

# Rural-Urban Migration of Alaska Native Peoples: Changing Patterns and Causes

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American Community Survey Data Users Conference  
May 18-20, 2021

# Synthesis of Empirical Studies of Mobility Decisions of Arctic Indigenous Peoples over the past 25 years

What have we learned about who moves where, and why they move where they do?

First: what do we mean by rural? A slight digression into Alaska geography



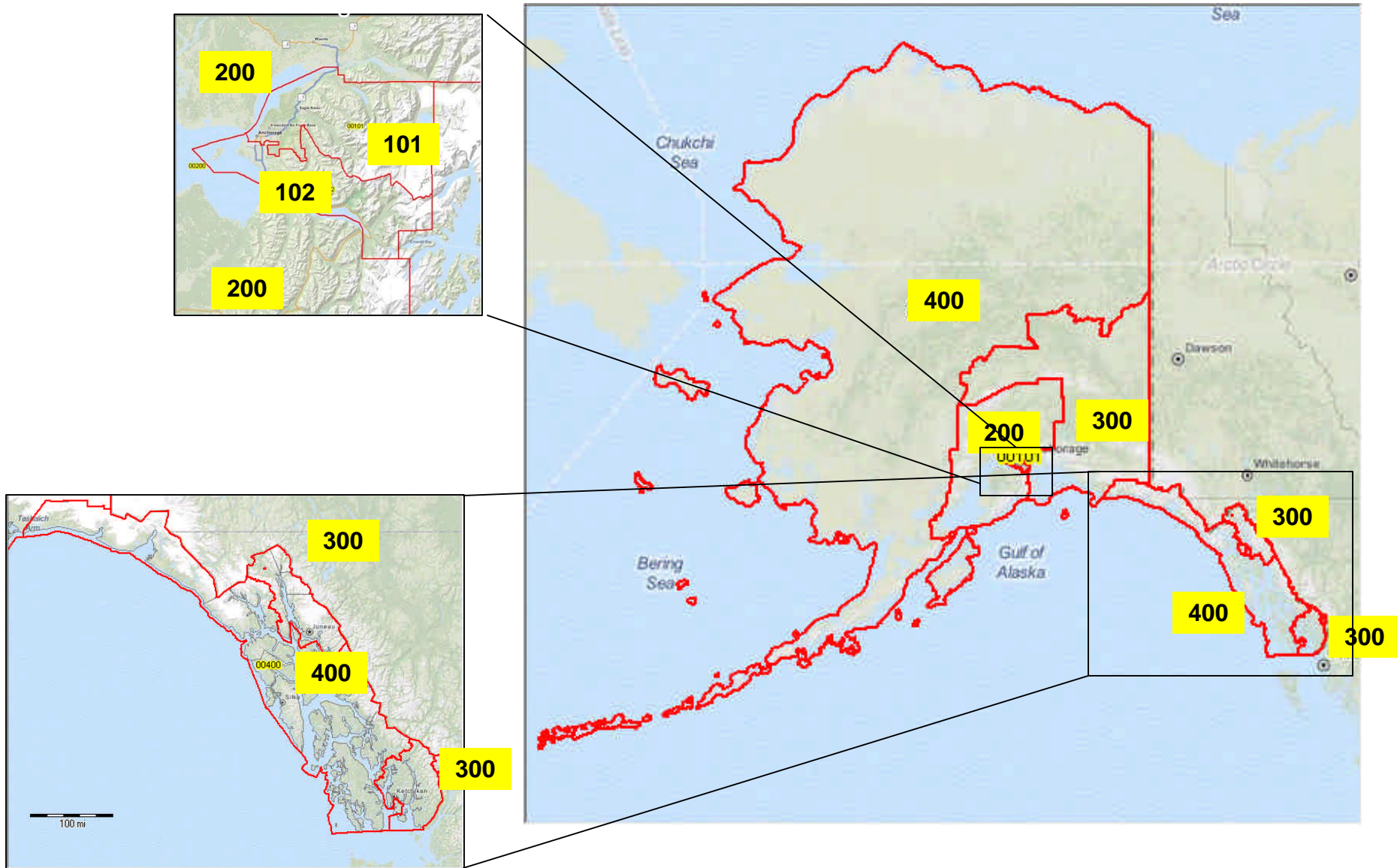
# Alaska Local Government Geography

- When Alaska became a state in 1959, county governments did not exist. Local government constituted incorporated cities like Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, and Nome surrounded by federal public lands.
- Census Bureau divided up Alaska into *census areas* for enumerating the population.
- State law created mechanism for organizing county-level governments. Counties were called *boroughs* and had expanded powers, mainly responsibility for public education within their boundaries.
- As population grew, cities annexed adjacent territory, and new boroughs were incorporated, often with different boundaries from the census areas. As a result, census geography can change every year.



