

UNDERSTANDING RESIDENT ATTITUDES TOWARDS MOVING OUT OF ILLINOIS

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A recurring story in media across Illinois is that, since 2014, the state's population has been shrinking. Following the 2020 Census, Illinois is losing one representative in the United States House of Representatives due to this population decline and combined with increases in the populations of other states. Recent analysis suggests the rate of population loss is much greater in the rest of Illinois than in the Chicago metro area. What is driving the exodus of people out of the non-Chicago area of Illinois? In this article, we use survey data to explore this question through a case study of the state capital, Springfield, and its metropolitan area. We find that current evaluations of the local area, prospective evaluations of the future of the area, and the level of confidence respondents have in the state government are all statistically significant predictors of respondents desiring to relocate. Our analysis gives state and local policymakers key insights into the factors that shape the attitudes of individuals toward the possibility of moving. This information can help shape local policies aimed at retaining current residents and decreasing population loss.

INTRODUCTION

A recurring story in media across Illinois is that, since 2014, the state's population has been shrinking (Buchman, 2019; Reyes, 2019; Louri, 2020; Pearson, 2021; Trubey, 2021; WIFR Newsroom, 2021). Following the 2020 Census, Illinois is losing one representative in the United States House of Representatives due to this population decline and combined with increases in the populations of other states. While both the Chicago metro area and the rest of Illinois, commonly referred to as “downstate,” are experiencing population loss, it's not at an equal rate. A recent analysis from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) suggests the rate of population loss is much greater in the downstate region than in the Chicago metro area (CMAP, 2021). According to CMAP's December 2020 analysis, the Chicago area has suffered a population loss of 0.05% in the past few years, while the rest of Illinois had a loss of 2.14% in the same time frame.

What is driving the exodus of people out of Illinois? Given the dramatic difference in outmigration rates between the two areas of Illinois, the more pressing question may be what is driving outmigration in the downstate region, in particular? In this article, we use survey data to systematically explore what may drive individuals to desire a move from downstate through a case study of the state capital, Springfield, and its metropolitan area. Understanding what drives people to consider moving is important as a desire to move indicates that a person may think they would be happier in a different area than where they currently reside (De Jong & Fawcett, 1981; Kley, 2011). Further, individuals who desire to move out of an area may pull back from investing or participating in the local area, contributing to the area's decline (van der Land & Doff, 2010), which perhaps could spur additional outmigration. Our analysis gives state and local policymakers key insights into the factors that shape the attitudes of individuals toward the possibility of moving. These findings can help drive state and local decisions around policies and marketing. Such actions can help with retaining residents, limiting the potential negative impact on investment or participation, and limiting the potential decline of an area by addressing the factors that are the most impactful on shaping an individual's interest in moving.

EXISTING RESEARCH

Previous research into individuals' moving decisions highlights a number of key findings. While not exhaustive, we will highlight salient parts of this research. One of the key points is separating a desire to move, an expectation or plan to move, and making a decision to move, which are all distinct phenomena (Rossi, 1955; von Reichert, 2006; Coulter et al., 2011; de Groot et al., 2011). This research also distinguishes from moves that are sought out based on a desire to move and moves that are forced, perhaps due to life circumstances, which follow a different decision-making process (Coulter et al., 2011). Further, existing research suggests that the evolution from a desire to move to actually moving is often a long process, and the desire to move frequently does not guarantee a person will move (Coulter et al., 2012). In fact, approximately 75% of people who desire a move expect to stay in their current area (von Reichert, 2006). The current article focuses on understanding the foundations of a desire to move.

Existing findings point to a key role of demographic factors in driving a desire to move. An often-looked-at motivating factor for considering moving is age.

Researchers find that as people's age increases, they are less likely to desire a move and less likely to translate that desire to move into action (Clarke & Hunter, 1992; Clark & Dieleman, 1996; Lu, 1998; Johnson et al., 2005; Brown & Glasgow, 2008; de Groot et al., 2011; Coulter et al., 2012; Ulrich-Schad et al., 2013). As people age, we form ties to communities through friendships, property ownership, membership in social organizations, and employment that shape our attachment to a given location (Smith & Krannich, 2000; Carr & Kefalas 2010b; Oishi, 2010; Winkler et al., 2011; Gonzalez et al., 2018). These attachments in turn may affect our desire to move.

