

Push and Pull Factors and Lee's Theory of Migration

1.1. Introduction

Migration is one of the distinguishing features of human beings that has been occurring since it started from the very beginning of man's appearance in this universe. Human mobility was even present in the primitive times and people used to migrate in search of abundant food and in search of a safe living environment and protection from physical dangers. In modern age, migration has gained importance with the ushering of the era of industrialisation and urbanisation. The factors like development of modern means of transport and communication, intermingling and interaction of different cultures, globalization, etc. has led thousands of people to migrate in search of better opportunities related to education, employment and living standard among other factors. Migration is one of the causes of social change and it is one of the three basic components of demographic change, the other two being birth and death. Migration is a complex phenomenon affected by many factors and attempts have been made from time to time to understand the various factors influencing the process.

1.2. Push and Pull Factors

Migration is broadly understood as a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence. In other words, migration may be defined as a form of relocation diffusion (the spread of people, ideas, innovations, behaviours, from one place to another), involving permanent moves to new locations. The reasons that people migrate are determined by push and pull factors, which are forces that either induce people to move to a new location, or oblige them to leave old residences. These could be economic, political, cultural, and environmental.

Push factors are conditions that can force people to leave their homes and are related to the country from which a person migrates. Push factors include non-availability of enough livelihood opportunities, poverty, rapid population growth that surpasses available resources, "Primitive" or "poor" living conditions, desertification, famines/droughts, fear of political persecution, poor healthcare, loss of wealth, and natural disasters.

Pull factors are exactly the opposite of push factors—they attract people to a certain location. Typical examples of pull factors of a place are more job opportunities and better living conditions; easy availability of land for settling and agriculture, political and/or religious freedom, superior education and welfare systems, better transportation and communication facilities, better healthcare system and stress-free environment attractive, and security.

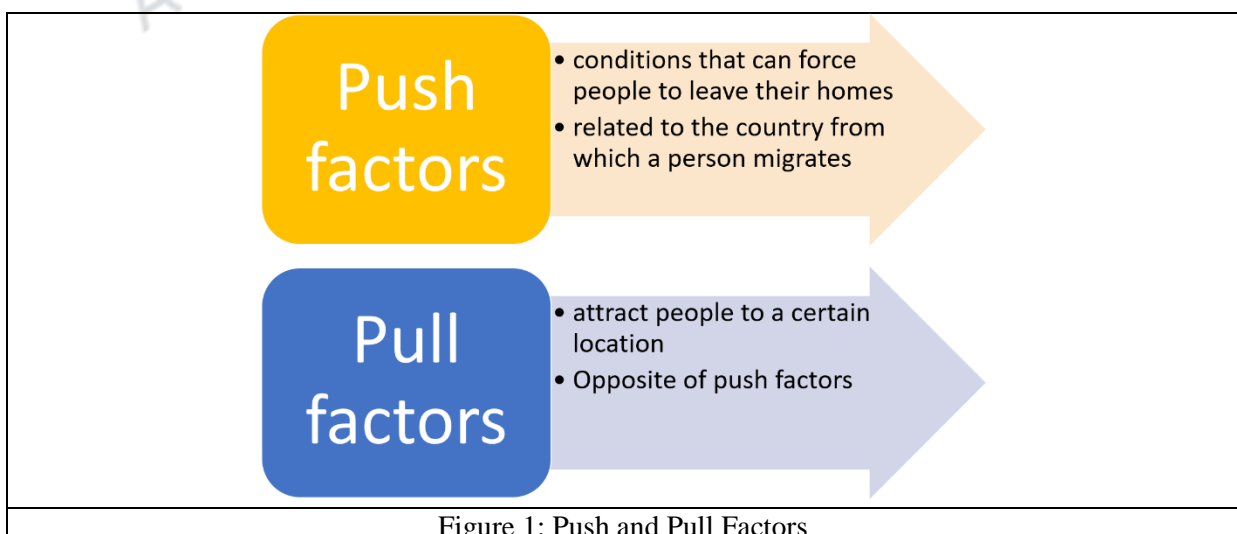


Figure 1: Push and Pull Factors

Source: Data above

Before a discussion Everett Lee's "Push-Pull theory", it is necessary to acknowledge the contribution of Ravenstein's 'Law of Migration' to the discipline of population studies. It was first presented before the Royal Statistical Society on March 17, 1885.

