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Is the Ongoing Migration from California to Texas a Migration of Cognitive Capital?

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Abstract

Over the last decade there has been considerable migration out of the strongly Democrat state of California and it is popularly reported that a significant component of this migration is to its rival, the strongly Republican state of Texas. These two states pursue very different economic and social policies. In this study, we explore whether this migration is related to intelligence: Is California losing cognitive capital to Texas? Based on proxy data, we cautiously conclude that this is, indeed, what is occurring. Intelligence is migrating from California to Texas. To a lesser extent, low IQ is migrating from Texas to California, consistent with very different state policies creating push and pull factors and also the ease with which the more intelligent can migrate. We demonstrate that our broader finding is congruous with other proxy data.

Keywords: Intelligence, Brain drain, Cognitive capital, California, Texas

1 Introduction

Over the last decade, evidence has amassed of considerable migration from the strongly Democrat state of California to the now reliably Republican state of Texas. It was estimated in 2022 that 10 % of new residents in Texas were from California (Tanzi, 2022). This appears to be a component of a more general migration out of the so-called "Golden State". Between 2006 and 2016, 2.5 % of California's population abandoned the state, with Texas being the most popular destination: one quarter of Californian migrants made their way to the "Lone Star State" (The Economist, 2019). Between 2009 and 2019, approximately 68,700 Californians moved to Texas every year, according to the American Community Survey. This outpaced the reversal — Texans moving to California — and between 2018 and 2019, it did so at a ratio of 2 to 1.

This movement accelerated during the Covid-19 pandemic. Between 2017 and 2019, 122,516 people made the move. Between 2020 and 2022, it was 178,292. The key factors in making the move are reported to be high housing costs and taxes in California, red tape precluding business activity there, government lockdowns in California, leftist dominance and related contempt for conservative values, and high crime in California, partly due to lax policing, itself a reflection of liberal political dominance (Barker et al., 2023). For example, law enforcement is so lax in San Francisco that numerous opioid addicts are permitted to live in tents in public streets (McCormick, 2022). They brawl, defecate on the pavements and commit property crime, such that 37 % of San Francisco residents, interviewed in 2022, said they wanted to leave the city in the next three years (Reinl, 2022). This is clearly having a serious economic impact, consistent with intelligent people leaving. A lengthy list of chains that were once operating in San Francisco have shut down in recent years and the office vacancy rate, as of 2023, was 30 % (Grimes, 2023).

This is partially congruous with the findings of the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement 2022 which found the key reasons for moving to Texas are work, family-related and housing, in that order across time from 2011, though with occasional fluctuations. This is somewhat different from what the newspaper found and is certainly more reliable, though less detailed. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic of 2021, "family-related" became the most important reason, though just for that year. However, this is internal migrants to Texas in general, not specifically Californians (Orrenius & Zavaodny, 2023). A 2021 survey of Californians found that those contemplating leaving were concerned about high housing costs in California (34 % of respondents). Conservatives were also more likely to contemplate

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leaving than liberals, implying that California's liberal policies may be a salient "push factor" (Johnson & McGhee, 2023). Unfortunately, there does not appear to be any survey specifically of Californians who have moved to Texas.

Such is the influx of Californians to Texas that the slogan "Don't California My Texas" has become popular. Texans are concerned that Californians, now resident in Texas, will vote Democrat and, so, change the nature of the Republican state for the worse, from a conservative perspective (Dallas Morning News, 2022). Until the 1950s, California was itself a reliably Republican state, though it identified as "Northern". Republican President between 1981 and 1989, Ronald Regan (1911-2004), was Governor of California between 1967 and 1975. By 1998, California was firmly Democrat for a number of reasons including high Hispanic immigration, the emigration to California of young, educated people due to its association with counter-culture and also to work in the growing tech industries, a resultant shift in cultural values, and a growing polarization between Democrats and Republicans. This has led to an increasing polarization between these two states, with California marked by forms of "socialism" and leniency towards crime. Texas, which identifies as "Southern" though it voted Democrat in the 1976 presidential election[1], is quite the opposite. As both states are very large, both geographically and in terms of population, there is open competition between the two to direct the future of the United States of America (Miller, 2020).