One factor that may combine with the relationship between age and a desire to move is homeownership. In the United States, there are large differences between younger individuals and older individuals when it comes to homeownership (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Less than 40% of individuals under the age of 35 own their home. But approximately 70% of Americans between the ages 45 and 54 own their homes, and 80% of those over 65 years old do. Homeownership is known to restrict moving behavior as homeowners move less frequently than renters (Speare et al., 1975; Clark & Dieleman, 1996; Mulder & Hooimeijer, 1999; Helderma, 2007).

Several other demographic aspects in addition to age and housing play a role in shaping an individual's desire to move. Race can drive a desire to move; being white correlates with an increased desire to move, as well as following through on those desires, especially in areas that are increasing in their diversity (Krysan, 2002; van Ham & Fiejen, 2008; Feijten & van Ham, 2009; Crowder et al., 2011). This process is related to a larger phenomenon referred to as "white flight" (Crowder, 2000; Emerson et al., 2001; Crowder & South, 2008). Findings on gender are more mixed, with some research finding gender differences aren't relevant in a desire to move (Michielin et al., 2008) while others have found that women are more likely to desire to move and more likely than men to turn a desire to move into a successful move (Lu, 1999; de Groot et al., 2011).

Employment also matters because individuals with a job are more likely to move than those who are unemployed (Feijten, 2005). Highly educated people also tend to be more mobile compared with less-educated people (Clark & Dieleman, 1996; Ulrich-Schad et al., 2013). Income, however, can be a complicated factor in a desire to move. Those with a high income have a higher probability to translate moving intentions into action, but they may be less likely to desire a move in the first place (Duncan & Newman, 1976; Moore, 1986; Lichter et al., 1995; de Groot et al., 2011; Coulter et al., 2012).

Researchers have also demonstrated a link between individual personalities and moving (Jokela, 2009; Oishi, 2010). One more consideration is that while surveys are often completed by individuals, those individuals may be married or in a relationship or have children, all of which can affect the interest, ability, and decision to move. Research finds frequent disagreement between couples on a desire to move and inaction on moving when spouses disagree (Mincer, 1978; Buck, 2000; Ferreira & Taylor, 2009; Coulter et al., 2012). Taken collectively, previous research points to a highly complex picture of the impact of demographics, which requires accounting for a number of factors when trying to understand a desire to move.

Outside of demographics, personal evaluations of the current area of residence have been found to be a large driving force of the desire to move, particularly dissatisfaction (Speare, 1974; Speare et al., 1975 and 1982; De Jong et al., 1992; Stinner & Van Loon, 1992; De Jong, 1994; von Reichert, 2006; Ulrich-Schad et al., 2013). Dissatisfaction depends on how respondents evaluate the current area they live in and how those evaluations interact with their expectations for the area (Rossi, 1955; Speare, 1974; von Reichert, 2006; Carr & Kefalas 2010a; Ulrich-Schad et al., 2013). Further, researchers have focused on the impact of optimism and pessimism for an area's future on a desire to move from an area in shaping dissatisfaction (Ulrich-Schad et al., 2013). Relatedly, researchers have found that evaluations of the local economy help influence attitudes toward moving (von Reichert, 2006; Carr & Kefalas 2010a; Ulrich-Schad et al., 2013). These findings suggest that understanding how individuals assess their local area is an important factor that affects an individual's desire to move, and researchers need to account for it.

DATA

The survey was fielded from June 1, 2019, to July 3, 2019, via mail questionnaire with the option to take the survey online. The sample was an address-based sample of 8,000 households in Sangamon County, Illinois. The Institute for Legal, Legislative, and Policy Studies sent an introductory letter, the mail questionnaire, and a postage-paid reply envelope. A total of 652 interviews were completed (612 via mail; 40 via the web).

DEPENDENT VARIABLE

Our dependent variable comes from the question “In the past 12 months, have you considered moving out of, or away from, Sangamon County?” Respondents

could select either “yes” or “no.” This measure reflects a desire to move while not necessarily reflecting an expectation or plan to move, which are distinctly different (von Reichert, 2006; Coulter et al., 2011; de Groot et al., 2011; Ulrich-Schad et al., 2013). We look at the desire to move as opposed to intent to move for two reasons. First, doing so aligns us with a number of existing studies. Second, we have the practical issue that intention to move was not asked in the survey analyzed. Future iterations of the survey will ask such questions. In our survey results, 52% of respondents report they desire to move away from Sangamon County.

