

Americans are leaving their biggest metros, but immigrants keep them growing

By Richard Florida, The Atlantic Cities May 23, 2014



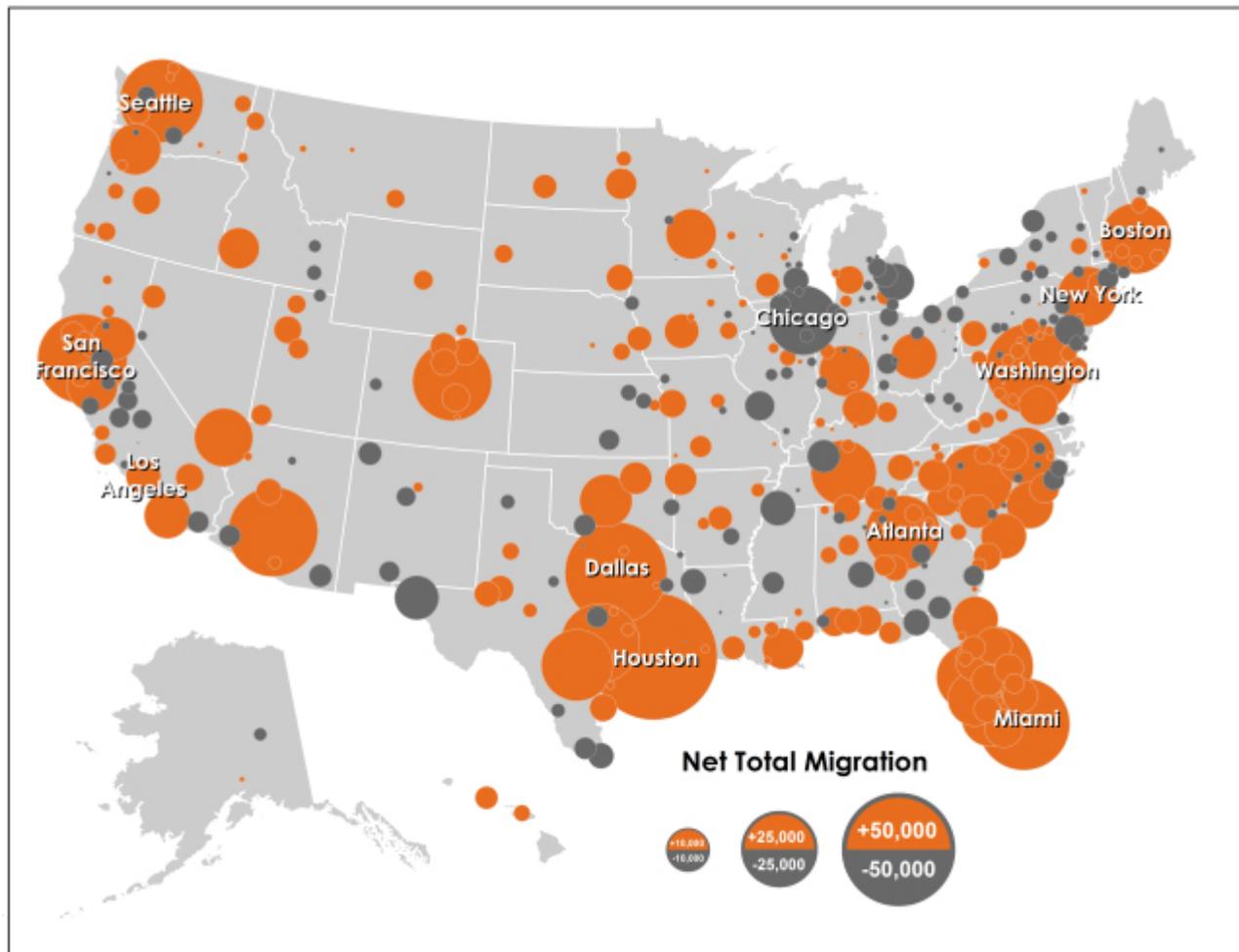
Migration—it's bigger in Texas. AP Photo/Donna McWilliam

America's [largest metro areas](#), which are currently gaining population at impressive rates, are driving much of the population growth across the nation. But that growth is the result of two very different migrations—one coming from the location choices of Americans themselves, the other shaped by where new immigrants from outside the US are heading.

