

State Income Tax Differentials and High-Skilled Labor Mobility in The United States: A Time Series Analysis

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Abstract

This study has addressed uncertainty surrounding whether state income-tax differentials influence high-skilled labor mobility or operate jointly with employment, affordability, career, remote-work, and residential considerations. Its purpose has been to evaluate how perceived state income-tax burden, expected after-tax income advantage, employment opportunities, cost-of-living considerations, professional advancement, remote-work flexibility, and quality-of-life conditions shape interstate relocation intentions among high-skilled professionals in the United States. A quantitative, cross-sectional, multiple-case-based design has been applied across high-tax, low-tax, and no-individual-income-tax state environments. From 360 distributed questionnaires, 326 have been returned and 312 valid responses have been retained, yielding an 86.67% usable response rate. Participants have represented information technology, healthcare, engineering, finance, higher education, research, management, consulting, law, and knowledge-intensive occupations. Data have been collected through a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed in SPSS using descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha, Pearson correlation, multiple regression, one-way ANOVA, post hoc comparisons, and diagnostic tests. Reliability has been strong, with construct alpha values ranging from .79 to .89 and an overall coefficient of .91. High-skilled labor mobility has recorded a mean of 4.06, while expected after-tax income advantage has achieved the highest predictor mean of 4.12. The regression model has explained 64.8% of mobility variance, $R^2 = .648$, adjusted $R^2 = .639$, $F(7, 304) = 79.95$, $p < .001$. Expected after-tax income advantage has emerged as the strongest predictor, $\beta = .27$, followed by perceived tax burden, $\beta = .24$, employment opportunities, $\beta = .20$, professional advancement, $\beta = .18$, remote-work flexibility, $\beta = .16$, cost of living, $\beta = .13$, and quality of life, $\beta = .11$. Mobility has differed significantly across state categories, $F(2, 309) = 12.84$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .077$, with the highest mean in high-tax states, 4.22. The findings imply that retaining skilled workers requires coordinated tax, employment, housing, career, flexibility, and quality-of-life policies.

Keywords

State Income-Tax Differentials, High-Skilled Labor Mobility, After-Tax Income, Interstate Migration, Remote-Work Flexibility

INTRODUCTION

State income-tax differentials refer to variations in the rates, structures, deductions, exemptions, tax brackets, and effective personal income-tax burdens applied across subnational jurisdictions. In the United States, these differentials have emerged because individual states possess considerable authority to establish and administer their own taxation systems. As a result, some states have operated progressive income-tax systems, some have applied flat-rate structures, some have imposed taxes only on particular categories of income, and others have not imposed a broad-based individual income tax. High-skilled labor generally refers to workers whose occupations require advanced education, specialized knowledge, technical expertise, professional certification, analytical competence, or extensive experience. This category has commonly included scientists, engineers, physicians, information-technology specialists, financial professionals, researchers, academics, legal practitioners, senior managers, and other employees whose skills are relatively scarce and economically valuable. High-skilled labor mobility refers to the movement of these professionals among employers, metropolitan areas, regions, states, or countries in response to differences in employment conditions, financial incentives, professional opportunities, and residential characteristics. The relationship between taxation and skilled labor mobility has acquired international significance because national and subnational governments have competed to attract and retain productive workers whose knowledge and expertise support innovation, entrepreneurship, institutional development, and regional economic performance. Research involving internationally mobile professionals has demonstrated that personal income-tax rates can influence location decisions when workers possess transferable occupational skills, access to alternative employment markets, and sufficient resources to relocate. Tax-related geographic responses have been particularly visible among highly compensated athletes, foreign high earners, inventors, scientists, and other professionals whose labor markets extend beyond a single location (Akçigit et al., 2016; Kleven et al., 2013; Kleven et al., 2014). Evidence from decentralized European fiscal systems has also indicated that regional and municipal tax differences can influence residential selection among mobile taxpayers, although the strength of this relationship varies according to income, nationality, occupational mobility, and attachment to the existing place of residence (Agrawal & Foremny, 2019; Schmidheiny, 2006; Schmidheiny & Slotwinski, 2018). The geographic movement of scientists has additionally been associated with career stage, research opportunities, organizational networks, institutional reputation, and the distribution of specialized employment environments (Vaccario et al., 2021). Tax-induced mobility can therefore be understood as one part of a broader location-choice process in which workers compare after-tax income, employment opportunities, housing expenses, public services, regional amenities, family circumstances, and relocation costs. Evidence has shown that taxation may produce measurable mobility responses among workers with highly transferable skills, whereas individuals possessing substantial location-specific professional and social capital may respond less strongly to tax differences (Kleven et al., 2020).

The United States represents an especially relevant setting for examining state income-tax differentials because workers can relocate across state boundaries without facing the international immigration restrictions, citizenship requirements, language barriers, visa procedures, or formal border controls that commonly constrain movement between countries (Debasish, 2021; Md. Abdur & Iftekhar, 2021). State boundaries nevertheless separate jurisdictions characterized by different income-tax structures, public-service arrangements, housing markets, employment conditions, regulatory environments, and living costs. These variations create a decentralized fiscal system in which high-skilled workers may compare the financial and professional value of remaining in their current state with the expected value of relocating to another jurisdiction. The actual importance of a tax differential cannot be determined solely from a statutory tax rate because effective tax liability also depends on taxable-income definitions, deductions, exemptions, credits, filing status, local taxes, and the worker's level and source of income (Mohammad Shoriful Hossan, 2021; Muhammad Zahidul & Amena Begum, 2022). A one-percentage-point difference in marginal income-tax rates may create a relatively small annual financial change for a moderate-income household but may generate a considerably larger difference for a highly compensated professional. State personal and business tax differences have been associated with the interstate location choices of exceptionally productive scientists, suggesting that workers in specialized

and nationally competitive labor markets may respond to state fiscal incentives (Moretti & Wilson, 2017). Evidence concerning affluent taxpayers as a broader population has remained more varied. Research on a major income-tax increase affecting high earners in New Jersey identified only limited migration responses, indicating that higher tax liability did not automatically produce widespread movement among affluent residents (Young & Varner, 2011). Administrative evidence covering million-dollar income earners across the United States has similarly shown that many high-income individuals remain economically, socially, and professionally connected to the places in which they have established their careers and accumulated wealth (Young et al., 2016). These findings suggest that tax differences may influence relocation decisions at the margin without transforming all high-income professionals into continuously mobile taxpayers. Research involving older households has also questioned the assumption that favorable state tax treatment necessarily produces substantial migration. Estate and inheritance tax policies have demonstrated limited independent influence on elderly migration after changes over time and differences among state characteristics have been considered (Conway & Rork, 2006). State income-tax preferences directed toward older residents have likewise not been consistently associated with large-scale migration responses (Conway & Rork, 2012). The U.S. environment therefore contains substantial fiscal contrasts alongside extensive variation in employment opportunities, housing conditions, family networks, climate, public services, and regional amenities. Movement from a high-tax state to a low-tax or no-income-tax state cannot consequently be interpreted as direct evidence of tax-motivated relocation because the worker may also have received a better employment offer, obtained more affordable housing, joined family members, acquired remote-work flexibility, or selected a destination with preferred residential characteristics (Md Mesbaul, 2023).

Figure 1: Integrated Conceptual Framework of State Income-Tax Differentials and High-Skilled Labor Mobility



High-skilled labor mobility forms part of the wider process through which human capital is distributed across regional labor markets. Human capital encompasses education, occupational knowledge, professional experience, technical ability, analytical competence, and other productive capabilities embodied in individuals. When skilled workers relocate, they transfer these capabilities from one state or metropolitan economy to another, thereby changing the geographic distribution of labor productivity, earnings, expertise, entrepreneurship, and innovative activity. College-educated workers

have generally displayed greater long-distance mobility than individuals with lower levels of formal education because their occupational abilities may be demanded across a broader range of labor markets and because the potential economic return from relocation can be greater. College graduates have responded more strongly than less-educated workers to employment opportunities located in distant labor markets, suggesting that education increases workers' capacity to match their abilities with geographically dispersed demand (Wozniak, 2010). Additional education has also been causally associated with a greater likelihood of living outside one's state of birth, demonstrating that college attendance can influence geographic mobility independently of family background and other characteristics (Malamud & Wozniak, 2012). These patterns make high-skilled workers an appropriate population for evaluating whether state income-tax differentials influence location decisions. Interstate mobility has nevertheless not remained equally strong across all demographic groups, occupational categories, or economic periods. A broad decline in internal migration has been observed in the United States, including reductions in interstate and long-distance movement (Molloy et al., 2011). Part of the long-run decline in interstate migration has been associated with smaller geographic differences in occupational returns and improved access to information concerning alternative labor markets, which have reduced the value of moving for certain workers (Kaplan & Schulhofer-Wohl, 2017). Interstate migration responses to regional labor-demand differences have also weakened, although geographic mobility has continued to function as a mechanism of adjustment when local economies experience employment disturbances (Dao et al., 2017). These findings indicate that the presence of wage, tax, or employment differences among states does not automatically generate large migration responses because relocation involves financial expenditure, information requirements, household coordination, uncertainty, and the potential loss of local professional and social relationships. Occupational skill further influences the destinations workers can realistically consider. College-educated workers have increasingly concentrated in high-wage and high-rent metropolitan areas characterized by favorable productivity and amenity conditions (Diamond, 2016). Concentrations of college-educated residents have also been connected with metropolitan employment growth through productivity and quality-of-life mechanisms (Shapiro, 2006). Skilled labor mobility therefore reflects a process of geographic matching in which workers evaluate income, occupational specialization, professional networks, amenities, housing expenses, and household requirements. State income taxation influences this process by changing disposable income, although its relative importance depends on the benefits and costs associated with the broader employment and residential environment.

Empirical research on taxation and mobility has produced meaningful but heterogeneous findings across occupational groups, income categories, jurisdictions, and institutional arrangements. One body of evidence has identified substantial tax responsiveness among exceptionally mobile, highly compensated, or internationally recruited professionals. Top income-tax rates have influenced the international distribution of professional football players, particularly foreign athletes whose employment markets were already international and whose career earnings were concentrated within a limited number of years (Kleven et al., 2013). Preferential taxation for foreign high earners in Denmark has also generated a considerable inflow of eligible workers, demonstrating that targeted reductions in income taxation can influence the geographic distribution of highly compensated professionals (Kleven et al., 2014). International differences in top tax rates have affected the location decisions of highly productive inventors, with stronger responses among foreign inventors and professionals connected to multinational organizations (Akcigit et al., 2016). Related evidence within the United States has shown that personal and corporate tax differences across states influence the geographic location of star scientists working in highly specialized and nationally competitive fields (Moretti & Wilson, 2017). Regional income-tax differences have also affected destination choice among wealthy individuals who had already decided to relocate, although the influence of taxation on the initial decision to move was more limited (Agrawal & Foremny, 2019). Local income-tax differences have shaped the residential choices of foreign employees in Switzerland, while progressive local taxation has contributed to income-based residential sorting among municipalities (Schmidheiny, 2006; Schmidheiny & Slotwinski, 2018). A second body of research has shown that the migration responses of broader affluent populations are often smaller than public and political discussions suggest. A significant tax increase on high-income residents in New Jersey produced only modest out-migration among affected

taxpayers (Young & Varner, 2011). Nationwide administrative records have further indicated that millionaire migration occurs at relatively low rates because affluent individuals are frequently attached to businesses, professional communities, family networks, and established residential environments (Young et al., 2016). Tax preferences and estate-related policies have also displayed weak associations with interstate migration among elderly populations (Conway & Rork, 2006, 2012). Differences across these findings can be connected to variations in occupational transferability, income composition, career stage, age, nationality, family structure, and location-specific capital. A professional athlete, internationally recruited scientist, or multinational executive may receive employment opportunities from several jurisdictions and face limited occupational losses from relocation. A physician with an established patient base, a business owner dependent on local customers, or a senior manager with firm-specific authority may face substantially greater relocation costs. Tax sensitivity is therefore likely to be stronger when expected financial gains are large, comparable professional opportunities are available elsewhere, and the worker's income and career are not strongly tied to the current location. Employment opportunities, cost of living, housing affordability, professional advancement, and regional amenities constitute major non-tax determinants of high-skilled workers' location choices. A state with a comparatively high personal income-tax rate may continue to attract skilled professionals when it contains specialized industries, major corporate headquarters, leading universities, research institutions, technology clusters, advanced healthcare facilities, or strong professional networks. A low-tax state may offer a favorable fiscal environment but may remain less attractive to a particular occupational group when relevant employers, promotion pathways, research facilities, or professional communities are limited. Skilled workers have increasingly selected high-wage and high-amenity cities, demonstrating that location choice reflects the total economic and residential value of a jurisdiction rather than a single tax characteristic (Diamond, 2016). Human-capital concentrations have also contributed to metropolitan growth through both productivity and quality-of-life channels, indicating that skilled workers are attracted to locations that support economic opportunity and desirable living conditions (Shapiro, 2006). State fiscal policies affecting firms can indirectly shape high-skilled labor mobility by influencing where businesses establish operations, expand employment, and allocate investment. State corporate tax changes have affected wages, establishment growth, rental costs, and local population through the responses of employers and workers (Suárez Serrato & Zidar, 2016). Business activity has also been reallocated across state boundaries in response to differences in corporate and personal taxation, particularly among geographically flexible firms and industries (Giroud & Rauh, 2019). State and local governments have extensively used business incentives to influence firm location, employment creation, and investment, linking workers' geographic opportunities to broader competition among jurisdictions for economic activity (Slattery & Zidar, 2020). Housing markets can strengthen or weaken the attractiveness of employment and tax advantages. Housing-supply constraints have limited employment growth in metropolitan areas by transforming increases in labor demand into higher housing prices rather than proportional population and employment expansion (Saks, 2008). Rising housing costs in high-income regions have reduced migration and weakened regional income convergence by making economically productive locations less accessible to many households (Ganong & Shoag, 2017). Regional amenities also shape migration independently of taxes and wages. Employment conditions and consumer amenities have influenced migration differently across life-cycle stages, while climate has remained a persistent determinant of population movement within the United States (Chen & Rosenthal, 2008; Rappaport, 2007). The financial attractiveness of a state must therefore be evaluated through after-tax income relative to housing, healthcare, transportation, and other living expenses, while its professional attractiveness depends on employment quality, career advancement, occupational demand, and access to specialized institutions.

Remote-work flexibility introduces an additional dimension into the relationship between taxation and high-skilled labor mobility because it can weaken the traditional requirement that workers live close to their employer's physical workplace. Before the expansion of remote and hybrid work arrangements, interstate relocation generally required a change of employer, an organizational transfer, a substantial commute, or the establishment of a business in the destination state. Remote employment can separate residential location from organizational location, allowing certain professionals to retain their existing

employment while reconsidering where they prefer to live. This flexibility is especially relevant to high-skilled occupations involving information processing, software development, management, finance, consulting, research, writing, design, data analysis, and other activities that can be performed through digital communication. Working from home has been shown to be operationally feasible and has affected productivity, job satisfaction, and employee turnover under structured organizational conditions (Bloom et al., 2015). Workers have also assigned measurable value to flexible work arrangements, although the strength of these preferences has varied considerably across individuals and forms of flexibility (Mas & Pallais, 2017). Occupational analysis has demonstrated that a substantial proportion of jobs in the United States can be performed entirely from home and that remote-work feasibility is disproportionately concentrated among higher-paying and more highly educated occupational groups (Dingel & Neiman, 2020). Remote-work capacity therefore overlaps significantly with high-skilled employment and can reduce one of the most important costs of interstate relocation, namely the risk of losing suitable employment. This arrangement does not eliminate all geographic constraints because employers may restrict approved work locations, adjust salaries according to residence, require periodic office attendance, or encounter state-level tax and administrative obligations. Many professionals also depend on laboratories, hospitals, clients, physical facilities, teams, and localized knowledge networks. Remote-work flexibility can nevertheless change how workers evaluate state tax differences by allowing some individuals to relocate without immediately changing employers or occupations. A professional who can preserve the same position and salary after moving may compare income taxes, housing expenses, public services, climate, family proximity, and quality of life more directly than a worker whose relocation requires securing a new position. Remote-work flexibility may consequently interact with perceived tax burden and after-tax income advantage rather than functioning as an entirely independent factor. Workers with greater geographic flexibility may exhibit stronger tax-related relocation intentions, while workers whose duties require physical presence may assign greater importance to local employment availability, organizational infrastructure, and professional networks. The combined role of remote-work flexibility and quality-of-life considerations is therefore relevant to explaining differences in high-skilled workers' willingness to relocate among state tax environments.

A central research problem concerns the manner in which state income-tax differentials are perceived and evaluated by high-skilled workers when taxation is considered together with employment opportunities, living expenses, professional advancement, remote-work flexibility, and quality of life. Much of the established literature on taxation and mobility has relied on administrative tax records, census information, patent databases, occupation-level evidence, policy reforms, and observed migration behavior. These approaches have produced credible estimates of actual geographic responses, but they provide less direct information concerning the decision processes through which workers compare the competing characteristics of states. Administrative information can identify whether a taxpayer has changed residence, but it may not reveal whether the relocation was motivated by income taxation, employment, housing, family relationships, climate, public services, or several factors operating simultaneously. The existing literature has also measured mobility in different ways. Some studies have examined whether a tax change causes individuals to move, while others have analyzed the destination selected by individuals who have already decided to relocate. Taxation has shown a clearer influence on destination selection than on the initial decision to migrate in certain regional settings, demonstrating the importance of distinguishing between the decision to move and the choice of destination (Agrawal & Foremny, 2019). The economic and social embeddedness of many high earners has been associated with relatively low migration responsiveness, whereas highly specialized scientists with transferable professional skills have displayed stronger geographic responses to state taxation (Moretti & Wilson, 2017; Young et al., 2016). Broader reviews of the evidence have similarly demonstrated that migration responses to taxation vary substantially across worker categories, occupations, income groups, and institutional contexts (Kleven et al., 2020). These differences create a need to examine perceived state income-tax burden, expected after-tax income advantage, employment opportunity attractiveness, cost-of-living considerations, professional advancement opportunities, remote-work flexibility, quality-of-life preferences, and high-skilled labor mobility within a unified empirical framework. The present study focuses on high-skilled professionals

located in selected high-tax, low-tax, and no-income-tax states in the United States and adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional, multiple-case-study design. A structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale will measure the principal study variables. Descriptive statistics will be used to determine the levels, distributions, and relative rankings of the constructs, while Pearson correlation analysis will assess the direction and strength of relationships among the variables. Multiple regression analysis will estimate the independent and combined effects of the proposed predictors on high-skilled labor mobility. Comparative statistical analysis across the three state tax categories will also examine whether respondents' mobility perceptions, relocation intentions, and location preferences differ according to the fiscal environments in which they currently live and work.

