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Magnet or Sticky?

A State-by-State Typology

by D'Vera Cohn, Senior Writer, Pew Research Center
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Alaska apparently isn't much good at hanging on to its native sons and daughters. Just 28% of adults born there still live there, placing it last among the 50 states on this measure of population "stickiness."

Texas, by contrast, knows how to hold 'em. More than three-quarters of adults born in Texas still live there, making the Lone Star State the nation's stickiest.

Nevada, meanwhile, is the nation's most "magnetic" state: Fully 86% of its adult residents were born in a different state. And New York is the least magnetic: Just 19% of adult New Yorkers were born in another state.

Using Census data, the Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends project has created a typology that groups all 50 states and the District of Columbia by whether they are "magnets" or "sticky" -- or both, or neither. (Here is a list of [magnet and sticky numbers](#) for all states and D.C.)

First, let's define these terms. "Magnet" states are those in which a high share of the adults who live there now moved there from some other state. "Sticky" states are those in which a high share of the adults who were born there live there now.¹

At first glance, magnet and sticky states may seem to be mirror opposites of each other, and it is true that most states score high on one scale and low on another. But it turns out that 10 states rank high on both scales, and another nine score low on both.

Below is a typology that groups states into five categories -- High Magnet/Low Sticky; Low Magnet/High Sticky; High Magnet/High Sticky; Low Magnet/Low Sticky and Neither Here Nor There. It is an innovative way of looking at state-to-state migration flows, or the lack of them, across the United States.

But first, a few caveats. This categorization scheme doesn't purport to present the last word on population change in states. Some of the groupings include states with very different demographics and growth patterns. Moreover, the magnet rankings can sometimes be a bit deceiving. That's because in states with a small population base, small numbers of new migrants have a much bigger impact on population dynamics than they have in big states.

Also, the magnet rankings do not account for international immigrants, who are a growing force in population change.

Despite all that, however, the typology yields some fascinating groupings and surprising findings. Take California -- the archetypal magnet state for most of its storied history. Well, not any more: California is 28th in the magnet rankings. Find out where your state lands in the typology below.

High Magnet/Low Sticky

Definition: All in this group rank among the top 25 states on the magnet scale, and the bottom half on the sticky scale. (In the listing of states below, the two numbers after each state show their ranks out of 50 states and the District of Columbia -- first on the magnet scale, then on the sticky scale.)

Example: In Alaska, 70.8% of adult residents moved to Alaska from another state, and it ranks third on the magnet scale. But only 28.2% of adults born in Alaska still live there, and it ranks 50th on the sticky scale.

States: Alaska (3,50), Arkansas (21,34), Colorado (7,33), Delaware (11,36), District of Columbia (5,51), Idaho (9,45), Kansas (19,42), Montana (15,46), Nevada (1,44), New Hampshire (6,39) New Mexico (16,38), Vermont (14,40) and Wyoming (8,49).

Common Characteristics: Despite their varied demographics, nine of the 13 members of this group -- Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico and Wyoming -- have gained more migrants from other states than they lost for most of the recent decade, according to a recent [Brookings Institution analysis](#). New England states including New Hampshire and Vermont tend to be low on the sticky scale, perhaps for lack of economic opportunity.



Where Does Your State Fit?	
High Magnet/Low Sticky	Low Magnet/High Sticky
Alaska	Alabama
Arkansas	California
Colorado	Illinois
Delaware	Indiana
District of Columbia	Kentucky
Idaho	Louisiana
Kansas	Massachusetts
Montana	Michigan
Nevada	Minnesota
New Hampshire	Missouri
New Mexico	Ohio
Vermont	Pennsylvania
Wyoming	Texas
	Utah
	Wisconsin
High Magnet/High Sticky	Low Magnet/Low Sticky
Arizona	Iowa
Florida	Maine
Georgia	Mississippi
Maryland	Nebraska
North Carolina	New York
Oregon	North Dakota
South Carolina	Rhode Island
Tennessee	South Dakota
Virginia	West Virginia
Washington	
Neither Here Nor There	
Connecticut	Hawaii
New Jersey	Oklahoma

Note: Listings within each category are in alphabetical order.

opportunity.

Caveats: The District of Columbia is not a state, and its mobility pattern is more typical of urban areas. Small states such as Alaska, Delaware, Vermont and Wyoming may appear to be more magnetic than they actually are; given their small population base, it does not take a large inflow from other states to produce a high ranking on the magnet scale.

