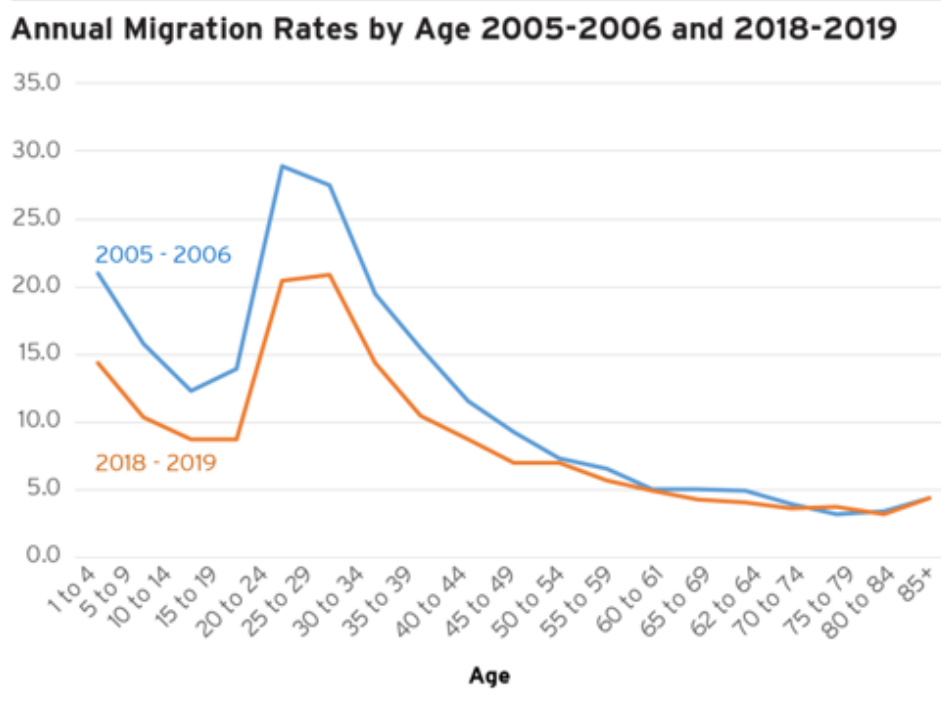
This research provides an in-depth analysis of domestic migration in the Midwest and State of Wisconsin between 2006-2010 and 2011-2015. The Midwest and Wisconsin have frequently been described as experiencing out-migration to coastal regions and coastal states, losing their best and brightest to greener pastures, especially young Midwesterners and retirees. This research suggests that this statement isn't entirely true. While overall domestic migration from the Midwest remains negative as of the 2011-2015 timeframe, the losses experienced by domestic migration in the Midwest have sharply declined from 2006-2010, especially in the 30-year-old age cohort and the 75-and-greater age cohort. In fact, several Midwestern states, like Wisconsin, flipped from negative domestic migration in 2006-2010 to positive domestic migration in 2011-2015. This is the result of a noticeable increase of in-migration to the state of 30-year-olds (the first half of the Millennial generation) and those 75-and-greater (the first half of the Silent generation).

This research finishes by examining push and pull factors responsible for the return migration of Millennials and Silents back to the Midwest and Wisconsin and presents challenges and opportunities presented by this return migration.

Introduction

Americans have historically been a mobile population. From the Dust Bowl and Great Migration to the economic expansion of the 1990s and the Great Remigration, Americans seem to always be moving around the country. This term is called domestic migration and refers to the movement of people within national boundaries. In the average lifetime, migration rates tend to be highest in the 20s, as people move for education, employment, or adventure (Figure 1). Migration slows in the 30s and 40s, as people settle down, purchase a home, and start a family (Figure 1). Migration remains low through middle-age but increases slightly in the 70s and 80s as seniors move for retirement, healthcare, or family (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Annual Migration Rates by Age 2005-2006 and 2018-2019



Source: Frey, 2019

This research begins by analyzing domestic migration in the Midwest and State of Wisconsin and concludes by discussing implications of return migration and what this means for planners. The Midwest in this research uses the United States Census definition, and includes Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. This research analyzes domestic migration between two timeframes: 2006-2010 and 2011-2015. Even though these two time periods are only a year apart, they represent vastly different periods in American history. The 2006-2010 years represent the Great Recession, when the national economy struggled and employment opportunities were scarce,

especially in the Midwest. Conversely, 2011-2015 represent years of robust economic growth with growing employment opportunities, especially in the Midwest.