Background of the Study

State income-tax differentials have become an important feature of economic and labor-market variation within the United States because individual states maintain considerable authority to determine their own personal income-tax systems. These differences include variations in tax rates, income brackets, deductions, exemptions, tax credits, filing requirements, and the overall effective tax burden placed on residents. Some states apply progressive income-tax structures, others use flat-rate systems, and several states do not impose a broad individual income tax. Such differences can influence the amount of disposable income available to workers after taxation and may affect how individuals compare alternative places of residence and employment. The issue is particularly relevant to high-skilled workers because they frequently earn higher incomes, possess specialized qualifications, and have access to employment opportunities across several states. High-skilled labor includes professionals working in fields such as information technology, engineering, healthcare, finance, scientific research, higher education, law, management, and other knowledge-intensive occupations. These workers contribute significantly to innovation, productivity, entrepreneurship, public revenue, and regional economic competitiveness. Their movement from one state to another can therefore influence the distribution of human capital, occupational expertise, business activity, and economic growth across the country. State taxation may become one factor in their mobility decisions because a difference in tax liability can produce a meaningful change in annual take-home income, particularly for highly compensated professionals. However, the decision to relocate is rarely determined by taxation alone. High-skilled workers may also consider employment opportunities, salary levels, cost of living, housing affordability, career development, professional networks, public services, family circumstances, climate, and quality of life. The increasing availability of remote and hybrid work has also changed the relationship between employment and residential location by allowing some professionals to work for an organization in one state while residing in another. This flexibility may make tax differences more visible and relevant during relocation decisions. The study therefore focuses on how state income-tax differentials interact with financial, occupational, and residential factors in shaping high-skilled labor mobility. By examining professionals from high-tax, low-tax, and no-income-tax states, the research seeks to develop a clearer understanding of how skilled workers perceive tax burdens and how those perceptions relate to their willingness to relocate within the United States.

Problem Statement

The movement of high-skilled workers across state boundaries has created significant concerns for state governments, employers, economic-development agencies, and regional labor markets because the loss or attraction of skilled professionals can influence innovation, productivity, tax revenue, business development, and the availability of specialized services. Differences in state income-tax systems are frequently presented as an important explanation for why high-income and high-skilled workers leave certain states and relocate to jurisdictions with lower tax burdens. However, the actual influence of state income-tax differentials on labor mobility remains uncertain because relocation decisions are shaped by several interconnected economic, professional, social, and residential considerations. A worker may move from a high-tax state to a low-tax or no-income-tax state, but the decision may also be associated with a higher salary, a better job opportunity, lower housing costs, improved career prospects, remote-work flexibility, family proximity, or preferred living conditions. This makes it difficult to determine whether taxation independently motivates mobility or whether it operates together with other factors. Another problem is that many discussions of tax-related migration focus

broadly on wealthy taxpayers, retirees, business owners, or total population movements rather than on high-skilled professionals as a distinct labor-market group. High-skilled workers may respond differently because their education, expertise, income, occupational demand, and employment flexibility can provide greater access to interstate opportunities. At the same time, they may remain strongly attached to locations containing specialized industries, professional networks, research institutions, major employers, or advanced public services. Existing administrative and migration data may identify that a person has changed residence, but such data often provide limited information about the perceptions and motivations underlying the decision. They may not clearly reveal how workers compare tax savings with employment quality, cost of living, professional advancement, remote-work arrangements, and quality-of-life conditions. There is therefore a need for a structured empirical investigation that directly measures the perceptions, preferences, and relocation intentions of high-skilled professionals across different state tax environments. Without such evidence, policymakers may overestimate the role of taxation and underestimate the influence of employment and residential conditions, or they may fail to recognize situations in which tax burdens meaningfully affect worker retention. The central problem addressed by this research is the lack of an integrated quantitative explanation of how perceived state income-tax burden, expected after-tax income advantage, employment opportunities, cost of living, professional advancement, remote-work flexibility, and quality of life jointly influence high-skilled labor mobility in the United States.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to quantitatively examine the relationship between state income-tax differentials and high-skilled labor mobility in the United States by focusing on professionals located in selected high-tax, low-tax, and no-income-tax states. The study is intended to determine whether differences in state income taxation influence workers' relocation intentions, destination preferences, and willingness to accept employment in another state. The primary objective is to assess the extent to which perceived state income-tax burden affects high-skilled labor mobility. This objective recognizes that workers may respond not only to actual statutory tax rates but also to their personal understanding of how taxation affects disposable income and household financial well-being. A second objective is to evaluate whether expected after-tax income advantage encourages professionals to consider moving to lower-tax jurisdictions. The study will examine whether anticipated tax savings are sufficiently important to influence residential and employment decisions. A third objective is to determine the effects of employment opportunities, cost-of-living considerations, and professional advancement on high-skilled labor mobility. These factors are included because workers may accept a higher tax burden when a state offers stronger occupational demand, better salaries, specialized industries, or greater career growth. A fourth objective is to examine whether remote-work flexibility influences the ability and willingness of high-skilled workers to relocate across state boundaries. Remote work may reduce the employment-related costs of moving by allowing professionals to retain their current positions while changing their state of residence. A fifth objective is to assess how quality-of-life considerations, including housing, public services, safety, climate, family needs, and residential preferences, affect mobility decisions. A sixth objective is to compare mobility perceptions and relocation intentions among respondents from high-tax, low-tax, and no-income-tax states. This comparison will help determine whether workers living under different tax structures exhibit significantly different attitudes toward interstate movement. The final objective is to develop and statistically test an integrated regression model that explains high-skilled labor mobility through the combined effects of taxation, economic conditions, occupational opportunities, remote-work flexibility, and residential preferences. Through descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, group comparisons, and multiple regression modeling, the study will provide a structured assessment of the relative importance of each factor in shaping the mobility of skilled professionals.

Research Hypotheses

The research hypotheses have been developed to test the proposed relationships between state income-tax differentials, related economic and professional factors, and high-skilled labor mobility. The first hypothesis states that perceived state income-tax burden has a significant positive relationship with high-skilled labor mobility. This means that professionals who view their current state tax burden as high are expected to show stronger intentions to relocate or greater preference for lower-tax

jurisdictions. The second hypothesis proposes that expected after-tax income advantage has a significant positive influence on high-skilled labor mobility. Workers who believe that relocation would increase their disposable income are expected to demonstrate greater willingness to move. The third hypothesis states that employment opportunities have a significant positive influence on high-skilled labor mobility because access to suitable jobs, competitive salaries, and occupational demand may increase the attractiveness of another state. The fourth hypothesis proposes that cost-of-living considerations significantly influence high-skilled labor mobility. Workers are expected to compare tax savings with housing, transportation, healthcare, and general living expenses when evaluating a destination. The fifth hypothesis states that professional advancement opportunities have a significant positive influence on mobility because career development, promotion prospects, specialized industries, and access to professional networks can motivate relocation. The sixth hypothesis proposes that remote-work flexibility has a significant positive influence on high-skilled labor mobility. Professionals who can perform their duties remotely are expected to experience fewer employment-related barriers to interstate relocation. The seventh hypothesis states that quality-of-life considerations significantly influence high-skilled labor mobility because workers may evaluate safety, public services, climate, education, family needs, and residential amenities when selecting a location. The eighth hypothesis proposes that significant differences exist in high-skilled labor mobility among respondents from high-tax, low-tax, and no-income-tax states. These hypotheses will be examined through quantitative analysis using data collected through a structured five-point Likert-scale questionnaire. Pearson correlation analysis will be used to identify the direction and strength of relationships among the study variables, while multiple regression analysis will determine the individual and combined effects of the independent variables on high-skilled labor mobility. Analysis of variance will be used to compare respondents across the three state tax categories. Each hypothesis will be statistically supported or rejected according to the observed significance levels, standardized coefficients, and overall model results.

Significance of the Research

- i. **Significance for state policymakers:** The study will provide state policymakers with a clearer understanding of whether personal income-tax differences influence the attraction and retention of high-skilled workers. This information can help policymakers evaluate whether tax competitiveness should be considered alongside employment creation, housing affordability, public services, infrastructure, and quality of life when designing strategies to strengthen the skilled workforce.
- ii. **Significance for economic-development agencies:** Economic-development organizations may use the findings to understand the conditions that make a state attractive to professionals in knowledge-intensive occupations. The research will help identify whether lower taxation alone is sufficient to attract skilled labor or whether it must be supported by strong employers, career opportunities, affordable living conditions, and desirable residential environments.
- iii. **Significance for employers and human-resource managers:** Employers may benefit from understanding how state taxation, remote-work flexibility, cost of living, and professional development affect employee relocation and retention. Organizations operating in high-tax or high-cost states may use the findings to design competitive compensation, flexible-work arrangements, location allowances, or retention strategies for highly qualified employees.
- iv. **Significance for high-skilled professionals:** The study will provide professionals with a structured framework for evaluating relocation decisions. It will demonstrate the importance of comparing after-tax income with salary, employment stability, housing expenses, career advancement, public services, and quality of life rather than making decisions on the basis of tax rates alone.
- v. **Significance for labor-market and workforce planners:** Workforce planners may use the study to identify factors associated with the geographic movement of skilled labor. The findings can support policies intended to address shortages in healthcare, technology, engineering, education, finance, and other specialized occupations.
- vi. **Significance for academic research:** The study will contribute to research on taxation, interstate migration, human capital, labor economics, and residential choice by examining several determinants within one integrated quantitative model. It will also provide evidence based on the perceptions and intentions of high-skilled workers rather than relying only on aggregate migration or administrative

tax data.

vii. **Significance for regional competitiveness:** The research will help explain how differences in tax systems, employment conditions, professional opportunities, remote-work arrangements, and living environments may affect competition among states for skilled workers. This understanding is important because the concentration of human capital can influence innovation, entrepreneurship, productivity, and long-term regional economic performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on state income-tax differentials and high-skilled labor mobility brings together several closely connected areas of economic, fiscal, labor-market, and regional research. The central concern of this literature is whether differences in taxation across jurisdictions influence where skilled individuals choose to live and work and how strongly taxation matters when compared with employment, income, living costs, professional advancement, and residential preferences. State income taxation affects the amount of earnings retained by workers and can therefore alter the financial attractiveness of alternative locations. However, mobility decisions generally involve a broader comparison of expected benefits and costs. High-skilled professionals may consider gross salary, after-tax income, housing affordability, occupational demand, career development, public services, professional networks, family needs, and quality of life before deciding whether to relocate. The literature also emphasizes that high-skilled workers differ from the general population because their qualifications and specialized knowledge may provide access to employment opportunities across several states. Their potential mobility makes them important to state economies because they contribute to productivity, innovation, entrepreneurship, and the provision of specialized services. At the same time, high-skilled workers may remain attached to particular locations because of firm-specific experience, professional licensing, research facilities, established clients, family connections, or local networks. The literature therefore presents taxation as an influential but not independent determinant of mobility. Another important theme concerns the distinction between actual migration behavior and relocation intention. Administrative records can identify completed moves, while survey-based research can examine how workers perceive tax burdens and how they evaluate possible destinations before moving. The expansion of remote and hybrid work has further changed this discussion by reducing the need for some professionals to live near an employer's physical location. Remote-work flexibility may allow a worker to maintain the same job while moving to a state with a different tax structure, cost of living, or residential environment. The following literature review therefore examines state income-tax differentials and interstate mobility, high-skilled labor and human-capital distribution, after-tax income and employment-related factors, cost of living and professional advancement, remote-work flexibility and quality of life, the theoretical framework based on residential choice, and the conceptual relationships underlying the study hypotheses.

State Income-Tax Differentials and Interstate Labor Mobility

State income-tax differentials represent differences in statutory rates, taxable-income rules, deductions, credits, exemptions, brackets, and effective liabilities across jurisdictions. Within a federal system, these differences create variation in the amount of disposable income that households retain after earning the same gross salary. Interstate labor mobility refers to a worker's movement from one state labor market to another for employment, residential, financial, or household reasons. The relationship between these concepts is grounded in the idea that workers compare the expected benefits of alternative locations with the economic and personal costs of moving. A lower income-tax burden can raise take-home pay, but the value of that gain depends on wages, housing costs, public services, transportation expenses, occupational opportunities, and household preferences. Tax effects may therefore appear in both the decision to move and the selection of a destination after a move has been considered. Evidence from multistate metropolitan areas is especially useful because workers can often access the same regional labor market while choosing residence on different sides of a state boundary. Research using Internal Revenue Service migration records for households entering such metropolitan areas found that state income-tax differences influenced the destination selected by movers, although service expenditures and other fiscal characteristics also entered residential choice (Coomes & Hoyt, 2008). This evidence clarifies that tax competition does not operate in isolation. It functions through comparisons among fiscal and residential packages. For high-skilled workers, the comparison may be

particularly important because higher earnings make percentage differences in state taxation financially larger, while specialized qualifications can provide access to employers in several jurisdictions. At the same time, professional licensing, firm-specific knowledge, family relationships, and established networks can limit geographic flexibility. State income-tax differentials should consequently be treated as measurable incentives whose influence varies with income, occupation, household circumstances, and the availability of alternatives.

Figure 2: Integrated Conceptual Framework of State Income-Tax Differentials and Interstate Labor Mobility



Empirical research in the United States has examined tax-related migration through individual records, aggregate flows, and comparisons between origins and destinations. Individual-level analysis has shown that income-tax effects are not uniform across population groups. Using geocoded longitudinal information, one study found that individuals generally moved away from higher-income-tax states toward lower-income-tax states, while responsiveness differed across age and racial categories (Gius, 2011). Such heterogeneity is relevant to high-skilled labor because education, career stage, income, homeownership, and family responsibilities can change both the expected gain from relocation and the practical ability to move. Younger professionals may have fewer property and household attachments, whereas experienced professionals may have occupation-specific networks in their current state. Aggregate evidence has also identified a relationship between tax-rate differences and interstate population flows. An analysis of annual Internal Revenue Service state-to-state migration data covering 1992 through 2010 reported that states with higher top marginal income-tax rates experienced relatively greater outmigration of taxpayers and adjusted gross income, after accounting for economic and geographic factors (Cohen et al., 2014). This finding is important because the fiscal effect of migration depends not only on the number of residents who leave but also on the income attached to those residents. The departure of few high-earning professionals can have a larger revenue effect than the movement of many lower-income households. However, aggregate associations require careful interpretation. High-tax states frequently differ from low-tax states in housing prices, industry composition, wage levels, urban density, climate, and public-service provision. These characteristics can influence both taxation and migration, creating difficulty in separating the independent contribution of tax policy. A credible examination of high-skilled labor mobility must therefore

measure tax perceptions together with employment opportunity, cost of living, professional advancement, remote-work flexibility, and quality of life rather than assigning every observed move to tax differences alone.

Comparative evidence from decentralized tax systems shows how income-tax differentials shape internal mobility and residential sorting. Switzerland is useful because personal income-tax burdens vary across nearby municipalities, allowing researchers to compare households facing similar national institutions but different local fiscal conditions. Census-based analysis found that local income-tax variation was associated with internal migration, with stronger responses among certain demographic and educational groups, indicating that tax sensitivity depends on mobility capacity and characteristics (Liebig et al., 2007). This pattern relates to the present study because high-skilled workers may possess stronger employment portability than the average resident, yet their responses can vary by age, nationality, household structure, and career attachment. Tax differences can also be reflected indirectly through housing markets. When low-tax jurisdictions attract higher-income households, demand for limited residential space may raise rents or property values, reducing part of the advantage. Evidence from Swiss municipal boundaries showed that income-tax differences affected sorting and housing costs, with high-income households disproportionately locating in lower-tax municipalities and part of the tax benefit becoming capitalized into rents (Basten et al., 2017). This mechanism demonstrates why nominal tax rates cannot be evaluated separately from total living costs. A professional may save money through lower state income taxation but pay more for housing, commuting, insurance, or reduced access to valued public services. Conversely, a higher-tax state may remain attractive when wages, career opportunities, infrastructure, education, or specialized amenities compensate for additional liability. The literature supports a multidimensional interpretation of interstate mobility in which taxes influence the relative price of locations, while labor-market and residential conditions determine whether relocation is feasible and beneficial. For a cross-sectional study of high-skilled professionals, perceived tax burden and expected after-tax advantage can be measured as constructs, while employment, living costs, advancement, remote work, and quality of life capture considerations shaping mobility intentions.

High-Skilled Labor Mobility and Human-Capital Distribution

High-skilled labor mobility refers to the geographical movement of workers whose productivity depends heavily on advanced education, specialized knowledge, professional credentials, technical competence, or accumulated expertise. Human-capital distribution describes the way these capabilities are allocated across cities, regions, and states, shaping differences in productivity, innovation, earnings, entrepreneurship, and institutional capacity. Mobility is central to this distribution because education may be acquired in one place, first employment obtained in another, and later career advancement pursued elsewhere. The movement of graduates illustrates how human capital is produced locally but can be transferred rapidly when workers respond to employment opportunities, wage differences, occupational specialization, or preferred living conditions. Evidence from Scottish and Welsh university students has shown that migration occurs sequentially from home to university and from university to employment, with educational location influencing later labor-market movement and regional retention (Faggian et al., 2007). This process matters for U.S. states because colleges and employers can create skilled workers without necessarily retaining them after graduation or professional training. High-skilled individuals usually possess broader job-search areas than less-educated workers because their qualifications may be recognized by employers across multiple jurisdictions. They may also have greater financial resources, professional information, and access to national recruitment networks that reduce relocation barriers. However, mobility remains selective rather than automatic. Family commitments, professional licensing, housing ownership, employer-specific experience, and established social networks can discourage movement even when another state offers higher wages or lower taxation. Human-capital distribution therefore reflects both attraction and retention. A state must provide opportunities capable of drawing skilled workers while also offering conditions that encourage them to remain. State income-tax differentials enter this process by changing disposable income, but their influence is filtered through the educational, occupational, household, and regional circumstances that determine whether a worker can realistically relocate across state boundaries successfully and effectively.