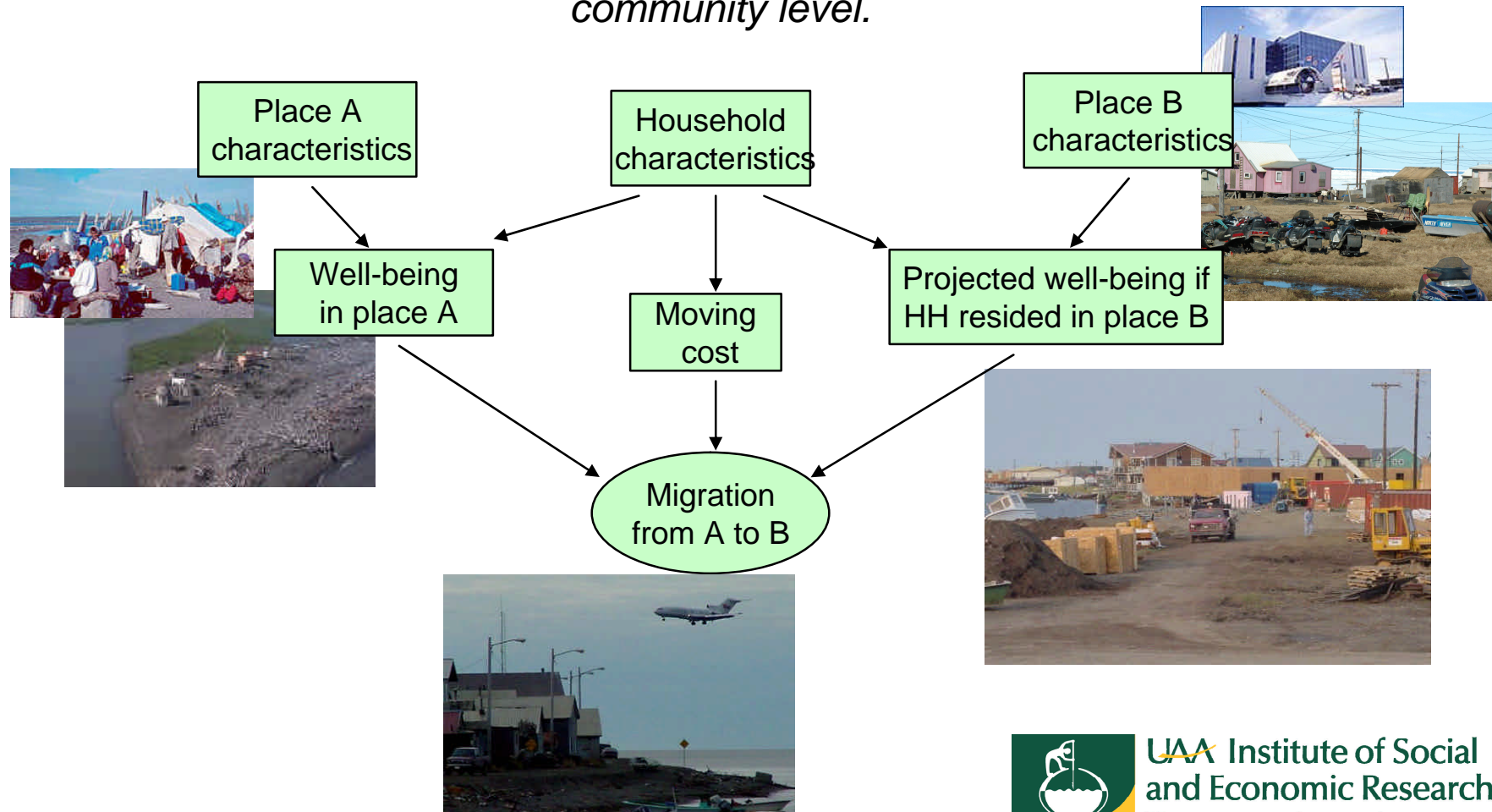
# 2010 Census/ACS PUMA Regions

Rural Alaska: boroughs and census areas within PUMA 400