I chose this topic for my Professional Project because of trends I witnessed throughout the 2010s. I noticed immediately after graduating from undergraduate school in 2012, I saw an exodus of youth from Madison and Wisconsin. Several of these people received jobs in major cities such as New York or San Francisco while some moved cities they've wanted to live in, such as Austin or Nashville. I received a job offer in Madison, so I stayed.

A few years later in 2015, I began to notice several of these people return to Wisconsin. They returned after living in Austin, San Francisco, New York City, DC, and other coastal or Southern cities. This trend became more pronounced in 2018 as I hit my late-20s. I asked these people why they returned to Wisconsin, and they all stated one of three reasons. The first is they returned to be closer to their family, who remained in Wisconsin. The second is they returned to purchase a home, which they couldn't do in the city in which they previously lived. The third is they returned to start a family of their own and wanted their children to grow up near family in Wisconsin.

Another interesting trend I noticed was seniors returning to Wisconsin. In 2012, my grandmother returned to Wisconsin after splitting her time between Wisconsin and Florida for several years and then permanently living in Florida for several years. Her reason for returning was the same as above, wanting to be closer to family.

I decided to pursue this topic and see if these trends I witnessed in Wisconsin could be supported and verified through data.

Methodology

The United States Census provides data on domestic migration by age cohort through the 2006-2010 and 2011-2015 American Community Survey datasets. The estimates provided by the Census resemble the annual number of movers between counties for the 5-year period in which data was collected. This is the most granular level of data for domestic migration by age cohort that is publicly available by the United States Census. No other data sources were needed.

The data was downloaded in county-to-county flows delimited by age cohort. Domestic migration for ages 1-4 is represented by age cohort '01', for ages 5 to 17 by age cohort '02', and so on, through ages 75-and-greater represented by age cohort '15'. This data was appropriate to use for my county-level analysis of selected Wisconsin counties. However, to achieve state-level data, the county-level data needed to be aggregated by state. This was performed in Excel through a series of formulas, an example of which is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Excel Calculation for In-Migration by Age Cohort 01

=SUMIFS(\$X\$3:\$X\$14078,\$E\$3:\$E\$14078,01,\$O\$3:\$O\$14078,"<>Wisconsin",\$O\$3:\$O\$14078,"<>Asia",\$O\$3:\$O\$14078,"<>Africa",\$O\$3:\$O\$14078,"<>Caribbean",\$O\$3:\$O\$14078,"<>Central America",\$O\$3:\$O\$14078,"<>Europe",\$O\$3:\$O\$14078,"<>Northern America",\$O\$3:\$O\$14078,"<>Southern America",\$O\$3:\$O\$14078,"<>Oceania and At Sea",\$O\$3:\$O\$14078,"<>U.S. Island Areas")

This formula in Figure 2 sums all county-level migration values for age cohort 01 (**bolded**) where the migration was not from Wisconsin (as we are not looking at migration occurring within the State of Wisconsin) or any other international continent or entity (underlined). This gives us the total number of domestic migrants for age cohort 01 into Wisconsin, where the migration was from another county in the United States (excluding Wisconsin). This formula was applied to data from each state in the Midwest through a series of Excel workbooks, which were then combined to provide domestic in-migration for the entire Midwest. These steps were performed for each state in the 2006-2010 in-migration and out-migration datasets as well as the 2011-2015 in-migration and out-migration datasets in order to provide comparisons between Midwestern domestic migration and state-level domestic migration between 2006-2010 and 2011-2015.