Working closely with demographer and Martin Prosperity Institute (MPI) colleague Karen King, I decided to take a closer look at [newly released data from the US Census Bureau](#), which breaks out metro population growth according to its various components. We looked at domestic migration; international migration; and net migration for 2012 to 2013. MPI's Zara Matheson mapped the patterns.

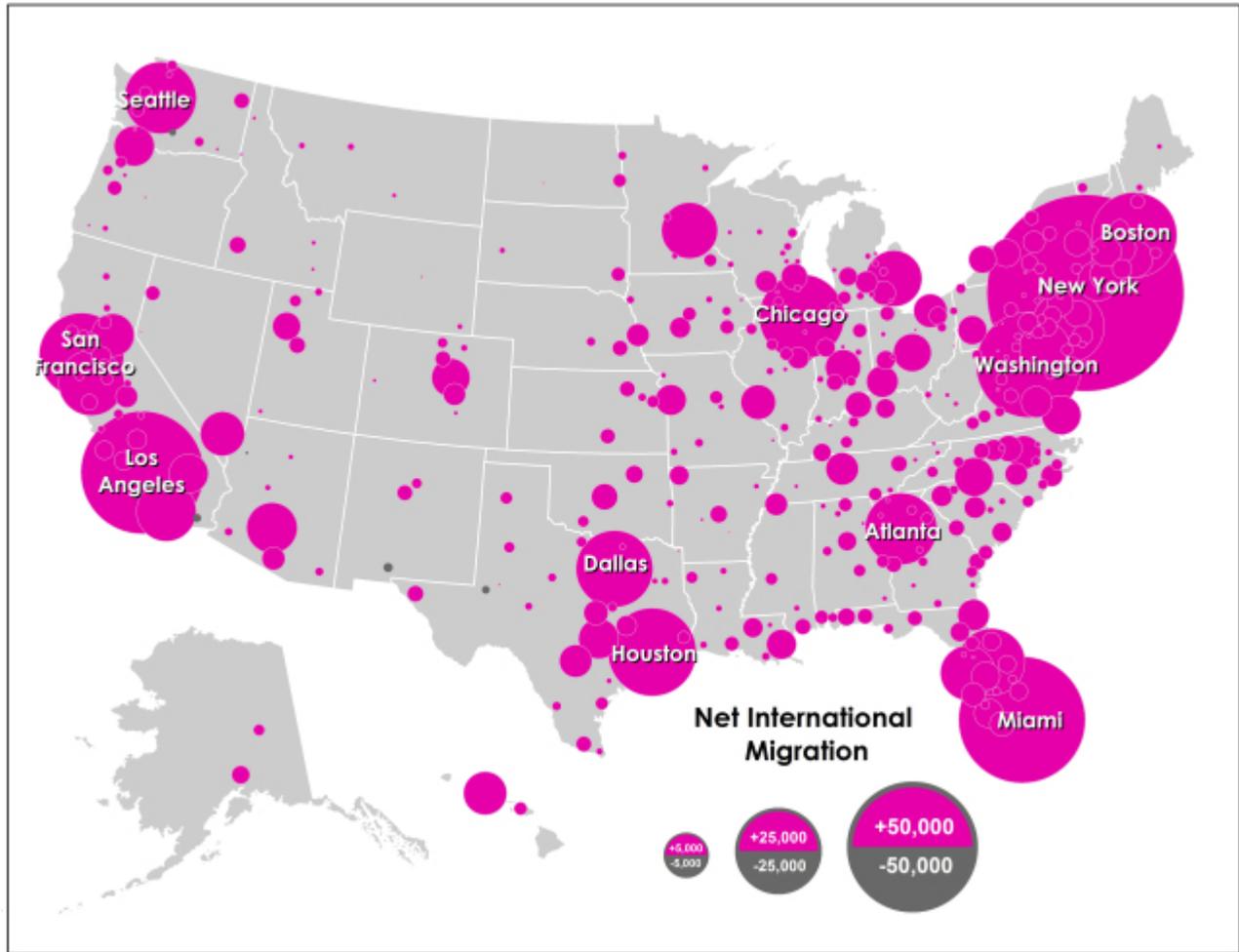
While many metro areas are attracting a net-inflow of migrants from other parts of the country, in several of the largest metros—New York, Los Angeles, and Miami, especially—there is actually

