

The Continuing Population Rebound in Nonmetro America

Since 1990, nonmetro population growth rates have rebounded from the low levels of the 1980's. Three of every four rural counties have grown. Migration from metro areas and foreign countries has produced most of this growth—with a net gain of 1.8 million from 1990 to 1996. In contrast, natural increase from excess of births over deaths contributed less to these recent gains than it did in the past. Current trends are viewed as part of a process of deconcentration that extends back to 1970, with a pause in the 1980's caused by the economic difficulties of that time.

In the 1990's, rural America has been growing at the fastest rate since the 1970's. This rebound contrasts sharply with the outmigration and widespread population loss that had characterized most of rural America since World War I. Most of this recent nonmetro growth is due to migration. This is very different from historical trends, which in this century typically saw nonmetro growth occur only when high rural childbearing outpaced both deaths and outmigration. However, rural and urban fertility have recently converged, making growth differentials now much more dependent on migration. So far in the 1990's, far fewer people have left rural areas and a surprising number of urban residents have moved in. The result is the second largest nonmetro population gain since World War I. Only during the rural turnaround of the 1970's, which the rebound of the 1990's resembles, was the rural population gain greater.

The Rural Rebound Is Widespread

Nearly 75 percent of the 2,304 counties classified as nonmetro in 1993 gained population between 1990 and 1996 (table 1). In all, 680 more nonmetro counties gained population than in the 1980's. The estimated nonmetro population was 53.8 million in July 1996, a gain of nearly 3.0 mil-

lion (5.9 percent) since April 1990. In contrast, during the entire 1980's, nonmetro areas grew by just over 1.3 million. Thus, the nonmetro population gain between 1990 and 1996 is more than double that during all of the 1980's. The growth was still at a slower pace than that of the metro population (6.9 percent) between 1990 and 1996, but the gap was much narrower than during the 1980's. Year-to-year data indicate that the growth rate slowed somewhat between 1995 and 1996, but it remains to be seen whether this slowdown is temporary. Gains were prevalent in the Mountain West, Upper Great Lakes, Ozarks, parts of the South, and in rural areas of the Northeast. Widespread losses occurred only in the Great Plains, Western Corn Belt, and Mississippi Delta (fig. 1).

A comparison of growth patterns of the 1990's with those for the 1980's underscores three important points. First, the renewal of nonmetro growth in the 1990's is very widespread. Counties rebounding from loss in the 1980's to growth in the 1990's are numerous in all regions of the country. Many are on the periphery of existing concentrations of counties that grew consistently through the 1980's and early 1990's. Second, many counties that lost population during the 1990's are concentrated in areas of the country with long histories of population decline. Third, many counties that resumed growth in the 1990's after losing population in the 1980's either had long prior histories of growth or participated in the nonmetro turnaround of the 1970's.

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Table 1

Population change, net migration and natural increase by adjacency and metro status, 1980-90 and 1990-96

Substantial migration gains fueled widespread nonmetro growth during 1990-96

Item	Counties	Population change				Net migration			Natural increase		
		Initial population	Absolute change	Growth rate	Share growing	Absolute change	Growth rate	Share growing	Absolute change	Growth rate	Share growing
		Number	Thousands	Percent		Thousands	Percent		Thousands	Percent	
1980 to 1990:											
All nonmetro	2,305	49,578	1,320	2.7	45.1	-1,370	-2.8	27.3	2,690	5.4	89.6
Nonadjacent	1,298	22,612	134	0.6	36.4	-1,175	-5.2	20.7	1,309	5.8	87.0
Adjacent	1,007	26,966	1,186	4.4	56.3	-194	-0.7	35.8	1,382	5.1	92.9
Metro	836	176,965	20,848	11.8	81.0	6,575	3.7	57.7	14,271	8.1	7.7
Total	3,141	226,543	22,168	9.8	54.7	5,206	2.3	35.4	16,962	7.5	91.8
1990 to 1996:											
All nonmetro	2,304	50,820	2,995	5.9	74.6	1,829	3.6	66.5	1,166	2.3	73.3
Nonadjacent	1,297	22,669	1,117	4.9	65.9	593	2.6	58.4	524	2.3	66.7
Adjacent	1,007	28,151	1,878	6.7	85.7	1,236	4.4	77.0	642	2.3	81.8
Metro	837	197,893	13,570	6.9	89.4	3,627	1.8	73.7	9,943	5.0	96.1
Total	3,141	248,718	16,565	6.7	78.5	5,456	2.2	68.4	11,109	4.5	79.4