Midwestern Domestic Migration Trends

This research analyzes domestic migration in the Midwest for three age cohorts spread across two major generations: 20-29-year-olds, 30-39-year-olds, and those 75-and-greater. The first two age cohorts roughly correspond to the first half of the Millennial generation, those born between 1981 and 1989 (Dimock, 2019). These Millennials were 17-29 years old in 2006-2010 and 22-34 years old in 2011-2015. The 75-and-greater cohort roughly corresponds to the first half of the Silent Generation, those born between 1928 and 1937 (Dimock, 2019). These seniors were 69-82 in 2006-2010 and 74-87 in 2011-2015.

Millennial Domestic Migration Trends

The 2006-2010 data extends over the years of the Great Recession. These years correspond to the first half of the Millennial generation, those born between 1981 and 1989, graduating college and entering a workforce marked by high unemployment and low job growth. Between 2006-2010, the Midwest lost almost 170,000 jobs, with a loss of over 500,000 jobs in 2009 and 2010 alone (National Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). During this timeframe of extreme job losses, Midwestern youth fled the region for job opportunities elsewhere. The Midwest lost approximately 70,000 20-29 domestic migrants per year, or a loss of over 340,000 through 2006-2010 (Table 1). Losses were additionally experienced in the 30-39 age cohort, with a loss of 24,000 per year, or a loss of over 100,000 30-39-year-olds throughout 2006-2010 (Table 1).

Conversely, the 2011-2015 data extends over five years of relatively robust job and wage growth throughout the country, but especially in the Midwest. The Midwest gained almost 375,000 jobs from 2011-2015, with a 250,000 job gain in 2015 alone (National Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). By this time, the vast majority of older Millennials had graduated and were in the workforce or actively looking for work. During this timeframe of significant job gains, domestic migration of Midwestern youth out of the region fell dramatically. The loss of 20-29-year-olds decreased 66%, to a loss of 24,000 a year. The loss of 30-39-year-olds decreased 82%, to a loss of only 4,200 a year (Table 1).

Table 1: Midwest Domestic Migration by Age Cohort 2006-2010 and 2011-2015

Midwest 2006-2010					Midwest 2011-2015				
Cohort	AGE	IN	OUT	Net	Cohort	AGE	IN	OUT	Net
1	1 to 4	68244	75559	-7315	1	1 to 4	34113	37074	-2961
2	5 to 17	135314	158311	-22997	2	5 to 17	62897	72712	-9815
3	18 to 19	104787	120176	-15389	3	18 to 19	74615	78092	-3477
4	20 to 24	180017	225334	-45317	4	20 to 24	105656	120934	-15278
5	25 to 29	152711	177025	-24314	5	25 to 29	95359	104480	-9121
6	30 to 34	98261	113068	-14807	6	30 to 34	65291	68902	-3611
7	35 to 39	73532	82722	-9190	7	35 to 39	39227	39847	-620
8	40 to 44	57250	63111	-5861	8	40 to 44	29453	32090	-2637
9	45 to 49	49822	56609	-6787	9	45 to 49	23795	25635	-1840
10	50 to 54	40692	49878	-9186	10	50 to 54	21935	24796	-2861
11	55 to 59	32686	41635	-8949	11	55 to 59	19004	22667	-3663
12	60 to 64	23205	34772	-11567	12	60 to 64	13491	18498	-5007
13	65 to 69	15253	23288	-8035	13	65 to 69	8690	14158	-5468
14	70 to 74	9773	13827	-4054	14	70 to 74	6310	9265	-2955
15	75 +	25299	31807	-6508	15	75 +	13511	15583	-2072
		1066846	1267122	-200276			613347	684733	-71386

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2006-2010, 2011-2015.