Some Democrats dislike this process of migration away from California, as it may be seen to imply that there is something wrong with the policies which they have pursued there. Accordingly, there have been attempts to "debunk" the supposed "myth" of Californian migration to Texas. The leftist website Vice, for example, has run an article entitled: "A Shocking Number of Californians Are Moving to Texas Unless You Do Basic Math" (Gordon, 2022). The implication of this fallacious "appeal to insult" is that those who disagree with the writer are innumerate and thus of low intelligence. The article argues that 11 % of new Texans are Californian and that, based on California's population size and general migration patterns within the US, this should be 13 %. Of course, this is a piece of sophistry, as it fails to take into account the fact that the move from California to Texas is a massive geographical and cultural move. It cannot reasonably be compared to moving to an adjacent state. A number of other left-leaning publications have attempted to play down what appears to be going on (e.g. Fulton 2021). The very fact that such cognitive dissonance appears to be displayed should make any open-minded researcher strongly desire to understand what is really taking place.

In general, migration is correlated with intelligence. Those who are more intelligent have the future-orientation to move and the resources and organizational ability to do so (Jensen, 1998). Migration patterns have, therefore, led to significant average IQ differences when comparing different areas of different countries (e.g. Abdelrasheed et al. 2019; Dutton & Lynn 2014; Lynn 1979, 1980; Pesta 2022). We would aver that this process of migration is important if it involves the significant movement of "cognitive capital", if it is the more intelligent who are migrating from California to Texas. This is a crucial issue because intelligence is robustly correlated with numerous factors that lead, at the group level, to a high standard of living and an innovative economy, including wealth, education, income, law-abidingness, creativity, innovativeness, genius, openness, abstract thinking, altruism, health, happiness, socioeconomic status of origin and achieved, honesty, and trust (Lynn & Vanhanen, 2012; Rindermann, 2018). The adult heritability of intelligence is also very high, 0.83 based on a meta-analysis of twin studies (Lynn, 2011, p. 101). If the migration from California to Texas involves such a movement of cognitive capital, we would expect the heart of technical innovation in the US to, eventually, move from Silicon Valley to Texas. A prominent example already occurred in 2021 when businessman Elon Musk moved Tesla from California to Texas (Reuter, 2021). A number of celebrities have also relocated from California to Texas, such as the popular podcaster Joe Rogan (De Luna, 2020). This may lead to a "Trickle Effect", the process whereby high-status people tend to be imitated (Simmel, 1957).

In this study, therefore, we will attempt to test whether or not California is indeed bleeding cognitive

[1] This may partly reflect the former political pattern whereby Southern states, that were part of the Confederacy, reliably voted Democrat due to the winning Union States in the American Civil War having been run by Republicans. This tendency for Southern Whites to vote Democrat, a party formerly regarded as the party for poor Whites, began to change, especially once Civil Rights Laws were imposed on Southern states in the 1960s by a Democrat administration (see Manza & Brooks 1999).

capital to Texas, with all of the likely consequences that this will have for the future of both states. We will further test whether Texas is bleeding cognitive capital to California. We will test this by analyzing the available data, which is at the county level and includes proxies for intelligence. Our hypothesis is that more intelligent counties in California will show the highest migration rates to Texas while the lowest IQ counties in Texas will display disproportionate migration to California. If this hypothesis is proven, then it is likely that state-level policies are to blame for what is occurring. Further, we will test the polarization hypothesis: the idea that the cause of this migration is Republicans leaving Democrat states in order to live in Republican ones.

2 Method

The United States Census Bureau is a large, publically available data set. Among data it has collected are the racial demography of each county within California, the median and mean annual salary for each county, the per cent in each county who hold a graduate or professional degree, and the net outflow from that county to Texas between 2016 and 2020. The latter was only collected for a subsample of counties, so these are the ones examined below. Although, we do not have a direct measure of intelligence, the Census Bureau provides a number of robust proxy measures, as discussed earlier. In addition, the average White IQ in the US is set at 100 while the average Black IQ in the northern states is approximately 90; it being around 80 in the southern states (Levin, 1997, pp. 135-136).