EVALUATION-BASED EXPLANATORY VARIABLES

Given that most people surveyed desire a move from the area, the reasons were likely to be diverse, aligning with the previously mentioned existing research, requiring exploration of numerous potential motivations. Building on the idea that a desire to move is driven by subjective evaluations, we explore multiple subjective evaluations of Sangamon County, state and local government, and a respondent’s neighborhood. To understand what drives individuals to want to move, we included a number of survey questions aimed to evaluate individuals’ lives and the area they live in.

The first variable, “right direction,” comes from the question “Generally speaking, would you say that things in Sangamon County are heading in the right direction or are they off on the wrong track?” Similarly worded questions have been used at the national, state, and locality levels since the early 1970s, and they capture how optimistic or pessimistic about the area respondents are. Including a measure of optimism or pessimism is consistent with other research on this topic (Ulrich-Schad et al., 2013).

The survey also asked respondents to rate Sangamon County as a place to live, raise children, work, and retire. For each, response options were “poor,” “fair,” “good,” or “excellent.” We account for these measures of local-area satisfaction to build on prior work that has demonstrated a connection between dissatisfaction with an area and a willingness to move from that area (Speare, 1974; Speare et al., 1975 and 1982; De Jong et al., 1992; De Jong, 1994; von Reichert, 2006). In our main analysis, we combine respondent scores into an overall rating of Sangamon County, which has values between zero and 16. This combined summative index is similar to the approach utilized by Ulrich-Schad et al. (2013). While the “right direction or wrong track” question captures how optimistic or pessimistic a respondent is about the future of a given area, this

combined variable captures how respondents currently rate the area (Rossi, 1955; Speare et al., 1974; von Reichert, 2006; Carr & Kefalas, 2010a; Ulrich-Schad et al., 2013).

Confidence in local leaders comes from the survey question asking “In general, how much more confidence would you say you have in local leaders to effectively address problems in your community?” Respondents could select “not confident at all,” “not very confident,” “somewhat confident,” or “very confident.” Including a measure of evaluation of local government is consistent with other research on local migration (Ulrich-Schad et al., 2013; Ketterer & Rodríguez-Pose, 2014). Given Springfield’s status as the home of state government, with the state government overwhelmingly being the largest employer in the metropolitan area, evaluations of state government may affect attitudes (City of Springfield, 2020, p. 200). By accounting for state government, we expand considerations of dissatisfaction with it and also capture potential dissatisfaction with the largest employer in an area. To gather this, we included a question that asked “In general, how much more confidence would you say you have in state leaders to effectively address problems in your community?” As with local leaders, respondents could select “not confident at all,” “not very confident,” “somewhat confident,” or “very confident.”

Evaluation of local economic conditions captures respondent evaluation of the local economy and is based on responses to the question “How do you rate Sangamon County’s economy today?” This four-point measure has options of “poor,” “fair,” “good,” and “excellent.” The importance of economic considerations comes from findings of prior research (von Reichert, 2006; Carr & Kefalas 2010b; Ulrich-Schad et al., 2013).

For the variable feelings of safety, we also account for how safe respondents feel in their neighborhood. Previous research has found a relationship between attitudes toward a person’s immediate neighborhood and a desire to move (Sundblad & Sapp 2011). This variable comes from the question “Do you feel safe or unsafe walking alone at night in your neighborhood” with “safe” and “unsafe” as the response options.

DEMOGRAPHIC-BASED EXPLANATORY VARIABLES

Our control variables include basic demographic information. As noted, prior research has found demographic factors to be important factors for understanding why people move. Age is a five-point measure, with groups

including “18 to 34 years old,” “35 to 44 years old,” “45 to 54 years old,” “55 to 64 years old,” and “65 and older.” Education is also a five-point measure, with groups including “less than a high school diploma,” “a high school diploma or GED,” “between a high school diploma and completed four-year degree,” “a completed four-year college degree,” and “more than a four-year degree.” We account for a respondent’s race by asking whether a respondent self-identified as “white,” with “white” respondents coded as one and non-white respondents coded as zero. Employment is captured by asking respondents “Which of the following best describes your current employment status?” (Coulter et al., 2011). Relatedly, we also account for income with a five-point measure (Lichter et al., 1995). Gender is included through a dichotomous variable, with men coded as zero and women coded as one. Lastly, as existing research suggests a strong correlation between personality type, particularly agreeableness, and a person’s willingness to move, we account for personality (Jokela, 2009; Oishi, 2010). To do this, we account for a respondent’s willingness to trust as a proxy of agreeableness through an individual’s response to the question “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?” In line with the long-established use of such a question, the response options are “most people can be trusted” and “can’t be too careful.” An individual’s willingness to trust others constitutes part of an agreeable personality in psychology (Costa & McCrae, 1992; McCrae & Costa, 2003; McCrae, 2004).¹