However, robust job growth in the Midwest in 2011-2015 was not even across the region. The State of Illinois began to struggle economically in the later years of this timeframe, specifically from 2013-2014. During these two years, Illinois lost almost 100,000 jobs (National Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Not surprisingly, due to significant job losses in Illinois between 2013-2014, the population of the state shrunk by an average of 17,000 people per year between 2013-2015 (United States Census, Factfinder). Illinois was the only state in the Midwest to lose population during this time. Other Midwestern states that struggled during the Great Recession, such as Michigan and Ohio, continued to gain jobs and residents between 2013-2015 (National Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Removing Illinois from the Midwestern data shown in Table 1 presents a different picture of Midwestern domestic migration from 2006-2010 to 2011-2015. This data is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Midwest Domestic Migration by Age Cohort 2006-2010 and 2011-2015
(Excluding the State of Illinois)

Midwest (excluding IL) 2006-2010					Midwest (excluding IL) 2011-2015				
Cohort	AGE	IN	OUT	Net	Cohort	AGE	IN	OUT	Net
1	1 to 4	56020	59107	-3087	1	1 to 4	27618	25905	1713
2	5 to 17	112502	123390	-10888	2	5 to 17	50729	52208	-1479
3	18 to 19	88800	88814	-14	3	18 to 19	63154	52873	10281
4	20 to 24	142698	181209	-38511	4	20 to 24	80089	90531	-10442
5	25 to 29	118412	139062	-20650	5	25 to 29	69585	75720	-6135
6	30 to 34	78773	87407	-8634	6	30 to 34	49645	47911	1734
7	35 to 39	59259	64397	-5138	7	35 to 39	31076	27313	3763
8	40 to 44	46202	50054	-3852	8	40 to 44	24043	23185	858
9	45 to 49	41799	44832	-3033	9	45 to 49	18914	18172	742
10	50 to 54	33996	38804	-4808	10	50 to 54	18017	17822	195
11	55 to 59	27570	33107	-5537	11	55 to 59	15444	16485	-1041
12	60 to 64	19240	27132	-7892	12	60 to 64	11487	13273	-1786
13	65 to 69	13213	18672	-5459	13	65 to 69	7377	10401	-3024
14	70 to 74	8471	10695	-2224	14	70 to 74	5079	6892	-1813
15	75 +	21232	24948	-3716	15	75 +	11217	11600	-383
		868187	991630	-123443			483474	490291	-6817

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2006-2010, 2011-2015.

After removing the State of Illinois from the Midwestern datasets, annual net domestic migration of 20-29-year-olds remains negative with a loss of 59,000 per year from 2006-2010. By 2011-2015, this figure decreases significantly by 74% to an annual domestic migration loss of 16,500 20-29-year-olds. Excluding the State of Illinois, a decrease of 13,700 30-39-year-olds from the Midwest occurred every year between 2006-2010. However, from 2011-2015, the Midwest excluding Illinois actually experienced a gain in domestic migration of 5,400 30-39-year-olds into the region per year. This figure represents those moving to the Midwest (excluding Illinois) from elsewhere in the country, likely due to the improved economy and robust job growth experienced during 2011-2015. This increase is likely due to ex-Midwesterners from the first half of the Millennial generation returning to the Midwest in their 30s, flipping domestic migration positive for the 30-39 age cohort in 2011-2015.

Silent Generation Domestic Migration Trends

The data also presents interesting patterns of domestic migration in the Midwest for the age 75-and-greater cohort. The 2006-2010 years correspond to the first half of the Silent Generation, those born between 1928 and 1937, entering retirement or having enjoyed retirement for several years. During these years, Midwestern seniors fled the region for retirement opportunities elsewhere, including warmer climates and lower cost-of-living in Southern or Western states.

The Midwest lost approximately 6,500 75-and-greater aged domestic migrants per year, or a loss of over 32,000 through 2006-2010 (Table 1).

During the 2011-2015 dataset, the first half of the Silent Generation was almost completely in the 75-and-greater age cohort, ranging from 74-87 years old during this timeframe. Surprisingly, domestic migration out of the Midwest fell by 68% for this age-group, to a loss of only 2,000 aged 75-and-greater persons per year (Table 1)

Most of this generation is past working age and many live on a fixed income for retirement, either from social security or savings. This results in seniors typically moving from high-cost or high-taxation states to low-cost or low-taxation states (Smith Conway & Houtenville, 2003). Illinois is a high-taxation state, with taxes higher than neighboring states in the Midwest and one of the least-friendly tax rates in the nation (Kiplinger, 2019) Therefore, excluding Illinois from our Midwestern dataset of domestic migration presents some interesting trends. From 2006-2010, annual net domestic migration of the 75-and-greater age cohort remained negative with a loss of 3,700 per year. By 2011-2015, this figure decrease dramatically by almost 90% to a net loss of only 380 75-and-greater year-olds out of the Midwest (Table 2).

