



Rewriting the Rural Narrative

Speak softly and carry statistics

Benjamin Winchester
Senior Research Fellow
Extension Center for Community Vitality

People keep leaving rural America. According to U.S. Census figures from 2010, just 16% of the country's population lives in rural areas, down from 20% in 2000, and down dramatically from 72% about a hundred years ago. Behind the numbers are stories, both of the people who left their rural homes and the small percentage of Americans who still live in rural areas. There are stories, too, of people who've left for myriad reasons. We want to know those stories and tell.

Sociologists Patrick Carr and Maria Kefalas spent two years in a small town in Iowa trying to find out why so many young people are leaving rural America. What they found was that many small towns are playing a role in their own demise, by pushing the best and brightest to leave and under-investing in those who stay.

From Breadbasket to Basket Case

In the 1980s, rural Americans faced fewer teen births and lower divorce rates than their urban counterparts. Now, their positions have flipped entirely.

Rural Minnesota is in trouble. Young people are fleeing the farms and forests of the Gopher State, and the residents left there are aging. And they're dying. While population is growing in the Twin Cities area, especially the suburbs

We became kind of the poster child for the war on poverty, and any time somebody wanted to do a story about poor people, we were the first stop.



Fighting for an American Countryside

The Decline of Rural Minnesota

THU SEP 20, 2012 AT 09:04 PM PDT

The slow, agonizing death of the small
US town

HOLLOWING OUT THE MIDDLE

*The Rural Brain Drain and
What It Means for America*

When death comes to a small town, the school is usually the last thing to go. A place can lose its bank, its tavern, its grocery store, its shoe shop. But when the school closes, you might as well put a fork in it.

Survival of Rural America

VICTORIES AND BITTER HARVESTS



Richard E. Wood



THE NARRATIVE

- There's a brain drain
 - We live in the middle of nowhere
 - We are a sleepy town
 - Everyone knows one another
 - Nobody lock their doors
-
- What we had
 - What we don't have
 - What we wish we had
 - What we could have had...



Deficit Approach

Fixing things that can't or shouldn't be fixed



NO MORE ANECDATA!

anecdota (noun). *information which is presented as if it is based on serious research but is in fact based on what someone thinks is true*

1900-1950

- Mechanization of agriculture
- Roads and transportation
- Educational achievement and population loss
- Church closings (Delafield)



1950+

- Main street restructuring
- School consolidations
- Hospitals closings



The rural idyll



Iron Range town fighting for more than the mail

Calumet challenges the decision to close its post office, which is a social hub for its residents.

By KEVIN DIAZ Star Tribune | MAY 5, 2012 — 9:50PM



The Media Idyll Persists

Who are you going to find in a small town when you travel to small towns in morning and afternoon?

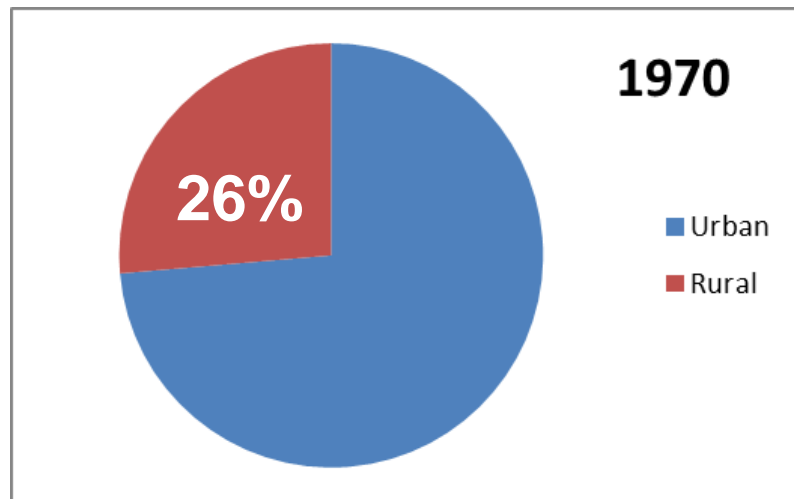
RURAL IS CHANGING, NOT DYING

- Yes, things are changing
- Small towns are microcosms of globalization
 - Many of these changes impact rural and urban areas alike (not distinctly rural)
 - Yet more apparent in rural places
- Survived massive restructuring of social and economic life
- Research base does NOT support notion that if XXXX closes, the town dies
 - In Minnesota only 3 towns have dissolved in past 50 years