Ravenstein's original paper was based upon the British Census of 1881. In 1889, Ravenstein explored the subject further with data from more than twenty countries. Samers (2010: 55-56) points out that Ravenstein's laws are, in actuality, empirical generalisations based on his calculations from the British and other censuses of his time. They referred more to internal than international migration. These laws (or generalizations) are presented in a condensed form:

1. Migrants move mainly over short distances; those travelling longer distances head for the great centres of industry and commerce.
2. Most migration is from agricultural to industrial areas.
3. Large towns grow more by migration than by natural increase.
4. Migration increases with the development of industry, commerce, and transport.
5. Each migration stream produces a counter-stream.
6. Females are more migratory than males, at least over shorter distances. Males are dominant in international migration.
7. The major causes of migration are economic.

The first law (item number 1) proposes a gravity model of migration, which runs parallel to Newton's second law of motion, that the volume of movement between two places is directly proportional to the product of their masses (i.e. populations) and inversely proportional to the square of the distance between them (White and Woods 1980: 39).

Laws 2 and 3 concern rural-urban migration and urbanisation which are, historically, the main forms of population change in most countries of the world, even today. The fourth Law, related to migration for development, anticipated Zelinsky's (1971) famous 'hypothesis of the mobility transition' by nearly a century to which we will return

Law 5 established the basis for the study of two-way migration dynamics, net migration, and return migration. Return migration became the subject of detailed study in the 1970s and 1980s. It remains an under-researched component of migration. Law 6 was even more pioneering: it introduced the gender element, which was ignored for nearly a hundred years since. The seventh law states a fundamental truism of most forms of migration.

In fact, Ravenstein's laws of Migration led to studies of the various influencing factors in migration: industrialization, sex, race, distance, education, the labour force, etc. However, most studies, which focused on the characteristics of migrants, were conducted with little reference to the volume of migration, the reasons for migration or the assimilation of the migrant at the destination. Regardless of the forms of migration or its duration, or how easy or how difficult it is, all acts of migration involve an origin, a destination, and an intervening set of obstacles. Of these obstacles, Lee (1966) included distance of the move as one that is always present.

1.3. Lee's Theory of Migration

Everett Spurgeon Lee, Professor of Sociology at the University of Georgia is known for his pioneering theory of migration, which is known as the Push and Pull Theory, or also as Lee's Theory. Lee first presented his model at the Annual meeting of Mississippi Valley Historical Association,

Kansas City, in 1965. In 1966, his seminal work, 'A Theory of Migration', was published in Demography journal. The theory, which draws on principles of sociology, attempts to formalize a 'theory' of migration which would provide a scheme of the factors that could explain the volume of migration between origin and destination. Lee's theory is both simple and has withstood the test of times.

Everett Lee has conceptualized the factors associated with the decision to migrate and the process of migration into the following four categories: (1) Factors associated with the area of origin; (2) Factors associated with the area of destination; (3) Intervening obstacles; and (4) Personal factors.