a net outflow of Americans to the rest of the country. Immigration is driving population growth in these places. Sunbelt metros like Houston, Dallas, and Phoenix, and knowledge hubs like Austin, Seattle, San Francisco, and Washington, DC are gaining much more from domestic migration.



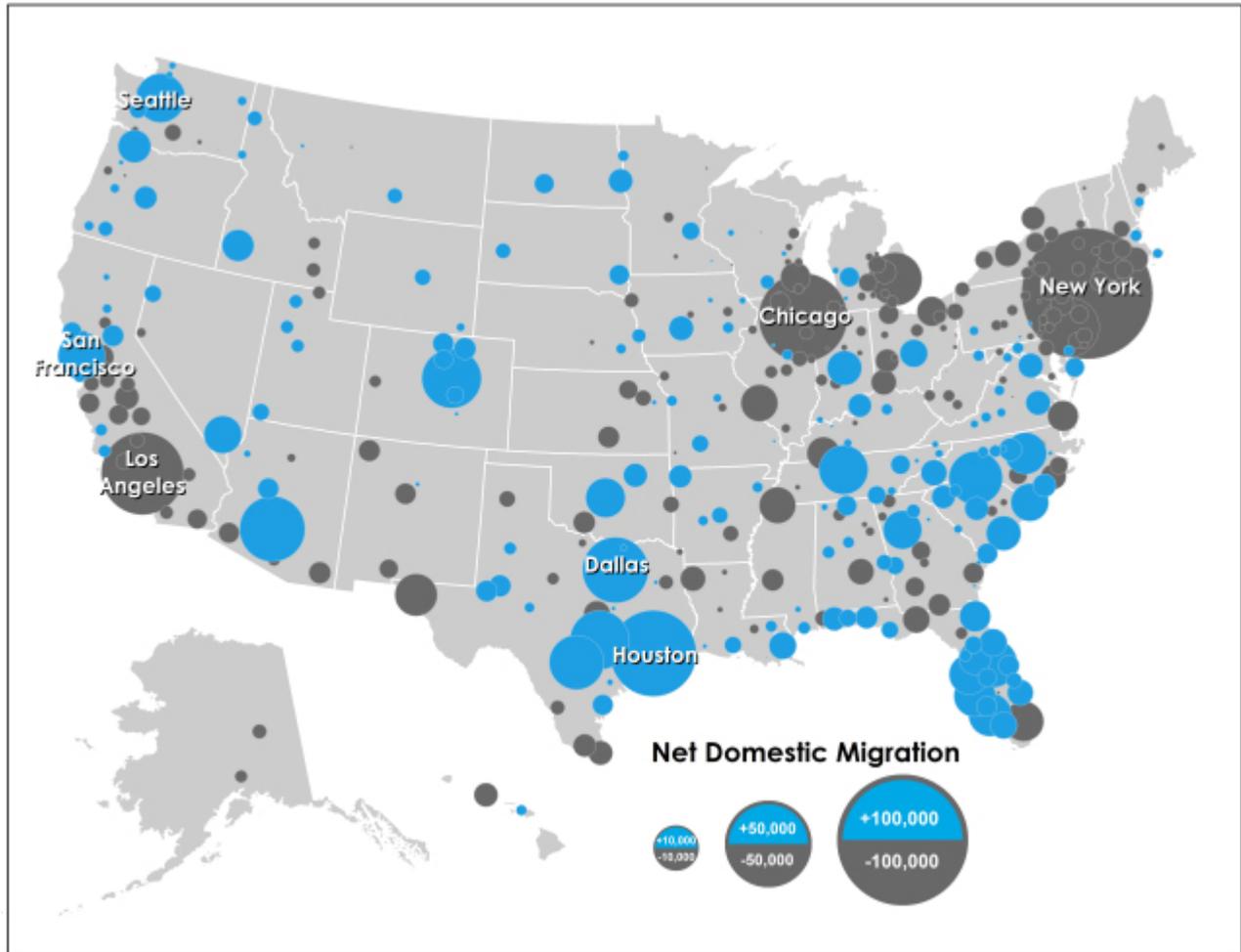
The first map, above, charts overall or net migration—a combination of domestic and international migration. Most large metros, those with at least a million residents, had more people coming in than leaving. As [I noted last month](#), the metros with the highest levels of population growth due to migration are a mix of knowledge-based economies and Sunbelt metros, including Houston, Dallas, Miami, Washington DC, San Francisco, Seattle, and Austin.