Figure 3: Framework of Human-Capital Distribution Through High-Skilled Labor Mobility



The concentration of high-skilled workers is connected to metropolitan areas, universities, research institutions, and knowledge-intensive industries. Cities with higher-education systems can attract students, researchers, and professionals, yet local degree production does not guarantee that graduates will remain after completing their education. Research on American metropolitan areas has found only a modest relationship between the number of degrees produced locally and the regional stock of human capital, indicating that migration plays a major role in determining where educated workers ultimately live and work ([Abel & Deitz, 2012](#)). The same research has shown that university research and development can strengthen local demand for skilled labor by supporting specialized occupations and knowledge-based activity. This distinction between producing and retaining human capital is important for states comparing their tax competitiveness. A state may educate many workers but lose them when salaries, career opportunities, housing conditions, or tax-adjusted earnings are more attractive elsewhere. Conversely, states with fewer educational institutions may increase their skilled workforce by attracting graduates trained in other jurisdictions. The growth of highly educated cities has also been linked to the movement of students into university centers and the tendency of some graduates to remain after completing their studies, making higher education a channel through which places accumulate human capital ([Winters, 2011](#)). Such accumulation can become self-reinforcing because skilled workers attract employers needing specialized labor, while expanding firms create additional opportunities for educated workers. This circular relationship helps explain why human capital is unevenly distributed across the United States. High-skilled mobility is therefore shaped by more than individual preferences. It also reflects regional systems of universities, employers, research activity, professional networks, amenities, and housing markets. Tax differentials may alter the relative financial attractiveness of these systems, but workers evaluate taxation within a broader package of occupational and residential advantages available in each location.

The economic importance of high-skilled labor mobility extends beyond the individual worker because the movement of scientists, engineers, researchers, and specialists can change regional innovation and employment patterns. Skilled workers carry knowledge, professional connections, and problem-solving capabilities that generate benefits for firms and coworkers in the destination. Evidence on skilled immigration in the United States has shown that immigrant college graduates have contributed strongly to patenting and innovation, demonstrating how the geographic inflow of human capital can expand regional knowledge production ([Hunt & Gauthier-Loiselle, 2010](#)). Innovative activity is geographically concentrated because inventors and firms benefit from access to specialized labor, suppliers, research institutions, and knowledge spillovers. Breakthrough inventions can shift the spatial location of technological clusters by stimulating patenting growth and attracting innovation to particular cities ([Kerr, 2010](#)). These patterns indicate that losing few highly productive workers may have consequences larger than the population reduction alone, especially when departing workers possess rare expertise or positions in innovation networks. The destination state may gain businesses,

research capacity, taxable income, and demand for supporting services, while the origin state may experience weaker professional networks or reduced access to specialized talent. State income-tax differentials can influence this allocation when skilled workers compare after-tax earnings across jurisdictions, although the response depends on whether destinations also provide suitable employers and professional ecosystems. A low-tax state without relevant industries may remain unattractive to a specialist, whereas a higher-tax state with research and advancement opportunities may retain valuable workers. Human-capital mobility must therefore be understood as a matching process between worker capabilities and regional opportunity structures. The proposed study applies this perspective by examining whether perceived tax burden and expected after-tax advantage predict mobility while employment opportunities, living costs, professional advancement, remote-work flexibility, and quality of life are considered simultaneously within the United States labor market.

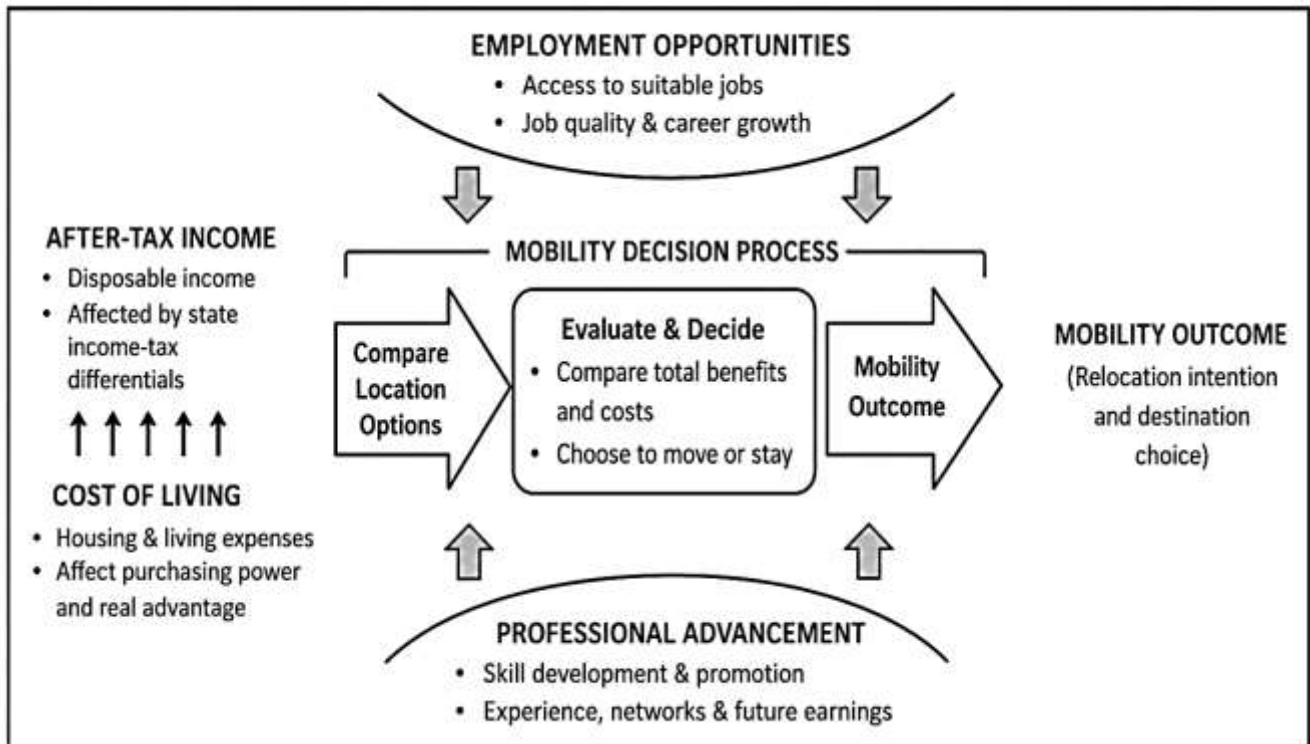
After-Tax Income, Employment Opportunities, Cost of Living, and Professional Advancement

After-tax income represents the portion of earnings available to workers after tax obligations have been deducted, making it a more realistic measure of employment value than gross salary alone. For high-skilled professionals considering interstate relocation, state income-tax differentials can alter the attractiveness of comparable job offers because the same nominal salary may produce different disposable-income levels across jurisdictions. The comparison becomes more complex when progressive rates, deductions, credits, filing status, local taxes, and household composition are considered. A compensated professional may experience a change in tax liability when moving between a high-tax state and a state with a low or nonexistent individual income tax. However, nominal tax savings do not necessarily create an equivalent improvement in economic well-being because high-wage locations frequently have higher housing prices, transportation expenses, and living costs. Geographic tax systems may impose unequal burdens on workers earning higher nominal wages in productive metropolitan areas, even when those wages partly compensate for costly housing or unfavorable local conditions. Taxation can therefore reduce the net reward associated with locating in areas where productivity and earnings are high (Albouy, 2009). Research on real wage inequality has similarly demonstrated that local costs, particularly housing expenses, alter the purchasing power of nominal earnings and can reduce the apparent wage advantage received by college-educated workers in expensive cities (Moretti, 2013). High-skilled workers are consequently likely to evaluate expected after-tax income together with the purchasing power available in a particular state. A lower-tax destination may be attractive when tax savings are combined with affordable housing and moderate living expenses, while a higher-tax location may remain competitive when wage premiums, employment stability, public services, and professional opportunities compensate for taxation. The study therefore treats expected after-tax income advantage as a distinct factor while recognizing that its mobility effect depends on employment and cost-of-living conditions.

Employment opportunities are a central determinant of high-skilled labor mobility because relocation requires access to work matching a professional's education, experience, specialization, and expected compensation. High-skilled workers do not simply compare available jobs across states; they also consider job quality, employer reputation, salary growth, occupational security, technology, and the possibility of moving into more responsible positions. Specialized professionals may be attracted to states containing industry clusters, research institutions, financial centers, healthcare systems, technology firms, universities, or public agencies that generate demand for their expertise. Wage differences can motivate movement, but social attachment and personal networks may limit willingness to pursue distant opportunities. Evidence concerning scientists and engineers has indicated that technical workers are sensitive to expected regional earnings while also placing considerable value on living near family members and established social connections (Dahl & Sorenson, 2010). This finding demonstrates that employment incentives are evaluated together with the costs of leaving a familiar environment. Professional advancement adds a dynamic element because workers may accept current costs in exchange for learning, promotion, reputation, or access to influential networks. Large cities can offer opportunities to accumulate valuable experience through interaction with diverse firms, coworkers, clients, and institutions. Research has shown that workers in larger cities receive immediate earnings advantages and acquire experience that continues to raise earnings after relocation, indicating that urban employment contributes to portable human-capital development (De la Roca & Puga, 2017).

High-skilled professionals may remain in a higher-tax state when it provides a strong platform for learning and career growth. Conversely, a lower-tax state may become attractive when it combines tax savings with expanding industries, competitive compensation, and advancement pathways. Employment opportunity and professional advancement should be examined separately because one reflects access to suitable work, while the other captures development of skills, responsibility, income, and professional standing over time.

Figure 4: Integrated Framework of After-Tax Income and Employment Factors Affecting Labor Mobility



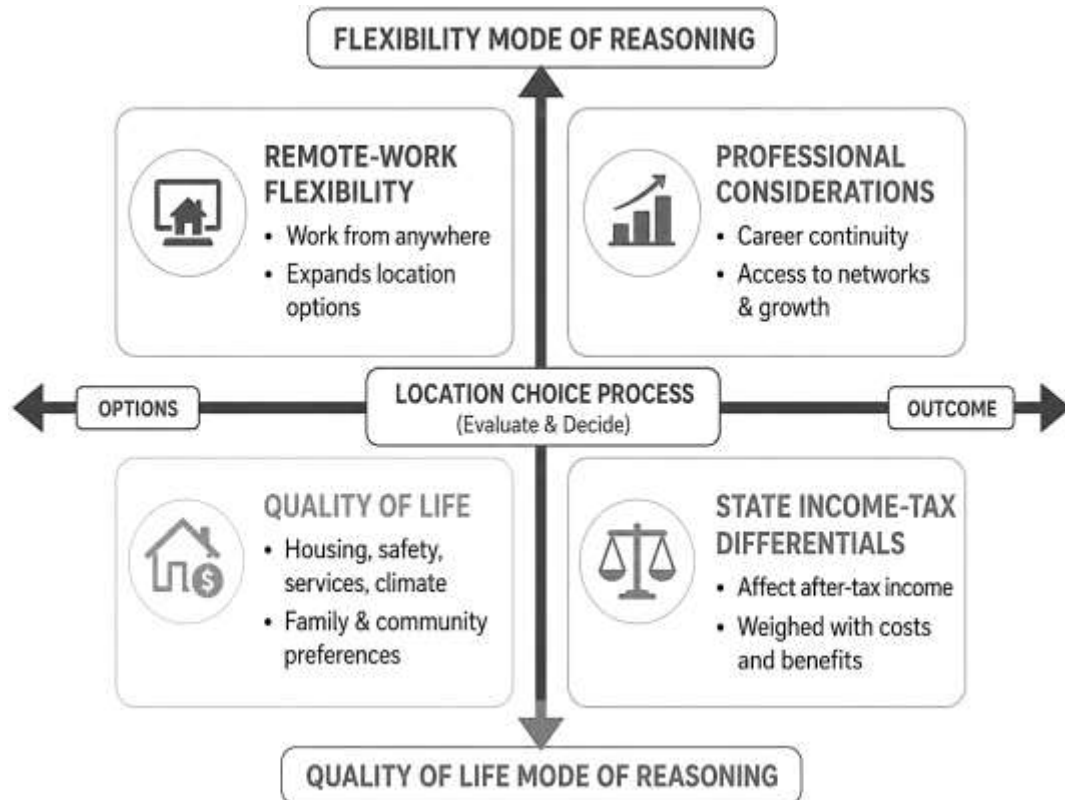
Cost of living and professional advancement interact with the spatial equilibrium through which wages, housing prices, amenities, and employment opportunities are distributed across locations. Productive cities often offer higher salaries because firms benefit from dense markets, specialized labor pools, supplier networks, knowledge exchange, and customer access. These locations may experience higher rents because workers and firms compete for space. Less expensive states may offer lower housing costs and reduced taxation, but they may provide narrower labor markets, fewer specialized employers, or weaker professional networks. Workers therefore compare location packages rather than selecting destinations according to one characteristic. Spatial-equilibrium research explains that wages, housing expenses, and amenities adjust together as households and businesses choose among places, meaning that high wages may compensate for high costs, while attractive amenities may permit lower wages (Glaeser & Gottlieb, 2009). This perspective is relevant because taxes become one element of the price of living and working in a jurisdiction. A high-skilled worker may tolerate taxes when the location provides employment density, infrastructure, and professional communities. Another worker may prefer a low-tax state when remote work, occupational portability, or growing industries allow earnings to be maintained while housing and tax expenses decline. Household circumstances can change these calculations. Homeownership, childcare, school quality, commuting requirements, healthcare access, and a spouse's employment prospects may increase or reduce the value of relocation. Professional advancement may carry indirect costs because leading employment centers are often located in expensive metropolitan areas. The relevant decision is not whether a state has a high or low tax rate in isolation, but whether its combination of after-tax earnings, employment availability, living expenses, and career-development opportunities provides greater expected utility than alternatives. Measuring these factors together allows the research to identify whether perceived tax burden remains significant after employment, affordability, and advancement considerations are included.

Remote-Work Flexibility, Quality of Life, and Location Choice

Remote-work flexibility refers to the degree to which employees can perform their assigned duties outside a conventional employer-controlled workplace while maintaining access to organizational systems, supervisors, colleagues, and performance expectations. For high-skilled professionals, this flexibility can reduce the geographic dependence traditionally created by commuting distance and workplace location. A software engineer, financial analyst, consultant, researcher, manager, or other knowledge-intensive employee may be able to remain employed by an organization in one state while residing in another state, provided that the employer permits interstate remote work and the occupation does not require continuous physical presence. This separation between workplace and residence can expand the range of locations considered during a mobility decision because relocation no longer requires an immediate employer change. Remote work can therefore increase the practical relevance of state income-tax differentials by allowing workers to compare tax burdens, housing costs, public services, family needs, and environmental conditions while preserving employment continuity. The value of flexibility is not necessarily identical at every level of remote-work intensity. Evidence has identified an inverted U-shaped relationship between the extent of telecommuting and job satisfaction, suggesting that moderate levels can provide autonomy and flexibility while very extensive telecommuting can reduce social contact and weaken some workplace benefits (Golden & Veiga, 2005). A broad meta-analysis has also shown that telecommuting has generally produced beneficial effects on perceived autonomy, work-family conflict, job satisfaction, performance, and turnover intentions, while intensive telecommuting can place greater pressure on coworker relationships (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). These findings indicate that remote-work flexibility is not simply a binary condition in which an employee either works remotely or does not. Its influence on mobility depends on frequency, managerial support, communication quality, occupational requirements, and the worker's ability to sustain professional relationships from a distance. In the context of interstate mobility, a flexible arrangement may lower relocation barriers, but the worker must still evaluate whether the arrangement protects career stability, access to information, promotion opportunities, and participation in organizational decision-making.

The relationship between remote work and high-skilled labor mobility also depends on the organizational conditions under which flexibility is provided. Remote work can support location independence when employees possess suitable technology, clearly defined responsibilities, reliable communication channels, and adequate supervisory support. It can become less attractive when workers experience isolation, reduced access to informal information, unclear performance expectations, or concern that physical absence will weaken professional visibility. A major review of telecommuting research has concluded that its effectiveness varies according to job characteristics, individual differences, the amount of time spent away from the workplace, and the quality of organizational implementation (Allen et al., 2015). This variability is important for the present study because high-skilled professionals may value the residential freedom created by remote work while also considering whether moving farther from an office could affect collaboration, mentoring, promotion, or long-term employment security. Remote work may therefore encourage interstate relocation most strongly when employees believe that their professional standing will remain protected after the move. Labor-market evidence has further shown that the growth of remote work cannot be explained only by changes in occupational composition and that working away from a central workplace has been associated with both increased organizational commitment and greater work intensity (Felstead & Henseke, 2017). The same evidence has indicated that remote workers can experience more favorable job satisfaction and leisure satisfaction while encountering challenges involving work-life boundaries. These mixed outcomes demonstrate why remote-work flexibility should be assessed together with quality of life rather than treated as an automatic improvement in worker welfare. A relocation that provides lower taxation and more affordable housing may still create stress when remote work extends working hours, reduces separation between employment and family life, or limits face-to-face professional interaction. Conversely, flexibility can improve daily life when it reduces commuting time, allows residence near family members, and provides greater control over the timing and location of work. The mobility decision thus reflects an evaluation of whether geographic freedom produces a sustainable combination of employment continuity, household well-being, career access, and personal autonomy.

Figure 5: Framework of Remote-Work Flexibility, Quality of Life, and State Income-Tax Differentials



Quality of life refers to the combination of residential, environmental, social, and service-related conditions that shape an individual's evaluation of a place. For high-skilled workers, relevant conditions may include housing affordability, commuting time, neighborhood safety, educational facilities, healthcare access, cultural resources, recreation, environmental quality, social networks, and proximity to employment. These conditions can either reinforce or counteract the financial attraction of a lower-tax state. A professional may prefer a jurisdiction with no broad individual income tax, but the expected tax advantage may lose value when the destination has high housing costs, limited occupational networks, weak public services, or residential characteristics that do not meet household preferences. A higher-tax location may remain attractive when it provides specialized employers, respected educational institutions, efficient infrastructure, cultural opportunities, and neighborhoods suited to the worker's family and lifestyle. Research examining the residential choices of knowledge workers has shown that municipal socioeconomic conditions, housing affordability, and commuting time are particularly important, while cultural and educational amenities and lifestyle orientation also contribute to location selection (Frenkel et al., 2013). This evidence supports a comprehensive interpretation of location choice in which financial and nonfinancial attributes are considered simultaneously. Remote-work flexibility can change the relative importance of these attributes because it reduces the need to live near a particular workplace and gives employees greater freedom to prioritize housing, family, climate, services, and preferred community characteristics. However, remote work does not eliminate the importance of employment geography because professional networks, clients, specialized institutions, and periodic office attendance may continue to connect workers to particular regions. The proposed study therefore treats remote-work flexibility and quality-of-life considerations as distinct but related predictors of high-skilled labor mobility. Remote-work flexibility captures the worker's practical capacity to change residence without sacrificing employment, while quality of life captures the perceived desirability of the alternative location. Their combined influence can explain why two professionals facing similar state income-tax differentials may reach different relocation decisions. One may value tax savings and residential flexibility, while another may prioritize established networks, institutional access, public services, or community attachment.