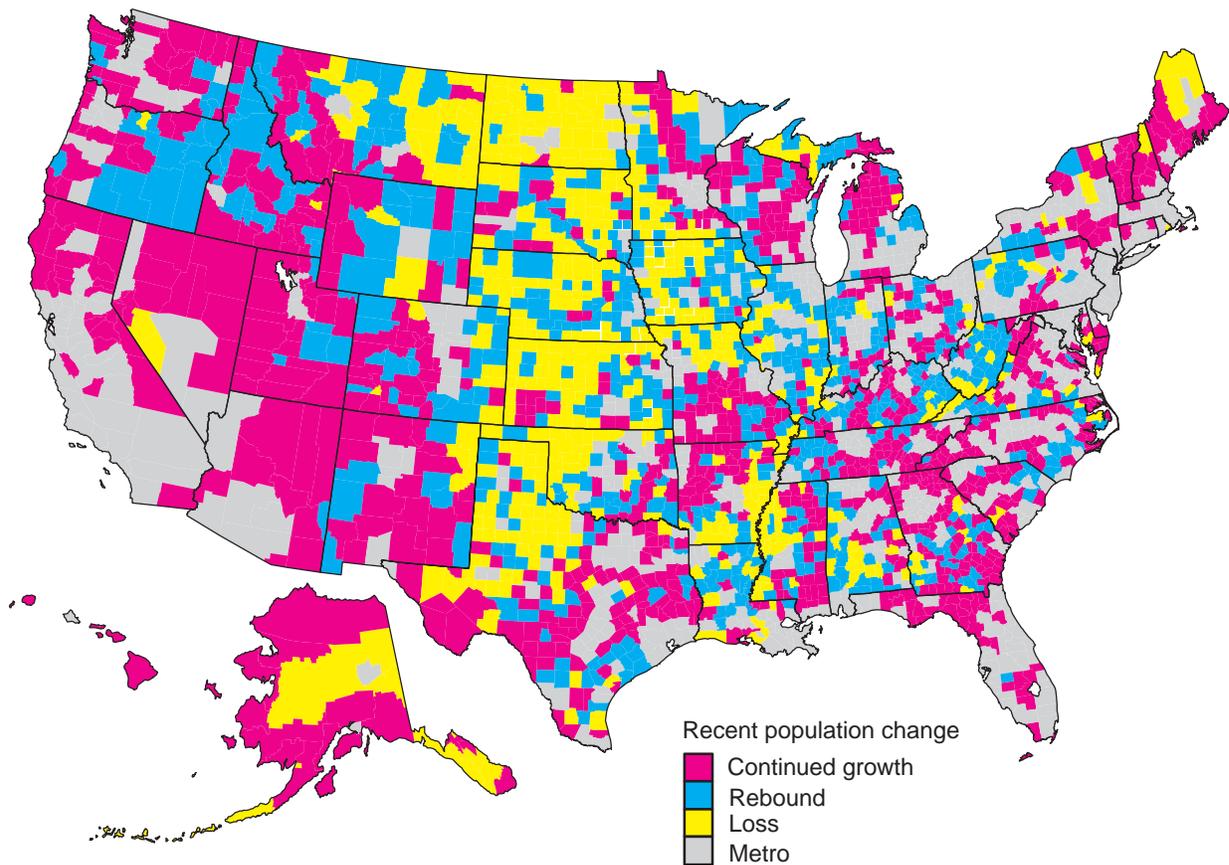
Note: 1993 metro status.

Source: Authors' calculations using Census Bureau data.

Figure 1

Recent nonmetro population change

More than 730 nonmetro counties rebounded from loss in the 1980's to growth in 1990-96



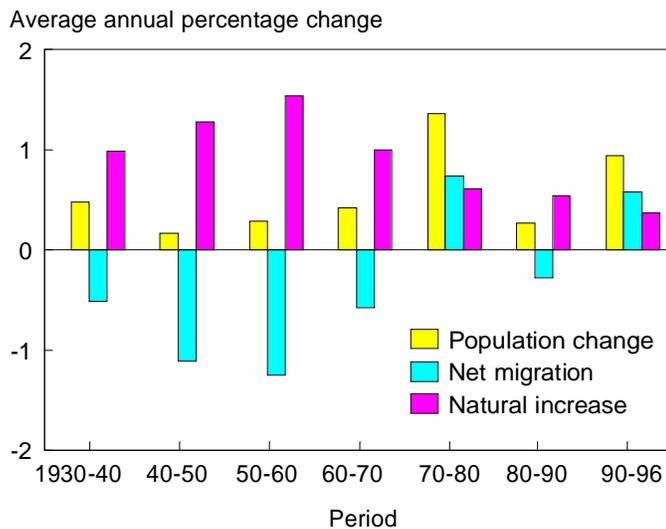
Source: Prepared by authors from Census Bureau data.

