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Rural Brain Drain

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Research Question

Why have rural areas experienced population decline, while urban areas have not?

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

This project focuses on the phenomenon of college graduates migrating to big cities, and thus creating a loss of human capital in small towns. This phenomenon is also known as rural “brain drain.” I expect to find that younger, more educated people with higher incomes will be more likely to live in a city and to desire to live in a city. This phenomenon holds great significance as more and more young academics and professionals are moving to big cities and metropolitan areas than ever before.

RURAL BRAIN DRAIN THEORY: One explanation for why rural areas are losing population is that people who have higher levels of education and income are more mobile. They have more resources available to them and can afford to move to big cities/urban areas to seek job opportunities. Less educated people with lower incomes do not have these same resources. Therefore, people who have higher levels of education and income are more likely to live and want to live in a city/suburb.

H₁: The higher level of education that someone has, the more likely he/she is to both want to live and to live in a city.

H₂: The higher level of income that someone has, the more likely he/she is to both want to live and to live in a city.

H₀: Education level and income level have no effect on where people choose to live.

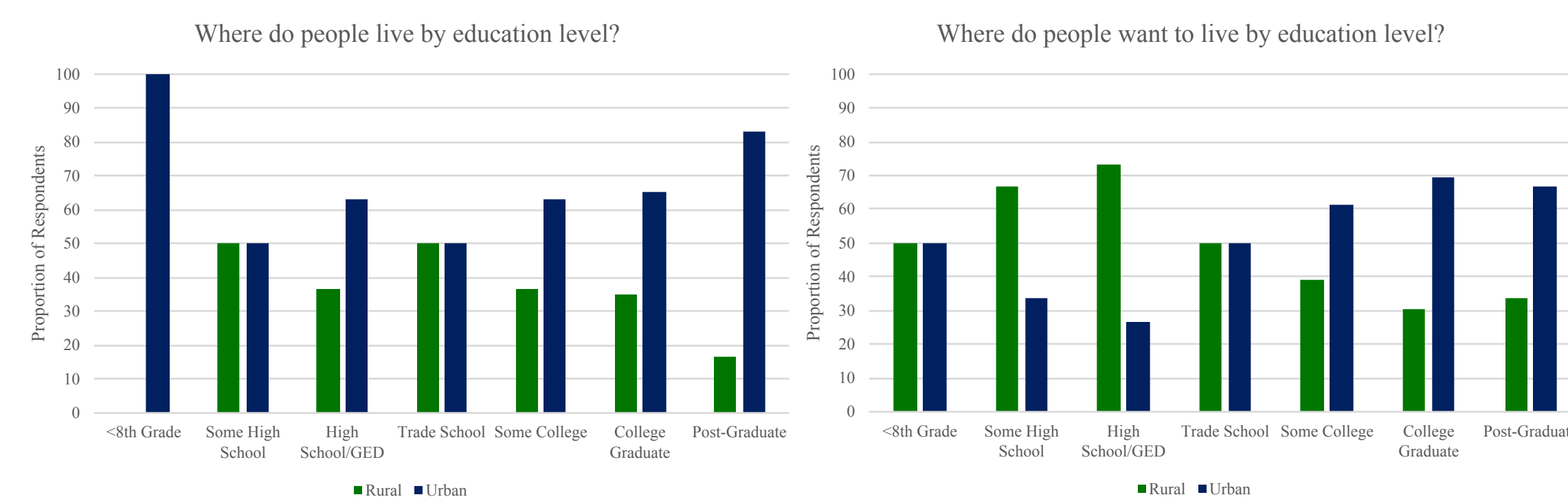
METHODOLOGY AND DATA

PROPOSED METHOD: I propose completing empirical analyses of the Mobility data set (n=2,260) from the Pew Research Center (2009). I plan to control for multiple factors that may explain why someone desires to move to a city or rural area.