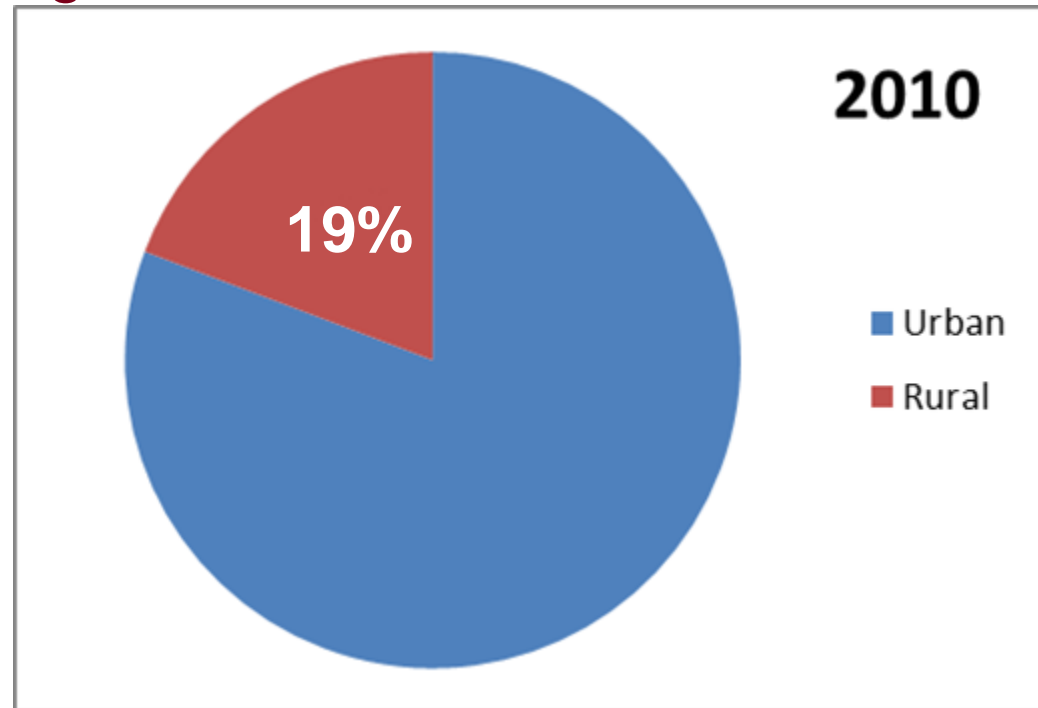


Rural Rebound

- Since 1970, rural population increased by 11%
 - Relative percentage living rural decreased



203,211,926
(53.6m rural)



308,745,538
(59.5m rural)



Rural Data

Rural Populations Continue to Shrink

[Is Rural America Struggling?](#) provides an excellent summary of the economic and population issues facing rural America. Key quote:

... rural America's job growth is stagnant and the population is in decline. In fact, it's the first time such a population decline has been recorded in the nation's rural counties.

Population figures reduced by formerly rural places now designated as urban (since 1974)

