

Graphic Detail

Geographic Information Systems organize and clarify the patterns of human activities on Earth's surface and their interaction with each other. GIS data, in the form of maps, can quickly and powerfully convey relationships to policymakers and the public. This department of Cityscape includes maps that convey important housing or community development policy issues or solutions. If you have made such a map and are willing to share it in a future issue of Cityscape, please contact david.e.chase@hud.gov.

Satisfaction With Local Conditions and the Intention To Move

Richard N. Engstrom
Nathan Dunkel
Kennesaw State University

The recent economic downturn has presented many challenges to local communities and policymakers. Foreclosed properties, job losses, and other challenges that local residents face can threaten the economic viability of local communities. Another consequence of the economic downturn is decreased government budgets, forcing policymakers to make decisions about how to allocate scarce resources effectively. When making decisions about local and regional policy, it would be useful to know how local characteristics contribute to the decisions residents make about whether to remain in a local community or to relocate. Exhibits 1 through 4 present maps created to investigate the relationship between residents' perceptions of local conditions and the intentions of residents to move. The maps are of the ZIP Codes in the five core counties in the Atlanta metropolitan area (Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Fulton, and Gwinnett), combined with data from a public opinion survey conducted by the A.L. Burruss Institute of Public Service at Kennesaw State University.

All maps identify the approximate locations, within ZIP Codes, of respondents who express an intention to move sometime during the next year. Exhibit 1 presents this location information (as point data) along with ZIP Code-level measures of residents' overall satisfaction with local conditions in the Atlanta metropolitan area (shaded regions). Darker region shadings represent higher levels of satisfaction. Exhibit 2 shows the level of satisfaction residents have with local police protection, exhibit 3 shows residents' level of satisfaction with local schools, and exhibit 4 shows residents' level of satisfaction with local opportunities for employment.