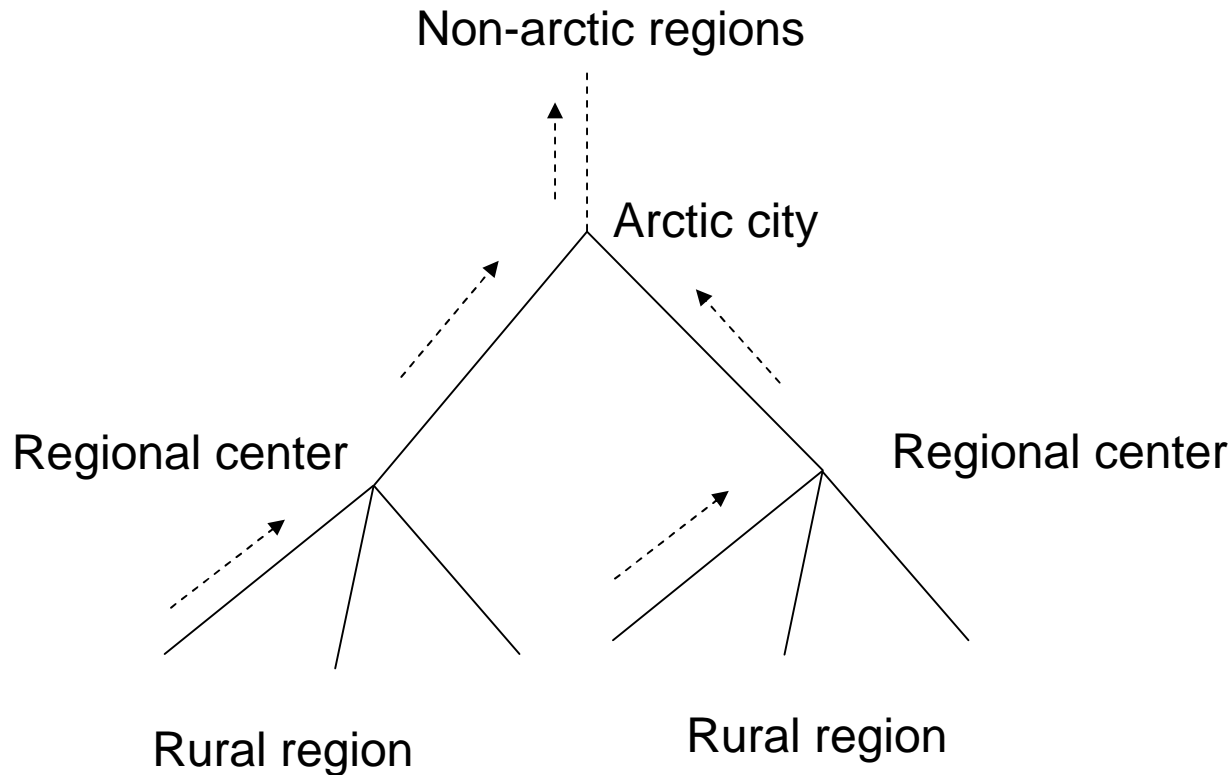
# Theoretical Framework: migration as an indicator of relative well-being (Huskey et al., 2004)

