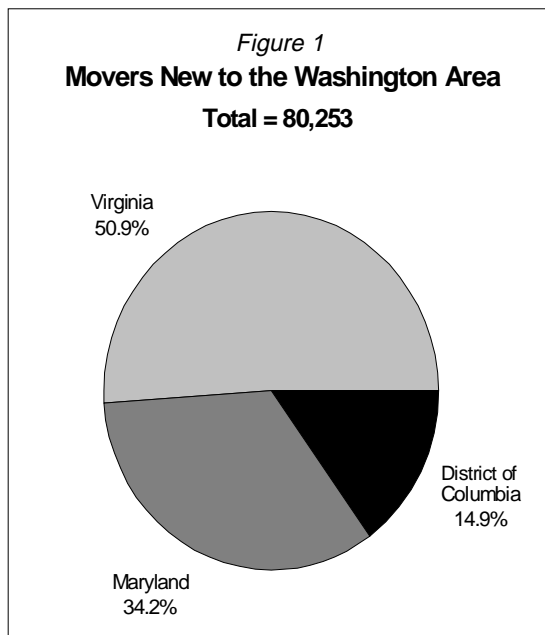


Residential Choices in the Washington Area

by Hanns Kuttner

Over 80,000 federal taxpayers moved into the Washington area from other parts of the country and abroad between 1996 and 1997, but they did not settle evenly across the metropolitan area. Virginia gained a larger share than Maryland (see Figure 1). The District also did well, more resembling Virginia than Maryland in its share relative to size.



This analysis is based on information about movers prepared by the Internal Revenue Service comparing the addresses from which taxpayers filed tax returns in 1996 and 1997.¹ Most of these movers had to choose where in the Washington area they would live. While we

do not know the reasons they decided which jurisdiction to choose, we do know the favorite choices. With more housing units available in the larger jurisdictions, they get more of the movers. Fairfax County leads in attracting the most new residents from outside the area with almost 19,000 in one year, followed by Montgomery County and the District with 13,000 and 12,000 respectively (see Figure 2).

Figure 2
New Movers to the Washington Area
1996-1997

Fairfax	19,526
Montgomery	12,898
District of Columbia	11,944
Prince George's	8,119
Arlington	6,534
Prince William	5,948
Alexandria	4,186
Frederick	3,273
Loudoun	3,101
Charles	1,811
Stafford	1,592
Calvert	1,318
Total	80,250

The attractiveness of jurisdictions is different, however, when the number of long distance movers is compared to the number already in the jurisdiction. Alexandria and Arlington are almost tied with 63 and 61 percent more of the movers than their population would warrant (see Figure 3). The District of Columbia also gets more than its share of people moving to

the Washington area. After the District, the more distant Virginia jurisdictions—Loudoun, Prince William, and Stafford Counties—came next, all surpassing the Maryland jurisdictions in their ability to pull in new arrivals. Prince George’s County had the least success in attracting people relative to population with 42 percent less than expected based on its size.

Figure 3
**Movers New to the Area
Relative to Population
1996-1997**

	Index ²
Alexandria	1.63
Arlington	1.61
Loudoun	1.30
District of Columbia	1.29
Prince William	1.24
Stafford	1.17
Fairfax	1.09
Washington Area	1.00
Montgomery	0.82
Frederick	0.71
Charles	0.67
Calvert	0.64
Prince George’s	0.58

Perhaps most surprising is the District’s performance. Although the District had passed its recent low point in government finances and municipal services, it was hardly perceived as on a sharp upswing in 1997. The amenities and features of the urban core apparently are valuable to attracting new people moving into the area.

Movement within the region

Those who move between jurisdictions in the region are more numerous than those moving into the region. The single largest jurisdiction-to-jurisdiction flow is from Arlington County to Fairfax County, Virginia. (A table showing

the number moving between each jurisdiction is available on the Research Center’s website.)

Those who move between jurisdictions are different from those who move into the area. They choose one jurisdiction after having lived in another in the area. The choice may involve a variety of reasons for preferring one location over another. Often it is related to the need for a larger or smaller dwelling unit or changes in job location.

The pattern of relative strength in attracting movers from within the area is similar to the attraction for those moving from outside. Arlington, Alexandria, and Loudoun are the first three preferences on both lists when the changes are ranked relative to size of the jurisdiction (see Figure 4). However, although the District gets a relatively high share of movers coming in from outside the area, it gets 18 percent less than its share of those moving within the region. Still, the District remains more attractive to these intra-regional movers than Montgomery County.

Figure 4
**Movers Within the Area
Relative to Population
1996-1997**

	Index ²
Alexandria	2.29
Arlington	1.86
Loudoun	1.79
Stafford	1.56
Prince William	1.17
Prince George’s	1.03
Washington Area	1.00
Fairfax	0.88
Charles	0.87
Calvert	0.86
District of Columbia	0.82
Montgomery	0.69
Frederick	0.57

Non Movers

One reason the Maryland jurisdictions score low on attracting movers is that their residents are less likely to change jurisdictions than those in the Virginia suburbs and the District. Looking at the proportion who did not move between 1996 and 1997, all five Maryland jurisdictions had over 90 percent of tax filers not moving (see Figure 5). Only Fairfax County among the District and Virginia jurisdictions had over

90 percent non movers. In contrast, Alexandria had only 81 percent of its filers not moving and Arlington had 83 percent. This difference is undoubtedly attributable, in part, to Alexandria's having over 60 percent of its dwelling units as rental units, compared to 32 percent in Montgomery County. However, this pattern is not uniform since Fairfax County has a lower percent of rental units, but a higher percent of movers than Montgomery County.

Figure 5
Non Movers in the Washington Area
1996-1997

	Non Movers as a Percent of Population ³	Percent of Dwelling Units Rented, 1990
Alexandria	80.9%	59.5%
Arlington	83.1	55.4
Prince William	86.0	29.0
District of Columbia	88.7	61.1
Stafford	89.2	18.1
Fairfax	90.0	29.5
Loudoun	90.9	26.7
Prince George's	91.3	41.1
Montgomery	92.1	32.1
Charles	92.5	24.3
Calvert	93.2	15.0
Frederick	93.6	29.2
Total	89.8%	39.5%

¹ A "move" is a change in the address an individual uses in filing his or her federal income tax return. In order to be counted as a mover, a taxfiler must have filed tax returns in both 1996 and 1997. Examples of individuals who would thus not be counted here include: immigrants who arrived in 1997; individuals with incomes below the filing threshold in either year who did not file (for example, welfare recipients with no earned income in one year and some in the other year and individuals entering the tax system (e.g., students first becoming employed.))

The data are based on the address from which a tax return is filed. "Moves" in the IRS's data may include a tax preparer moving its offices from downtown Washington to Rosslyn or vice versa, creating apparent "moves" when individuals, in fact, had not changed their residence.

In analyzing the IRS data, Fairfax City and the City of Falls Church were included with Fairfax County.

² The index is the ratio of the share of in-movers to the share of 1996 tax filers. Alexandria, for example had 5.31% of in-movers and 3.25% of 1996 filers; $5.31/3.25 = 1.63$.

³ Non movers include those who move within the same jurisdiction. An individual who moves from an apartment in downcounty Montgomery County to a newly constructed townhouse in upper Montgomery County would not be counted as a "mover" while someone who made an equivalent move, from an apartment in Arlington to a home in Fairfax County, would be considered a "mover".