

# Young Adults Choose "Cool Cities" During Recession

Demographics, 2010 Census, Cities

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[http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2011/1028\\_young\\_adults\\_frey.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2011/1028_young_adults_frey.aspx)

Previously data showed that rates of migration [declined](#) as the recession began and places that grew the most during the fat part of last decade—both [states](#) and [metropolitan areas](#)—saw those gains begin to evaporate. But the American Community Survey's new data for the years 2008 through 2010, inclusive, provides the first clear glimpse of migration gainers and losers during the Great Recession and permits a comparison with the three previous economically supercharged years. It also allows for a clean "before and after" comparison of destinations for young adults, whose preferences may differ from movers in general.

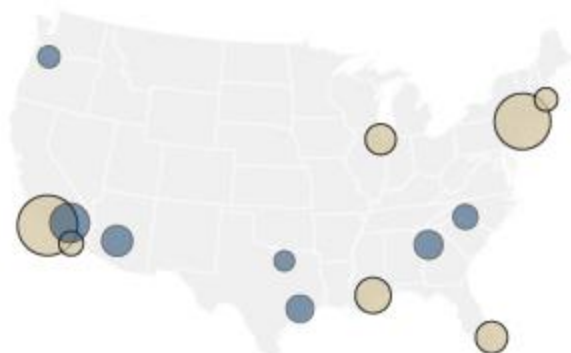
Beyond the "occupiers" concerns about lost job prospects and presumed corporate greed, recent demographic data on homeownership declines, delayed marriages, and doubled-up households show that the lives of many young people have been put on hold. The new migration data show something else as well. To the extent they are moving at all, young adults are headed to metro areas which are known to have a certain vibe—college towns, high-tech centers, and so-called "cool cities."

Consider the contrast: The top large metro area gainers for adults aged 25-34 in 2005 through 2007 were largely bubble economy hot spots: Riverside, Phoenix and Atlanta, with annual average population gains of 23,000, 14,000 and 12,000.

In the subsequent recession years, Riverside moved from first to eighth, gaining less than one-quarter of the young adults it drew during the bubble. Phoenix descended from second to 17th and Atlanta from third to 23th, each barely gaining any young adults. All three of these areas were magnets for jobs, but also affordable housing—perfect places for young people to jump start careers and families.

## Average Annual Net Domestic Migration by Metropolitan Area Among Persons Aged 25-34, 2005-07 and 2008-10

2005-07



### Top Gainers

Riverside Metro Area	23,147
Phoenix Metro Area	14,220
Atlanta Metro Area	12,167
Houston Metro Area	10,992
Charlotte Metro Area	9,273
Portland Metro Area	6,744
Dallas Metro Area	6,357

### Top Losers

Los Angeles Metro Area	-53,795
New York Metro Area	-47,027
New Orleans Metro Area	-18,626
Miami Metro Area	-15,208
Chicago Metro Area	-13,859
San Diego Metro Area	-8,991
Boston Metro Area	-8,201

2008-10



### Top Gainers

Denver Metro Area	10,429
Houston Metro Area	9,366
Dallas Metro Area	8,731
Seattle Metro Area	7,451
Austin Metro Area	7,099
DC Metro Area	7,044
Portland Metro Area	6,656

### Top Losers

Los Angeles Metro Area	-24,470
New York Metro Area	-22,325
Chicago Metro Area	-9,645
Detroit Metro Area	-7,501
Miami Metro Area	-5,724
San Diego Metro Area	-5,364
Virginia Beach Metro Area	-3,855

Among metropolitan areas with populations exceeding one million.

Data pertain to successive three-year periods: 2005 through 2007, and 2008 through 2010.

Source: William H. Frey analysis of 2005-7 and 2008-10 U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey data

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The double whammy of the mortgage meltdown and unemployment surge changed all that. While young people are moving less than before, it is interesting to see where those who did move went. Heading the list are Denver, Houston, Dallas, Seattle, Austin, Washington D.C., and Portland. The top three areas and our nation's capital, arguably, fared [relatively well](#) economically during the recession. But all seven are places where young people can feel connected and have attachments to colleges or universities among highly educated residents.

Young people's destinations differ sharply from the top migrant draws for all ages combined—where Phoenix and Riverside still rank in the top three, though gaining fewer migrants than mid-decade.

While not top gainers before, some of these metro areas were upper-tier magnets for young people in the mid-2000s as well. Yet they ascended to the top even as overall youth mobility declined and migration to the other high-flying metros dropped dramatically. Two on the list gained markedly in rank among young movers: Denver, which moved from twelfth to first, and Washington D.C., which improved from 44th to sixth.

At the other end of the spectrum were metro areas that were bleeding young people at the middle of the decade, as the promise of jobs and affordable housing lured them east from coastal California and south from the Northeast megalopolis. Now, these areas, including metro New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Boston have shown sharp declines in their young adult losses. Some potential migrants are holding tight, waiting for the next boom to come, but others may just choose to remain in these metros that have long held appeal to young people.

There is no doubt that the current economic doldrums are leaving many young people in limbo—some on city streets outside financial institutions and stock exchanges--waiting for employment and housing opportunities to emerge. When the economy does eventually pick up, they will follow the jobs, no doubt,

wherever they become available. In the meantime, a select group of metro areas with modestly growing economies, and strong youth cachet, seem to be the places where they are riding out the downturn.

**Courtesy of JB Goodwin**