Wisconsin Domestic Migration Trends

Table 3 outlines domestic migration by age cohort in Wisconsin between the years 2006-2010 and 2011-2015. Overall, the state experienced negative domestic migration of 8,300 annually out of the state between 2006-2010 and positive domestic migration of 4,200 annually into the state between 2011-2015. In both time periods, Wisconsin consistently lost 20-year-olds. From 2006-2010, this loss averaged 5,100 a year, and in 2011-2015, this loss averaged 3,600 a year (Table 3). However, the state consistently gained 30-year-olds. From 2006-2010, this gain averaged 2,900 a year and in 2011-2015, this gain increased to 4,700 a year (Table 3).

Table 3: Wisconsin Domestic Migration by Age Cohort 2006-2010 and 2011-2015

Wisconsin 2006-2010					Wisconsin 2011-2015				
Cohort	AGE	IN	OUT	Net	Cohort	AGE	IN	OUT	Net
1	1 to 4	4113	5167	-1054	1	1 to 4	1765	2905	-1140
2	5 to 17	6750	10928	-4178	2	5 to 17	2942	4377	-1435
3	18 to 19	7119	9730	-2611	3	18 to 19	4947	6207	-1260
4	20 to 24	12119	16462	-4343	4	20 to 24	6949	9418	-2469
5	25 to 29	11740	12559	-819	5	25 to 29	7094	8319	-1225
6	30 to 34	10254	7354	2900	6	30 to 34	6737	5042	1695
7	35 to 39	6264	6262	2	7	35 to 39	5220	2167	3053
8	40 to 44	5289	4537	752	8	40 to 44	3875	1797	2078
9	45 to 49	4747	4377	370	9	45 to 49	2902	1792	1110
10	50 to 54	3494	3295	199	10	50 to 54	2532	1394	1138
11	55 to 59	3612	2950	662	11	55 to 59	2384	1250	1134
12	60 to 64	2631	2278	353	12	60 to 64	1836	1000	836
13	65 to 69	1400	1533	-133	13	65 to 69	1092	695	397
14	70 to 74	1017	891	126	14	70 to 74	689	630	59
15	75 +	1795	2336	-541	15	75 +	1236	1002	234
		82344	90659	-8315			52200	47995	4205

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2006-2010, 2011-2015.

Domestic migration in Wisconsin for the 75-and-greater age cohort changed considerably between 2006-2010 and 2011-2015. From 2006-2010, Wisconsin lost over 500 domestic migrants aged 75-and-greater per year. From 2011-2015, this trend reversed, and Wisconsin attracted over 200 domestic migrants per year aged 75-and-greater.

However, domestic migration is not spread regularly across Wisconsin. Certain counties are attracting 20-year-olds, 30-year-olds, and those aged 75-and-greater, and certain counties are losing domestic migrants in these age cohorts. Table 4 shows Dane County and Milwaukee County, the two economic engines of the State of Wisconsin

