



2020 U.S. Moving Trends & Analysis



Scores of Californians were turning in their surfboards and leaving the state.



The top three outbound states of 2020 were Illinois, New York, and New Jersey.



Idaho, Arizona, Tennessee, South Carolina, and North Carolina were the most popular states for inbound moves.



The last three in our top eight states for inbound moves were Florida, Texas, and Colorado.



Perhaps most notable in 2020 was that people continued to move at rates comparable to last year, despite the pandemic and possibly as a direct result of it.

States in the Northeast Lead in Outbound Migration

Four of the seven states with the most outbound moves on our list are in the northeast and importantly, states from this region did not make an appearance in our top eight for inbound moves either. Of the northeastern states, New York had the most residents leaving, with New Jersey coming in second.

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California prevented the northeastern sweep by coming in fourth for most outbound moves, with Maryland taking our fifth spot. Importantly, Maryland has been a frequent guest on our outbound states list, ranking between second and fifth since 2015. Expanding our view, Pennsylvania and Michigan have also been fairly consistent in their appearance on our top ten in recent years and continued that tradition in 2020 as well. As the dust of the pandemic continues to settle into 2021, it will be interesting to see where these states find themselves in next year's rankings.

There are a few reasons why people may be leaving these states:

1. The [northeastern region's frigid winters](#) may be driving some people to seek out warmer climates to call home.
2. Despite its ideal climate, [California's vast and unyielding wildfires](#) may be proving too problematic to overlook for some residents.
3. [Companies are becoming less likely to establish offices](#) in these same states which may be fueling a lack of job opportunities and further spurring outbound moves.
4. Affordability is likely another major cause driving migration out of both the [northeast](#) and [California](#). Cities in these states have a high cost of living, high taxes, and home prices that are out of reach for many. Loss of employment, shutdowns, furloughs, and the general uncertainty that blanketed the nation as a result of COVID-19, likely played a role in making these costs untenable for many who chose 2020 as their year to leave.

The Sunbelt and Southern States Continued to Welcome New Residents

In recent years, southern states have consistently ranked high on our inbound moves lists. In 2020, southeastern, southern, and southwestern states continued to grow their populations as they welcomed more residents than they lost.

Since 2015, both Arizona and South Carolina have been in the top five inbound states, and this year, they took second and fourth place respectively. North Carolina, another consistent favorite for migratory Americans remained popular, taking our fifth spot for 2020 inbound moves. Tennessee made waves this year, crooning its way up from number five to number three on the list.



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Having been consistently in our top 12 since our first report in 2015, Florida and Texas have breezed through the ranks year over year. This pattern continued despite the unusual conditions of 2020, with Florida grabbing number six and Texas staying lucky at number seven.

One southern state that didn't pull out of its downward trajectory was Georgia. While the peachy state had made our top eight in years past, it has failed to do so since 2018 and this remained unchanged into 2020. Despite this, the south overall has shown itself to be an enduring region for Americans who are on the move and we don't see this changing anytime soon.

Many of the reasons for the south's growth in popularity are juxtaposed by those driving both the northeast and California's outbound moves.

1. The consistent pattern over recent years of companies [establishing headquarters](#) or [relocating](#) to the south has led to plentiful job opportunities that may be attracting new residents. Perhaps in the face of the pandemic, this aided southern states in shoring up sufficient employment opportunities over the years, netting them a greater amount of resilient jobs that were less impacted by COVID-19. This, paired with [fewer restrictions](#) may have led to the south's low unemployment figures in 2020 and further new resident growth.
2. [Low taxes](#) may also be an enduring attractor to the south. Consistently top-ranking inbound states like Texas, Florida, and Tennessee do not have a state income tax at all, while Arizona (#2), South Carolina (#4), and North Carolina (#5) all have low state income taxes that are below 7%.
3. Climate may also be another driving factor. As we see so many [cold-weather states losing residents](#) year-over-year in direct contrast to the consistent growth of these warmer southern states, people may be seeking a bit of sunshine.
4. Especially apt for 2020, the south also offers greater space to its residents. In normal times and amidst a pandemic, the ability to [live in a larger home](#) or on larger lots than other regions can be extremely attractive to many people.

Second to the Northeast: Midwestern Residents Moving Elsewhere

Since we began this annual study in 2015, midwestern states have made an appearance on our outbound list each year. The midwestern state most of note this year is Illinois. The Land of Lincoln has held its spot at #1 for outbound moves for three consecutive years.