RESULTS

Considering our variable of interest is a “yes” or “no,” all analysis presented in this section is based on binomial logistic regressions as opposed to ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. OLS regression would be appropriate if our dependent variable were a continuous scale, such as a question that asked “How likely are you to move in the next year?” with a four- or five-point scale as the response. This is consistent with additional research on this topic (Ulrich-Schad et al., 2013).

For those unfamiliar with regression analysis, regressions are a statistical way to holistically account for different factors to understand what is really driving the phenomena of interest and what isn’t. A straightforward explanation of Table 1 is that those variables that have stars next to their numbers are statistically significant and correlated with desiring a move out of Sangamon County. If a variable’s numbers are negative, this means that a particular

TABLE 1
FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSIDERATION OF MOVING AWAY FROM SANGAMON COUNTY

VARIABLE	MODEL 1	MODEL 2	MODEL 3	MODEL 4	MODEL 5
Right direction	-0.807 (0.295)*	-1.464 (0.244)*			
Overall rating	-0.357 (0.072)*		-0.476 (0.066)*		
Confidence in local leaders	-0.215 (0.194)			-0.733 (0.149)*	
Confidence in state leaders	-0.358 (0.179)*				-0.793 (0.142)*
Local economy	-0.137 (0.251)	-0.699 (0.206)*	-0.339 (0.226)	-0.857 (0.190)*	-0.953 (0.190)*
Feel safe	-0.122 (0.304)	-0.314 (0.273)	-0.089 (0.284)	-0.228 (0.261)	-0.368 (0.264)
Trust	-0.405 (0.276)	-0.869 (0.242)*	-0.433 (0.254)	-0.680 (0.236)*	-0.787 (0.235)*
Age	-0.225 (0.097)*	-0.272 (0.088)*	-0.168 (0.091)	-0.215 (0.084)*	-0.227 (0.085)*
Education	0.262 (0.147)	0.235 (0.131)	0.197 (0.133)	0.165 (0.123)	0.169 (0.124)
Woman	-0.074 (0.249)	-0.237 (0.226)	-0.175 (0.231)	-0.123 (0.216)	-0.013 (0.219)
White	-0.081 (0.462)	0.278 (0.407)	-0.013 (0.432)	0.359 (0.389)	0.154 (0.389)
Income	0.282 (0.141)*	0.328 (0.127)*	0.381 (0.132)*	0.333 (0.121)*	0.285 (0.122)*
Unemployed	-0.947 (1.249)	0.067 (0.896)	-0.315 (1.015)	0.346 (0.834)	0.140 (0.826)
Constant	3.094 (0.816)*	1.509 (0.695)*	2.741 (0.750)*	1.693 (0.680)*	1.891 (0.688)*
AIC	457.35	526.08	507.87	570.49	563.02
BIC	514.63	571.64	553.52	616.57	609.09
Log-likelihood	-214.68	-252.04	-242.94	-274.25	-270.51
McFadden Pseudo R-Squared	0.512	0.427	0.448	0.376	0.385

*Coefficients and standard errors. All models are binomial logistic regression.² *p ≤ 0.05.*