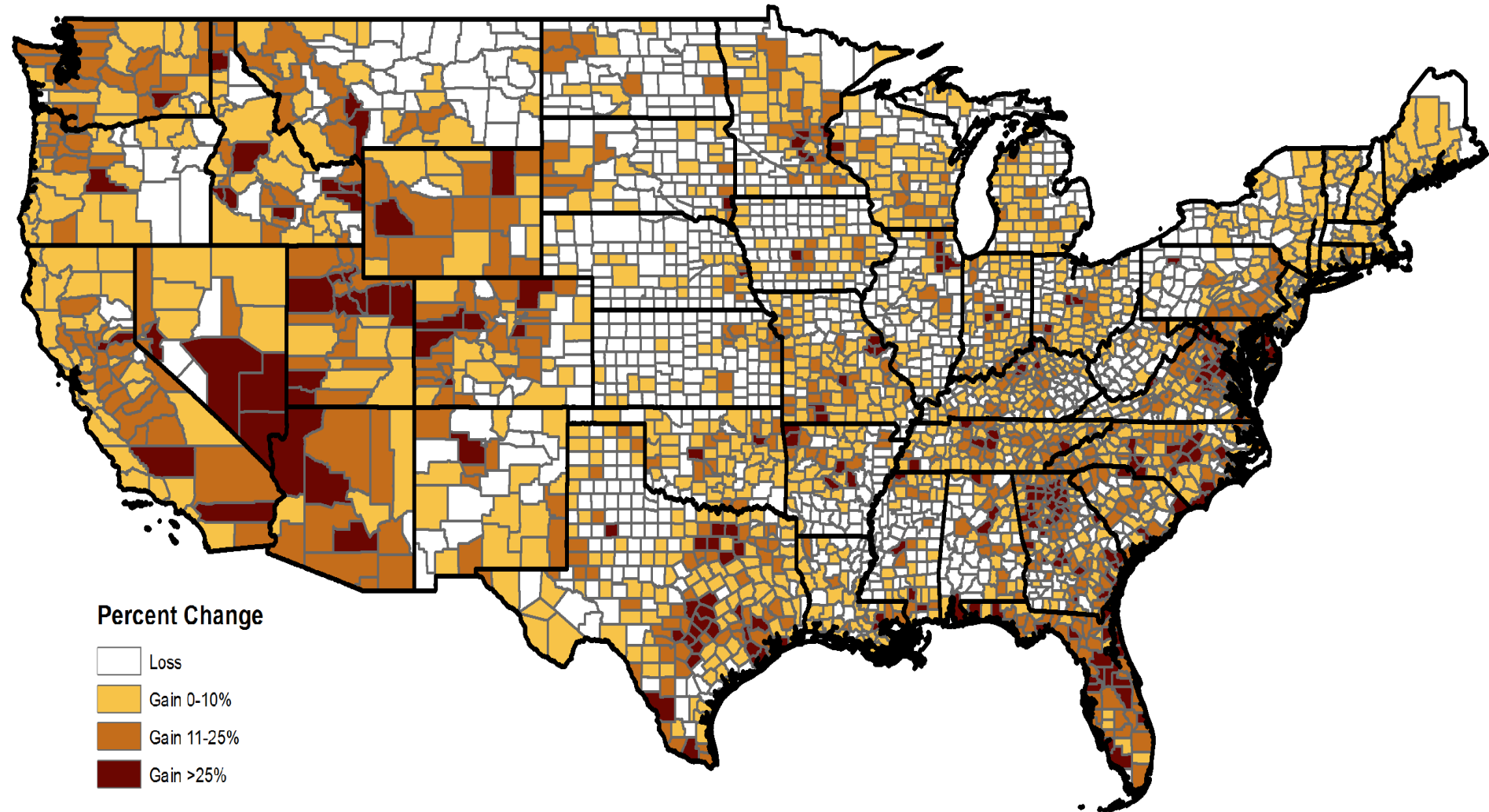
- Iowa 473,312
- Kansas (12 counties, 417k residents reclassified – 15%)
- Minnesota 352,224
- Nebraska 170,855
- North Dakota 181,639
- South Dakota 207,790

Urban areas have grown WIDER, not TALLER

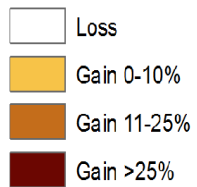


Total Population Infatuation

2000-2010



Percent Change



Total Population Infatuation

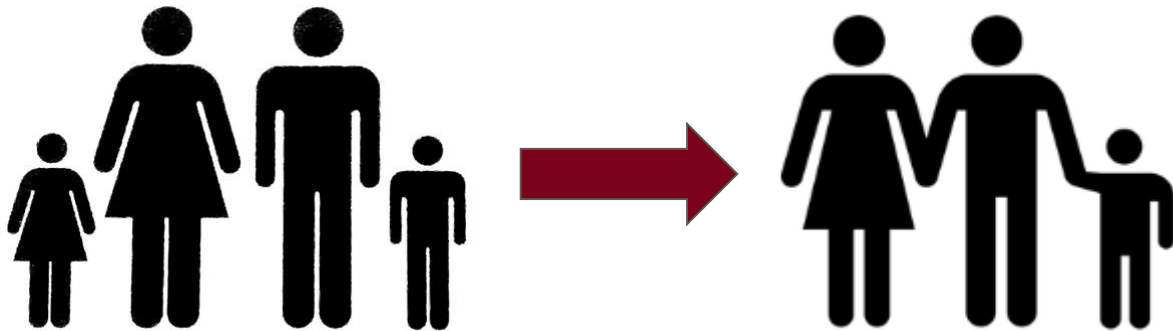
Wait, what?