The striking contrast between the rural rebound of the 1990's and the demographic trends that predominated in nonmetro areas through most of this century is evident when longitudinal data are examined. From 1930 through 1970, population growth in what are now nonmetro areas was fueled entirely by natural increase (fig. 2). In each decade, migration losses diminished the population gain from the surplus of births, though the magnitude of the migration loss varied from decade to decade. In contrast, growth in the 1970's and 1990's was fueled by both net migration gains and natural increase. The anomalous position of the 1980's is reflected in the minimal migration losses and modest natural increase then. Though similar in form to historical trends, the 1980's are at most a weak echo of the massive outmigration and substantial natural increase of the 1940's and 1950's. In general, nonmetro growth in the 1990's to date is similar in pattern to that during the turnaround decade of the 1970's, though smaller in magnitude. Thus, the 1970's and 1990's represent a significant departure from the historical demographic trends in nonmetro areas of the United States.

Rebound Fueled by More Migration But Less Natural Increase

Migration gains accounted for 61 percent of the total estimated population increase between April 1990 and July 1996. Nonmetro areas had an estimated net inflow of 1.83 million people during the period (including immigrants), compared with a net outflow of 1.37 million during the 1980's. The nonmetro net migration percentage gain (3.6 percent) between 1990 and 1996 was twice that in metro

Figure 2
Nonmetro demographic change, 1930-96
The 1970's and 1990's are exceptions to the long-term trend of net outmigration from nonmetro areas



Source: Calculated by authors from Census Bureau and other data.

areas (1.8 percent). This is in sharp contrast with the 1980's, when metro areas had net immigration of 3.7 percent, while nonmetro areas had a net outflow of 2.8 percent. The only other recent period when nonmetro migration gains exceeded those in metro areas was during the population turnaround of the 1970's. Nonmetro migration gains were widely distributed in 1990-96, though they were least evident in the Great Plains, West Texas, and the Mississippi Delta (fig. 3).

Throughout much of this century, most nonmetro population growth stemmed from natural increase—a surplus of births over deaths. But it accounted for only 39 percent of such growth between April 1990 and July 1996. In all, births exceeded deaths by 1.17 million in nonmetro areas. On an annualized basis, nonmetro gains from natural increase were somewhat lower between 1990 and 1996 than they were during the 1980's. In contrast, the rate of natural increase accelerated in metro areas during the early 1990's. This represents a significant demographic shift in the United States. Traditionally, natural increase fueled all nonmetro growth, whereas metro areas grew through both natural increase and a significant influx of migrants from rural areas, together with immigration. However, during the 1970's and again during the 1990's, the bulk of metro growth came from natural increase, whereas the majority of the nonmetro gain was from net immigration.

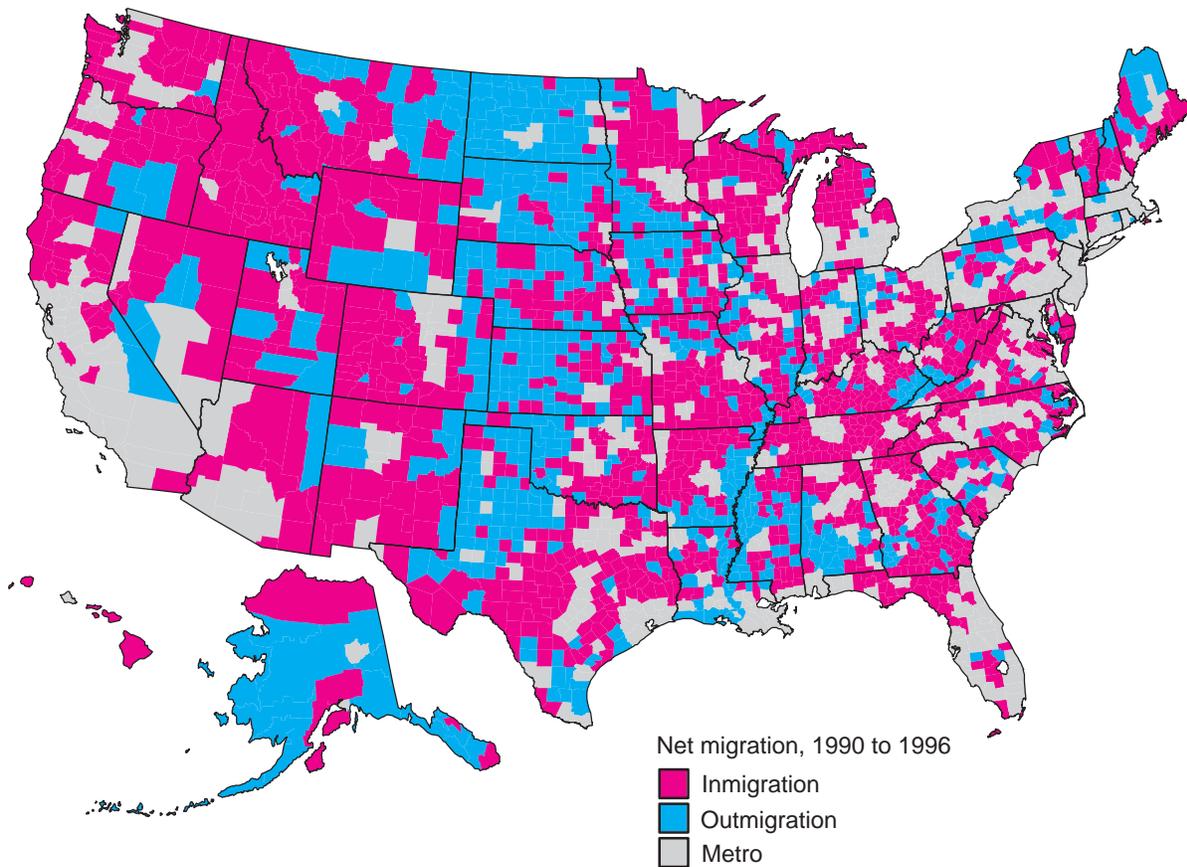
Diminishing natural increase in nonmetro areas is reflected in a sharp increase in the number of counties with more deaths than births. This condition was virtually unheard of in the United States prior to the 1950's, but began to occur in a few isolated areas thereafter. After rising to a peak in the early 1970's after the Baby Boom ended, natural decrease subsided rapidly in the late 1970's and the early 1980's. But in an extraordinary second wave of natural decrease, an estimated 615 nonmetro counties experienced natural decrease from 1990 to 1996, compared with just 240 in the 1980's (fig. 4). The incidence of natural decrease is now higher than at any point in history.