**Table 4: Dane County and Milwaukee County
Domestic Migration by Age Cohort and 2011-2015**

Dane County, WI 2011-2015					Milwaukee County, WI 2011-2015				
Cohort	AGE	IN	OUT	Net	Cohort	AGE	IN	OUT	Net
1	1 to 4	501	963	-462	1	1 to 4	548	2198	-1650
2	5 to 17	991	1706	-715	2	5 to 17	1297	3745	-2448
3	18 to 19	2191	2088	103	3	18 to 19	2256	3055	-799
4	20 to 24	2829	4827	-1998	4	20 to 24	2614	5915	-3301
5	25 to 29	5135	4285	850	5	25 to 29	4437	5901	-1464
6	30 to 34	5648	2549	3099	6	30 to 34	5600	3836	1764
7	35 to 39	2794	930	1864	7	35 to 39	5082	2130	2952
8	40 to 44	1926	786	1140	8	40 to 44	2465	1539	926
9	45 to 49	1272	869	403	9	45 to 49	1235	1669	-434
10	50 to 54	1490	620	870	10	50 to 54	1411	1261	150
11	55 to 59	1350	535	815	11	55 to 59	1370	1064	306
12	60 to 64	950	548	402	12	60 to 64	1018	868	150
13	65 to 69	462	377	85	13	65 to 69	727	341	386
14	70 to 74	274	241	33	14	70 to 74	433	315	118
15	75 +	443	332	111	15	75 +	588	1013	-425
		28256	21656	6600			31081	34850	-3769

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2011-2015.

Both Dane County and Milwaukee County are losing 20-year-olds while gaining 30-year-olds. Both counties are home to large universities and experience significant migration loss in the 20-24 age cohort as students graduate from the university and move elsewhere. This loss is balanced by an increase in 30-year-olds as natives or former students return to the county after living elsewhere. Dane County is gaining migrants greater than 75-years-old as the county is the center of healthcare in South Central Wisconsin. Milwaukee County is surprisingly losing migrants greater than 75-years-old. This is likely due to the Milwaukee Metropolitan Area spanning several counties in Southeastern Wisconsin. The loss is likely due to migrants moving to nearby counties, like Waukesha County or Ozaukee County, where access to Milwaukee County's healthcare facilities is relatively easy.

Table 5 shows domestic migration in two medium-sized counties home to two medium-sized cities (Eau Claire and La Crosse) which follow a similar pattern as the State, losing 20-year-olds, gaining 30-year-olds, and gaining those 75-and-greater.

**Table 5: Eau Claire County and La Crosse County
Domestic Migration by Age Cohort 2011-2015**

Eau Claire County, WI 2011-2015					La Crosse County, WI 2011-2015				
Cohort	AGE	IN	OUT	Net	Cohort	AGE	IN	OUT	Net
1	1 to 4	84	217	-133	1	1 to 4	461	181	280
2	5 to 17	303	477	-174	2	5 to 17	495	272	223
3	18 to 19	745	570	175	3	18 to 19	1399	632	767
4	20 to 24	829	1596	-767	4	20 to 24	1008	1683	-675
5	25 to 29	1083	894	189	5	25 to 29	1334	877	457
6	30 to 34	1913	349	1564	6	30 to 34	561	354	207
7	35 to 39	443	272	171	7	35 to 39	530	232	298
8	40 to 44	277	200	77	8	40 to 44	307	91	216
9	45 to 49	238	179	59	9	45 to 49	184	136	48
10	50 to 54	278	235	43	10	50 to 54	89	193	-104
11	55 to 59	118	79	39	11	55 to 59	88	264	-176
12	60 to 64	174	59	115	12	60 to 64	242	67	175
13	65 to 69	44	55	-11	13	65 to 69	112	91	21
14	70 to 74	5	50	-45	14	70 to 74	77	35	42
15	75 +	85	49	36	15	75 +	239	138	101
		6619	5281	1338			7126	5246	1880

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2011-2015.

These counties are both home to state universities where the migration data suggests students move there for college (18-19 age cohort) and move away after graduating in their early 20s. However, domestic migration turns positive in the 30-39 age cohorts, likely due to natives or former college students returning to these counties to raise a family. Interestingly, both counties have positive migration of those 75-and-greater. This is likely due to large, advanced healthcare facilities located in Eau Claire County and La Crosse County which attract aging seniors from nearby rural counties.