*Migration is an indicator of relative well-being at the community level.*





# Theoretical Framework: stepping stones model of hierarchical internal migration (Howe et al., 2013)



# Drivers of well-being in a place

- Cash economy: earnings opportunities
- Subsistence economy (difficult to measure systematically across places)
- Housing, living costs, especially cost of fuel
- Gender differences
  - Greater female participation in wage economy
  - Greater male ties to subsistence

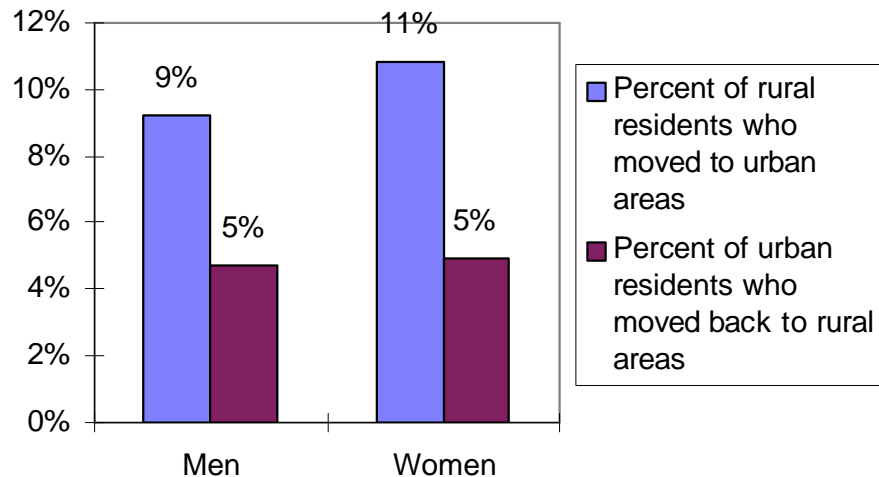


# Alaska, 1985-1990 (Huskey et al., 2004)

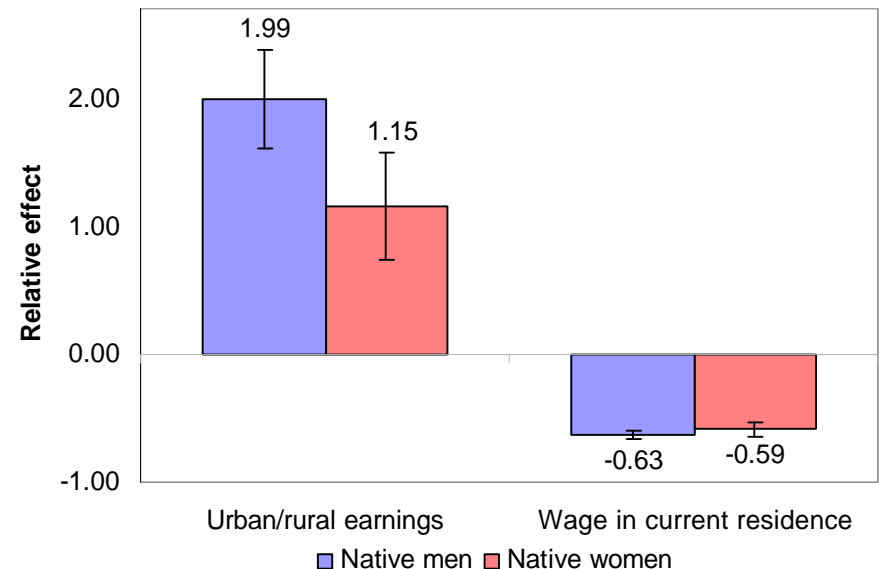
## 1990 US Census Long Form Survey PUMS data

- Predicted relative earnings attract migrants to urban areas.
- High wages in the current place keeps people in place (higher wages in rural areas, but fewer weeks worked)
- Men more sensitive than women to earnings differentials
- Subsistence not measured systematically enough to test its effects

**Alaska Native Adults Moving Out of and Into Rural Alaska Over a Five Year Period**



**Effects of relative earnings and wage rates on migration decisions, Alaska Natives, 1985-1990**





# Alaska, 1995-2000, Arctic Canada, 1996-2001 (Berman and Howe, 2012; 2013), Canada Census and Aboriginal Peoples Survey Microdata