The accelerating occurrence of natural decrease in nonmetro America results from four interrelated phenomena. First, the age structure of many nonmetro areas has been distorted by decades of outmigration by young adults, coupled with the aging in place of older adults. Second, the traditionally higher fertility rates of nonmetro women have converged toward those of urban women. Third, rural women have traditionally borne their children earlier than their urban counterparts; thus, the current shift of the bulk of the Baby Boom from their prime childbearing years to middle age reduced nonmetro births sooner. Fourth, the extensive movement of retired people into many areas has added to the older population. These phenomena have combined to diminish the number of nonmetro births while increasing deaths among the aging residents in many rural

Figure 3

Nonmetro net migration, 1990-96

Two-thirds of nonmetro counties gained from migration in 1990-96, compared with less than a fourth in the 1980's



Source: Prepared by authors from Census Bureau data.

areas. Thus, the natural increase that has traditionally fueled most nonmetro growth has diminished sharply in recent years. A continuation of this trend for an extended period would represent a fundamental turning point in the demographic processes underlying population growth in rural America. How likely this trend is to continue remains in doubt. Recent evidence indicates that the number of older people in many rural areas has peaked. If this is correct, it suggests that counties with long histories of natural decrease may eventually reach a new demographic equilibrium with births and deaths again in balance. Whatever the course of natural decrease, rural growth will probably not be fueled by a substantial excess of births over deaths as it was in the past.

Growth Varies by Location and County Type

Nonmetro counties near a metro center have been more likely than more remote counties to be growing in the 1990's. More than 85 percent of these adjacent counties gained pop-