**Table 6: Price County and Door County
Domestic Migration by Age Cohort 2011-2015**

Price County, WI 2011-2015					Door County, WI 2011-2015				
Cohort		IN	OUT	Net	Cohort		IN	OUT	Net
1	1 to 4	6	6	0	1	1 to 4	59	17	42
2	5 to 17	22	100	-78	2	5 to 17	38	23	15
3	18 to 19	6	64	-58	3	18 to 19	36	129	-93
4	20 to 24	38	110	-72	4	20 to 24	24	156	-132
5	25 to 29	65	107	-42	5	25 to 29	55	86	-31
6	30 to 34	34	50	-16	6	30 to 34	39	63	-24
7	35 to 39	68	29	39	7	35 to 39	38	36	2
8	40 to 44	13	20	-7	8	40 to 44	21	46	-25
9	45 to 49	14	31	-17	9	45 to 49	0	0	0
10	50 to 54	28	9	19	10	50 to 54	29	3	26
11	55 to 59	28	2	26	11	55 to 59	48	46	2
12	60 to 64	4	13	-9	12	60 to 64	73	27	46
13	65 to 69	10	0	10	13	65 to 69	8	18	-10
14	70 to 74	3	13	-10	14	70 to 74	6	9	-3
15	75 +	30	42	-12	15	75 +	8	21	-13
		369	596	-227			482	680	-198

Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2011-2015.

Table 6 shows domestic migration in Price County and Door County in Wisconsin, two smaller, more rural counties which are struggling to attract domestic migrants in all age cohorts. These two counties are relatively rural and contain no major urbanized area. Neither are home to a major higher educational institution, showing a significant drop in the 18-24-year-old age cohorts. Similarly, these two counties aren't home to any major employers or businesses, explaining the lack of in-migration in the 30s or 40s. Additionally, there aren't any major healthcare institutions located in either county, which is likely responsible for the decrease in domestic migration experienced in the 75-and-greater age cohort, as this population moves to more urbanized areas closer to healthcare institutions.

Analysis of Midwestern and Wisconsin Domestic Migration Trends

Push Factors from the Midwest and Wisconsin

In a country like the United States, push factors are typically economic, such as a region's lack of job growth, lack of income potential, and high cost-of-living or taxation. There are other non-economic push factors, such as discrimination and even climate that push people from a region. For Millennials in the Midwest, major push factors are economic, such as the job losses experienced in 2006-2010 in the region, but also cultural and societal. The first half of the Millennial generation came into the workforce during these years at the height of the Great Recession. 2009-2010 in particular saw half a million jobs decrease in the Midwest (National Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2019). Millennials were pushed from the Midwest to other regions to find employment. Millennials were also pushed from the Midwest and Wisconsin for other reasons such as the regions snowy, cold, and at times harsh climate, or for lifestyle reasons, such as a desire to live in a big coastal city like New York or Los Angeles.

The major push factors for the Silent Generation in the Midwest involves retirement, cost-of-living, and climate. Retirement and climate often go hand-in-hand, as retirees leave cold, snowy regions and states (like the Midwest and Wisconsin) for warmer Southern or Western states. Cost-of-living and high-taxes also factor in, as portions of the Midwest such as Chicago have a higher cost-of-living and tax burden than warm-weather retirement destinations like Florida, South Texas, and South Carolina (Smith Conway & Houtenville, 2003).

Pull Factors to the Midwest and Wisconsin

Pull factors also tend to be economic, such as a region's booming economy, surge in job opportunities, and low cost-of-living or low taxation which attract residents to the region. Additionally, there are pull factors that are not economic, such as a region's culture, climate, or familial networks. Pull factors pulling Millennials and Silents back to the Midwest are numerous and include economic factors as well as social factors. The Midwest offers a lower cost-of-living for young families as well as those on a fixed-income like seniors, as it is the region with the most affordable housing (Bourassa & Haurin, 2016). Furthermore, the Midwest experienced relatively robust job growth of almost 375,000 jobs in the 2011-2015 timeframe (National Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2019), likely attracting Midwesterners who moved during the 2006-2010 economic downturn back to the Midwest. Lastly, telecommuting opportunities changed significantly, even between the 2006-2010 and 2011-2015 timeframes. This technology allows Millennials and other working adults to return to the Midwest where the cost-of-living is lower but keep their job outside of the region.