Comparison Historical Population from 1960 to 2010

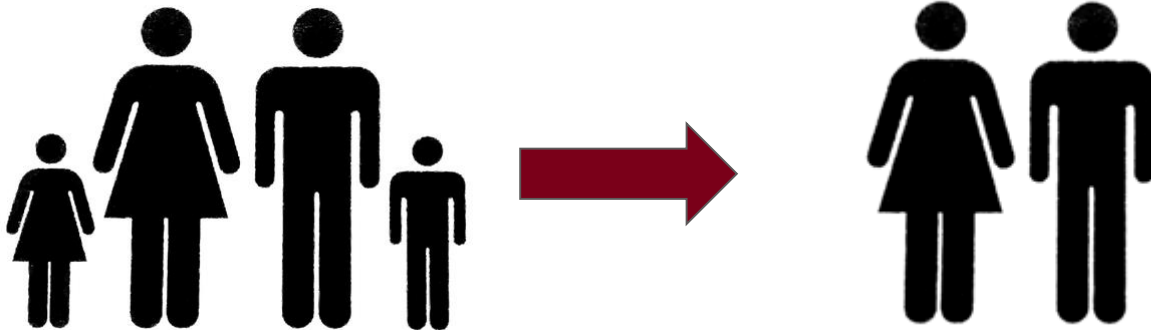
Community	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	% Change
UMVRDC Region	69,063	61,806	59,822	50,845	50,011	45,190	-34.57%
Households	19,428	19,367	22,026	20,088	19,846	20,039	3.14%
Big Stone County	8,954	7,941	7,716	6,285	5,820	5,269	-41.15%
Chippewa County	16,320	15,109	14,941	13,228	13,088	12,441	-23.77%
Lac qui Parle County	13,330	11,164	10,592	8,924	8,067	7,259	-45.54%
Swift County	14,936	13,177	12,920	10,724	11,956	9,783	-34.50%
Yellow Medicine County	15,523	14,415	13,653	11,684	11,080	10,438	-32.76%

Source: US Census Bureau





Smaller Household
Size



Kids graduate

Population: -2

Households: NC



Spouse passes

Population: -1

Households: NC



Single senior passes

Population: -1

Households: NC



Mobility



Households Moving Between 1995 and 1999:

44% Iowa

46% Kansas

Minnesota

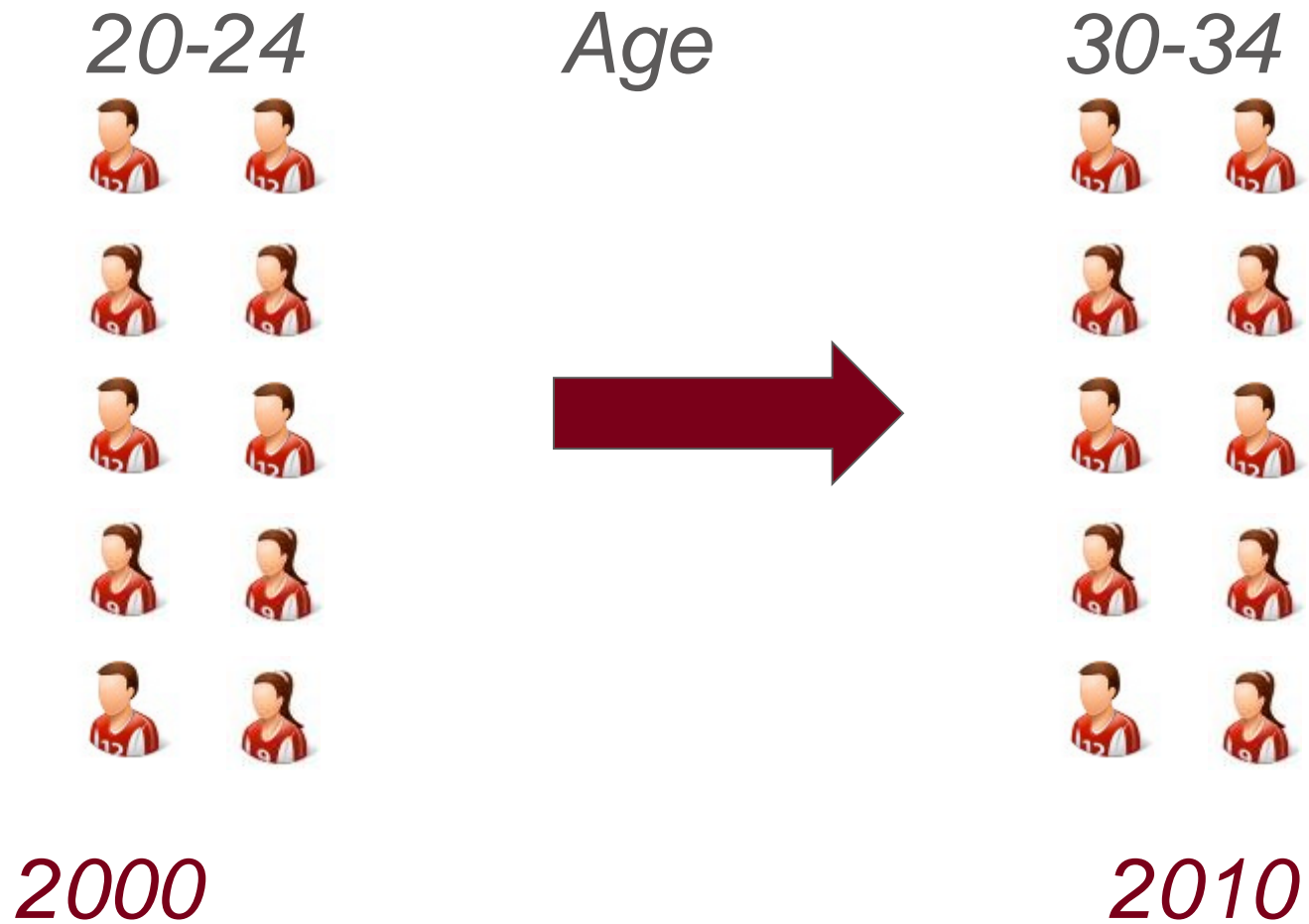
North Dakota

Wisconsin

47% Nebraska

49% United States

IF NOBODY EVEN MOVED IN OR OUT...