- Migrants seek higher earnings and lower living costs
- Subsistence retains rural residents or attracts them to return
- Gender differences largely explained by earnings differences?
- Distance and stepping stones effects

Migration equations	Arctic Canada	Arctic Alaska
More likely to move		
Older adult	+	+
Children at home		-
Inuit language at home		-
Old housing in community	+	
Predicted destination		
Predicted earnings	+	+
Predicted harvest	+	+
Poor housing	-	
New housing		+
Cost of living (remoteness)	-	-
Air segments	-	
Jet service	+	
Iceroad	+	
Move up or down one level	+	

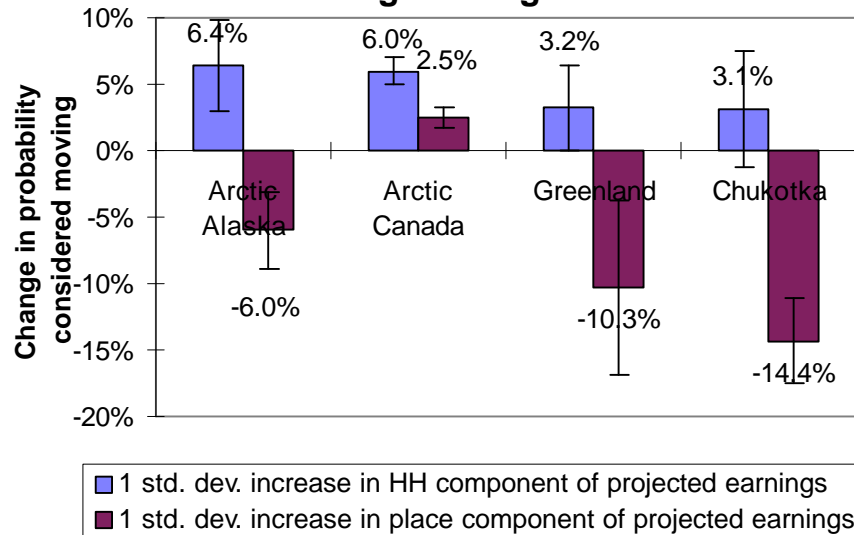


# Migration intent, SLiCA 2003 Alaska, Canada, and Greenland Inuit, Chukotka Indigenous peoples (Berman, 2009; 2016)

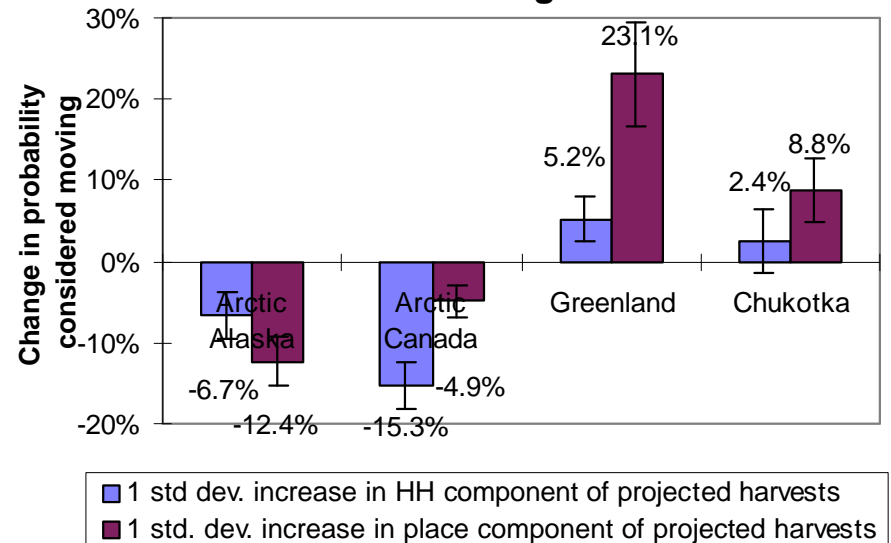
Survey of Living Conditions in the Arctic (SLiCA) (circa 2003) microdata