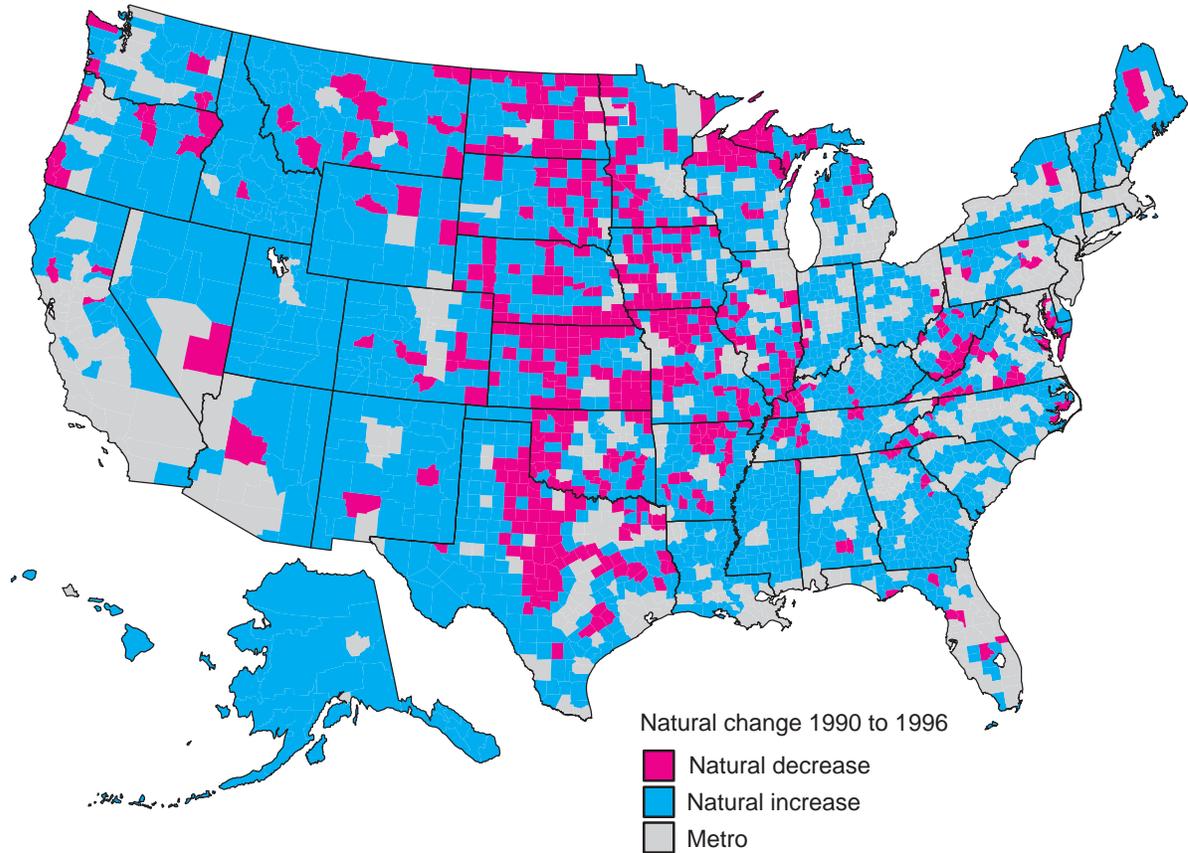
ulation between 1990 and 1996, and 77 percent had net immigration (table 1). In fact, the net migration gain in adjacent nonmetro counties (4.4 percent) exceeded that in metro areas (1.8 percent) by a substantial margin during 1990-96. Even among more remote nonmetro counties, recent population gains were significantly greater than during the 1980's (table 1). Growth occurred in 66 percent of counties not adjacent to metro areas in the early 1990's, compared with 36 percent during the 1980's. Such nonadjacent counties had net immigration (2.6 percent) between 1990 and 1996, compared with a net loss (-5.2 percent) in the 1980's.

Rural destinations for retirement-age migrants and recreation areas are among the fastest-growing counties in the 1990's. All 190 nonmetro retirement-destination counties gained population and 99 percent had net immigration between 1990 and 1996 (table 2). Such areas are in the Sunbelt, coastal regions, parts of the West, and in the Upper Great Lakes. Population and migration gains were

Figure 4

Nonmetro natural population change, 1990-96

More than 600 nonmetro counties had more deaths than births between 1990 and 1996



Source: Prepared by authors from Census Bureau data.

also the rule in the 285 nonmetro recreational counties we identified (93 percent had growth and 88 percent had net immigration). Such counties were prominent growth nodes during the 1970's and 1980's, and this trend has persisted in the 1990's. Many recreational counties are also retirement destinations because the amenities, temperate climate, and scenic advantages that attract vacationers and seasonal residents also appeal to retirees. In all, the 101 counties that fall into both destination categories are growing faster than any other identifiable group, with the bulk of such growth attributable to net immigration.

Counties where much of the land is federally owned also had much growth in the early 1990's. Most of these counties are in the West and many have experienced significant net immigration in recent years, with migrants attracted by the scenic and recreational amenities. Nonmetro population gains were also widespread in manufacturing and government-dependent counties, though the gains were smaller than those in recreational and retirement

counties. Growth in such counties was more evenly balanced between natural increase and net immigration. Other county types with high growth rates fueled by net immigration include those with a large proportion of their work force commuting to jobs in other counties and those with economies dominated by service-sector jobs.

Farming and mining-dependent counties have been the least likely to gain population during the 1990's. Only 50 percent of the farming-dependent group gained population and only 47 percent had net immigration. Nearly half had more deaths than births. Population gains were only slightly more widespread in mining counties, and here too, the magnitude of the gains was quite small. Many mining areas had net outmigration as well. The below-average population gains and widespread outmigration from mining- and farming-dependent counties during the 1990's represent a continuation of the trends of the 1980's. However, even among these counties, the trends moderated in the 1990's compared with the 1980's,

Table 2

Nonmetro population change, migration, and natural increase by county type, 1990-96*Nonmetro growth was widespread but varied by type of county*