We used the characteristics of the Californian county of origin as variables upon which to conduct a regression. These include % of population white, median earnings, graduate or professional degree, and median age. The dependent variable was the outflow from the county to Texas as a proportion of the county population, averaged over 5 years from 2016-2020.

3 Results

Our results can be seen in Table 1. Based on these data, we found that the average median earnings of the counties with above average flow to Texas as a proportion of their population are 10 % above the California median. Accordingly, it is wealthier Californians who, on average, are migrating to Texas. Of the counties with above average flow to Texas as a proportion of the population, their average white proportion of the population is 65 %, 9 % above the California median. Thus, it is whiter Californians who are moving to Texas. Of the counties with above average flow to Texas as a proportion of the population, the average proportion of those holding a graduate or professional degree is 15 %, over 2 percentage points above the California median. Hence, it is more educated Californians who are moving to Texas. Accordingly, on every proxy for intelligence available to us, it would appear that among Californians, intelligence predicts moving to Texas. In terms of voting at the last US presidential election in 2020, it should be noted, of the counties with above average flow to Texas as a proportion of their population, all but one voted for Joe Biden, the Democrat candidate, and nearly 40 % of them gave Biden more than 70 % of the vote.

Looking at the migration from Texas to California over the same period, demographic data at county level for Texas is much more limited. Of the thirteen Texan counties with above average net flow to California, there is only demographic data available for three of them. However, we can say for those three that the average median earnings are approximately 17 % lower than the Texan state median. Also the average proportion of those holding a graduate or professional degree is nearly six percentage points lower than the Texan state median. These are un-weighted, but the net flows are calculated as a proportion of the county size - hence they are already 'weighted' in the sense that we are considering everything relative to the size of each respective county.

4 Discussion

As we predicted, county-level proxies of intelligence predict migration from California to Texas and negatively predict reverse migration from Texas to California. California-to-Texas migration is highest from the counties

Table 1: California counties, intelligence proxies, age, population, and voting.