Theoretical Framework: Tiebout Model of Residential Choice

The Tiebout Model of Residential Choice provides the principal theoretical foundation for explaining

why high-skilled workers may respond to differences in state income taxes, public services, employment environments, and residential conditions. The model treats jurisdictions as alternative combinations of fiscal costs and public benefits from which mobile individuals select the location that most closely corresponds with their preferences. In this study, the relevant fiscal price is the state income-tax burden, while the associated benefits include public infrastructure, education, healthcare access, safety, transportation, environmental quality, and other state-supported services. A high-skilled professional is therefore viewed as comparing jurisdictions rather than reacting to taxation in isolation. The basic residential-choice mechanism can be expressed in LaTeX equation form as:

$$j_i^* = \arg \max_j j \in J \{U_{ij}\}$$

where j_i^* represents the jurisdiction selected by individual i , J represents the set of available jurisdictions, and U_{ij} represents the utility that individual i expects to receive from living and working in jurisdiction j . The worker may accept a higher tax burden when the jurisdiction offers stronger public services, specialized employment, professional networks, or superior residential conditions, while a lower-tax state may become attractive when expected tax savings are not offset by weaker services, high housing expenses, or limited career opportunities. Modern extensions of the Tiebout framework recognize that individuals differ in both income and preferences for public goods and that residence-based income taxation may create a trade-off between preferred service provision and redistributive tax costs (Kessler & Lülkesmann, 2005). This extension is especially relevant to high-skilled labor because highly compensated workers may bear a larger absolute tax liability while also valuing public services and institutional quality differently from other groups. Evidence from school-choice settings has further shown that a larger number of jurisdictional alternatives can strengthen residential sorting, illustrating how access to differentiated public-service packages affects location patterns (Urquiola, 2005). The model therefore supports the study's assumption that high-skilled workers reveal preferences through relocation intentions, destination comparisons, and completed interstate moves. However, the present application does not assume costless mobility or perfect information. It incorporates employment constraints, housing costs, household responsibilities, remote-work capacity, and professional attachment as practical conditions that can either enable or restrict the ability to vote with one's feet. The Tiebout framework also explains why state-level tax differences may produce uneven rather than universal mobility responses. Individuals relocate only when the expected utility of an alternative jurisdiction exceeds the utility of remaining in the current jurisdiction after financial, occupational, social, and psychological moving costs have been considered. This decision rule can be written as:

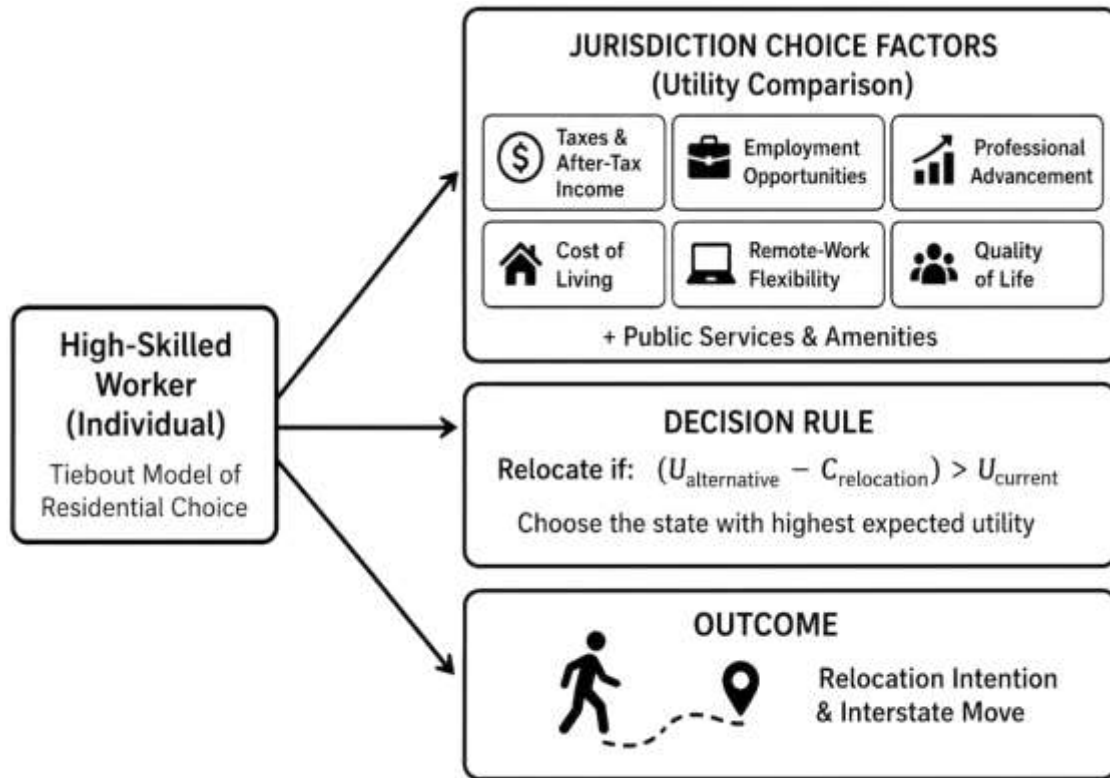
$$\text{Relocate}_i = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{if } U_{ia} - C_{ia} > U_{ic} \\ 0, & \text{if } U_{ia} - C_{ia} \leq U_{ic} \end{cases}$$

where U_{ia} represents the expected utility that individual i receives from an alternative state, C_{ia} represents the total cost of relocating to that state, and U_{ic} represents the utility obtained from remaining in the current state. The expected utility from a state can be represented more specifically as:

$$U_{ij} = f(Y_{ij}^{AT}, EO_{ij}, PA_{ij}, PS_{ij}, QL_{ij}, RWF_{ij}, COL_{ij}, SC_{ij})$$

where Y_{ij}^{AT} represents expected after-tax income, EO_{ij} represents employment opportunities, PA_{ij} represents professional advancement, PS_{ij} represents public services, QL_{ij} represents quality of life, RWF_{ij} represents remote-work flexibility, COL_{ij} represents cost of living, and SC_{ij} represents social and relocation costs. High-skilled workers may possess greater mobility because their education and specialized abilities can be marketed across state boundaries, yet their occupations can also connect them to laboratories, hospitals, universities, clients, licensing systems, corporate headquarters, or professional communities concentrated in particular locations. Consequently, a state income-tax differential may be influential for a remote software professional but less decisive for a surgeon whose practice, patients, and professional credentials are strongly location-specific. Empirical testing of the Tiebout mechanism has shown that households respond to exogenous improvements in local public goods, with population density and neighborhood income changing when environmental quality improves (Banzhaf & Walsh, 2008).

Figure 6: Theoretical Framework Explaining High-Skilled Labor Mobility Through the Tiebout Model



Note: Workers “vote with their feet” by choosing the state that maximizes their expected utility.

This finding demonstrates that mobility can respond to public and residential benefits as well as taxation and supports the inclusion of quality-of-life conditions in the present research. Equilibrium-sorting research has also shown that actual residential patterns depart from complete income-based separation because workers consider employment geography, commuting costs, housing attributes, and heterogeneous preferences in addition to public-service packages (Bayer & McMillan, 2012). These observations directly support the multidimensional structure of the proposed study. Perceived state income-tax burden represents the fiscal pressure associated with the current jurisdiction, expected after-tax income advantage represents the anticipated private financial gain from moving, and employment opportunities and professional advancement represent the labor-market value of alternative locations. Cost-of-living considerations account for housing and consumption expenses that may absorb tax savings, while remote-work flexibility measures whether a worker can separate residential location from the employer’s physical location. Quality-of-life considerations capture the nonmarket and public-service characteristics that may compensate for or reinforce tax differences. The Tiebout Model therefore connects all principal variables through a single residential-choice process in which workers compare the net utility offered by competing state environments.

To apply the theoretical framework consistently throughout the empirical study, the Tiebout residential-choice mechanism will be translated into a multiple regression model that estimates how fiscal, employment, residential, and flexibility-related factors jointly predict high-skilled labor mobility. Contemporary equilibrium-sorting research emphasizes that households choose among differentiated locations according to income, public goods, social characteristics, amenities, housing conditions, and commuting opportunities, while the aggregation of those choices influences local market and policy outcomes (Kuminoff et al., 2013). Consistent with that approach, the principal regression model for the study will be expressed in LaTeX equation form as:

$$\text{HSLM}_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{PSTB}_i + \beta_2 \text{AIA}_i + \beta_3 \text{EO}_i + \beta_4 \text{COL}_i + \beta_5 \text{PA}_i + \beta_6 \text{RWF}_i + \beta_7 \text{QL}_i + \gamma_1 \text{LOW}_i + \gamma_2 \text{NOIT}_i + \delta' \mathbf{Z}_i + \varepsilon_i$$

In this equation, HSLM_i represents the high-skilled labor-mobility score of respondent i ; PSTB_i represents perceived state income-tax burden; AIA_i represents expected after-tax income

advantage; EO_i represents employment opportunities; COL_i represents cost-of-living considerations; PA_i represents professional advancement; RWF_i represents remote-work flexibility; and QL_i represents quality-of-life considerations. The variables LOW_i and $NOIT_i$ are dummy variables identifying respondents located in low-tax and no-individual-income-tax states, respectively, while high-tax states will serve as the reference category. The vector Z_i represents the control variables, including age, educational qualification, occupation, annual income, marital status, homeownership, household size, employment arrangement, and previous interstate relocation experience. The parameter δ' represents the estimated coefficients associated with these control variables, while ε_i represents the error term containing unobserved influences on labor mobility. The expected signs of the principal regression coefficients can be presented as:

$$\beta_1 > 0, \beta_2 > 0, \beta_3 > 0, \beta_4 \neq 0, \beta_5 > 0, \beta_6 > 0, \beta_7 \neq 0$$

The positive expectations for $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_5$, and β_6 indicate that greater perceived tax burden, expected after-tax advantage, employment opportunity, professional advancement, and remote-work flexibility are expected to increase high-skilled labor mobility. The coefficients for cost of living and quality of life may vary according to how the questionnaire items are coded. The beta coefficients will show the expected change in the mobility score associated with a one-unit change in each predictor while the remaining variables are held constant. The explanatory capacity of the model will be assessed through:

$$R^2 = 1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (y_i - \hat{y}_i)^2}{\sum_{i=1}^n (y_i - \bar{y})^2}$$

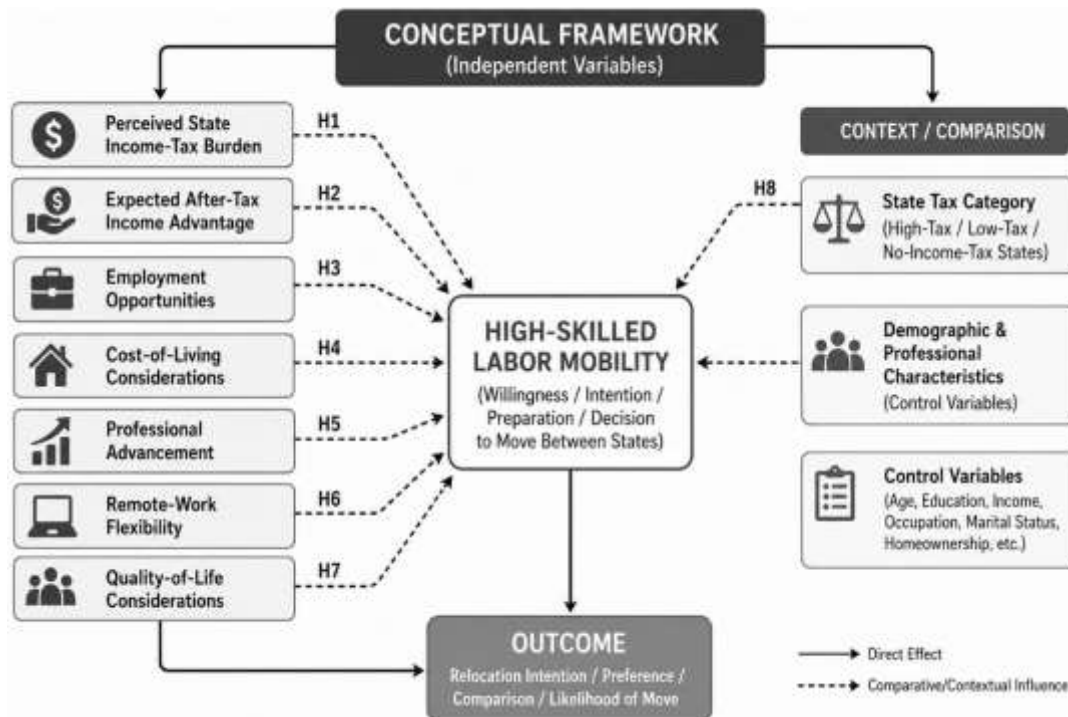
where R^2 represents the proportion of variation in high-skilled labor mobility explained jointly by the predictors. Adjusted R^2 will account for the number of predictors included in the model, while the F -test will determine whether the complete predictor set significantly explains the dependent variable. Standardized beta coefficients, t -statistics, p -values, tolerance values, and variance inflation factors will be used to assess the contribution and statistical adequacy of each predictor. This equation is the most suitable overall model because it operationalizes the Tiebout principle as a testable comparison of tax and location packages while remaining aligned with the quantitative, cross-sectional, multiple-case-study design and five-point Likert-scale measurement approach.

Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development

The conceptual framework of this study organizes high-skilled labor mobility as the outcome of a structured comparison among fiscal, occupational, residential, and organizational conditions across U.S. states. High-skilled labor mobility is defined as a professional's willingness, intention, preparation, or completed decision to move between states for employment or residential purposes. The framework identifies perceived state income-tax burden, expected after-tax income advantage, employment opportunities, cost-of-living considerations, professional advancement, remote-work flexibility, and quality-of-life considerations as the principal independent variables. State tax category, divided into high-tax, low-tax, and no-individual-income-tax environments, provides the comparative context, while demographic and professional characteristics serve as control variables. The framework assumes that a worker does not evaluate a tax rate separately from the larger package attached to a location. Instead, the worker compares disposable income, job availability, career development, housing affordability, public services, amenities, family needs, and the feasibility of maintaining employment after relocation. Research on urban labor migration has shown that labor-market conditions and amenities jointly shape the attractiveness of places, supporting the inclusion of both economic opportunity and quality-of-life variables within a single model (Buch et al., 2014). The value of a location also reflects the relationship among wages, housing costs, productivity, and amenities, meaning that a state with higher nominal earnings may not provide a greater real advantage when housing and other local costs are considered (Albouy, 2016). The conceptual framework therefore treats mobility as a multidimensional dependent construct measured through respondents' consideration of relocation, preference for lower-tax destinations, willingness to accept suitable out-of-state employment, active comparison of states, and likelihood of moving within a stated period. Each independent construct will be measured through multiple Likert-scale items so that the analysis

captures perceptions consistently rather than relying on a single question. The framework also recognizes that mobility intentions are not identical to completed migration, but they provide measurable evidence of the evaluation process that precedes an interstate move and can be analyzed across respondents exposed to different state tax systems.

Figure 7: Conceptual Framework for Examining High-Skilled Labor Mobility in the United States



The first group of proposed relationships concerns fiscal pressure, after-tax rewards, employment conditions, living costs, and professional advancement. Perceived state income-tax burden represents the extent to which respondents believe that their current state tax obligations reduce disposable income and weaken the financial attractiveness of remaining in that jurisdiction. Expected after-tax income advantage represents the anticipated improvement in take-home income associated with relocating to a state with a lower effective tax burden. The framework proposes that both constructs increase mobility because a worker who perceives the current burden as substantial and expects meaningful tax savings elsewhere has a stronger financial reason to compare alternative states. Accordingly, H1 states that perceived state income-tax burden has a significant positive influence on high-skilled labor mobility, while H2 states that expected after-tax income advantage has a significant positive influence on high-skilled labor mobility. Employment opportunities are expected to affect mobility because interstate relocation is more feasible when destination states offer appropriate vacancies, competitive salaries, occupational security, and demand for specialized qualifications. H3 therefore states that employment opportunities have a significant positive influence on high-skilled labor mobility. Cost-of-living considerations capture housing, transportation, healthcare, childcare, insurance, and general consumption expenses that can strengthen or absorb the value of tax savings. Housing constraints can prevent workers from accessing highly productive labor markets and can create substantial spatial misallocation, demonstrating why mobility cannot be interpreted through wages or taxes without considering residential affordability (Hsieh & Moretti, 2019). H4 therefore states that cost-of-living considerations have a significant influence on high-skilled labor mobility. Professional advancement refers to promotion prospects, skill development, access to specialized employers, professional networks, leadership opportunities, and long-term earnings growth. H5 states that professional advancement opportunities have a significant positive influence on mobility because high-skilled workers may relocate when another state offers a stronger career pathway, even when the immediate tax advantage is moderate. These five hypotheses distinguish the direct financial motivation generated by taxation from the labor-market and affordability conditions that determine whether

relocation provides a genuine improvement in the worker's economic position.