Another major pull factor, probably the most important, attracting former Midwestern Millennials and Silents back to the Midwest is family. Millennials who moved away return to the Midwest or Wisconsin where their parents, siblings, and other family members still live. They may also return to the Midwest or Wisconsin in their 30s as they prepare to start a family of their own, and wish for their children to grow up with family nearby. Childcare is expensive and having parents or grandparents that can help with raising children is a major financial benefit.

Similarly, this research suggests that members of the Silent Generation return to the Midwest or Wisconsin, after having retired elsewhere, to spend their remaining years surrounded by their children and grandchildren. This is the story of my grandmother, who retired to Florida for almost a dozen years, before fully returning to Wisconsin eight years ago. She returned so she could see her family more than once or twice a year, which was typical when she lived in Florida.

Besides family, another major pull factor for the Silent Generation returning to the Midwest involves healthcare. Senior healthcare is incredibly expensive, especially if care is needed in the home. As seniors age, more care is needed, particularly if seniors continue to remain living independently. The change in domestic migration may reflect seniors 75-and-greater return migrating to the Midwest, so their children and grandchildren can help with healthcare (Smith Conway & Houtenville, 2003).

Limitations, Implications, and Conclusion

This research was not without limitations. A major limitation experienced when calculating this data occurred with the 2006-2010 county-level out-migration data. The metadata for the 2006-2010 dataset stated that if migration was only one or two persons between a set of counties, that data was simply aggregated to the state-level (US Census Bureau). Therefore, several counties contain relatively little information on out-migration for 2006-2010. This research wished to analyze county-level domestic migration changes in Wisconsin from 2006-2010 to 2011-2015, similar to what was presented at the region and state-level in Tables 1-3, but this limitation of the 2006-2010 data made that impossible. This limitation was not present in the 2011-2015 data. In that dataset, migration of one or two persons between a set of counties remained at the county-level and was not aggregated to the state-level.

This research is incredibly useful for planners to understand across the Midwest. For decades, this region bled young persons to superstar coastal cities and seniors to Sunbelt metros. This research suggests that as of the 2010s, this trend is lessening and may even be reversing, as the Midwest “lures back its native sons and daughters while attracting new residents from all over the country” (Kotkin, 2011). The Midwest boasts relatively affordable housing, especially when compared to coastal areas. In fact, the Dynamic Housing Affordability Index indicates the Midwest is the region with the most affordable housing (Bourassa & Haurin, 2016). This helps explain the influx of 30-39-year-olds to the Midwest (excluding Illinois) between 2011-2015. It is important for planners in the Midwest to understand these shifts as an influx of 30-year-olds means school district enrollment will likely increase over the next five to ten years, as this group is of prime childbearing and childrearing age. This influx of 30-year-olds is likely concentrated in urban areas in the Midwest. Rural areas in the region will likely continue to see a decline of this age cohort, unless planners in rural communities stress the importance of broadband access and market themselves as family-friendly telecommuting communities.

Furthermore, the influx of senior citizens (those 75-and-greater) present unique challenges and opportunities for planners in the Midwest. Assisted living communities, retirement homes, and other senior living facilities will increase in demand. These facilities will likely be located in or near major Midwestern urban areas due to proximity to healthcare facilities and quality healthcare professionals. Rural areas in the Midwest will likely continue to lose senior citizens. Additionally, the demand for accessory dwelling units (ADUs), also known as “granny flats”, will increase to allow seniors their own home and space on the same lot as their family. Knowing these trends in senior-aged migration, planners can plan for more assisted living communities and update regulations to include ADUs.

Lastly, there is no way to actually quantify “return migration” with publicly available census data. For example, there isn’t data to show that 15,000 people moved from Wisconsin to California from 2006-2010, and 6,000 of those returned to Wisconsin from 2011-2015, showing a return of native Wisconsinites back to Wisconsin. This research suggests that a significant portion of the decline in out-migration from the Midwest and Wisconsin, and recent trends of in-migration, are due to native Midwesterners returning, particularly in their 30s and senior years.

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