- Country differences in role of traditional harvesting
- Tied to local political economy of subsistence harvesting

**Effect of household and place contributions to earnings on migration intent**



**Effect of household and place contributions to harvests on migration intent**

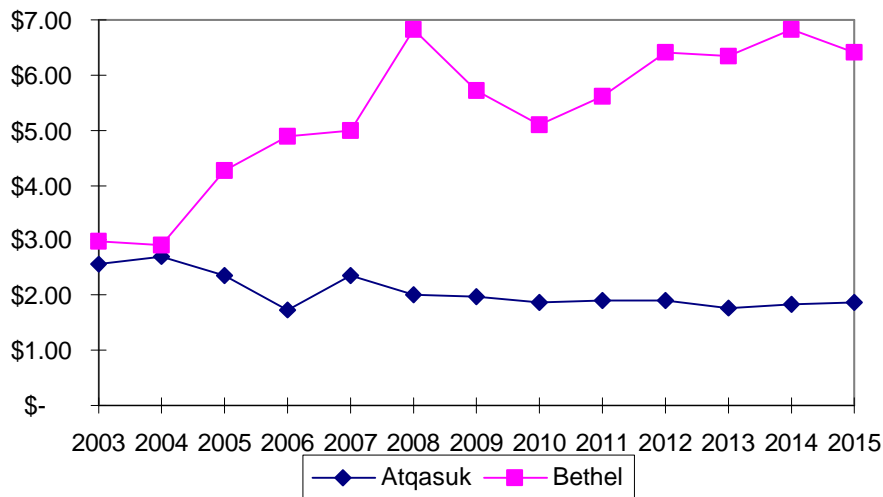


# 2005-2015 Rural Alaska Outmigration (Berman, 2017)

## Alaska Permanent Fund Dividend applications

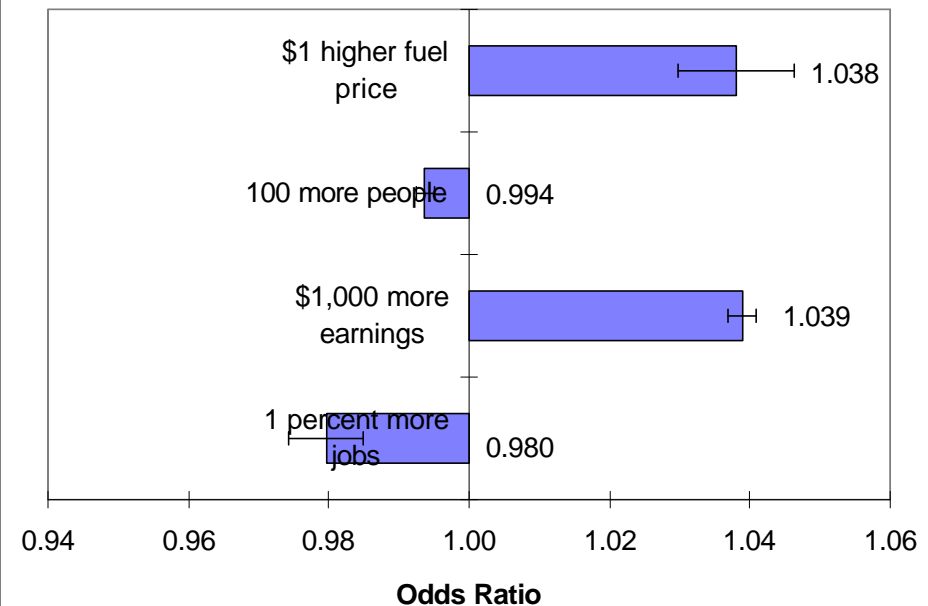
- Rising fuel costs in mid-2000s did cause increase in outmigration from villages
- However, effects relatively small on small community populations
- Why? regional center residents move to cities, not village residents

Home Heating Fuel Prices Adjusted for Inflation  
in Two Alaska Communities



Source: AHFC/DCRA retail fuel price surveys, adjusted to 2015 dollars using the Anchorage Consumer Price Index