Exhibit 1

Overall Satisfaction

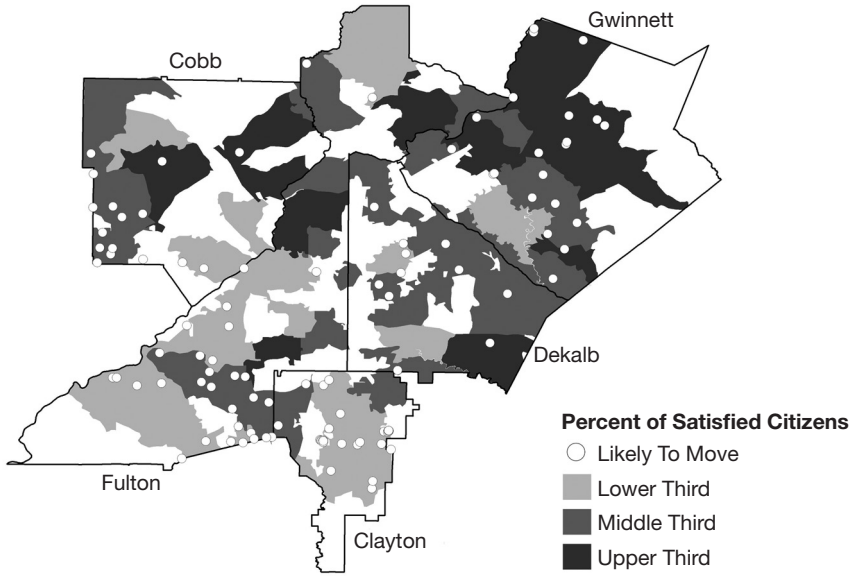


Exhibit 2

Satisfaction With Police Protection

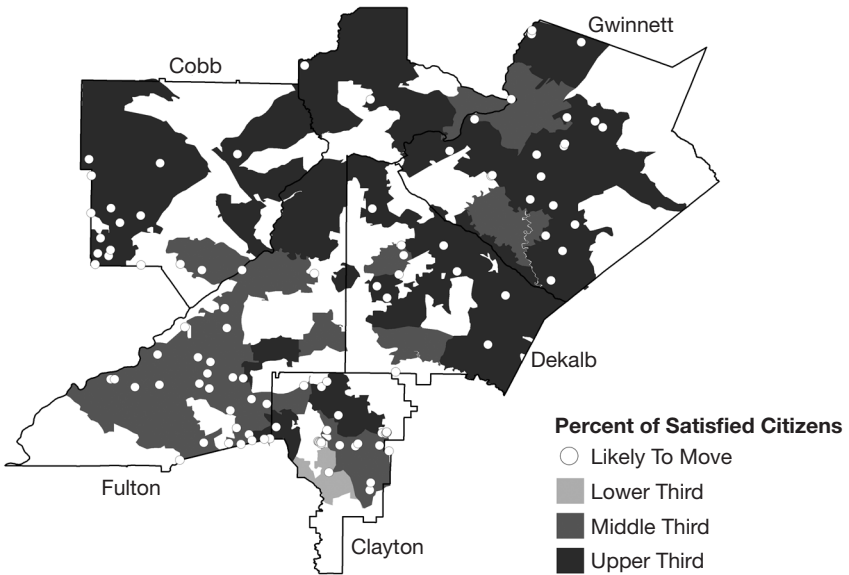


Exhibit 3

Satisfaction With School Quality

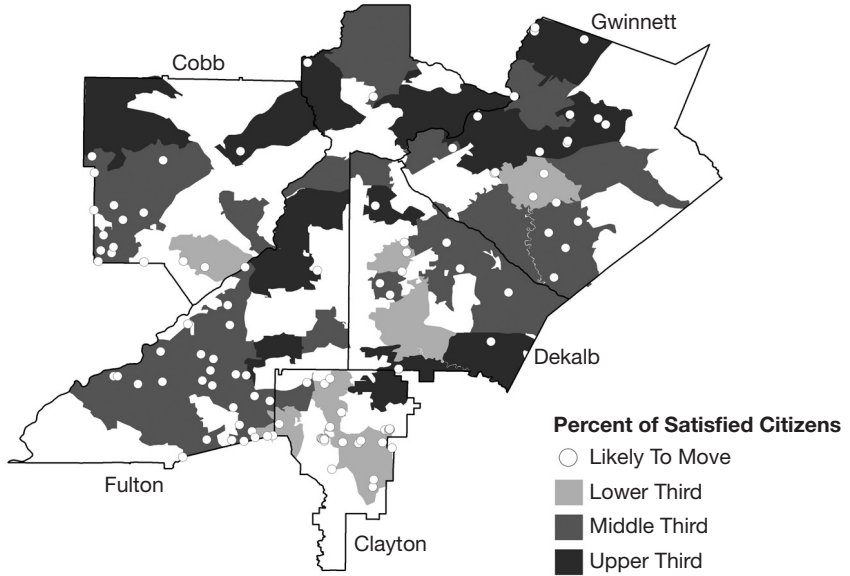
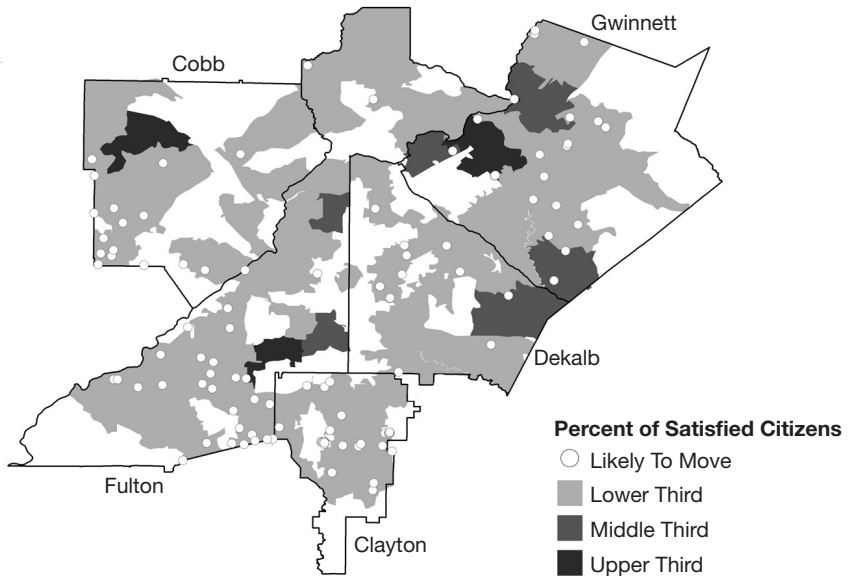


Exhibit 4

Satisfaction With Employment Opportunities



These four maps indicate that a summary measure of satisfaction seems to be associated with intent to move. The darkest regions, indicating ZIP Codes in which residents are the most satisfied with local conditions in general, contain no respondents who express an intention to move. The second level of shading, however, contains several respondents who intend to move. The lightest shading, indicating areas where people are least satisfied with local conditions, contains ZIP Codes in which most of those intending to move currently live.

It seems that residents' level of satisfaction with local conditions is related to residents' intentions to move. What, in particular, might it be about local conditions that cause people to want to move? Exhibits 2 through 4, taken together, show that, although attitudes about police protection and school quality do not seem to be associated with the intent to move, employment opportunities do influence peoples' intentions to move. Areas with high levels of satisfaction for police and school quality also contain many respondents who intend, nonetheless, to move from the area. This trend suggests that these elements of local conditions are not crucial factors in residents' decisions to relocate. On the other hand, areas with residents who express both high and moderate levels of satisfaction with local employment opportunities contain no residents who intend to move. All those respondents in the survey who intend to move reside in ZIP Codes that are also characterized by low levels of satisfaction with local employment opportunities, suggesting that economic conditions (and the perception of economic conditions) are particularly worthy of the attention of those who wish to understand, or influence, local residents' decisions to remain in or leave their communities.

This analysis does not fully explain why residents move, but it provides evidence that all public service provisions may not be equal in terms of their effect on residents' moving decisions. Additional analysis could help further researchers' understanding of how local conditions and the policies that affect perceptions of those conditions are related to community stability and residential mobility.

Authors

Richard N. Engstrom is an assistant professor with the Department of Political Science and International Affairs at Kennesaw State University, where he is also director of the A.L. Burruss Institute of Public Service and Research.

Nathan Dunkel is a researcher with the A.L. Burruss Institute of Public Service and Research, Kennesaw State University.