11 large metros, nearly all in or near the Rustbelt, had a net outflow of migrants, including Chicago, Detroit, Memphis, Philadelphia, and St. Louis. (Many of these metros still saw their overall populations grow due to “natural increase,” as birth rates outstripped death rates).



The second map charts international migration. All large metros had a net inflow of immigrants. The metro that attracted the most immigrants was, unsurprisingly, New York, with a net-inflow of 128,000 individuals. Next in line is Miami, with nearly 53,000 immigrants, and Los Angeles, with nearly 50,000. Washington, DC, attracted nearly 37,000 immigrants, while Houston, Boston, Chicago, and San Francisco each attracted between 20,000 and 30,000. Dallas, Philadelphia, Seattle, Atlanta, Orlando, San Jose, San Diego, Minneapolis, and even Detroit attracted between 10,000 and 20,000 immigrants.

The large metros with the smallest inflows of immigrants were mainly those with populations of between one and two million. These metros, including Grand Rapids, Birmingham, Memphis, Louisville, and Milwaukee, generally saw a net in-migration of somewhere between 1,000 and 3,000 immigrants.



The third map, above, shows the pattern for domestic migration.

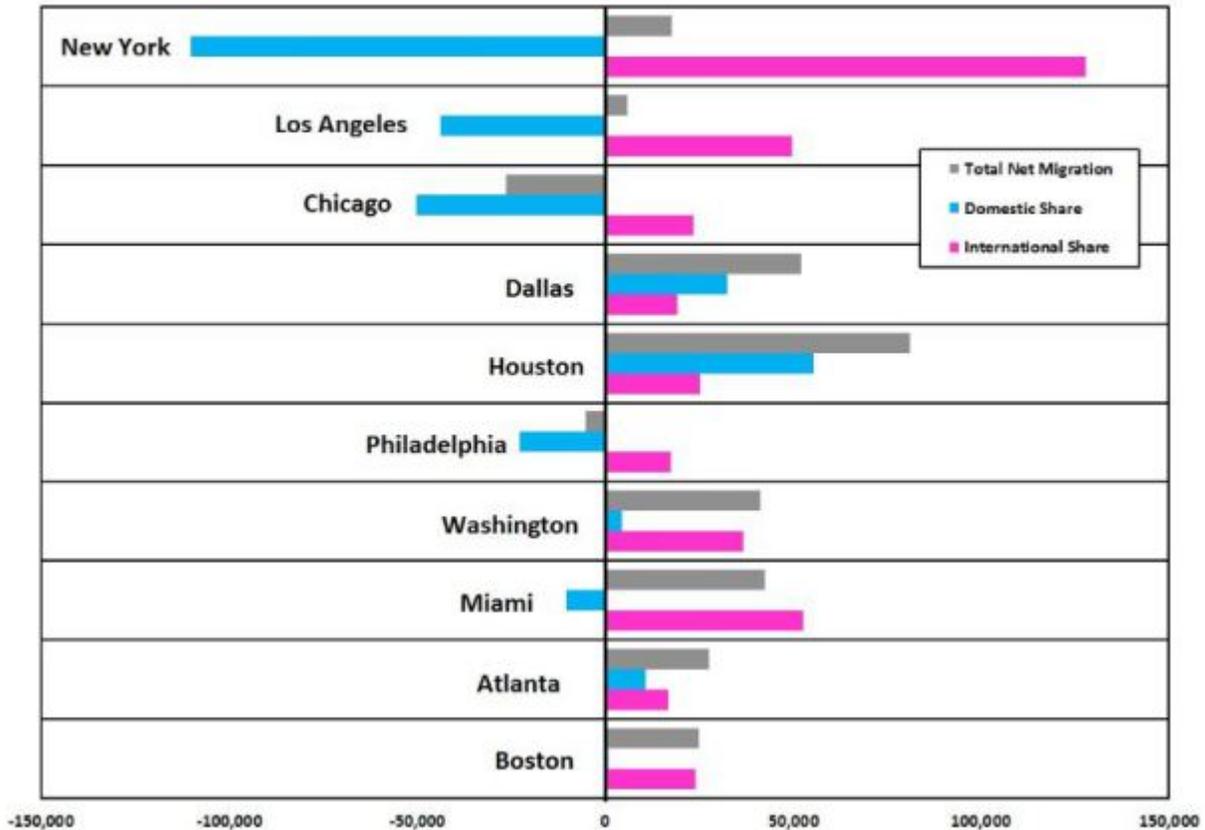
The three largest metros—New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago—all lost Americans to the rest of the country. New York saw a net outflow of more than 100,000 from 2012 to 2013. Los Angeles and Chicago each saw a net outflow of roughly 50,000.

The biggest net gainers of domestic population were a mix of low-cost Sunbelt metros like Phoenix, San Antonio, Dallas and Orlando; energy centers like Houston; leading knowledge and technology hubs like San Francisco, Austin, and Seattle; and Nashville, with its thriving music scene. The presence of San Francisco on this list, with a net influx of nearly 17,000 Americans, is especially surprising given its high costs of living.