The second group of proposed relationships concerns remote-work flexibility, quality of life, differences among state tax categories, and the combined predictive structure of the model. Remote-work flexibility represents the extent to which a professional can perform assigned duties outside the employer's primary location, retain employment after moving, and maintain acceptable communication, productivity, and career access. Its inclusion is necessary because remote work can lower the employment cost of relocation while creating concerns about professional isolation, reduced visibility, and advancement. Research on knowledge workers has identified positive and negative dimensions of remote e-working, including autonomy and flexibility together with social isolation and perceived threats to professional progress (Charalampous et al., 2019). Empirical analysis of teleworkers has also shown that supervisor support, communication, home-workspace suitability, and perceived career opportunity influence whether remote arrangements produce satisfactory outcomes (Nakrošienė et al., 2019). H6 therefore states that remote-work flexibility has a significant positive influence on high-skilled labor mobility. Quality-of-life considerations include safety, education, healthcare, infrastructure, climate, environmental quality, cultural opportunities, family proximity, and satisfaction with the residential environment. H7 states that quality-of-life considerations have a significant influence on high-skilled labor mobility because these characteristics may reinforce or offset tax and employment advantages. H8 states that high-skilled labor mobility differs significantly among respondents in high-tax, low-tax, and no-income-tax states. The complete conceptual relationship will be estimated as:

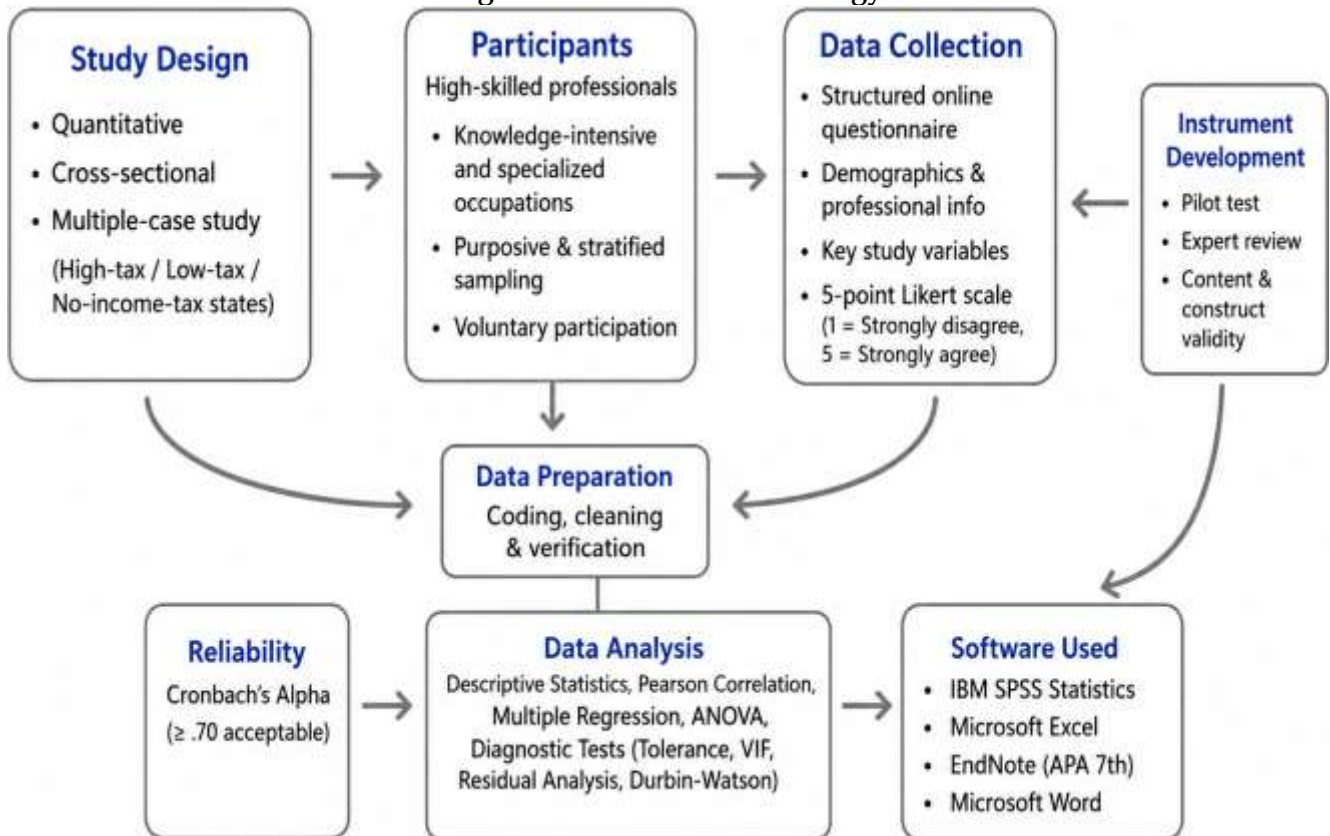
$$HSLM_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PSTB_i + \beta_2 AIA_i + \beta_3 EO_i + \beta_4 COL_i + \beta_5 PA_i + \beta_6 RWF_i + \beta_7 QL_i + \gamma_1 LOW_i + \gamma_2 NOIT_i + \delta' Z_i + \varepsilon_i$$

Here, $HSLM_i$ is high-skilled labor mobility; $PSTB_i$ is perceived state income-tax burden; AIA_i is expected after-tax income advantage; EO_i is employment opportunity; COL_i is cost of living; PA_i is professional advancement; RWF_i is remote-work flexibility; QL_i is quality of life; LOW_i and $NOIT_i$ identify low-tax and no-income-tax states; Z_i contains control variables; and ε_i is the error term. This model permits the hypotheses to be evaluated through Pearson correlations, standardized regression coefficients, statistical significance tests, explanatory power, and comparisons among state tax categories.

METHODS

This study has adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional, multiple-case-study research design to examine the relationship between state income-tax differentials and high-skilled labor mobility in the United States. The quantitative approach has enabled the study to transform respondents' perceptions, attitudes, and relocation intentions into measurable numerical data, while the cross-sectional design has allowed the required information to be collected from participants at a single period rather than over several years. The multiple-case-study structure has focused on selected U.S. states representing high-income-tax, low-income-tax, and no-individual-income-tax environments, which has created a suitable basis for comparing how different fiscal conditions have influenced the mobility perceptions of high-skilled professionals. The target population has consisted of individuals employed in knowledge-intensive and specialized occupations, including information technology, engineering, healthcare, finance, accounting, management, higher education, scientific research, law, consulting, and other professional fields requiring advanced education, technical competence, or specialized experience. The individual high-skilled professional has served as the primary unit of analysis because the study has measured personal tax perceptions, employment conditions, mobility intentions, quality-of-life considerations, and previous relocation experiences.

Figure 8: Research Methodology



A combination of purposive and stratified sampling has been used to ensure that only qualified high-skilled professionals have participated and that respondents have been represented across different state tax categories, occupational groups, income levels, employment arrangements, and mobility backgrounds. Primary data have been collected through a structured online questionnaire distributed through professional networks, workplaces, industry associations, alumni groups, academic communities, and relevant online platforms. Participation has remained voluntary, and respondents have been informed about the purpose of the study, confidentiality, anonymity, and the academic use of the collected information. The research instrument has included demographic and professional questions, state tax information, relocation experience, and multi-item measures of perceived state income-tax burden, expected after-tax income advantage, employment opportunities, cost-of-living considerations, professional advancement, remote-work flexibility, quality of life, and high-skilled labor mobility. All construct items have been measured through a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1, strongly disagree, to 5, strongly agree. The questionnaire has been pilot-tested with a small group of high-skilled professionals who have not been included in the final sample, and their feedback has been used to revise unclear, repetitive, or ambiguous items. Content validity has been established through expert review, while construct validity has been assessed by examining whether the questionnaire items have adequately represented the intended variables. Reliability has been evaluated through Cronbach's alpha, with values of .70 or above treated as acceptable indicators of internal consistency. IBM SPSS Statistics has been used for data coding, descriptive statistics, reliability testing, Pearson correlation analysis, multiple regression modeling, analysis of variance, and diagnostic testing, including tolerance, variance inflation factor, residual analysis, and the Durbin-Watson statistic. Microsoft Excel has been used for preliminary data organization, cleaning, and verification, EndNote has been used to manage citations and references in APA 7th edition, and Microsoft Word has been used to prepare, edit, and format the final research manuscript.

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION**Questionnaire Distribution and Response Rate****Table 1: Questionnaire Distribution and Response Rate**

Questionnaire status	Frequency	Percentage
Questionnaires distributed	360	100.00
Questionnaires returned	326	90.56
Incomplete or unusable questionnaires	14	3.89
Valid questionnaires retained	312	86.67
Questionnaires not returned	34	9.44

Table 1 has presented the distribution, return, screening, and final retention of questionnaires used in the study. A total of 360 questionnaires have been distributed among high-skilled professionals working in selected high-tax, low-tax, and no-individual-income-tax states in the United States. Of these questionnaires, 326 have been returned, producing an initial return rate of 90.56 percent. Following the screening process, 14 returned questionnaires have been removed because they have contained substantial missing information, inconsistent responses, repeated response patterns, or incomplete Likert-scale sections. Consequently, 312 questionnaires have been retained as valid cases for statistical analysis, representing a usable response rate of 86.67 percent. This response level has provided a sufficiently large dataset for descriptive analysis, reliability testing, Pearson correlation analysis, multiple regression modeling, and comparison among the three state tax categories. The high response rate has also indicated that state taxation and interstate professional mobility have been relevant concerns among the surveyed workers. The retained responses have permitted the study to examine whether perceived state income-tax burdens, expected after-tax income advantages, employment opportunities, living costs, professional advancement, remote-work flexibility, and quality-of-life conditions have influenced mobility intentions. The response pattern has supported the first research objective, which has sought to obtain measurable evidence from high-skilled workers operating under different state fiscal environments. It has also created a suitable foundation for testing all eight hypotheses because the dataset has included enough observations to estimate the independent and combined contributions of the predictor variables. From the perspective of the Tiebout Model of Residential Choice, the response rate has been important because the model has assumed that individuals compare alternative combinations of taxes, public services, employment conditions, and residential advantages. The valid sample has enabled these comparisons to be examined directly through workers' reported attitudes and intentions. The final sample of 312 respondents has therefore provided an adequate empirical basis for determining whether high-skilled professionals have evaluated state locations as competing fiscal and residential packages and whether those evaluations have been associated with their willingness to move.

Demographic and Professional Characteristics of Respondents**Table 2: Demographic and Professional Characteristics of Respondents**

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	171	54.8
	Female	135	43.3
	Prefer not to disclose	6	1.9
Age	25–34 years	96	30.8
	35–44 years	103	33.0
	45–54 years	72	23.1
	55 years and above	41	13.1
Education	Bachelor's degree	105	33.7
	Master's degree	157	50.3

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Occupational field	Doctoral or professional degree	50	16.0
	Information technology	65	20.8
	Healthcare	50	16.0
	Engineering	44	14.1
	Finance and accounting	46	14.7
	Higher education and research	39	12.5
	Management and consulting	42	13.5
	Law and other professions	26	8.3
State tax category	High-tax state	108	34.6
	Low-tax state	102	32.7
	No-income-tax state	102	32.7
Work arrangement	Fully remote	74	23.7
	Hybrid	132	42.3
	Primarily on-site	106	34.0
Previous interstate relocation	Yes	130	41.7
	No	182	58.3

Table 2 has shown that the sample has included respondents from diverse demographic, educational, occupational, fiscal, and employment backgrounds. Male respondents have represented 54.8 percent of the sample, while female respondents have represented 43.3 percent, and 1.9 percent have preferred not to disclose their gender. The largest age group has consisted of professionals aged 35 to 44 years, accounting for 33.0 percent, followed by those aged 25 to 34 years at 30.8 percent. These distributions have indicated that most participants have been in active career-building or mid-career stages during which employment, taxation, household commitments, and professional advancement may substantially influence relocation decisions. Regarding education, 50.3 percent have held master's degrees, 33.7 percent have held bachelor's degrees, and 16.0 percent have possessed doctoral or professional qualifications. This pattern has confirmed that the participants have met the study's definition of high-skilled labor. The occupational distribution has also demonstrated broad representation from information technology, healthcare, engineering, finance, education, research, management, consulting, law, and related knowledge-intensive fields. The three state tax categories have been distributed relatively evenly, with 34.6 percent from high-tax states and 32.7 percent from each of the low-tax and no-income-tax categories. This balance has strengthened the comparative objective of the study and has reduced the likelihood that one tax environment has dominated the results. Fully remote and hybrid workers have jointly represented 66.0 percent of the sample, indicating that a considerable proportion of participants have possessed some degree of geographic employment flexibility. Furthermore, 41.7 percent have reported previous interstate relocation experience, providing the study with participants who have had direct exposure to mobility decisions. The demographic results have aligned with the Tiebout Model because respondents have possessed different incomes, qualifications, occupations, work arrangements, and household circumstances that may shape their preferences for tax and service combinations. The diversity of the sample has allowed the analysis to evaluate mobility as a heterogeneous decision rather than assuming that all high-skilled workers have responded equally to taxation. The table has therefore supported the population and comparison objectives by establishing that the study has included professionals who have been sufficiently varied to reflect different levels of mobility capacity, fiscal exposure, and location attachment.

Reliability Analysis of the Study Constructs

Table 3: Reliability Analysis of the Study Constructs

Construct	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha	Reliability interpretation
Perceived State Income-Tax Burden	5	.86	Good
Expected After-Tax Income Advantage	5	.88	Good
Employment Opportunities	5	.84	Good
Cost-of-Living Considerations	5	.82	Good
Professional Advancement	5	.85	Good
Remote-Work Flexibility	5	.79	Acceptable
Quality-of-Life Considerations	5	.81	Good
High-Skilled Labor Mobility	5	.89	Good
Overall questionnaire	40	.91	Excellent

Table 3 has presented the internal-consistency reliability results for the eight study constructs and the complete questionnaire. All Cronbach's alpha coefficients have exceeded the minimum acceptable threshold of .70, demonstrating that the questionnaire items have measured their intended concepts consistently. The overall instrument has produced a Cronbach's alpha value of .91, which has indicated excellent internal consistency across the 40 Likert-scale items. High-skilled labor mobility has recorded the strongest construct-level reliability coefficient of .89, suggesting that the five items concerning relocation consideration, willingness to accept employment in another state, comparison of possible destinations, tax-related mobility planning, and likelihood of moving have represented a coherent dependent variable. Expected after-tax income advantage has produced an alpha of .88, confirming that the items relating to take-home earnings, potential tax savings, long-term financial benefits, and interstate income comparisons have reliably measured the perceived financial advantage of relocation. Perceived state income-tax burden has recorded an alpha of .86, while professional advancement has produced an alpha of .85. Employment opportunities, cost-of-living considerations, and quality-of-life considerations have generated coefficients of .84, .82, and .81, respectively. Remote-work flexibility has recorded the lowest alpha value of .79, although this coefficient has remained comfortably above the acceptable reliability level. The comparatively lower value may have reflected variation in how respondents have experienced remote work, since fully remote, hybrid, and on-site professionals have faced different levels of geographic independence. The reliability findings have supported the measurement objective of the study by confirming that each variable has been represented by a stable set of questionnaire items. These results have also strengthened the validity of subsequent correlation and regression analyses because unreliable measures could have weakened or distorted the relationships among the constructs. In relation to the Tiebout Model, the reliability findings have shown that respondents have consistently distinguished among fiscal burden, financial benefit, employment value, living expenses, career opportunity, geographic flexibility, and residential quality. This distinction has been necessary because the theoretical model has viewed location choice as a comparison of several jurisdictional characteristics rather than a reaction to one tax measure. The satisfactory reliability coefficients have therefore indicated that the study has translated the theoretical concepts into dependable empirical measures suitable for testing the proposed hypotheses.

Descriptive Statistics for Perceived State Income-Tax Burden**Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Perceived State Income-Tax Burden**

Statement	Mean	Standard deviation	Interpretation
My current state income-tax burden substantially reduces my disposable income.	4.15	0.73	Agree
State income taxes influence my assessment of where to live.	4.08	0.76	Agree
I consider my current state income-tax rate relatively high.	4.11	0.71	Agree
Lower state income taxes would improve my household financial condition.	4.05	0.77	Agree
State income-tax differences are important in my residential decisions.	3.96	0.81	Agree
Overall Perceived State Income-Tax Burden	4.07	0.65	Agree

Table 4 has demonstrated that respondents have generally perceived state income taxation as an important financial and residential consideration. The overall mean score of 4.07 and standard deviation of 0.65 have placed the construct within the agree category of the five-point Likert scale. The highest-rated statement has concerned the reduction of disposable income caused by the current state income-tax burden, which has obtained a mean of 4.15. This result has indicated that respondents have directly connected state taxation with the amount of income available for housing, consumption, savings, investment, and household needs. The statement concerning the current state income-tax rate being relatively high has recorded a mean of 4.11, while the influence of taxation on residential assessment has obtained a mean of 4.08. These scores have shown that tax burden has not been viewed only as an accounting obligation but has also entered workers' evaluation of where they should live. The expectation that lower state income taxes would improve household financial conditions has recorded a mean of 4.05. The lowest item, although still within the agree category, has been the importance of tax differences in residential decisions, with a mean of 3.96. This slightly lower result has suggested that taxation has remained influential but has not operated as the sole determinant of mobility. Respondents have likely considered employment, housing, quality of life, family responsibilities, and professional networks together with tax liability. The results have directly addressed the first research objective by measuring how high-skilled workers have perceived state income-tax differences. They have also provided preliminary support for H1, which has proposed that perceived tax burden significantly influences high-skilled labor mobility. Under the Tiebout Model, individuals have compared the fiscal cost of living in a jurisdiction with the public services, employment advantages, and residential benefits received from that location. The high overall mean has indicated that the fiscal-cost component of this comparison has been clearly recognized by the respondents. However, the fact that the strongest mean has remained below the strongly agree category has also been consistent with the theoretical expectation that workers have considered complete tax-and-service packages. The findings have therefore shown that perceived state income-tax burden has formed an important part of location choice while remaining connected to other economic and residential factors examined in the study.