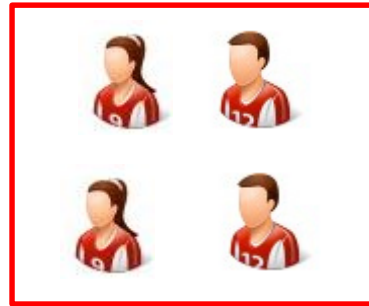


BUT IN REALITY PEOPLE DO MOVE...

Age 20-24



Moving out
- 4



Moving in
+ 6



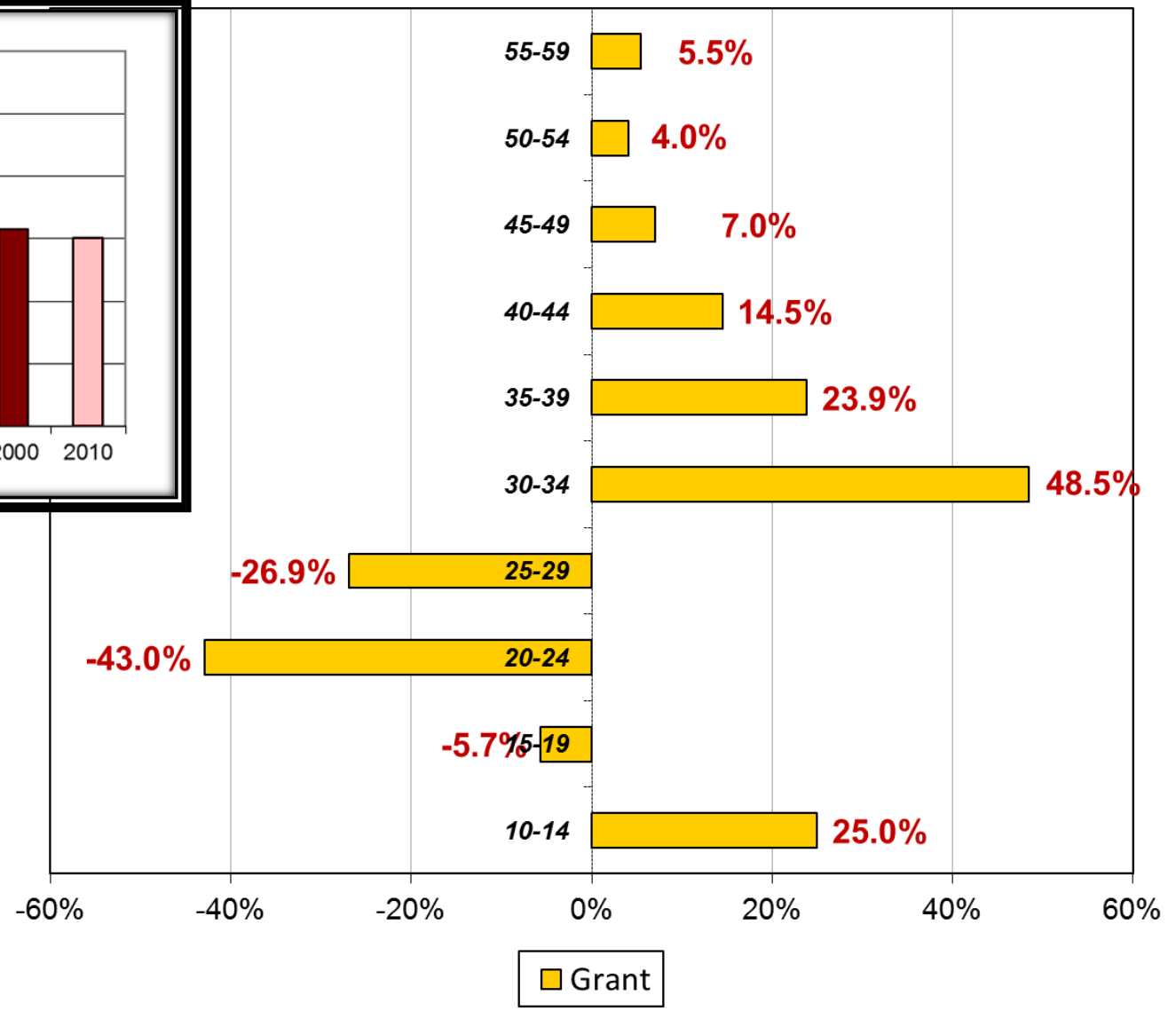
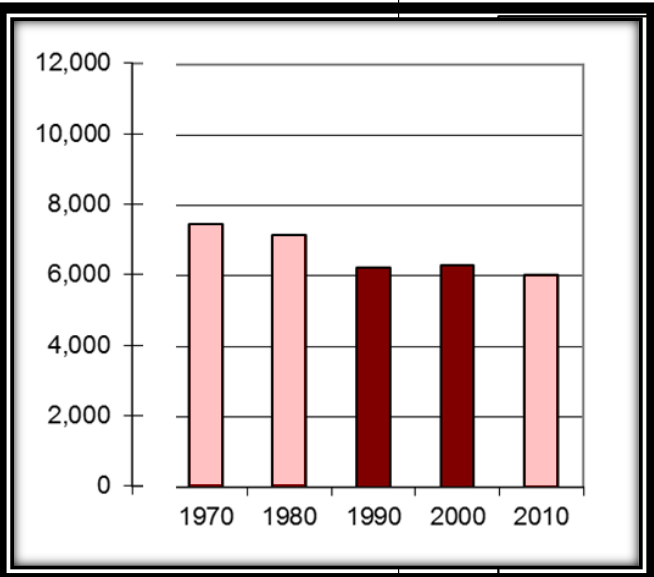
Age 30-34