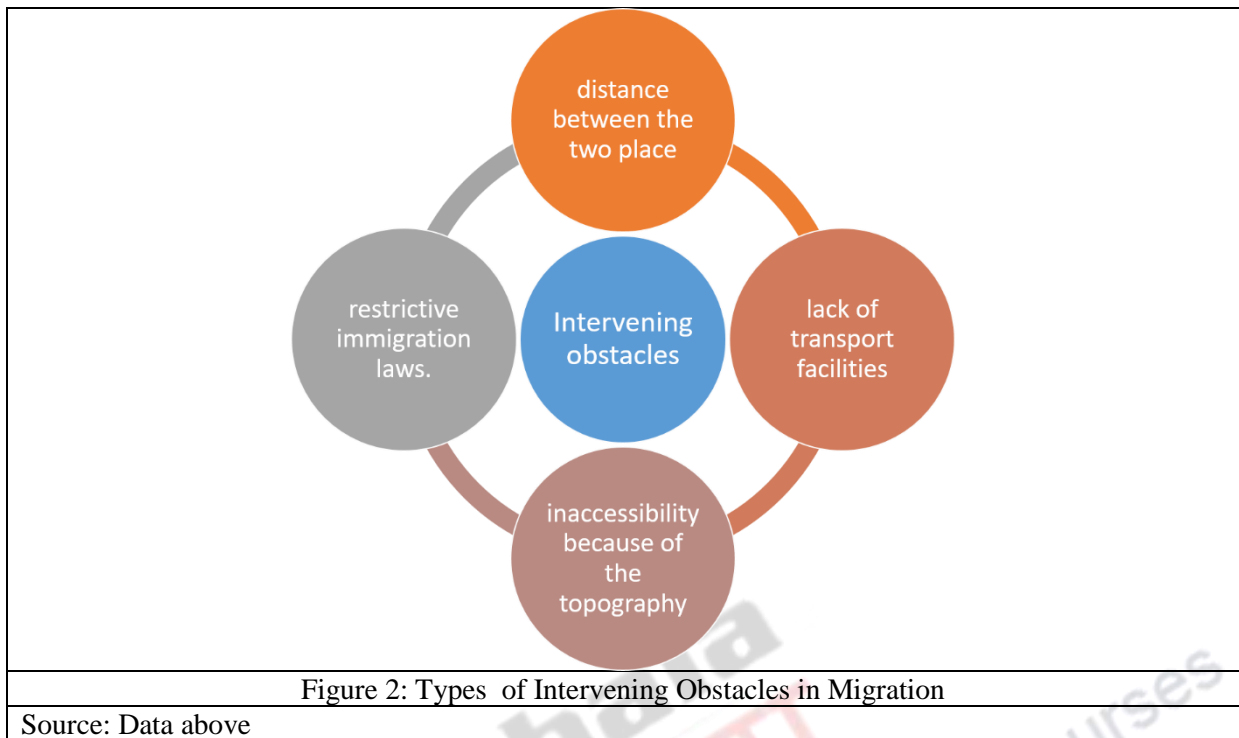
Lee elaborates all these four categories by pointing out that, in each area, there are numerous factors which act to drive away the people from the area, or to hold the people in the area or to attract the people to it. In this respect, there are significant differences between the factors associated with the area of origin and those associated with the area of destination. Migration may take place after both these are properly weighed. Usually, however, a person has a better and more realistic knowledge about the place of origin, while his knowledge about the place of destination is somewhat superficial and inexact.

Intervening obstacles also have to be overcome before migration finally takes place. These include distance and transportation. Technological advances, however, have lessened their importance in modern times.

Finally, the personal factors are of the utmost importance because, instead of the actual factors associated with the place of origin and/or destination, the individual's perception of these factors is found to influence the actual act of migration.⁸

We will examine the motivation for migration by considering how the relationship between origin and destination are affected by Push and Pull factors. Push factors exist at the point of origin and act to motivate out migration (a lack of economic opportunities, education, etc., which are mentioned earlier). On the other hand, pull factors are present at the destination, which attract migrants (work opportunities and availability of jobs, conducive educational facilities, religious or political freedom). Push and pull factors are paired, that is, migration can occur if the reason of emigrating (the push) has a solution in the pull by destination. In the context of labor migration, the push factors are often characterized by the lack of job opportunities in sending areas or countries; and the pull factors are the economic opportunities available in the receiving areas.

Migration flow between two places—origin and destination—also depends on the intervening obstacles. These are the distance between the two places, lack of transport facilities, inaccessibility because of the topography (rugged mountains and physical barriers), and restrictive immigration laws. The flow may not be strong in the presence of such intervening obstacles. The number of migrants is directly proportional to the extent of opportunities (the pull factors) available at the destination and inversely proportional to the intervening obstacles. The potential migrant may also consider the intervening obstacles as *intervening opportunities*, that is, the presence of other places between an origin and destination point to which one could migrate. Therefore, the volume of migration from one place to another is associated not only with the distance between places and number of people in the two places but also with the number of opportunities or obstacles between each place.