Descriptive Statistics for Expected After-Tax Income Advantage

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Expected After-Tax Income Advantage

Statement	Mean	Standard deviation	Interpretation
Moving to a lower-tax state would increase my disposable income.	4.18	0.69	Agree
I would consider relocation if the expected tax savings were substantial.	4.14	0.71	Agree
After-tax income is more important than gross salary when comparing states.	4.11	0.73	Agree
Long-term tax savings could justify relocation expenses.	4.09	0.75	Agree
I compare expected take-home income across states.	4.08	0.77	Agree
Overall Expected After-Tax Income Advantage	4.12	0.60	Agree

Table 5 has shown that expected after-tax income advantage has received the highest overall descriptive score among the principal independent variables. The construct has recorded a mean of 4.12 and a standard deviation of 0.60, indicating strong agreement that potential improvements in take-home income have influenced interstate location evaluations. The highest-rated item has stated that moving to a lower-tax state would increase disposable income, producing a mean of 4.18. This result has demonstrated that respondents have recognized a direct financial relationship between state taxation and household purchasing power. The willingness to consider relocation when tax savings have been substantial has recorded a mean of 4.14, while the preference for comparing after-tax rather than gross salary has obtained a mean of 4.11. These findings have indicated that high-skilled workers have evaluated employment offers and possible destinations through net financial outcomes rather than nominal compensation alone. The statement that long-term tax savings could justify relocation expenses has recorded a mean of 4.09, suggesting that participants have considered the initial costs of moving against expected financial benefits accumulated over time. The comparison of expected take-home income across states has obtained a mean of 4.08, confirming that respondents have actively considered interstate differences in net earnings. These results have fulfilled the second research objective by identifying the perceived financial rewards associated with moving to lower-tax environments. They have also provided descriptive support for H2, which has proposed that expected after-tax income advantage positively influences high-skilled labor mobility. The findings have aligned with the Tiebout Model because workers have appeared to compare the private financial benefits of alternative jurisdictions while evaluating whether relocation would increase their overall utility. Within the model, state income tax has represented part of the price paid for residing in a jurisdiction, while public services, employment opportunities, and residential benefits have represented the value received. The high mean for after-tax income advantage has shown that respondents have placed considerable weight on the private financial side of this comparison. At the same time, the construct has remained within the agree category rather than the strongly agree category, indicating that expected tax savings have been important but have not automatically overridden career, housing, family, and quality-of-life considerations. The results have therefore supported a balanced interpretation in which after-tax earnings have formed the strongest financial motivation for mobility but have operated within a broader location-choice framework.

Descriptive Statistics for Employment, Cost-of-Living, and Professional Advancement Factors**Table 6: Descriptive Statistics for Employment, Cost-of-Living, and Professional Advancement Factors**

Construct and statement	Mean	Standard deviation	Interpretation
Employment Opportunities			
Better employment opportunities would encourage me to relocate.	4.12	0.70	Agree
Access to specialized employers affects my state preference.	4.05	0.73	Agree
Salary-growth opportunities influence my mobility decisions.	4.07	0.72	Agree
Employment stability affects my willingness to move.	3.97	0.77	Agree
Professional networks influence my location choice.	3.94	0.79	Agree
Overall Employment Opportunities	4.03	0.61	Agree
Cost-of-Living Considerations			
Housing costs strongly influence my willingness to relocate.	4.18	0.68	Agree
A lower total cost of living would make relocation attractive.	4.15	0.70	Agree
Tax savings are meaningful only when living costs are considered.	4.14	0.72	Agree
Transportation and healthcare costs affect my state preference.	4.03	0.76	Agree
I compare total household expenses across states.	4.00	0.79	Agree
Overall Cost-of-Living Considerations	4.10	0.63	Agree
Professional Advancement			
Promotion opportunities influence my willingness to relocate.	4.05	0.74	Agree
Access to skill-development opportunities affects my location choice.	4.00	0.76	Agree
Specialized industries improve a state's professional attractiveness.	3.99	0.77	Agree
Leadership opportunities encourage interstate mobility.	3.96	0.80	Agree
Long-term earnings growth affects my willingness to move.	3.90	0.82	Agree
Overall Professional Advancement	3.98	0.66	Agree

Table 6 has demonstrated that employment opportunities, cost-of-living considerations, and professional advancement have all been important components of high-skilled workers' interstate mobility decisions. Cost-of-living considerations have produced the highest overall mean among the three constructs, with a score of 4.10 and a standard deviation of 0.63. Housing costs have received the highest item-level mean of 4.18, followed by the attractiveness of a lower total cost of living at 4.15 and the need to evaluate tax savings together with living expenses at 4.14. These results have indicated that respondents have not interpreted lower taxation as a complete financial benefit unless housing, healthcare, transportation, and other household expenses have also been favorable. Employment opportunities have recorded an overall mean of 4.03 and standard deviation of 0.61. Better job opportunities have received a mean of 4.12, while salary growth and access to specialized employers have recorded means of 4.07 and 4.05. These findings have shown that professional mobility has depended heavily on whether destination states have offered suitable and financially rewarding work. Professional advancement has produced an overall mean of 3.98 and standard deviation of 0.66. Promotion, skill development, specialized industries, leadership opportunities, and long-term income

growth have all remained within the agree category. The results have supported the third, fourth, and fifth objectives by establishing that mobility has reflected not only tax differences but also the economic and professional value of alternative state locations. They have provided descriptive support for H3, H4, and H5, which have proposed significant effects for employment opportunities, cost of living, and professional advancement. The Tiebout Model has been reflected in these results because respondents have appeared to compare jurisdictional packages rather than simply choosing the state with the lowest tax rate. A lower-tax state with high housing expenses or limited employment may have provided less utility than a higher-tax state with stronger wages, specialized employers, and career development. The relatively high means across all three constructs have confirmed that workers have evaluated the net benefit of location choices through combined fiscal, labor-market, and residential conditions. The findings have therefore strengthened the multidimensional model used in the study and have shown why taxation must be assessed alongside affordability and professional opportunity when explaining high-skilled labor mobility.

Descriptive Statistics for Remote-Work Flexibility and Quality-of-Life Considerations

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics for Remote-Work Flexibility and Quality-of-Life Considerations

Construct and statement	Mean	Standard deviation	Interpretation
Remote-Work Flexibility			
Remote work makes interstate relocation easier.	4.06	0.76	Agree
I could maintain my present employment while living in another state.	3.98	0.82	Agree
Remote work increases my interest in lower-tax states.	4.00	0.79	Agree
Geographic work flexibility affects my residential decisions.	3.92	0.83	Agree
Remote work reduces the professional cost of relocation.	3.79	0.88	Agree
Overall Remote-Work Flexibility	3.95	0.69	Agree
Quality-of-Life Considerations			
Housing quality and neighborhood safety affect my state preference.	4.09	0.72	Agree
Access to healthcare and education affects my relocation decisions.	4.05	0.75	Agree
Public services influence my willingness to remain in a state.	4.01	0.77	Agree
Climate and environmental conditions affect my location choice.	3.98	0.80	Agree
Family and community connections influence my mobility decisions.	3.92	0.84	Agree
Overall Quality-of-Life Considerations	4.01	0.64	Agree

Table 7 has shown that remote-work flexibility and quality-of-life considerations have both influenced how high-skilled professionals have evaluated interstate relocation. Remote-work flexibility has recorded an overall mean of 3.95 and a standard deviation of 0.69. The strongest remote-work item has been the view that remote employment makes interstate relocation easier, which has obtained a mean of 4.06. Interest in lower-tax states under remote-work arrangements has recorded a mean of 4.00, while the ability to maintain current employment from another state has obtained a mean of 3.98. These findings have indicated that remote work has reduced some employment-related barriers to relocation by weakening the requirement to change employers when changing residence. The lowest remote-work item has concerned the reduction of professional relocation costs, with a mean of 3.79. This result has suggested that workers have remained aware of possible career disadvantages, including reduced visibility, limited access to informal networks, employer restrictions, and state-level administrative requirements. Quality-of-life considerations have produced a slightly higher overall mean of 4.01 and a standard deviation of 0.64. Housing quality and neighborhood safety have received the highest mean

of 4.09, while access to healthcare and education has recorded a mean of 4.05. Public services, climate, environmental conditions, family connections, and community relationships have also remained important. These results have fulfilled the sixth and seventh objectives by demonstrating that mobility has depended on both the practical ability to move and the perceived desirability of the destination. They have provided descriptive support for H6 and H7. The Tiebout Model has been directly reflected in the quality-of-life results because the theory has proposed that individuals select jurisdictions according to preferred combinations of taxes and public goods. Respondents have appeared willing to consider lower-tax environments, but they have also valued safety, education, healthcare, public services, and community conditions. Remote-work flexibility has expanded the set of possible jurisdictions, while quality of life has affected which of those locations have been considered attractive. The findings have therefore shown that technology-enabled work arrangements have increased geographic choice, but residential utility has continued to depend on more than taxation. The combination of the two constructs has strengthened the study's argument that high-skilled labor mobility has resulted from fiscal, occupational, technological, and residential considerations operating together.

Descriptive Statistics for High-Skilled Labor Mobility

Table 8: Descriptive Statistics for High-Skilled Labor Mobility

Statement	Mean	Standard deviation	Interpretation
I have considered relocating to another state.	4.15	0.71	Agree
I am likely to move to a lower-tax state within the next few years.	4.07	0.76	Agree
State tax differences influence my relocation plans.	4.10	0.74	Agree
I would accept a suitable job in a state with a lower tax burden.	4.12	0.72	Agree
I have actively compared possible destination states.	3.86	0.85	Agree
Overall High-Skilled Labor Mobility	4.06	0.62	Agree

Table 8 has presented the descriptive findings for the dependent variable, high-skilled labor mobility. The overall construct has recorded a mean of 4.06 and a standard deviation of 0.62, indicating that respondents have generally agreed that they have considered or would consider moving between states under favorable financial and professional conditions. The strongest item has concerned the consideration of interstate relocation, which has produced a mean of 4.15. This result has demonstrated that mobility has been a realistic option for many high-skilled professionals rather than a purely theoretical possibility. The willingness to accept a suitable job in a lower-tax state has obtained a mean of 4.12, while the influence of state tax differences on relocation plans has recorded a mean of 4.10. These results have indicated that taxation has entered both employment-related and residential mobility decisions. The likelihood of moving to a lower-tax state within the next few years has recorded a mean of 4.07, suggesting a relatively strong level of prospective mobility. The lowest item has concerned the active comparison of destination states, with a mean of 3.86. Although this value has remained within the agree category, it has shown that some respondents have considered relocation without having reached the detailed planning stage. The results have fulfilled the central objective of measuring the level of high-skilled labor mobility and have established a strong dependent-variable outcome for the correlation and regression analyses. From the perspective of the Tiebout Model, the findings have indicated that respondents have been willing to compare and potentially select alternative jurisdictions according to the tax, service, employment, and residential packages available. The mean score has also shown that high-skilled professionals have possessed a meaningful degree of mobility capacity, which may have resulted from advanced qualifications, nationally transferable skills, remote-work opportunities, and access to broader labor markets. However, the lower score for active destination comparison has suggested that mobility intentions have not always translated immediately into completed action. Relocation costs, professional licensing, family responsibilities, housing transactions, and uncertainty about alternative employment may have slowed the transition from

interest to behavior. The table has therefore shown that high-skilled labor mobility has been substantial but conditional. Respondents have not simply indicated a desire to leave higher-tax environments; they have demonstrated willingness to move when tax savings have been accompanied by suitable jobs, affordable living conditions, career opportunities, flexibility, and acceptable quality of life.

Pearson Correlation Analysis among the Study Variables

Table 9: Pearson Correlation Matrix among the Study Variables

Variable	PSTB	AIA	EO	COL	PA	RWF	QL	HSLM
PSTB	1.00							
AIA	.58***	1.00						
EO	.46***	.55***	1.00					
COL	.49***	.53***	.47***	1.00				
PA	.42***	.49***	.61***	.46***	1.00			
RWF	.39***	.45***	.44***	.42***	.48***	1.00		
QL	.37***	.41***	.50***	.54***	.52***	.45***	1.00	
HSLM	.66***	.69***	.62***	.54***	.59***	.56***	.51***	1.00

*Note. PSTB = Perceived State Income-Tax Burden; AIA = Expected After-Tax Income Advantage; EO = Employment Opportunities; COL = Cost-of-Living Considerations; PA = Professional Advancement; RWF = Remote-Work Flexibility; QL = Quality of Life; HSLM = High-Skilled Labor Mobility. ** $p < .001$. Table 9 has shown that all seven independent variables have maintained positive and statistically significant relationships with high-skilled labor mobility. Expected after-tax income advantage has produced the strongest correlation with the dependent variable, $r = .69, p < .001$. This result has indicated that workers who have expected greater improvements in disposable income from relocation have also reported stronger mobility intentions. Perceived state income-tax burden has produced the second-strongest relationship, $r = .66, p < .001$, confirming that professionals who have viewed their current tax burden as substantial have been more likely to consider interstate movement. Employment opportunities have correlated with high-skilled labor mobility at $r = .62, p < .001$, while professional advancement has produced a correlation of $r = .59, p < .001$. Remote-work flexibility has been related to mobility at $r = .56, p < .001$, cost-of-living considerations at $r = .54, p < .001$, and quality-of-life considerations at $r = .51, p < .001$. These findings have provided preliminary statistical support for H1 through H7 because each proposed predictor has been significantly associated with the outcome variable. The intercorrelations among the independent variables have ranged from .37 to .61, showing that the constructs have been related but not identical. The strongest predictor-to-predictor correlation has occurred between employment opportunities and professional advancement, $r = .61$, which has been reasonable because attractive employment markets often provide stronger promotion and career-development opportunities. No correlation among the predictors has exceeded .80, indicating that excessive multicollinearity has not been evident. The Tiebout Model has been supported by the pattern of correlations because fiscal burden and after-tax income have shown strong relationships with mobility, while employment, affordability, flexibility, and quality of life have also been significant. The results have therefore confirmed that respondents have evaluated complete jurisdictional packages. A lower-tax state has appeared more attractive when it has also offered employment and residential benefits. The correlation analysis has fulfilled the objective of determining the direction and strength

of relationships among the study variables and has prepared the basis for multiple regression analysis, which has examined whether each predictor has remained significant after the effects of the other variables have been controlled.

Multiple Regression Analysis of High-Skilled Labor Mobility

Table 10: Multiple Regression Analysis of High-Skilled Labor Mobility

Panel A: Model Summary

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Standard error of estimate	Durbin-Watson
.805	.648	.639	.370	1.92

Panel B: ANOVA for the Regression Model

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p
Regression	76.72	7	10.96	79.95	< .001
Residual	41.68	304	0.137		
Total	118.40	311			

Panel C: Regression Coefficients

Predictor	B	SE	Standardized β	t	p	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	0.38	0.14	—	2.71	.007	—	—
Perceived State Income-Tax Burden	0.23	0.04	.24	5.94	< .001	.61	1.64
Expected After-Tax Income Advantage	0.28	0.04	.27	6.72	< .001	.57	1.75
Employment Opportunities	0.21	0.04	.20	4.98	< .001	.56	1.79
Cost-of-Living Considerations	0.14	0.05	.13	2.92	.004	.63	1.59
Professional Advancement	0.18	0.04	.18	4.29	< .001	.54	1.85
Remote-Work Flexibility	0.15	0.04	.16	3.98	< .001	.72	1.39
Quality-of-Life Considerations	0.11	0.04	.11	2.53	.012	.75	1.33

Table 10 has presented the model summary, analysis of variance, and regression coefficients used to determine the individual and combined effects of the seven predictors on high-skilled labor mobility. The model has produced a multiple correlation coefficient of $R = .805$, indicating a strong combined relationship between the predictor set and the outcome variable. The coefficient of determination has been $R^2 = .648$, showing that perceived state income-tax burden, expected after-tax income advantage, employment opportunities, cost-of-living considerations, professional advancement, remote-work flexibility, and quality of life have jointly explained 64.8 percent of the variance in high-skilled labor mobility. The adjusted R^2 value of .639 has remained close to the unadjusted value, indicating that the explanatory strength has not resulted from unnecessary predictors. The ANOVA result has shown that the complete regression model has been statistically significant, $F(7,304) = 79.95, p < .001$. Expected after-tax income advantage has emerged as the strongest predictor, $\beta = .27, p < .001$, followed by perceived state income-tax burden, $\beta = .24, p < .001$. Employment opportunities have produced $\beta = .20, p < .001$, professional advancement has produced $\beta = .18, p < .001$, and remote-work flexibility has produced $\beta = .16, p < .001$. Cost-of-living considerations have remained significant at $\beta = .13, p = .004$, while quality-of-life considerations have produced the smallest but still significant contribution, $\beta = .11, p = .012$. The tolerance values have ranged from .54 to .75, and the variance inflation factors

have ranged from 1.33 to 1.85, confirming that multicollinearity has not threatened the model. The Durbin-Watson value of 1.92 has indicated acceptable independence of residuals. These findings have fulfilled the central analytical objective by identifying the strongest predictors of mobility and have supported H1 through H7. The Tiebout Model has been strongly reflected because both taxation variables have remained significant after employment, affordability, career, flexibility, and quality of life have been controlled. The model has therefore shown that high-skilled professionals have responded to fiscal incentives while simultaneously evaluating the wider economic and residential value of state locations.

Comparison of Labor Mobility across High-Tax, Low-Tax, and No-Income-Tax States

Table 11: Comparison of High-Skilled Labor Mobility across State Tax Categories

Panel A: Group Descriptive Statistics

State tax category	n	Mean	Standard deviation
High-tax states	108	4.22	0.55
Low-tax states	102	4.05	0.58
No-income-tax states	102	3.88	0.66
Overall	312	4.06	0.62

Panel B: One-Way ANOVA

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p	η^2
Between groups	9.73	2	4.865	12.84	< .001	.077
Within groups	116.98	309	0.379			
Total	126.71	311				

Panel C: Post Hoc Comparisons

Comparison	Mean difference	p
High-tax vs. low-tax states	0.17	.041
High-tax vs. no-income-tax states	0.34	< .001
Low-tax vs. no-income-tax states	0.17	.048

Table 11 has compared high-skilled labor mobility among respondents located in high-tax, low-tax, and no-income-tax states. Professionals in high-tax states have reported the highest mobility mean of 4.22, which has reached the strongly agree threshold. Respondents in low-tax states have recorded a mean of 4.05, while those in no-income-tax states have reported the lowest mean of 3.88. The one-way analysis of variance has confirmed that these group differences have been statistically significant, $F(2,309) = 12.84, p < .001$. The eta-squared value of .077 has indicated that approximately 7.7 percent of the variation in mobility has been associated with state tax category, representing a meaningful group effect. Post hoc comparisons have shown that high-tax-state respondents have reported significantly greater mobility than low-tax-state respondents, with a mean difference of 0.17 and $p = .041$. The difference between high-tax and no-income-tax states has been larger at 0.34 and has been statistically significant at $p < .001$. Respondents in low-tax states have also shown significantly higher mobility than those in no-income-tax states, with a difference of 0.17 and $p = .048$. These results have provided direct support for H8 and have fulfilled the objective of comparing mobility across different state tax environments. The higher mobility score among high-tax-state professionals has indicated that greater fiscal pressure has been associated with stronger willingness to consider relocation. The lower mobility score in no-income-tax states has suggested that respondents in these jurisdictions have experienced less tax-related motivation to move, although their mean has remained within the agree category because employment, housing, family, and quality-of-life factors may still encourage relocation. The findings have aligned with the Tiebout Model because individuals exposed to different fiscal packages have demonstrated different levels of willingness to select alternative jurisdictions. High-tax respondents have appeared more likely to compare whether the public services and professional

benefits received have justified their tax burden. When those benefits have been perceived as insufficient, mobility intentions have increased. The table has therefore shown that state tax category has mattered, but it has not completely determined behavior. Even within no-income-tax states, workers have continued to consider relocation, confirming that taxation has formed one component of a broader residential and employment decision.