County	Net Flow to Texas	% of total flow	% White	Median Household income (dollars)	Bachelor's degree	Graduate or professional degree	Median age (years)	county population (2020)	Voting 2020 election
Stanislaus County, California	40	0.1%	70.4%	62,873	12.4%	5.4%	34.3	546,235	D
Santa Cruz County, California	25	0.1%	71.7%	89,986	24.4%	17.4%	38.2	273,170	>70% Biden
San Bernardino County, California	783	1.9%	56.1%	65,761	13.9%	7.4%	33.6	2,162,532	D
San Joaquin County, California	310	0.8%	51.5%	68,628	13.0%	6.2%	34.4	751,615	D
Riverside County, California	1206	3.0%	55.7%	70,732	14.9%	8.3%	35.8	2,437,864	D
El Dorado County, California	97	0.2%	86.4%	83,710	23.6%	11.6%	46.3	190,345	R
Sacramento County, California	826	2.0%	54.6%	70,684	20.5%	10.9%	36.4	1,537,948	D
San Francisco County, California	484	1.2%	44.9%	119,136	35.0%	23.7%	38.3	874,784	>70% Biden
Butte County, California	128	0.3%	80.0%	54,972	18.4%	9.9%	36.9	223,344	D
Napa County, California	91	0.2%	71.2%	92,219	24.4%	12.8%	41.8	138,572	D
Madera County, California	107	0.3%	60.7%	61,924	10.8%	4.4%	34.1	155,925	R
San Luis Obispo County, California	206	0.5%	82.6%	77,948	22.3%	13.8%	39.5	282,517	D
Kern County, California	679	1.7%	67.6%	54,851	11.4%	5.7%	31.9	892,458	R
Merced County, California	210	0.5%	51.0%	56,330	9.6%	4.5%	31.2	273,661	D
Solano County, California	388	1.0%	50.7%	84,638	18.5%	8.6%	38.3	444,538	D
San Benito County, California	55	0.1%	73.4%	85,808	14.7%	5.5%	35.7	61,547	D
Monterey County, California	407	1.0%	48.5%	76,943	15.8%	10.4%	34.7	432,977	D
Alameda County, California	1780	4.4%	38.0%	104,888	28.1%	20.6%	37.8	1,661,584	>70% Biden
San Mateo County, California	839	2.1%	48.3%	128,091	29.5%	22.6%	39.8	765,623	>70% Biden
Placer County, California	437	1.1%	80.4%	93,677	26.8%	13.9%	42.2	391,799	R
Los Angeles County, California	12167	29.9%	47.8%	71,358	21.8%	11.7%	36.7	10,040,682	>70% Biden
San Diego County, California	4746	11.6%	66.6%	82,426	24.2%	15.3%	36.1	3,323,970	D
Imperial County, California	270	0.7%	56.7%	46,222	11.0%	4.4%	32.5	180,580	D
Orange County, California	4851	11.9%	57.6%	94,441	26.4%	14.9%	38.3	3,170,345	D
Sonoma County, California	763	1.9%	72.5%	86,173	22.9%	13.6%	42.4	496,801	>70% Biden
Santa Clara County, California	2964	7.3%	41.6%	130,890	27.9%	25.6%	37.2	1,924,379	>70% Biden
Marin County, California	404	1.0%	76.7%	121,671	34.4%	25.8%	47.1	259,441	>70% Biden
Ventura County, California	1433	3.5%	75.4%	89,295	21.6%	12.3%	38.5	845,599	D
Yolo County, California	383	0.9%	66.4%	73,746	21.8%	20.8%	31.1	218,774	D
Contra Costa County, California	2724	6.7%	53.0%	103,997	26.8%	16.6%	39.9	1,147,788	>70% Biden
Santa Barbara County, California	1198	2.9%	71.8%	78,925	20.8%	14.1%	33.8	444,895	D
Humboldt County, California	527	1.3%	78.7%	48,235	20.7%	10.2%	38.9	136,101	D
CA average			56.1%	78,672	21.6%	13.1%	36.7	39,346,023	
Above average flow counties			65.0%	86,312		15.3%			

which we would expect to have the highest average IQs. Clearly, there is indirect evidence that the migration from California to Texas is draining intelligence from California. Migration from Texas to California also appears to reduce intelligence in California.

This is congruous with evidence from a poll conducted by the University of California at Berkeley in 2019. According to the poll, approximately 50 % of California residents have considered leaving the state (DiCamillo, 2019). Moreover, according to analysis of tax data, of the increased net domestic migration out of California from 2012 to 2019, only 14 % came from those in the under-$25,000 income category. Those with higher incomes accounted for 82 % of the increase in net internal migration. Indeed, 38 % of the increase came among the over-$100,000 per annum category (Kotkin & Cox, 2021). As a report on this matter summarized: "In fact, the largest increases in net domestic outmigration from 2012 to 2019 came from the top four income categories ($50,000 to $75,000; $75,000 to $100,000; $100,000 to $200,000; and over $200,000)." Moreover, in 2019, 27 % of these migrants were aged 35 to 44 and, thus, still likely to have children in their new state (Kotkin & Cox, 2021), especially considering the correlation between intelligence and delaying fertility (see Dutton & Woodley of Menie 2018; Lynn 2011). This report, alas, does not provide any information on the relative numbers of out-migrants and whether the wealthier are

over-represented in that regard.

In addition, a study by the United States Congress Joint Committee (Schweikert, 2019) has explored the education levels of Americans leaving and entering different states. As we have seen, education is a robust proxy for intelligence. This study defines "highly educated" as anyone in the top third of the national education distribution. It compares those born in the state 31-40 years earlier who still live there to those born there 31-40 years earlier who no longer live there: "Gross brain drain is defined as the share of leavers who are highly educated minus the share of adults who remain in their birth state ("stayers") who are highly educated. Net brain drain is the share of leavers who are highly educated minus the share of entrants to a state who are highly educated." Within these parameters, it finds that in California, in the year 2000, "leavers" classified as "highly educated" exceeded highly educated "stayers" by 0.83. By 2010, this had increased to an excess of 1.93 and by 2017, it had grown to an excess of 2.32. They term this excess the "brain drain".