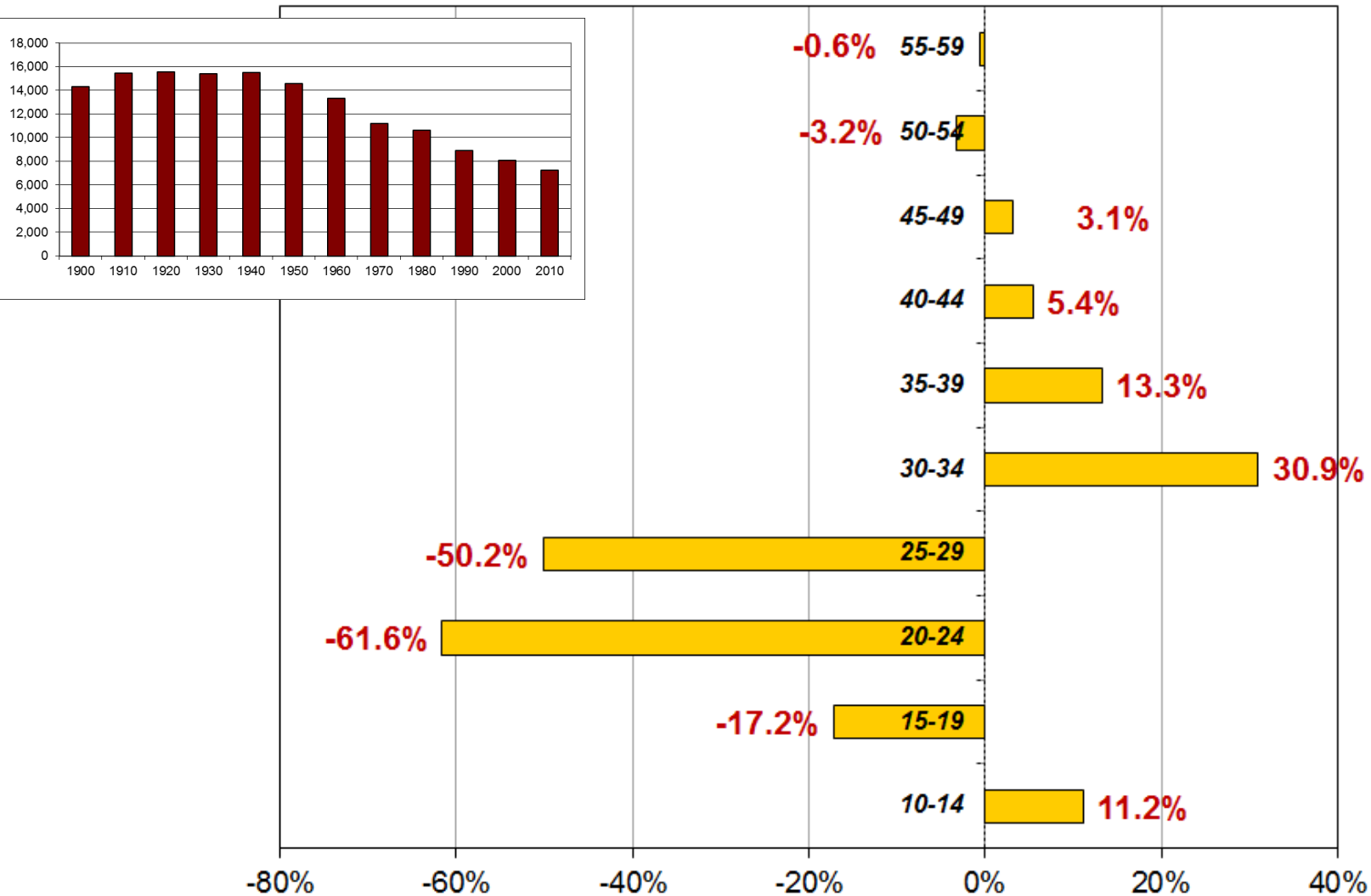
2000

2010

1990-2000, Percent Cohort Change