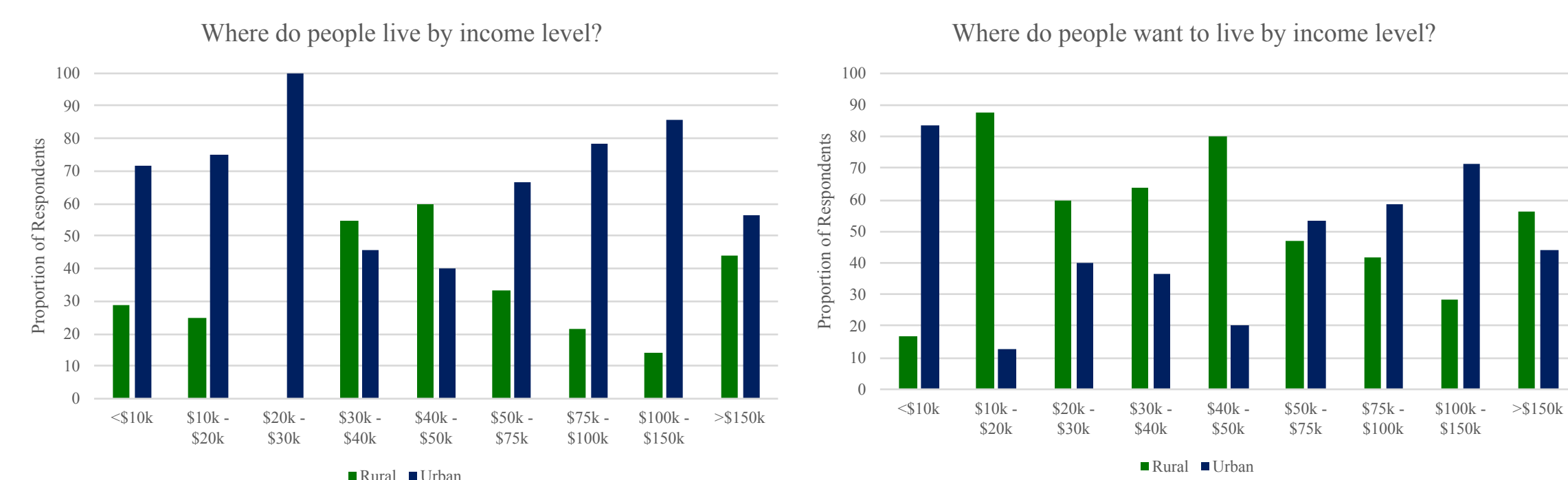
INITIAL DATA: To assess the Rural Brain Drain Theory, I randomly selected 100 respondents from the Pew Research Center’s Mobility data set. The Dependent Variables are “living in a certain place,” and “desiring to live in a certain place”; the Independent Variables are “Education Level” and “Income Level.”

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

EDUCATION



INCOME



ANTICIPATED FINDINGS & LIMITATIONS

From my sample, people with higher levels of education were more likely to live in urban and suburban areas and less likely to live in rural areas. For instance, 83.3% of people with post-graduate experience lived in an urban area, and only 16.7% lived in a rural area. This finding provides strong evidence for the Rural Brain Drain Theory.

Additionally, from my sample, people with higher levels of income were more likely to live in urban and suburban areas and less likely to live in rural areas. For example, 85.3% of people with an annual income of \$100k to \$150k lived in an urban area, and only 14.3% lived in a rural area. Although this finding supports the Rural Brain Drain Theory, my findings also showed that people with lower levels of income were more likely to live in urban areas than in rural areas.

One limitation of this analysis is that people with lower education levels and income levels were less likely to respond to the survey than people with higher education levels and income levels. If equal amounts of people from each education and income bracket were to respond to the survey, my preliminary findings would be more accurate.

SELECTED REFERENCES

Cohn, D'Vera, and Rich Morin. "Who Moves? Who Stays Put? Where's Home?" Pew Social Trends. December 17, 2008. Accessed March 25, 2019. <http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2010/10/Movers-and-Stayers.pdf>.

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