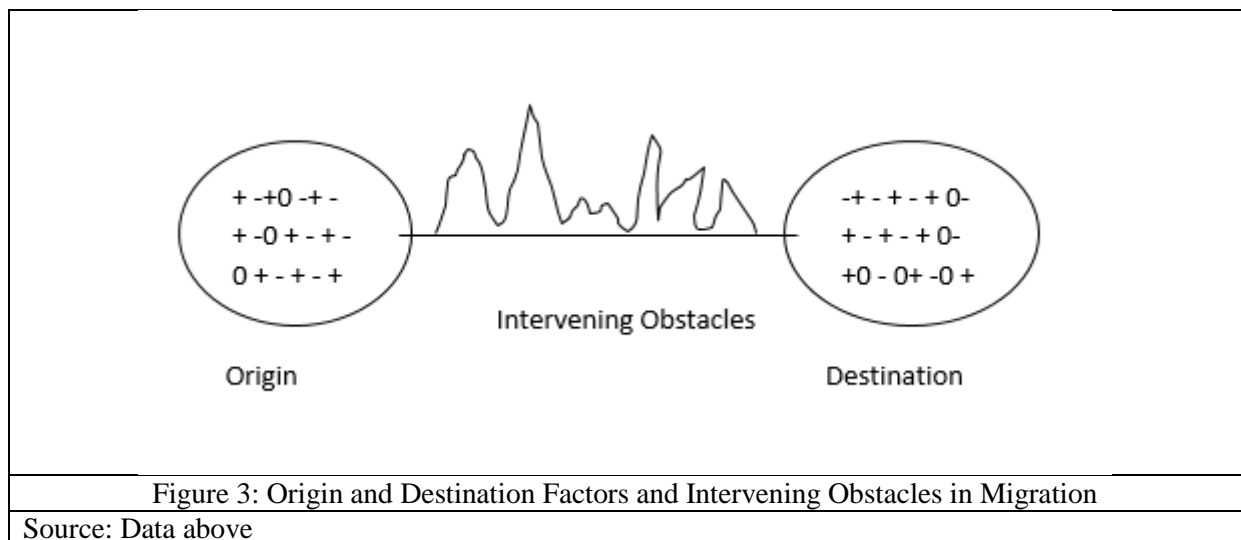


1.4. Empirical Model

There are multiple factors which act to hold people within an area, or attract people to it. There are also others which tend to repel them. These are shown in Figure 31.3 as (+) and (-) signs. There are others, shown as (0)'s, to which people are essentially indifferent. Some of these factors affect most people in much the same way, while others affect different people in different ways. Thus, a conducive climate is attractive and promotes migration, while an unfavorable climate is repulsive to nearly everyone. Likewise, a good educational infrastructure may be a (+) by a parent with young children to migrate to, but (-) for house owners without children. The set of (+'s) and (-'s) at both origin and destination are differently defined for every migrant or prospective migrant.

Potential migrants living in an area (i.e., the origin) have an immediate and often long-term acquaintance with the place, and are usually able to make considered and unhurried judgments regarding their locality. This is not necessarily true of the factors associated with the area of destination. Migrants' knowledge of the area of destination is rarely accurate and, indeed, some of the advantages and disadvantages of an area can only be perceived by living there. Hence, there are important differences between the factors associated with the area of origin and those associated with the area of destination. Therefore, to the migrants, there is always an element of ignorance, or even mystery, about the area of destination. Hence, the migrants will experience some uncertainty or apprehensions over their reception in a new area.

While migration results from an association of factors at the origin (push) and destination (pull), the intervening obstacles work to creating a balance in favour of movement by the migrant. The most studied among these obstacles are distance, physical barriers, and restrictive immigration laws.



Lee is, therefore, of the opinion that the decision to migrate is never completely rational and hence, it follows that it is always possible to come across exceptions to any type of generalization about migration. Within this conceptual framework, Lee attempted to formulate several hypotheses for the four types of factors associated with migration, incorporating the push and pull factors at both places of origin and destination.

