



Economic Review

Population Turnover and the Growth of Urban Areas

by: Jason P. Brown and Colton Tousey

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More people are moving to and from large urban areas, leading to faster population growth over time.

People in the United States are relocating nearly half as much they did in the early 1980s. Lower population turnover—the propensity of people to move into or out of a given location—may mean a decline in labor market adjustment across industries and occupations; when people move across regions for job-related reasons, they may help smooth out changes that hit certain labor markets harder than others. Population turnover may also lead to better matches between employer and employee, an important factor in the growth of urban areas.

Jason P. Brown and Colton Tousey examine the relationship between population turnover and overall population growth across urban areas of various sizes from 2000 to 2017. They find that larger urban areas tend to have higher population turnover and that higher initial levels of turnover are correlated with faster population growth over subsequent decades. Their findings, which are consistent with other studies showing economic activity increasingly concentrating in larger urban areas, suggest that areas with small populations and lower levels of labor market adjustment face greater economic challenges.

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Jason Brown is a Vice President and Economist in the Economic Research Department of the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City. In this role, he coordinates the regional and commodities research of the Bank and serves as liaison to regional and commodities researchers located in branch offices and in Kansas City. He conducts research on issues related to regional economic growth, emerging industries, natural resource development, and structural change in regional industry and labor markets. Prior to joining the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, Jason was an economist at the USDA Economic Research Service in Washington, D.C. He holds a Ph.D. from Purdue University.



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I joined the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City after receiving my BS degree in mathematics from the University of Kansas. Since joining the Kansas City Fed, I have had the honor to work with [Jason Brown](#) and [Francisco Scott](#) in their research. Currently, I am working on projects looking at the changes in trends in migration among urban areas in the United States as well as projects on transitions occurring in the energy sector. Recently, I have moved into a formal leadership role within the department, supervising new RAs and working on the development of RAs.