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Also of note is Michigan, which while not in the top 5, has consistently made the top 10 since 2015. So while the numbers may not be robustly dramatic for a given year, it is important to mention that for Michigan, it appears to be a long-running pattern of significant resident losses that are not counterbalanced by commensurate inbound moves.

Like the Northeast, the Midwest is home to harsh winters, though other reasons seem to be driving these figures:

1. Michigan in more distant years served as the bustling hub for the American auto industry. However, those golden years seem to have been difficult to revive with the 2020 pandemic [further torpedoing](#) the efforts to rebuild the industry.
2. When it comes to Illinois, one likely reason for people leaving is that of [public policy](#). Many people in the Prairie State seem to be leaving in search of an overall higher quality of life and lower taxes.

Some Western States Still Attracting New Residents

As we look back at our data over the past years, Western states seem to consistently draw in new residents. Interestingly, while much stayed the same in the west, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington, did not make the list this year for inbound moves, which is a break from past years.

According to our data, the western states welcoming the most new residents year-over-year are Idaho and Colorado. Colorado has had a slow and steady rise on the inbound moves list over the years. This year, Colorado grabbed the #8 spot on the inbound list. Texas also remained popular in 2020 at #7 on our inbound list.

Since 2015, Idaho has made the top 10 inbound states list while Colorado has either done the same or been close, depending on the year. In recent years, Idaho has claimed the number one spot for most inbound moves and that remained unchanged in 2020 with the potato state remaining hot in first place.



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But why Idaho? Here are just a few reasons people are flocking there:

1. Not only is Idaho one of the fastest-growing states in the west, but it also happens to be [fairly affordable](#).
2. A slower pace in Idaho has also made it an attractive place for many people to live.
3. Idaho has a [burgeoning tech scene](#) and is [trying to attract](#) California residents who are pondering joining the current tech exodus. In fact, recently, [nearly 90% of all out-of-state views](#) for Boise properties on Realtor.com came from California.

To that point, we would be remiss if we didn't expand on the current state of outbound moves in California when discussing western states. Since 2017, California has consistently made our top five outbound states list each year. While its exact spot has fluctuated within that top 5, there is no question that despite its populousness, the Golden State is losing residents at an astonishing rate year-over-year.

The inordinately expensive cost of living and exorbitant home prices in California's major cities seem to be mostly to blame. Notably, San Francisco where a family of four is considered at [poverty level when making over \\$100,000 a year](#), had a net +30% of outbound moves when compared to inbound this year. When coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic and record wildfires in the state, job loss, reduced hours, and future economic uncertainty may have proved too much to bear for some. In fact, for many white-collar workers in California, the pandemic showed itself to be a catalyst and for some, an opportunity as companies decided to switch to long-term, remote-first working arrangements for their teams. Many workers, [especially in tech](#), jumped at the opportunity to lower their cost of living while maintaining their salaries and likewise, the companies that employ them are also moving elsewhere for similar reasons.

Top Moving to and From MSA (Metropolitan Statistical Area) Areas

Top MSA Destination Cities (Moving To)	Top MSA Origin Cities (Moving From)
Phoenix, AZ	New York, NY
Houston, TX	Anaheim, CA
Dallas, TX	San Diego, CA
Atlanta, GA	Chicago, IL
Denver, CO	Riverside, CA

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In looking at the data for metro areas that include outlying suburbs of larger cities, we were not surprised to see Phoenix at number one for top inbound destinations. The city named for the bird of myth has held this spot for four of the last five years. 2018, was the only year Phoenix's metro area didn't make it to first place (Houston metro grabbed the top 2018 spot.)



Two of the top MSA destinations in 2020 were in Texas. The warm climate and low taxes of the Lonestar state have made it popular in recent years.

Our Methodology

For this report, we reviewed data for household moves in and out of the states. We focused on states with a high proportion of inbound or outbound moves, and we set an absolute value of 400 or greater. By setting that value, we took out smaller states that may have had fewer moves but a larger proportion.

A note on the expected versus the actual impact on move volume as a result of the pandemic:

Our initial inclination, like many other businesses at the outset of the pandemic, was that volume may sharply contract. In reality, while we experienced a slight decrease in volume during a couple of Spring months, overall our moving volume was on par with 2019. Despite COVID-19 and subsequent restrictions, consumer moves remained strong. One reason for this may be indicative of Pew Research's findings that 22% of American adults either moved as a direct result of the pandemic or know someone who did. So instead of hampering relocation outright, the pandemic may have acted as a catalyst to relocate for some.

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