Odds Ratio for Probability of Leaving Area:  
Relative to Trend



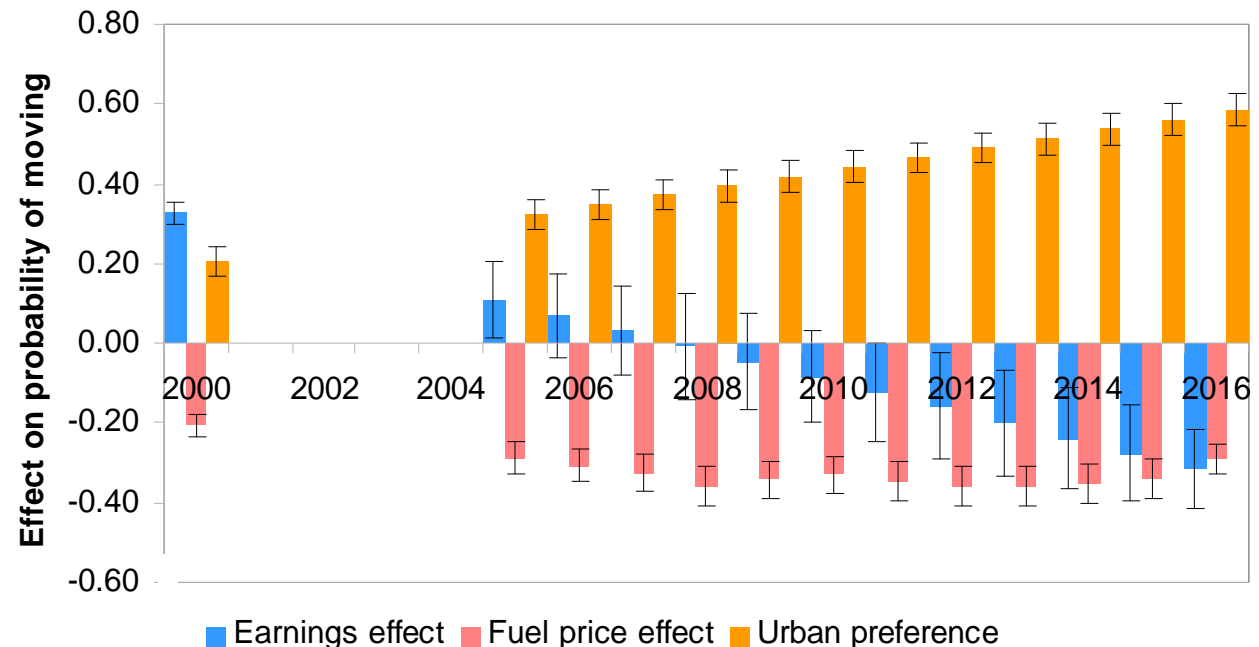
# Alaska, 2000-2016

2000 Census Long Form and 2005-2016 ACS microdata

- Earnings and living costs both important in 2000
- Since then, earnings became irrelevant, and living costs dominated
- Increasing preference for urban moves: reasons not in census data
- Stepping stones geography expressed in airline flight segments
- Gender differences no longer significant