County type	Counties	Population change		Net migration		Natural increase	
		Growth rate	Share growing	Growth rate	Share growing	Growth rate	Share growing
	Number	Percent					
Retirement	190	16.3	100	14.6	99	1.7	63
Federal lands	269	14.2	95	10.3	86	3.8	84
Recreational	285	11.2	93	8.7	88	2.5	76
Manufacturing	506	5.2	87	3.0	75	2.2	88
Commuting	381	8.4	90	6.3	85	2.1	83
Government	242	6.1	87	2.0	76	4.2	83
Service	323	8.4	83	6.5	76	2.0	72
Nonspecialized	484	6.2	81	4.5	75	1.7	73
Transfer	381	5.7	76	4.3	69	1.4	65
Poverty	535	4.9	74	1.8	57	3.1	82
Mining	146	2.8	64	0.2	52	2.6	83
Low-density	407	6.9	54	3.4	45	3.6	64
Farming	556	4.0	50	2.1	47	1.8	54
Total nonmetro	2,304	5.9	75	3.6	66	2.3	73

Notes: 1993 metro definition. Recreational counties defined by authors. Low-density counties contain fewer than six persons per square mile in 1990. All other types defined by ERS.

Source: Authors' calculations from Census Bureau data.

when population decline and migration losses were much more prevalent. Counties with histories of persistent poverty have also had low growth rates during the 1990's to date, and, as in the case of the mining and farming counties, natural increase accounted for most of the growth.

Inmigration Plus Natural Increase the Most Common Combination

The mix of natural increase and migration in the 1990's also contrasts with historical trends. For example, three-eighths of the nonmetro counties that lost population during the 1990's did so through both natural decrease and net outmigration (fig. 5). Such a combination was rare prior to 1970, but it has become more common as natural decrease has become more prevalent. In most cases, this pattern emanates from decades of young adult outmigration, exacerbated more recently by low rural fertility rates and the passing of the Baby Boom from their prime childbearing years.

An even more unlikely historical combination is the simultaneous occurrence of natural decrease and net inmigration. Yet, between 1990 and 1996, it occurred in 391 counties. More than 13 percent of the counties that lost population did so because net inmigration was insufficient to offset natural decrease. On the other hand, 18 percent of the growing counties gained population only

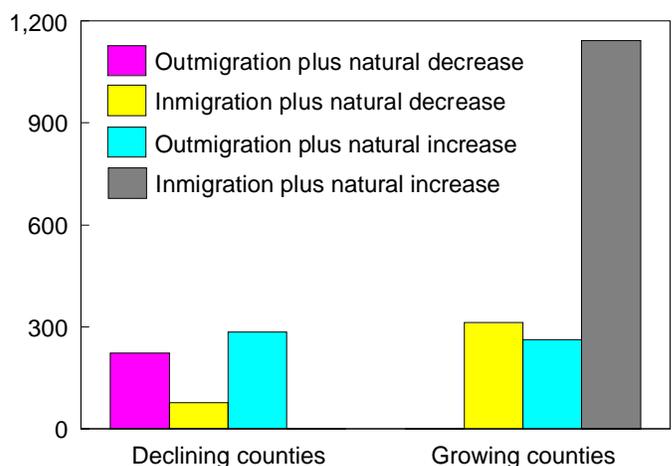
because inmigration was more than enough to offset losses from natural decrease. Some of these counties are retirement and recreational areas that attract streams of

Figure 5

Patterns of nonmetro population change, 1990-96

A large proportion of growing counties benefit from both inmigration and natural increase

Number of counties



Source: Calculated by authors from Census Bureau data.

Data and Procedures

Most of the demographic information used here is from the Federal-State Cooperative population estimates series developed jointly by the U.S. Bureau of the Census and the States. Additional data are from the U.S. decennial censuses of population. A typology used to classify counties by economic function was developed by the Economic Research Service. We developed the recreational specialty variable. Net migration is calculated by subtracting natural increase from the population change during the appropriate time period.

Counties are the appropriate unit of analysis because they have historically stable boundaries and are a basic unit for reporting fertility, mortality, and census data. Counties are reclassified from time to time as new metro areas are formed or fringe counties are added to or deleted from existing areas. Such metro reclassification complicates efforts to compare trends over time. To minimize such complications, the 1993 metro classification is used here to identify counties as metro or nonmetro. This definition results in somewhat greater nonmetro losses during the 1980's and smaller nonmetro gains during the 1990's than would have been the case had an earlier metro definition been used.

older migrants who contribute to the mortality but not to the fertility of the area.

Natural increase combined with net outmigration in 547 counties between 1990 and 1996 and predominated in many rural areas throughout most of this century. In such counties, whether the population grows or declines in a given period depends on whether the gain from natural increase is sufficient to offset net outmigration. Though far less common than it once was, this combination remains the most typical one for declining areas in the 1990's.

Between 1990 and 1996, a slight majority of counties (51 percent) combined natural increase with net immigration. In contrast, comparatively few nonmetro counties had this combination in the 1980's. In fact, the only other period since World War I when growth from both factors was widespread in nonmetro areas was during the turnaround of the 1970's.