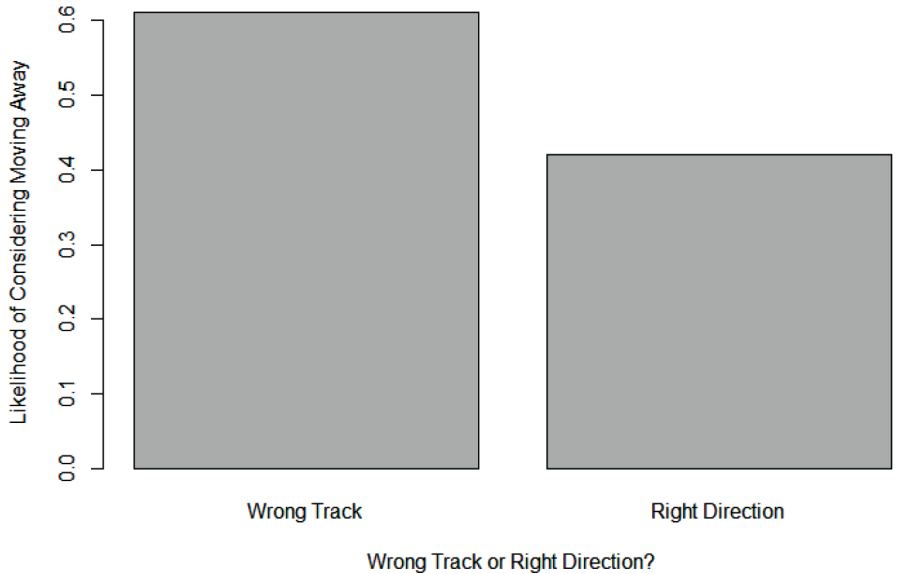
variable has a negative correlational relationship with considering moving out of Sangamon County. If there is a positive number, this means there is a positive correlational relationship with considering moving out of Sangamon County.

With that all in mind, what does the data presented in Table 1 tell us about the factors that impact considerations of moving away from Sangamon

County? First, thinking Sangamon County is heading in the right direction, or being optimistic about Sangamon County’s future, is significantly negatively correlated with desiring a move away from Sangamon County. Second, a respondent’s overall assessment of Sangamon County is significant and negatively correlated with desiring a move away. This suggests that as a person evaluates the area more positively, there is a significant negative relationship with considering moving away. The results also suggest that confidence in state leaders, not local leaders, is a significant and negative contributor to desiring a move. This suggests that those who have more confidence in state government are less likely to desire moving. Consistent with previous findings, older age is a significant negative predictor of desiring a move, and higher income is a significant positive predictor.

Building on the above regression analysis, we turn to predicted probabilities to further understand what drives a desire to move and how large an impact the factors have. These tell us the chance of the phenomena occurring, accounting for all other variables in the model. Figure 1 shows the difference in the predicted probability of a respondent saying they’ve considered moving from

FIGURE 1
IMPACT OF THINKING SANGAMON COUNTY IS HEADING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION ON CONSIDERING MOVING



Sangamon County based on if they report Sangamon County is heading in the right direction or is on the wrong track, keeping everything else accounted for in Model 1 at their average value. The impact is sizeable. A respondent who reports that Sangamon County is on the wrong track has a 61% chance of saying they've considered moving out of Sangamon County compared to a respondent who reports things are heading in the right direction, who has a 42% chance, holding all other variables included at their average. This is a 19-percentage-point difference. So not only does this measure of public sentiment have a statistically significant impact on a desire to move, but the impact is fairly large.

FIGURE 2
IMPACT OF OVERALL RATING OF SANGAMON COUNTY ON CONSIDERING MOVING

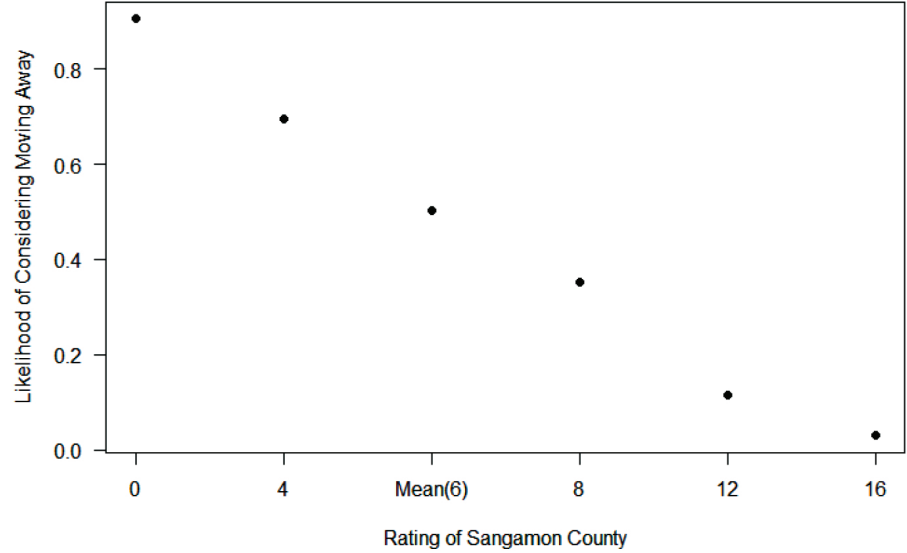


Figure 2 looks at the probability that a respondent reported having considered moving based on their overall scored evaluation of Sangamon County, holding all other variables in the model, including the effect of the right direction question, at their mean. As can be seen in Figure 2, a person whose overall rating of Sangamon County is zero has a 90.4% probability of reporting having considered moving in the past year, holding all other values at their mean. At the mean value response to the question, which is approximately a

six out of 16, that probability drops to approximately 50%, and a respondent rating Sangamon County eight out of 16 has a 35.2% probability of reporting considering moving.