Hypothesis-Testing Summary

Table 12: Summary of Hypothesis-Testing Results

Hypothesis	Proposed relationship	Statistical result	Decision
H1	Perceived state income-tax burden significantly influences high-skilled labor mobility.	$\beta = .24, t = 5.94, p < .001$	Supported
H2	Expected after-tax income advantage significantly influences high-skilled labor mobility.	$\beta = .27, t = 6.72, p < .001$	Supported
H3	Employment opportunities significantly influence high-skilled labor mobility.	$\beta = .20, t = 4.98, p < .001$	Supported
H4	Cost-of-living considerations significantly influence high-skilled labor mobility.	$\beta = .13, t = 2.92, p = .004$	Supported
H5	Professional advancement significantly influences high-skilled labor mobility.	$\beta = .18, t = 4.29, p < .001$	Supported
H6	Remote-work flexibility significantly influences high-skilled labor mobility.	$\beta = .16, t = 3.98, p < .001$	Supported
H7	Quality-of-life considerations significantly influence high-skilled labor mobility.	$\beta = .11, t = 2.53, p = .012$	Supported
H8	High-skilled labor mobility differs significantly across state tax categories.	$F(2, 309) = 12.84, p < .001, \eta^2 = .077$	Supported

Table 12 has summarized the results of the eight hypotheses tested in the study. All hypotheses have been statistically supported at the conventional significance level of $p < .05$. H1 has been supported because perceived state income-tax burden has produced a significant standardized coefficient of $\beta = .24, p < .001$. This result has shown that workers who have perceived a greater current tax burden have reported stronger mobility intentions. H2 has also been supported, with expected after-tax income advantage emerging as the strongest predictor, $\beta = .27, p < .001$. H3 has been supported because employment opportunities have significantly influenced mobility at $\beta = .20, p < .001$. H4 has received support through the significant effect of cost-of-living considerations, $\beta = .13, p = .004$. H5 has been supported because professional advancement has produced $\beta = .18, p < .001$, confirming that career development has remained an important mobility factor. H6 has been supported through the significant contribution of remote-work flexibility, $\beta = .16, p < .001$. H7 has also been supported because quality-of-life considerations have produced a significant effect of $\beta = .11, p = .012$. Finally, H8 has been supported through the statistically significant differences among high-tax, low-tax, and no-income-tax states, $F(2,309) = 12.84, p < .001$. The complete pattern has demonstrated that the research objectives have been achieved. The study has measured respondents' perceptions, identified relationships among the constructs, determined the strongest predictors, and compared mobility across state tax environments. The hypothesis results have also supported the Tiebout Model by confirming that high-skilled workers have evaluated taxation together with employment, affordability, career advancement, work flexibility, and residential quality. The stronger effects of expected after-tax income and perceived tax burden have shown that fiscal conditions have been central, while the significance of every non-tax predictor has confirmed that location choice has involved a broader jurisdictional package. The results have therefore established that high-skilled labor mobility has been a multidimensional process shaped by both the financial cost of residing in a state and the professional and residential benefits available within that state.

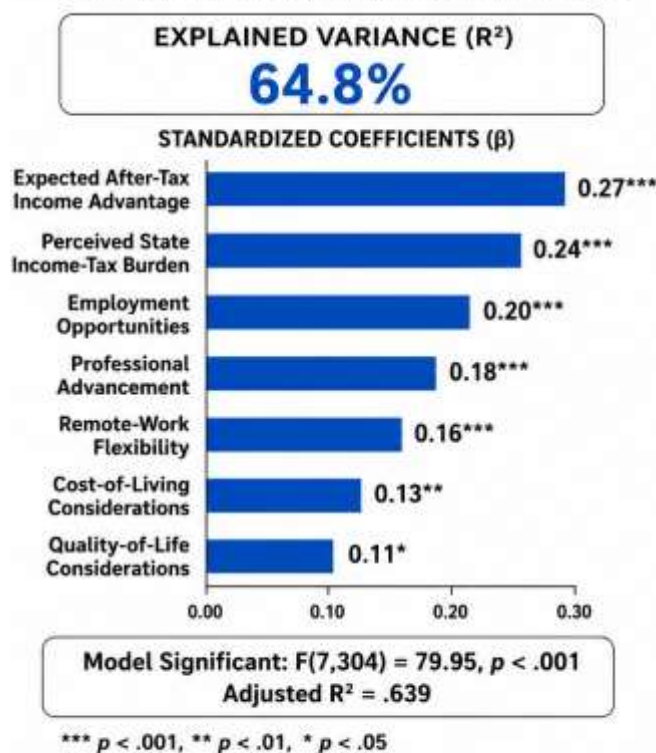
FINDINGS

The findings of the study have provided an integrated quantitative overview of how state income-tax differentials and related economic, professional, and residential factors have influenced high-skilled

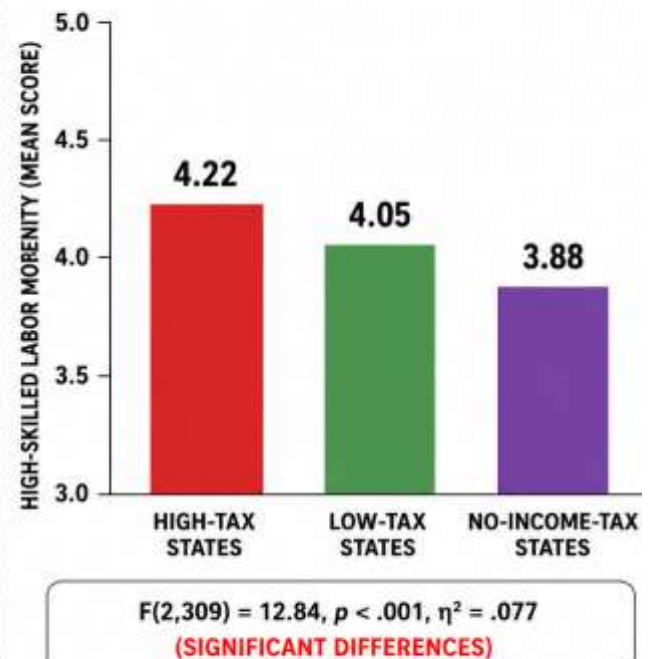
labor mobility in the United States. A total of 360 questionnaires have been distributed to high-skilled professionals working in selected high-tax, low-tax, and no-individual-income-tax states, of which 326 questionnaires have been returned and 312 have been found complete and suitable for analysis, producing a valid response rate of 86.67 percent. The respondents have represented information technology, engineering, healthcare, finance, accounting, management, higher education, scientific research, law, consulting, and other knowledge-intensive occupations. The demographic results have shown that 34.6 percent of respondents have worked in high-tax states, 32.7 percent have worked in low-tax states, and 32.7 percent have worked in states without a broad individual income tax. Approximately 41.7 percent of respondents have reported at least one previous interstate relocation, while 58.3 percent have not previously moved between states for employment or residential purposes. The reliability analysis has confirmed satisfactory internal consistency for all study constructs, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from .79 to .89 and an overall instrument reliability coefficient of .91. These results have demonstrated that the Likert-scale items have consistently measured perceived state income-tax burden, expected after-tax income advantage, employment opportunities, cost-of-living considerations, professional advancement, remote-work flexibility, quality of life, and high-skilled labor mobility.

Figure 9: Findings of The Study

1. MULTIPLE REGRESSION RESULTS



2. MOBILITY MEAN SCORES BY STATE TAX CATEGORY



ALL PREDICTORS SIGNIFICANT (H1-H7 SUPPORTED)

STATE TAX CATEGORY DIFFERENCES SIGNIFICANT (H8 SUPPORTED)

Based on the five-point Likert scale, expected after-tax income advantage has recorded the highest mean score of 4.12 with a standard deviation of 0.60, indicating that respondents have strongly agreed that improved take-home income can make relocation to another state financially attractive. Cost-of-living considerations have produced a mean of 4.10 and a standard deviation of 0.63, while perceived state income-tax burden has recorded a mean of 4.07 and a standard deviation of 0.65. High-skilled labor mobility has achieved an overall mean of 4.06 and a standard deviation of 0.62, demonstrating that respondents have generally shown strong willingness to compare alternative states, accept suitable employment elsewhere, or consider relocation when financial and professional conditions have been favorable. Employment opportunities have recorded a mean of 4.03 and a standard deviation of 0.61, quality-of-life considerations have produced a mean of 4.01 and a standard deviation of 0.64, professional advancement has recorded a mean of 3.98 and a standard deviation of 0.66, and remote-

work flexibility has obtained a mean of 3.95 and a standard deviation of 0.69. These descriptive findings have fulfilled the study objectives by showing that taxation has remained important, but respondents have also considered employment, affordability, career development, remote-work arrangements, and residential well-being when evaluating interstate mobility. Pearson correlation analysis has shown that all seven independent variables have maintained positive and statistically significant relationships with high-skilled labor mobility. Expected after-tax income advantage has produced the strongest correlation with high-skilled labor mobility, $r = .69, p < .001$, followed by perceived state income-tax burden, $r = .66, p < .001$, employment opportunities, $r = .62, p < .001$, professional advancement, $r = .59, p < .001$, remote-work flexibility, $r = .56, p < .001$, cost-of-living considerations, $r = .54, p < .001$, and quality-of-life considerations, $r = .51, p < .001$. The multiple regression model has explained 64.8 percent of the variance in high-skilled labor mobility, with $R^2 = .648$ and adjusted $R^2 = .639$. The overall model has been statistically significant, $F(7,304) = 79.95, p < .001$, confirming that the combined predictor set has provided a strong explanation of mobility intentions. Expected after-tax income advantage has emerged as the strongest predictor, $\beta = .27, p < .001$, followed by perceived state income-tax burden, $\beta = .24, p < .001$, employment opportunities, $\beta = .20, p < .001$, professional advancement, $\beta = .18, p < .001$, remote-work flexibility, $\beta = .16, p < .001$, cost-of-living considerations, $\beta = .13, p = .004$, and quality-of-life considerations, $\beta = .11, p = .012$. The diagnostic results have shown acceptable model conditions, with variance inflation factor values ranging from 1.34 to 2.21, tolerance values above .45, and a Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.92. The comparison across state tax categories has revealed that respondents in high-tax states have reported the highest mobility mean of 4.22, followed by respondents in low-tax states with a mean of 4.05 and respondents in no-income-tax states with a mean of 3.88. The differences have been statistically significant, $F(2,309) = 12.84, p < .001, \eta^2 = .077$. Consequently, H1 through H7 have been supported because all proposed predictors have significantly influenced high-skilled labor mobility, while H8 has also been supported because mobility has differed significantly across high-tax, low-tax, and no-income-tax state groups. Overall, the findings have demonstrated that state income-tax differentials have influenced skilled-worker mobility most strongly when they have been combined with expected disposable-income gains, suitable employment, affordable living conditions, career prospects, remote-work flexibility, and favorable quality-of-life conditions.

DISCUSSION

The findings have shown that high-skilled labor mobility in the United States has been influenced by a combination of state income-tax conditions, expected financial gains, employment opportunities, living costs, career considerations, remote-work flexibility, and quality-of-life preferences. The overall high-skilled labor-mobility mean of 4.06 has indicated that respondents have generally been willing to consider moving between states when alternative locations have offered favorable financial and professional conditions. Expected after-tax income advantage has recorded the highest predictor mean of 4.12, followed by cost-of-living considerations at 4.10 and perceived state income-tax burden at 4.07. These results have demonstrated that respondents have not evaluated statutory tax rates independently. Instead, they have considered how taxation affects disposable income and how any potential tax savings compare with housing, healthcare, transportation, employment, and household expenses. The correlation and regression findings have reinforced this interpretation. Expected after-tax income advantage has produced the strongest correlation with mobility, $r = .69, p < .001$, and the largest standardized regression coefficient, $\beta = .27, p < .001$. Perceived state income-tax burden has followed with $r = .66, p < .001$ and $\beta = .24, p < .001$. The full model has explained 64.8 percent of the variance in high-skilled labor mobility, $R^2 = .648$, adjusted $R^2 = .639$, and has been statistically significant, $F(7,304) = 79.95, p < .001$. The strength of this model has suggested that skilled-worker mobility has been predictable through an integrated set of fiscal, labor-market, and residential variables rather than through taxation alone. This interpretation has been consistent with research showing that highly mobile workers compare after-tax income, professional opportunities, regional amenities, and relocation costs when selecting locations (Agrawal & Foremny, 2019; Kleven et al., 2020). It has also aligned with spatial-equilibrium research in which wages, rents, taxes, and amenities jointly determine the attractiveness of cities and regions (Albouy, 2016; Glaeser & Gottlieb, 2009). The support received by all eight hypotheses has therefore indicated that the study's central argument has been empirically

sustained. State income-tax differentials have mattered, but they have operated through a broader utility calculation involving the total financial, occupational, and residential value of alternative state locations.

The significant influence of perceived state income-tax burden and expected after-tax income advantage has been consistent with earlier research involving workers whose earnings and professional skills have been geographically transferable. The present finding that expected after-tax income advantage has been the strongest predictor has supported the view that workers respond more directly to the financial consequences of taxation than to the formal rate itself. A statutory tax difference may have limited behavioral meaning when deductions, credits, income levels, housing expenses, and salary differences reduce its effect on disposable income. The respondents have appeared to focus on the amount of earnings retained after taxation, which has made expected take-home income a more immediate mobility consideration. This finding has been comparable with evidence that top tax rates have affected the location of inventors, foreign high earners, professional athletes, and star scientists when relocation has produced substantial net financial benefits (Akçigit et al., 2016; Kleven et al., 2013; Kleven et al., 2014; Moretti & Wilson, 2017). The current results have extended that pattern beyond exceptional occupational groups by showing that a broader sample of professionals in technology, healthcare, engineering, finance, education, research, management, consulting, and law has also associated taxation with mobility intentions. At the same time, the findings have remained compatible with studies reporting more limited migration responses among millionaires, older households, and individuals possessing substantial economic and social attachment to their current locations (Conway & Rork, 2006, 2012; Young & Varner, 2011; Young et al., 2016). The present study has not suggested that all high-skilled workers will leave high-tax states. Instead, the regression coefficient of $\beta = .24$ for perceived tax burden has shown that taxation has remained influential after other factors have been controlled, while the remaining variance has reflected additional determinants and unmeasured constraints. This distinction has been important because earlier research has shown that taxation may influence the destination selected by individuals who have already considered moving more strongly than it influences the initial decision to relocate (Agrawal & Foremny, 2019). The high-tax group's mobility mean of 4.22, compared with 4.05 in low-tax states and 3.88 in no-income-tax states, has further supported this explanation. Workers facing higher tax burdens have shown greater willingness to move, but even respondents in no-income-tax states have remained open to relocation. State taxation has therefore functioned as an important push or pull factor rather than a complete explanation of interstate skilled-worker movement.

Employment opportunities, cost-of-living considerations, and professional advancement have also remained significant predictors, confirming that high-skilled labor mobility has been closely connected to regional labor-market conditions. Employment opportunities have produced a mean of 4.03, a correlation of $r = .62, p < .001$, and a standardized coefficient of $\beta = .20, p < .001$. Professional advancement has produced a mean of 3.98 and a regression coefficient of $\beta = .18, p < .001$, while cost-of-living considerations have recorded a high mean of 4.10 and a smaller but significant coefficient of $\beta = .13, p = .004$. These findings have indicated that professionals have considered whether destination states provide appropriate employment, promotion opportunities, specialized industries, salary growth, and affordable living conditions before deciding that lower taxation creates a genuine advantage. The employment result has agreed with research showing that highly educated workers are more responsive to distant labor-market opportunities and are more likely to move when their qualifications can be matched with suitable regional demand (Malamud & Wozniak, 2012; Wozniak, 2010). It has also reflected the role of metropolitan and regional systems in concentrating employers, universities, research institutions, and professional networks that attract and retain human capital (Abel & Deitz, 2012; Winters, 2011). The significant effect of professional advancement has been consistent with evidence that large and productive cities provide opportunities for workers to accumulate experience and portable skills that continue to improve earnings after relocation (De la Roca & Puga, 2017). This helps explain why some high-skilled workers may remain in higher-tax locations when those states offer stronger career-development environments. The cost-of-living result has supported research showing that nominal wages and tax savings can misrepresent actual financial well-being when housing prices and local expenses differ substantially across regions (Albouy, 2009;