Examples of Rebounding Counties

The following examples of counties that have been growing in population through immigration since 1990 after decline in the 1980's will illustrate some of the sources of demographic recovery, such as agribusiness, natural amenities and tourism, factories, prisons, intercounty commuting, retirement, and urban flight.

Mercer and Sullivan Counties, MO, which adjoin one another, are located in the southern Corn Belt, where productivity is below that of the best midwestern farming areas. Here, the growth of nonfarm job opportunities has never been enough to offset the decline in farm employment. The result has been an extraordinarily prolonged downward trend in population. Mercer County reached a peak of 14,700 residents in 1900 and then decreased in each subsequent census to a low of 3,700 in 1990—a decline of 75 percent. Sullivan County followed the same pattern, with a drop from 15,200 in 1900 to 6,300 in 1990, a loss of 58 percent. Their history is an extraordinary example of how

very drawn out the consequences of successive waves of labor-reducing agricultural change can be.

After 1991, however, their populations began to rise. By July 1996, Mercer had grown 7.6 percent in just 6 years, while Sullivan had recovered by 5.1 percent. Yet their populations were so advanced in age by 1990 that both counties were still regularly having more deaths than births. All recent growth has come from net inmovement of people that has outweighed the excess of deaths. The source of the growth is agribusiness. An entrepreneur developed a large new hog-raising and pork-processing business. The hogs are produced in very large numbers in confinement-feeding operations requiring many workers. The headquarters of the firm is in Mercer County, with the packing plant in Sullivan County, and both counties have had an influx of labor force.

Chaffee County, CO, and Grand County, UT, are examples of Western counties whose former heavy dependence on mining employment led to population loss in the 1980's, when the demand for most metals fell. Hundreds of Chaffee residents commuted to a neighboring county, which was the site of a major molybdenum mine that closed. With the loss of these jobs, the population fell by 4.1 percent from 1980 to 1990. From 1990 to 1996, however, the population level rose by 15.7 percent, all from immigration. The county, with a scenic location in the Rockies, exemplifies a number of Western counties that are attracting people who are drawn to their natural beauty and amenities and dissatisfied with urban conditions. In Chaffee County, newcomers have started businesses, bought out older proprietors, or brought in businesses, including small-scale manufacturing. Retirees are present as well. Many newcomers have come from the Front Range (stretching from Fort Collins through Denver to Pueblo) and others from out of State.

In Grand County, UT, the loss of uranium mining brought a precipitous decline of nearly a fifth of the population (19.7 percent) in the 1980's. The county government decided to

promote the area for tourism, for it contains Arches National Park and large areas suitable for mountain biking. Their efforts were more successful than they had dreamed—perhaps more so than they had wished—and by 1996 the population had risen by 18.2 percent as the area was publicized and became a vacation destination.

A more prosaic case is that of Dickinson County, KS. The presence of a service-center town of 6,000 people (Abilene) and location on an interstate highway did not prevent this Great Plains farming county from declining by 6.0 percent during 1980-90, when many years were marked by agricultural crisis and consolidation. In the first 6 years of the 1990's, though, the county grew by 4.7 percent, despite no surplus of births over deaths. The key event has been the opening of a large national-brand candy factory, employing about 600 workers. In addition, construction of residential housing for older people has brought in retirees.

A common means of job development in rural and small-town areas over the last 10 years has been the acquisition of prisons. Communities desperate for steady, decently paid jobs have not hesitated to bid for them. More than 50 nonmetro counties that have rebounded from population loss in the 1980's to gain in the 1990's have done so in part or in whole by obtaining prisons.

An example from the old Cotton Belt is Lake County, TN. Lake County is a Delta farming area whose census population peaked in 1950 not long after the mechanization of cotton farming began. From then until 1990, population loss was continuous, with a 40-percent decline. A shift into manufacturing—dominated by low-wage textile work—cushioned the fall but did not end it. Since 1992, however, when a State prison with over 1,000 inmates and 350 workers opened, the loss has ended, with a growth of 16.9 percent by 1996. For census purposes, prison inmates are counted as residents of a county. This type of population growth may seem somewhat artificial, since the prisoners are not in the community, but the jobs have a stabilizing effect.

A frequent source of new population increase is the greater propensity now for people to commute across county lines to work. In each census since 1960, when commuting data were first obtained, cross-county job commuting has grown. Hundreds of nonmetro counties adjoin metro areas, and some are always in the process of becoming transformed into metro fringe counties. But many other areas that lie yet another tier of counties beyond the metro border are getting new commuter residents, and the same residential deconcentration is going on around nonmetro job centers. Local officials interviewed during the preparation of this article often cited as a growth factor an influx of commuters wanting to live in a smaller scale community while retaining their well-paying urban jobs.