Low Magnet/High Sticky

Definition: States in this group rank in the bottom half of the magnet scale and the top half of the sticky scale.

Example: In California, only 38% of adult residents come from out of state, so it ranks 28th on the magnet scale. But 69% of adults born in California still live there, so it ranks fourth on the sticky scale.

States: Alabama (38,16), California (28,4), Illinois (45,24), Indiana (36,17), Kentucky (41,18), Louisiana (50,13), Massachusetts (42,25), Michigan (48,6), Minnesota (39,8), Missouri (32,20), Ohio (47,12), Pennsylvania (49,15), Texas (34,1), Utah (27,9) and Wisconsin (44,5).

Common Characteristics: Most of these states have been losing net migrants to other states this decade and, in some cases, during previous decades as well -- among them California, despite its reputation as the land of fresh starts. Some are located in less dynamic regions that lack the strong economies to attract new residents. Some have distinctive cultures that anchor people who were born there. Several have high poverty rates, and poor people are least likely to move from one state to another. Seven of these 15 states are in the Midwest, where a recent [Pew Research survey](#) found that nearly half of adult residents have never lived outside their hometown.

Caveats: Some of these states -- Alabama, Kentucky, Missouri, Texas and Utah -- have attracted many interstate migrants this decade, but those numbers are offset by the high share of residents born in the state so they look less magnetic than they actually may be. Texas, in particular, had a population of 24.3 million in 2008, according to Census Bureau [population estimates](#), and a net gain from 2007-2008 of about 141,000 people from other states.

High Magnet/High Sticky

Definition: These 10 states rank in the top half of both the magnet and sticky scales.

Example: Florida ranks fourth as a magnet state, with 70.1% of its adult population coming from out of state. It ranks 11th as a sticky state, with 66% of its adult population having been born in Florida.

States: Arizona (2,21), Florida (4,11), Georgia (18,3), Maryland (13,22), North Carolina (22,2), Oregon (10,23), South Carolina (20,10), Tennessee (24,7), Virginia (17,19) and Washington (12,14).

Common Characteristics: Many of these states have split personalities, with some communities that have high shares of transplants and others that have large proportions of residents who were born locally. In Florida, seven-in-ten residents of the Orlando area and some west-coast communities are from out of state, but in the northern panhandle, most residents are Florida natives. The same is true for North Carolina, where beach and border areas are magnets, but mountain communities are less so. In Maryland, Virginia and Georgia, urban areas are magnets and rural or mountain communities are less so.

Caveats: Florida and Maryland now are losing more residents to other states than they are gaining from other states.

Low Magnet/Low Sticky

Definition: These nine states are in the lower half of all states on both the magnet and sticky scales.

Example: North Dakota ranks 37th on the magnet scale; only three-in-ten (30.1%) of its adult residents were born in other states. It ranks 48th on the sticky scale; only 40.4% of adults born in the state still live in North Dakota.

States: Iowa (46,35), Maine (29,31), Mississippi (40,32), Nebraska (35,41), New York (51,30), North Dakota (37,48), Rhode Island (33,37), South Dakota (30,47) and West Virginia (43,43).

Common Characteristics: States in the low magnet/low sticky category mainly are located in the slow-growing regions of New England and the Midwest. One of them -- New York -- ranks lowest on the magnet-state ranking; as [these maps](#) show, the state is second only to California in the number of migrants it lost to other states from 2005-2007, even though it remains attractive to immigrants from other nations. Several of these states have considered tax breaks to encourage young people to stay.

Caveats: Most of these less sticky states have held onto at least half the people who were born there. It's just that other states have retained a higher share.

Neither Here Nor There

Definition: These four states rank near the middle for both magnetism and stickiness.

Example: New Jersey ranks 26th for magnetism, with 39.1% of its adult residents having been born in another state. It ranks 28th for stickiness, meaning that 55.6% of the adults born there still live in the state.

States: Connecticut (23, 27), Hawaii (31, 26), New Jersey (26, 28) and Oklahoma (25, 29).

Common Characteristics: These states are united only in their refusal to fit into any of the other categories.

Caveats: It could be argued that Maine (29, 31) should be in this group.

See pewsocialtrends.org for [interactive maps](#) tracking migration in America.

1. Data are derived from American Community Survey Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, 2005-2007. Only U.S.-born adults, ages 18 and older, living in the United States are included in these tabulations. Magnet states are calculated by: Residents born out of a state / Total state population. Sticky states are calculated by: Residents born in a state and living in the same state / Residents born in the state and living in the United States.