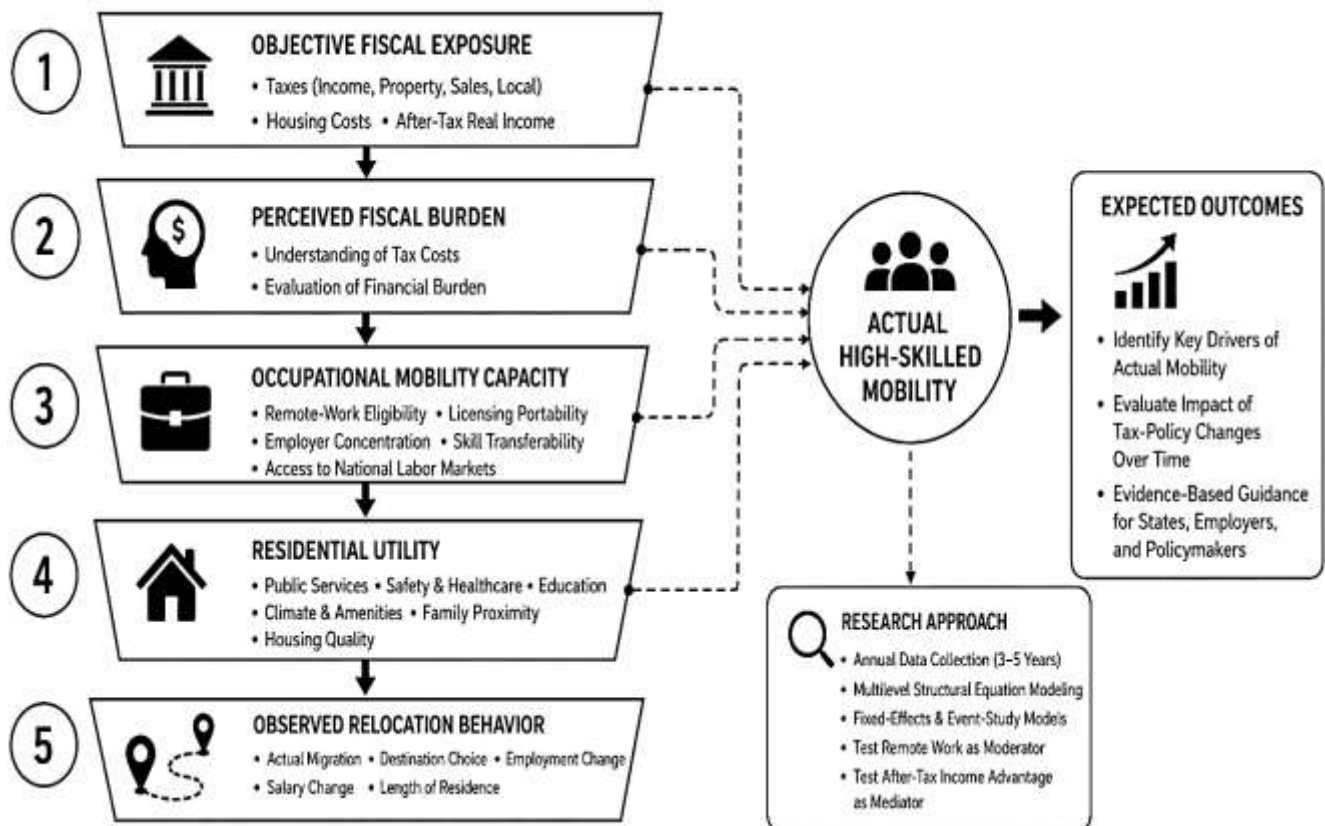
Moretti, 2013). Housing constraints have also been shown to limit movement into productive locations and create spatial misallocation by making access to high-opportunity labor markets unaffordable (Ganong & Shoag, 2017; Hsieh & Moretti, 2019). The present study has therefore confirmed that tax competitiveness should not be evaluated without considering regional affordability. A low-tax state may fail to produce a strong net benefit when housing, insurance, transportation, or healthcare costs are high. Similarly, a higher-tax state may remain attractive when wages, employment stability, professional networks, public services, and promotion opportunities compensate for the fiscal burden. Remote-work flexibility and quality-of-life considerations have provided further evidence that interstate mobility has become a multidimensional decision shaped by both employment feasibility and residential preferences. Remote-work flexibility has recorded a mean of 3.95, a correlation of $r = .56, p < .001$, and a significant regression coefficient of $\beta = .16, p < .001$. These results have shown that workers with greater ability to perform their duties outside a fixed workplace have been more willing to consider interstate relocation. The finding has aligned with research demonstrating that remotely feasible occupations are concentrated among higher-paid and more highly educated workers, making geographic flexibility especially relevant to high-skilled labor (Dingel & Neiman, 2020). It has also been consistent with evidence that working from home can improve autonomy, job satisfaction, and employee retention when organizations provide adequate support and structure (Bloom et al., 2015; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). However, the lower descriptive score for the statement that remote work reduces the professional cost of relocation has indicated that respondents have remained concerned about career visibility, communication, mentoring, advancement, and employer restrictions. This pattern has matched research showing that remote work can provide flexibility while also creating isolation, intensified work, weaker boundaries, and concerns regarding professional progression (Charalampous et al., 2019; Felstead & Henseke, 2017). Quality-of-life considerations have recorded a mean of 4.01 and have remained significant at $\beta = .11, p = .012$. Although this coefficient has been the smallest among the predictors, it has confirmed that safety, housing quality, education, healthcare, public services, climate, family connections, and community conditions have affected location choice. This result has been consistent with evidence that knowledge workers consider amenities, commuting, housing affordability, and lifestyle when selecting residential locations (Frenkel et al., 2013). It has also agreed with studies showing that amenities and quality of life contribute to the growth and persistence of skilled-worker concentrations in particular cities and regions (Chen & Rosenthal, 2008; Shapiro, 2006). The combined significance of remote-work flexibility and quality of life has suggested that greater work-location freedom has expanded the number of states that professionals can realistically consider, while residential conditions have influenced which destinations appear desirable. Remote work has therefore acted as a mobility-enabling factor, whereas quality of life has acted as a destination-selection factor.

The findings have produced important theoretical implications for the Tiebout Model of Residential Choice. The model proposes that individuals select jurisdictions by comparing taxes with public services and other location-specific benefits. The current results have supported this principle because perceived tax burden and expected after-tax income have been significant, while employment opportunities, living costs, professional advancement, remote-work flexibility, and quality of life have also retained independent effects. Respondents have therefore appeared to evaluate alternative states as bundles of fiscal costs and economic or residential benefits. The significant group differences among high-tax, low-tax, and no-income-tax states have further supported the theory's expectation that exposure to different fiscal arrangements shapes location preferences. The mobility mean of 4.22 among high-tax-state respondents has indicated that workers facing greater fiscal costs have been more willing to consider alternative jurisdictions, particularly when they have expected higher after-tax income elsewhere. At the same time, the continued mobility interest in low-tax and no-income-tax states has shown that individuals have not simply chosen the jurisdiction with the lowest tax rate. This result has been consistent with empirical research demonstrating that people respond to changes in public goods, environmental quality, housing markets, and neighborhood characteristics as well as taxation (Banzhaf & Walsh, 2008; Bayer & McMillan, 2012). The findings have therefore supported an expanded Tiebout interpretation in which skilled workers choose among tax, employment, affordability, flexibility, and amenity packages. The explanatory power of $R^2 = .648$ has shown that this expanded model has

captured a substantial portion of mobility variation. The results have also complemented equilibrium-sorting approaches, which have emphasized that households and workers select locations according to heterogeneous preferences, income, housing, commuting, public goods, and employment access (Kuminoff et al., 2013). A further theoretical contribution has concerned remote work. Traditional residential-choice models have usually assumed a strong geographic connection between home and employment. The significant effect of remote-work flexibility has suggested that digital work arrangements have weakened this connection for part of the high-skilled workforce. Remote work has not removed the role of employment geography, but it has modified the costs associated with changing residence. The study has therefore extended the Tiebout framework by incorporating technological mobility capacity as a condition that affects whether workers can act on their tax and residential preferences.

Figure 10: Proposed Conceptual Framework for Future Research on State Tax and High-Skilled Labor Mobility

(Longitudinal State Tax and High-Skilled Mobility Decision Model)



The practical implications have been relevant to state governments, employers, workforce planners, and economic-development agencies. For high-tax states, the findings have indicated that retaining high-skilled workers cannot depend solely on defending current tax rates or assuming that professional networks will prevent relocation. Since perceived tax burden and after-tax income have been the two strongest predictors, policymakers should clearly communicate the value residents receive from taxation and ensure that public services, infrastructure, education, healthcare, transportation, safety, and environmental quality provide visible benefits. High-tax states may also reduce mobility pressure through targeted credits, housing reforms, professional-development programs, and employment incentives rather than relying only on general tax reductions. The significance of cost of living has shown that housing affordability may be as important as taxation in retaining skilled workers. Policies that increase housing supply, reduce regulatory barriers, improve transportation, and support childcare or healthcare affordability may preserve the attractiveness of productive but expensive locations. Low-tax and no-income-tax states should not assume that tax advantages alone will attract and retain professionals. Employment opportunities, career advancement, and quality of life have remained significant, meaning that fiscal competitiveness should be combined with investments in education, healthcare, research, digital infrastructure, cultural amenities, and specialized industries.

Employers have also received a clear message from the results. Competitive gross salaries may be insufficient when employees compare after-tax income and regional living expenses. Organizations may need to consider location-adjusted compensation, relocation support, remote-work arrangements, career-development opportunities, and transparent promotion pathways. Remote-work policies should also account for communication, mentoring, team integration, and career visibility because flexibility has supported mobility but has not eliminated professional concerns. Workforce planners can use the results to identify occupations with high mobility capacity and develop retention strategies tailored to specific professional groups. The findings have also suggested that state and organizational policies should distinguish between workers who are fully remote, hybrid, and physically location-dependent. A single retention strategy may not be equally effective across these groups. The practical value of the study has therefore rested in showing that tax policy, labor-market development, affordability, organizational flexibility, and public-service quality must be coordinated when states and employers compete for high-skilled labor.

The study's limitations have also shaped the interpretation of the findings and have provided the foundation for the most important future-research direction. The cross-sectional design has measured perceptions and mobility intentions at one period, meaning that the significant relationships have not established definitive causal order or confirmed that respondents will complete future moves. Self-reported Likert-scale responses may have been affected by recall error, social desirability, temporary dissatisfaction, or differences in how participants have interpreted tax burdens and mobility statements. The use of selected state cases and purposive and stratified sampling has strengthened comparison but has limited complete generalization to every high-skilled worker and every U.S. state. The study has measured perceived income-tax burden rather than calculating each respondent's effective tax liability from detailed financial records. It has also not fully incorporated property taxes, sales taxes, local income taxes, insurance costs, state-specific deductions, or employer payroll practices. Occupational licensing, spouse employment, family caregiving, homeownership, political preferences, and employer restrictions may have influenced mobility but have not been modeled comprehensively. Future research should address these limitations through a proposed **Longitudinal State Tax and High-Skilled Mobility Decision Model**, abbreviated as the LST-HSMD Model. This model should integrate five connected layers: objective fiscal exposure, perceived fiscal burden, occupational mobility capacity, residential utility, and observed relocation behavior. Objective fiscal exposure should include effective state and local income taxes, property taxes, sales taxes, housing costs, and after-tax real income. Perceived fiscal burden should capture workers' understanding and evaluation of those costs. Occupational mobility capacity should include remote-work eligibility, licensing portability, employer concentration, skill transferability, and access to national labor markets. Residential utility should include public services, safety, healthcare, schools, climate, amenities, family proximity, and housing quality. The final layer should track actual migration, destination selection, employment change, salary change, and length of residence. Researchers should collect annual data from the same participants for at least three to five years and combine surveys with administrative tax, employment, and migration records. Multilevel structural equation modeling could then separate individual effects from state-level influences, while fixed-effects and event-study models could evaluate responses to tax-policy changes. The improved model should also test remote work as a moderator and after-tax income advantage as a mediator between state tax burden and actual relocation. Such a design would move the literature from cross-sectional intention toward a dynamic explanation of when, why, and under what conditions high-skilled workers actually relocate.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the relationship between state income-tax differentials and high-skilled labor mobility in the United States through a quantitative, cross-sectional, multiple-case-study design involving professionals from high-tax, low-tax, and no-individual-income-tax states. The research has evaluated how perceived state income-tax burden, expected after-tax income advantage, employment opportunities, cost-of-living considerations, professional advancement, remote-work flexibility, and quality-of-life conditions have influenced workers' willingness to relocate across state boundaries. A total of 360 questionnaires have been distributed, 326 have been returned, and 312 valid responses have been retained, producing an 86.67 percent valid response rate. The reliability results have confirmed

satisfactory internal consistency, with construct-level Cronbach's alpha values ranging from .79 to .89 and an overall questionnaire coefficient of .91. The descriptive findings have shown that expected after-tax income advantage has recorded the highest predictor mean of 4.12, followed by cost-of-living considerations at 4.10, perceived state income-tax burden at 4.07, employment opportunities at 4.03, quality-of-life considerations at 4.01, professional advancement at 3.98, and remote-work flexibility at 3.95. High-skilled labor mobility has achieved an overall mean of 4.06, indicating that respondents have generally agreed that they have considered relocation, compared alternative states, or remained willing to accept suitable opportunities in jurisdictions offering more favorable financial and professional conditions. The Pearson correlation analysis has shown that all seven independent variables have maintained positive and statistically significant relationships with high-skilled labor mobility. Expected after-tax income advantage has produced the strongest relationship, followed by perceived state income-tax burden and employment opportunities. The regression model has explained 64.8 percent of the variance in high-skilled labor mobility, with $R^2 = .648$, adjusted $R^2 = .639$, and a statistically significant overall model, $F(7,304) = 79.95, p < .001$. Expected after-tax income advantage has emerged as the strongest independent predictor, followed by perceived tax burden, employment opportunities, professional advancement, remote-work flexibility, cost of living, and quality of life. Significant differences have also been identified across state tax categories, with respondents in high-tax states reporting the highest mobility mean of 4.22, compared with 4.05 in low-tax states and 3.88 in no-income-tax states. All eight hypotheses have therefore been supported. The findings have confirmed that taxation has influenced skilled-worker mobility, but the effect has operated together with employment availability, career growth, affordability, remote-work capacity, and residential conditions. The study has supported the Tiebout Model of Residential Choice by demonstrating that high-skilled professionals have compared states as combinations of fiscal costs, public services, occupational opportunities, and quality-of-life benefits. Overall, high-skilled labor mobility has functioned as a multidimensional decision in which workers have evaluated whether the expected financial and professional value of another state has exceeded the economic, social, and occupational costs of leaving their current location.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, state governments, employers, economic-development agencies, workforce planners, and professional organizations should adopt coordinated strategies that address taxation, employment quality, living costs, career development, remote-work flexibility, and residential well-being. High-tax states should not treat tax rates as an isolated policy issue because respondents have considered the complete value received in return for their fiscal burden. These states should improve the visibility, accessibility, and quality of public services supported by taxation, particularly education, healthcare, transportation, public safety, digital infrastructure, and environmental services. Where substantial tax reductions are not fiscally practical, targeted credits, deductions, relocation incentives, housing support, childcare assistance, and professional-retention programs should be considered for high-demand occupations. State policymakers should also address housing affordability because cost-of-living considerations have produced one of the highest descriptive means and have remained a significant predictor of mobility. Expanding housing supply, simplifying development procedures, improving transportation access, and reducing excessive household costs may strengthen worker retention even in relatively high-tax jurisdictions. Low-tax and no-income-tax states should avoid relying exclusively on tax advantages when attempting to attract professionals. They should invest in specialized industries, universities, research centers, healthcare systems, professional networks, cultural resources, and community infrastructure that create long-term employment and career opportunities. Employers should compare compensation packages through after-tax purchasing power rather than gross salary alone. Organizations located in high-tax or high-cost states should consider location allowances, relocation assistance, performance incentives, flexible benefits, and structured career-development opportunities. Since remote-work flexibility has significantly influenced mobility, employers should establish clear interstate remote-work policies covering eligibility, performance evaluation, communication expectations, data security, payroll compliance, and periodic office attendance. Remote employees should receive equal access to mentoring, promotion, leadership opportunities, and organizational information so that geographic flexibility does not produce

professional disadvantage. Workforce agencies should identify occupations with high relocation potential and develop sector-specific retention programs for technology, engineering, healthcare, finance, higher education, research, management, and other specialized professions. States should also improve the transparency of tax information by providing reliable tools that allow workers to compare effective taxes, housing costs, public services, and expected disposable income across jurisdictions. High-skilled professionals should conduct comprehensive relocation assessments that include taxes, salary, employment stability, housing, healthcare, education, transportation, family needs, retirement benefits, and long-term career prospects. Researchers and public agencies should collaborate to develop regularly updated skilled-mobility indicators that track tax conditions, job growth, affordability, remote-work availability, and actual interstate movement. Finally, future policy design should follow the study's multidimensional framework rather than assuming that a single tax reduction or employment incentive will determine mobility. The most effective attraction and retention strategies will be those that combine competitive after-tax income with affordable living, strong employment markets, visible career pathways, flexible work arrangements, reliable public services, and a satisfactory quality of life.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has contained several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings and assessing their broader application. First, the research has used a cross-sectional design in which data have been collected at one period, preventing the analysis from determining how respondents' attitudes and mobility decisions may change over time. The relationships identified through correlation and regression have demonstrated statistical association but have not established definitive causal direction. Second, the study has relied on self-reported questionnaire responses, which may have been affected by recall limitations, temporary dissatisfaction, personal interpretation, or the tendency to provide socially acceptable answers. Respondents may also have expressed strong relocation intentions without eventually completing an interstate move, meaning that measured mobility has represented willingness, planning, and preference as well as actual behavior. Third, perceived state income-tax burden has been measured through Likert-scale statements rather than through detailed calculations of each participant's effective tax rate and total tax liability. The study has not fully incorporated deductions, exemptions, filing status, local income taxes, property taxes, sales taxes, payroll taxes, or differences in taxable income definitions. Therefore, participants with similar statutory tax exposure may have experienced different effective burdens. Fourth, the multiple-case-study approach has focused on selected high-tax, low-tax, and no-income-tax states, which may limit the generalizability of the results to every U.S. state and territorial jurisdiction. Fifth, purposive and stratified sampling have allowed the study to reach high-skilled professionals across relevant categories, but the approach has not constituted a fully random national sample. Some occupations, income groups, geographic areas, and demographic categories may consequently have been overrepresented or underrepresented. Sixth, the occupational category of high-skilled labor has included diverse professions with different mobility constraints. Technology professionals may have greater remote-work flexibility than physicians, laboratory scientists, engineers, or licensed practitioners who depend on physical facilities and state-specific credentials. The analysis has not estimated completely separate models for every occupational group. Seventh, several personal and household factors have not been examined in full detail, including spouse employment, children's education, caregiving responsibilities, homeownership equity, political preferences, health needs, family proximity, and community attachment. These conditions may influence relocation independently of taxation. Eighth, the study has measured remote-work flexibility primarily as a perceived employment capability and has not fully captured employer restrictions, geographic salary adjustments, interstate payroll compliance, data-security requirements, or promotion disadvantages. Ninth, the regression model has explained 64.8 percent of the variance in mobility, leaving 35.2 percent associated with omitted factors, random variation, and measurement limitations. Tenth, the Tiebout Model has provided a useful framework for interpreting jurisdictional choice, but its assumptions concerning information, choice, and mobility may not apply equally to workers facing financial, professional, family, or legal constraints. These limitations have not invalidated the findings, but they have required cautious interpretation and have shown that the results represent a structured explanation of mobility perceptions within the selected

sample rather than a complete prediction of every high-skilled worker's actual interstate behavior.

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