What’s even more interesting is that about a third of all large metros saw a net outflow of domestic migrants. These metros are a diverse bunch, including America’s three largest city-regions, New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago; expensive, high-tech powerhouses like San Jose and San Diego; and unsurprisingly, large swaths of the Rustbelt, including Detroit, St. Louis, and Milwaukee.

The table below compares the components of net migration—overall migration, domestic migration, and international migration—for America’s ten largest metro areas.

Components of Net Migration (2013)



Notice the opposite directions of the domestic and international migration patterns in several metros, including New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Miami. The huge net influx of immigrants into New York, Los Angeles, and Miami offset the net exodus of American residents, but in Chicago and Philadelphia huge population losses to other metros led to an overall pattern of out-migration.

Some metros, in contrast, are attracting both domestic and international migrants. Houston and Dallas stand out on this score, but Atlanta is doing so as well. The knowledge economy centers of Washington, DC and Boston—as well as the knowledge and tech hubs of San Francisco and Austin, not on the chart above—are also attracting domestic and international migration.

These overall figures begin to paint a clearer picture of the population shifts across the US. But the patterns tell us little about the income, education, or skill levels of the people who are coming and going. Some of these places may be attracting higher income, higher skilled people who can afford a high cost of living, while shedding lower income, less skilled workers who are driven out by high prices. These metro-level data also tell us nothing about where different groups of people are locating, whether in the city center or the suburbs.