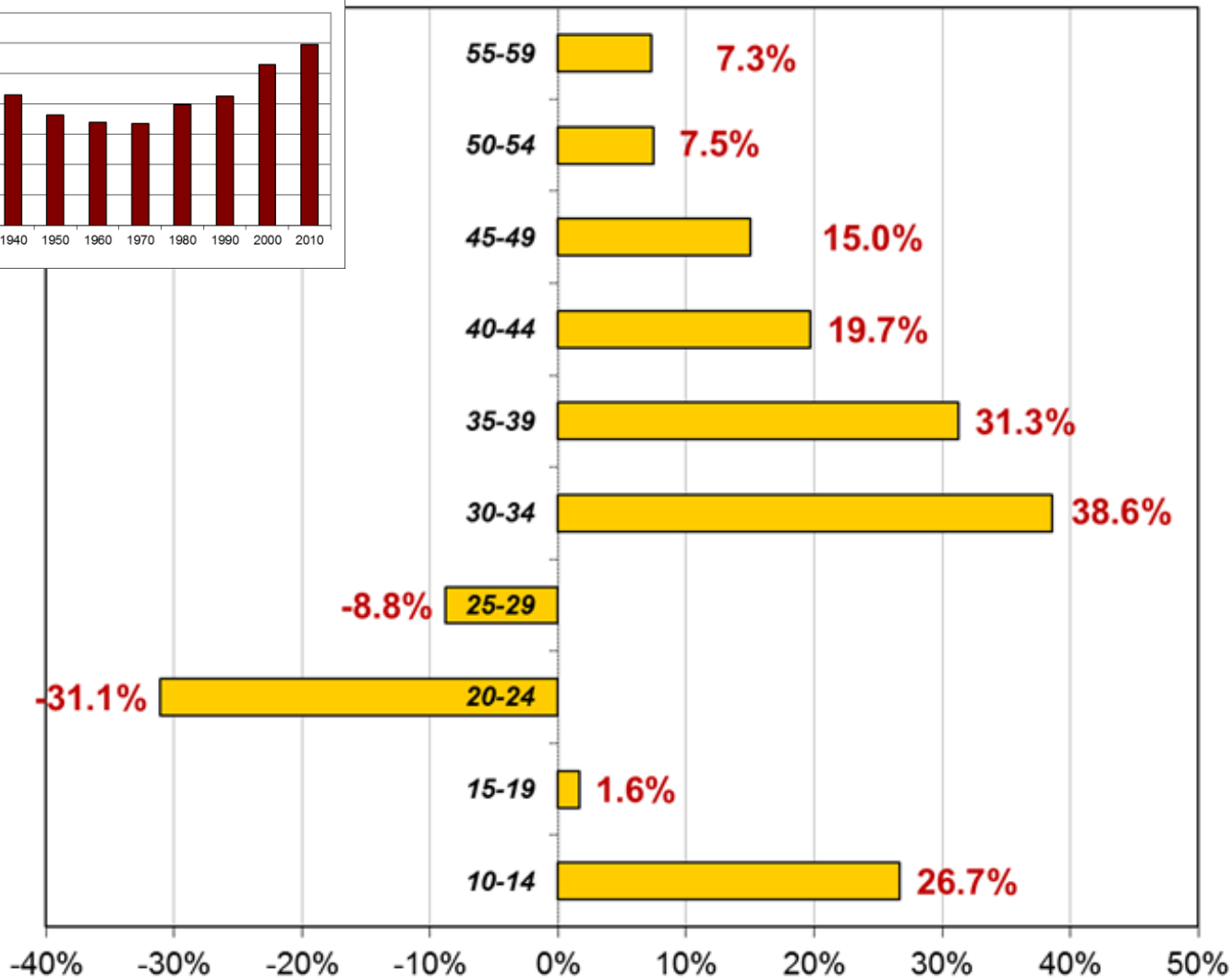
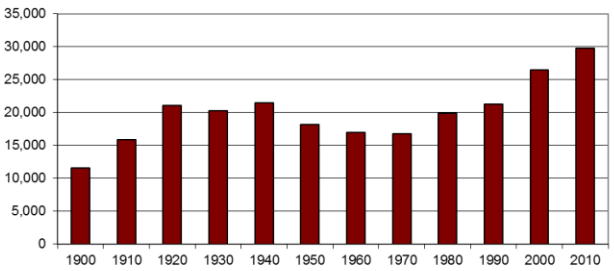
2000-2010, Percent Cohort Change