CONCLUSIONS

Our results support previous research that highlights dissatisfaction with the local area as driving a desire to move away from a given region. We find measures capturing the optimism or pessimism an individual has toward an area and current evaluations of a location as being motivating factors of a desire to relocate. Local governments or nonprofits may want to allocate resources to be active in articulating a positive vision for their area, as well as reinforcing the current benefits of an area through marketing campaigns. Essentially, reminding residents why an area is a good place, as well as convincing residents to be optimistic about the area's future, may have important payoffs for local governments looking to retain their residents.

In a new addition to this research area, we find that metropolitan Springfield residents not having confidence in state government significantly correlates with a desire to move out of the area. This finding might be explained in at least two ways: first as a lack of confidence in the state of Illinois as a government and second due to state government being the largest employer in the area. This finding may be unique to state capitals, like Springfield, and may not translate to areas that do not house state government or areas where the state government is not the largest employer. It's possible that previous research findings that are missing evaluations of state government may be over-attributing the impact of local governments on a desire to move. In our analysis, a lack of confidence in local government is a significant predictor of an expressed desire to move out of the Springfield metropolitan area, but this significance goes away once we account for evaluations of state government.

Relatedly, state government in Illinois faced a budget impasse for over two years between July 2015 and August 2017. As a consequence of this, Illinois' credit rating was lowered, the state government defaulted on paying debts and contracts, and the state's reputation was damaged. In 2019, when this survey was fielded, the Springfield metropolitan area still may have been vulnerable to more ill will being aimed at the state government that residents in the metro areas of other state governments may not have felt. Still, this is a potential warning

for localities that residents may hold an area accountable for evaluations of state government, which are often far beyond the influence of local government.

A number of considerations around this study should be mentioned. Given that this study does not have longitudinal data for each respondent, this study cannot test direct causation. This is a potential issue as it would be reasonable to debate whether a desire to move may come from a negative evaluation of the community or if, once one desires to move, they begin to evaluate their community more poorly. Further, while this study looks at the desire to move due to data limitations, it does not explore the intent to move. Therefore, the question of whether the factors that explain a desire to move in Illinois also explain the intent to move is left open. Future similar surveys may want to incorporate questions around both the desire to move and the intention to move. As well, employment opportunities are the number one reason cited for moving from an area (Frost, 2020). Future studies will want to incorporate whether respondents are pursuing employment opportunities away from the area where they currently reside in addition to other potential motivators for moving. Relatedly, the sector of employment for respondents may matter for a desire to move. If respondents work in an employment sector that is growing or shrinking in an area, this may influence a desire to move. In line with existing research mentioned previously, homeownership also shapes a desire to move. Future studies will want to incorporate questions related to homeownership into data collection. They also may want to ask about tenure in the area because the length of time a respondent has lived in an area may influence a desire to move. Lastly, while this study looks at local residents' attitudes and evaluations of an area, future research may want to expand such analysis to look at the attitudes and evaluations of local employers on their willingness to keep their business in the area or relocate.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Given the large number of factors explored in this project and some potential similarities between the concepts, we examined whether there were any concerning levels of correlations. We found some moderate correlational relationships, but none that reached a level of concern.

² Due to the moderate strength of a couple of the variables in the previously presented correlation matrix, we also tested for multicollinearity in the data. The concern is over-multicollinearity, which means that one of the variables in our regression predicts the value of one or more additional variables in the regression. Based on the parameters outlined in Zuur et al., 2010, we find no concerning levels of multicollinearity. For our main model (Model 1), the variance inflation factor for each variable was: right track=1.45, overall=1.59, confidence in local leaders=1.48, confidence in state leaders=1.30, evaluation of the local economy=1.51, whether respondents feel safe=1.23, whether respondents trust in other people=1.29, age=1.08, education level=1.41, whether the respondent was a woman=1.09, whether a respondent was white=1.07, household income=1.47, and unemployed=1.023.

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