These hypotheses cover the volume of migration, development of streams and counter-streams of migration, and characteristics of migrants to explain why some people migrate and others do not. These hypotheses are mentioned in the following sections:

1.4.1 Volume of Migration

- (1) The volume of migration within a given territory varies with the degree diversity of the areas included in that territory;
- (2) The volume of migration varies with the diversity of the people in that territory;
- (3) The volume of migration is related to the difficulty of the surmounting intervening variables. In other words, the more is the intervening obstacles the less is the volume of migration.;
- (4) The volume of migration fluctuates with the economy;
- (5) Unless severe checks are imposed, both volume and rate of migration tend to increase with time;
- (6) The volume and rate of migration vary with the state of progress in a country or area.

1.4.2 Streams and Counter-streams of Migration

- (1) Migration tends to take place largely within well-defined streams;
- (2) For every major migration stream, a counter-stream also develops;
- (3) The efficiency of the stream (ratio of stream to counter-stream or the net redistribution of population affected by the opposite flow) is high if the major factors in the development of a migration stream are minus factors at origin;
- (4) The efficiency of the stream and the counter-stream of migration tends to be low if the place of origin and the place of destination are similar;
- (5) The efficiency of migration streams will be high if the intervening obstacles are great;
- (6) The deficiency of the migration stream varies with economic conditions, being high in prosperous times and low in times of depression.

1.4.3 Characteristics of Migrants

- (1) Migration is selective. Due to differences in personal factors, the conditions at the places of origin and destination, and intervening obstacles are responded differently by different individuals. The

selectivity could be both positive and negative. It is positive when there is selection of migrants of high quality, and negative when the selection is of low quality.

- (2) Migrants respond primarily to the plus factors at destination term to be positively selected;
- (3) Migrants responding primarily to minus factors at origin tend to be negatively selected; or, where the minus factors are overwhelming for the entire population group, they may not be selected for migration; In other words, migrants responding to negative factors at origin tend to be negatively selected.
- (4) When all migrants are considered together, selection for migration tends to be bimodal;
- (5) The degree of positive selection increases with the difficulty posed by the intervening obstacles;
- (6) the heightened propensity to migrate at certain stages of the life-cycle is important in the selection of migrants;
- (7) The characteristics of migrants tend to be intermediate between the characteristics of the population of the place of origin and of the population of the place of destination.

Table 1. Push and pull factors for potential migration

A) Potential cost of leaving a country inhibiting factors	B) Potential benefits of leaving a country pull factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Transport to the new destination b. Uncertainty related to finding a new workplace, the problem of accommodation while looking for work. c. Cost of living while looking for work d. Necessity for upward social mobility(e.g., personal hygiene, education, clothing) e. Feeling of alienation f. Lack of respect and acceptance in an unfamiliar environment g. Necessity to know and use a new language h. Necessity to change previous manners of behavior, habits, linkages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Higher wages b. Opportunity for choosing a work place, consideration of personal preferences c. Improvement in living condition d. Opportunity for to improving level of education, a chance of self-fulfilment, rising the level of ambitions e. Potential for development, and education of children, f. Higher status and standard of living g. Attractive social life h. Favorable ethnic racial religious political and social conditions, political stability, lawful governance, democratic pluralism, equal economic opportunity.
C) potential cost of staying in a country push factors	D) potential benefits of staying in a country inhibiting factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Difficulty in finding work locally, non-availability of work corresponding to the aspiration of individuals b. Unsatisfactory social and political environment c. Violation of basic human rights d. Ethnic, social, political and religious inequalities e. International conflicts, internal military conflicts, political instability, natural disaster, unemployment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Inexpensive accommodation (or relatively stable housing) b. Certainty of food supply, relatively comfortable living standards c. Family support, good relationships with the family and social groups d. Proximity to community members e. Having a definite social status f. comfort resulting from the possibility to maintain native tongue, traditions, customs, ways of dressing

1.5. Criticism

Although the push-pull theory has been acknowledged as a path breaking model that explains migration at various periods and has stood the test of time, it has also faced criticism. Many scholars claim that it is difficult to determine which plus factors and which minus factors at both origin and destination are quantitatively the most important to different groups and classes of people. Moreover, the presence of intervening obstacles do not help demographers to identify which factors have major influence and which ones are minor factors. For this reason, Lee's theory offers little practical guidance for policy and decision-making in developing nations.

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