For instance, Wolfe County, KY, is a completely rural Appalachian area that lies three counties distant from Lexington, the nearest metro center. Population fell by 2.9 percent in the 1980's as coal mining jobs there and in neighboring counties ended. But the county benefits from a four-lane limited-access highway that permits residents to work in Lexington or even go to newer highly desired auto plant jobs yet another county distant. Wolfe County also attracts retired people, and so has once again grown (13.2 percent during 1990-96), despite an exceptionally high poverty rate of 44 percent at the last census that one might think would deter new residents.

In the West, population gains are reported in a number of counties without accompanying job growth or commuting access to employment centers. These cases exemplify the nonpecuniary, quality-of-life motives that seem to characterize much recent nonmetro population increase, in a manner similar to the 1970's (See *RDP*, vol. 14, no. 2). Idaho and Lewis Counties, ID, are examples. Timber and agriculture dependence led to 1980's population losses of 6.7 and 14.6 percent respectively in these adjacent areas, which in 1990-96 reversed to growth of 8.4 and 13.8 percent. People of mostly urban background, who want open space and relish the low level of local government regulation, are described as moving into the countryside from other States, with land being subdivided for this purpose.

What Does the Rebound Suggest About the Future of Rural America?

Since 1990, population growth rates in nonmetro areas have rebounded from the minimal levels of the 1980's. In all, three-fourths of nonmetro counties are growing and two-thirds are experiencing net immigration. Although rural growth rates are slightly lower than those in metro areas, the gap between the relative growth rates is quite small. The higher growth rates in metro areas stem from higher rates of natural increase there. In contrast, nonmetro natural increase is lagging far below historical levels. Overall, the growth patterns in nonmetro America during the early 1990's resemble the patterns of the turnaround of the 1970's more than those of any other period. At the very least, these findings suggest that the renewed growth in nonmetro areas first evident in the 1970's was not just a short-term phenomenon.

Nonmetro and metro areas may be entering a period of relative equilibrium where short-term demographic shifts are sensitive to "period effects" resulting from changes in the economic, political, and social climate. Such "period effects" include the protracted economic recession of the 1980's, which hurt nonmetro areas more than urban areas. In addition, agricultural areas were hit hard by the long farm financial crisis of 1980-86 and nonmetro manufacturing faced increased competitive pressure from offshore firms during the 1980's. All these factors slowed nonmetro

growth through most of the 1980's. Only late in the decade, as the differential impact of these periodic factors began to subside, did nonmetro growth rates begin to rise again. No such pronounced period effects are evident in the 1990's. The milder recession of the early 1990's seemed more oriented to urban-based white-collar and defense jobs, with the result that metro unemployment rates rose above those in nonmetro America. Presumably, this provided less incentive for rural and small-town people to move away (rural outmovement is known to have dropped), and stimulated some net inmovement from the metro centers. However, a net influx from the cities has continued since the end of that recession.

Our findings on the rural rebound of the 1990's cast doubt on the argument that the turnaround of the 1970's was a function of unique factors, whereas the redistributive patterns of the 1980's represent a reversion to historical patterns. The nonmetro demographic trends of the 1980's were neither a repeat of the nonmetro turnaround of the 1970's nor a reversion to the patterns of the 1950's. It is more likely that the diminished nonmetro gains of the 1980's were just a pause—due to period effects—in the growth of nonmetro areas through the combination of net immigration and modest natural increase that began during the 1970's.

The overall pattern of population change in nonmetro areas between 1970 and 1996 appears most consistent with a process of selective deconcentration. Over time, such deconcentration will result in the growth of smaller places as spatial constraints on the location of work and residence diminish because of improvements in the transportation and communication systems. Diminished spatial constraints allow some individuals to exercise longstanding preferences for lower density, higher amenity areas. Such deconcentration forces have been and are likely to continue to be selective. For example, growth has been quite common in recreational and retirement areas, beyond the metro periphery and in diversifying manufacturing, commuting, and service counties. Other parts of nonmetro America are likely to continue to lose population because they remain linked to extractive industries which, despite a century of adjustment in which capital and technology replaced labor, continue to shed jobs and consolidate. Such extractive industries are also subject to significant cyclical swings resulting from world economic and political condi-

tions, as well as climate, environmental, and energy issues. The deconcentration slowdown during the 1980's reminds us that such trends seldom proceed at an even pace.

Predicting future nonmetro population redistribution is perilous given the fluidity of the demographic shifts in the United States during the past several decades. This reflects the complexity of the forces affecting rural America in the 1990's. Future nonmetro demographic trends are likely to be more volatile than in the past. Recent reductions in nonmetro fertility rates and a changing age structure are likely to diminish the substantial contribution that natural increase has traditionally made to nonmetro population gains. This makes future nonmetro growth increasingly dependent on net migration, which is extremely sensitive to external factors. And, as the people and institutions of nonmetro America approach the new century, such factors and their future will be increasingly linked to national and global economic, political, and social forces.

For Further Reading . . .

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