**Changes in relative effects of earnings and living costs on likelihood of moving, Alaska Natives, 2000-2016**

Error bars represent standard errors

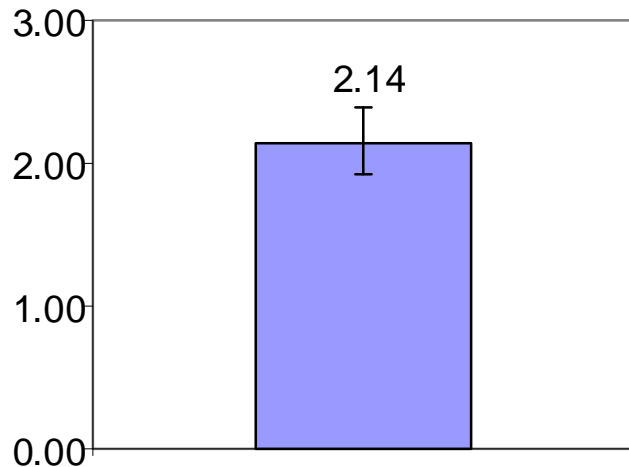


# Alaska, 2000-2016

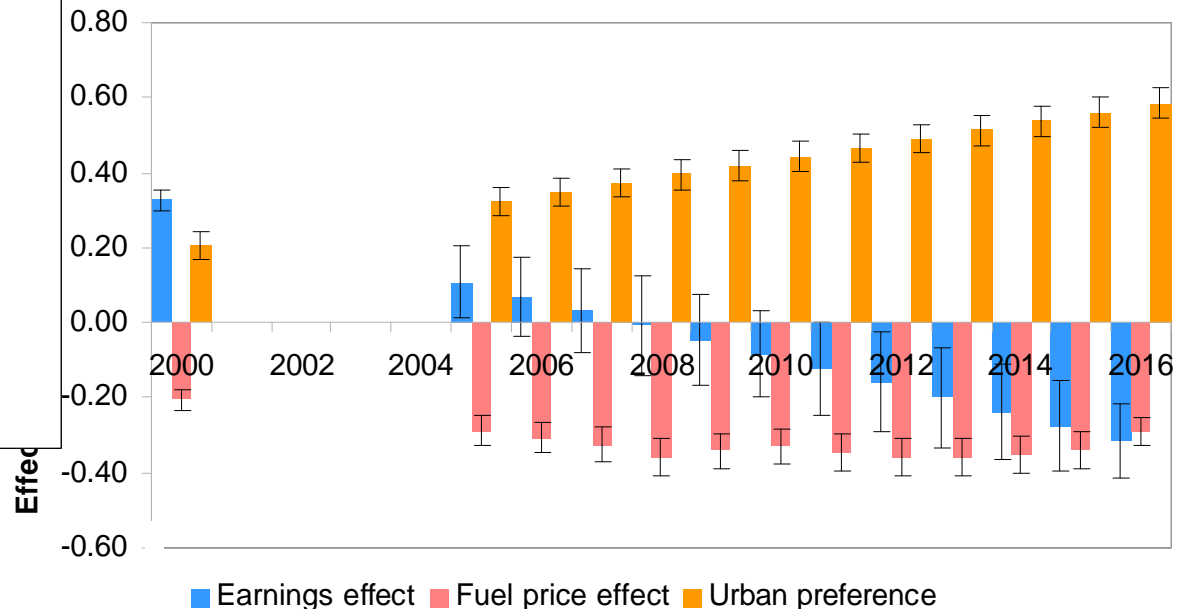
## 2000 Census Long Form and 2005-2016 ACS microdata

- Mobility window changed in from a five-year window in the 2000 Census Long Form Survey to a one-year mobility window in the ACS
- Alaska Native peoples were only twice as likely to have moved between rural and urban areas 5 years later than 1 year later

**Relative odds ratio: different county  
five years vs. one year later**  
Error bars represent standard errors



**Changes in relative effects of earnings and living costs  
on likelihood of moving, Alaska Natives, 2000-2016**  
Error bars represent standard errors





# Synthesis

Over the past 30 years, main drivers of rural to urban migration have changed

- Up to 2000, migration from rural to urban areas driven by employment opportunities (earnings)
- Gender differences in earnings drove gender disparities in migration
- Since 2000, living costs, especially fuel costs, increasingly eclipsed earnings as main driver
- Subsistence appears to retain people in Alaska and to some extent in Canada, but high fuel costs impede harvesting although data on subsistence are not systematically available
- Other factors (health care, social opportunities for youth?) also have increased in importance, and need further study



# Questions?



Photo: Gary Kofinas

The author gratefully acknowledges financial support from the National Science Foundation, project numbers 9521459, 9909156, 1216399, 0457662, 0639211; and the Alaska Energy Authority. The opinions and conclusions expressed here are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Census Bureau. This research was performed at a Federal Statistical Research Data Center under FSRDC Project Number 1211. All results have been reviewed to ensure that no confidential information is disclosed.