California is a relatively educated state. It ranks 15th in terms of the percentage of the population with a bachelor's degree or higher (World Population Review, 2023). If 'highly educated' is defined as the top third of California's education distribution, then the brain drain increases to 2.84. This would at least be consistent, via a proxy measure, with cognitive capital moving out of California and increasingly doing so. In Texas, the brain drain in the year 2000 was 9.32, employing the same system and parameters previously discussed in relation to California. In 2010, it was 11.03, but, by 2017, it had fallen back to 8.76. Thus, although its brain drain is worse than California's overall, there is a definite change taking place in recent years which would be congruous with an increase in cultural capital making its way to Texas, at least in part, from California, where brain drain continues apace. One way of interpreting these data is that perceptions of Texas are changing and it is increasingly being considered, by the highly educated, as a good place in which to live. California, by contrast, is increasingly being regarded, by this same class of people, as a very suboptimal place to live.

Taken together with our results, these findings render it even more reasonable to regard the on-going migration from California to Texas as a brain drain, not least as the proportion of out-migrating educated Californians increases while the proportion of out-migrating educated Texans declines. The migration would, indeed, appear to betoken a transfer of cognitive capital from California to the state that has very different social and economic policies and which has long been its rival for directing the future of the US. Consistent with these findings California has a gradually rising unemployment rate (EDD, 2023) while unemployment in Texas is in significant decline (Texas Workforce Commission, 2023).

One advantage of US states is that they have no legal restrictions on migration from other US states, as is the case for international migration where the immigration authorities can be quite selective about the kinds of people they let in. So, here we can read the net effects of the push and pull factors straight from the numbers migrating. The simplest explanation is that California takes from the rich, and thus from the intelligent, so they migrate to Texas, which is more friendly to those with resources. Texas does relatively little for the poor, and thus those with on average lower cognitive human capital, whereas California does, so there is a clear "pull" factor. Of course, rich people are generally better able to migrate, which would explain why there is more movement from California to Texas than the reverse. The problem with this argument is that, according to the Gini coefficient, income inequality is not much different between California and Texas. California is ranked seventh, with a coefficient of 0.48, while Texas is ranked fifteenth, with 0.47 (https://censusreporter.org/tables/B19083). The unemployment rate in California, it should be noted, as of July 2023 is 4.6 % while it is 4.1 % in Texas (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023).

Part of the explanation for the observation that the absolute numbers, relative to population, moving from California to Texas is higher than the reverse migration is that it is easier for richer people to migrate. Added to this are narrower problems of social policy of the kinds explored earlier, especially problems with crime, lax law enforcement, red tape and expensive housing, though taxes may be a minor issue. An alternative hypothesis is that the movement to Texas from California is mediated by growing polarization in the US, such that Republicans are migrating from Democrat states to Republican ones, somewhat like Hindus moving from Pakistan to India and Muslims moving from India to Pakistan after the end of the colonial era. A poll in 2019 (DiCamillo, 2019) found that conservatives and Republicans were far more likely

than liberals and Democrats to be seriously considering leaving California, a finding that would be congruous with polarization playing a part in this process. Moreover, Republicans who leave could be fleeing from the most liberal counties, so with data available to us we cannot rule out the hypothesis that polarization is playing a part in this process.

5 Limitations

The key limitations of this study are that we have had to draw upon proxy data for intelligence in the form of income, race and education level. Moreover, we have only been able to conduct of our analysis at the county level. However, this is the best available data, so we have no choice but to employ it, with many studies having been forced to employ this level of data in the past (e.g. Dutton & Lynn 2014). Obviously, any conclusions drawn from it must be drawn with caution for these reasons. However, crucially, we have demonstrated that it is consistent with other studies of related proxy data, which should markedly increase confidence in the findings. Future research should develop our findings by examining other apparent movements of cognitive capital in other countries and regions in order to better discern the future locations of prosperity and innovation.

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