Rural Prairie County



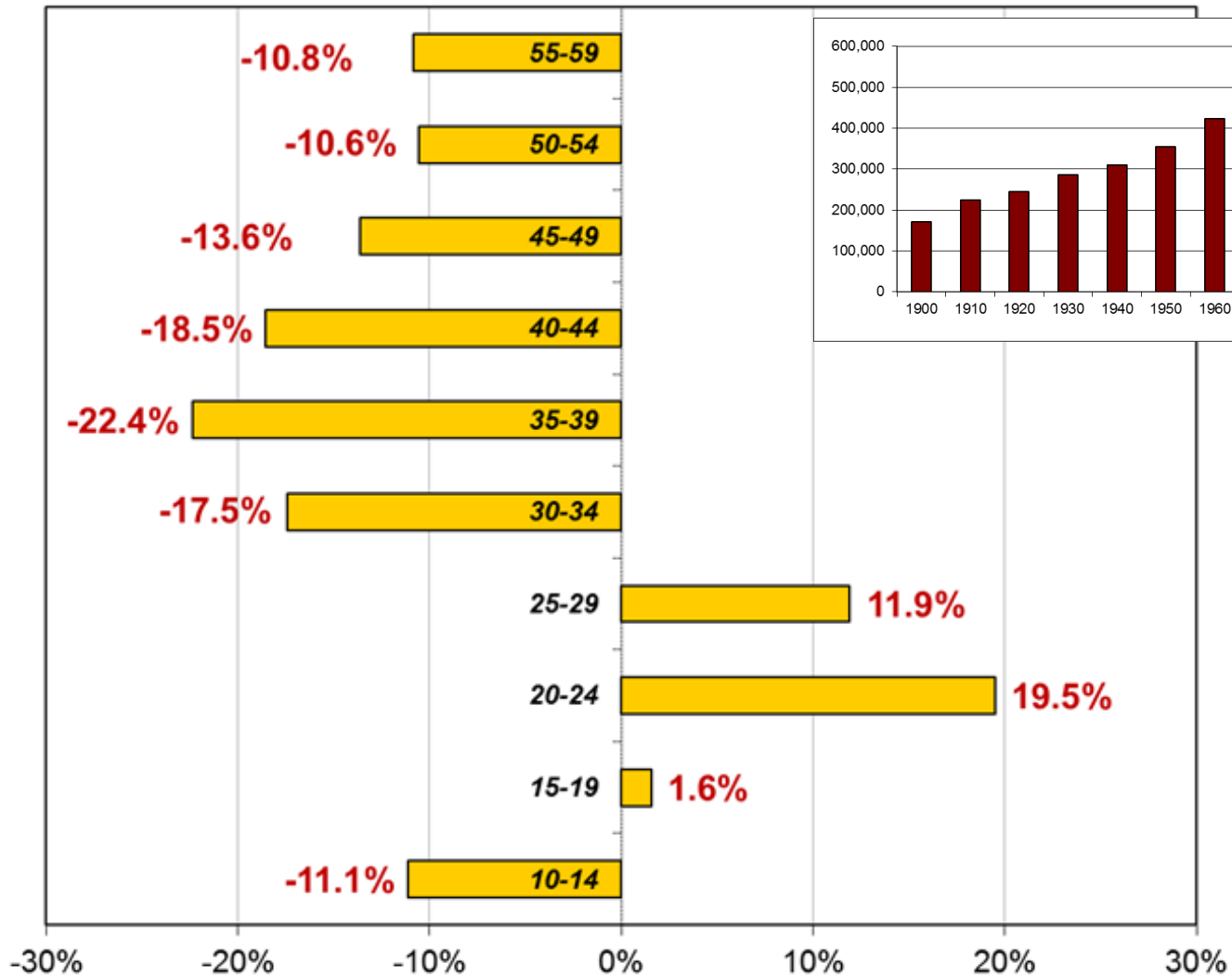
2000-2010, Percent Cohort Change



Rural Recreational County



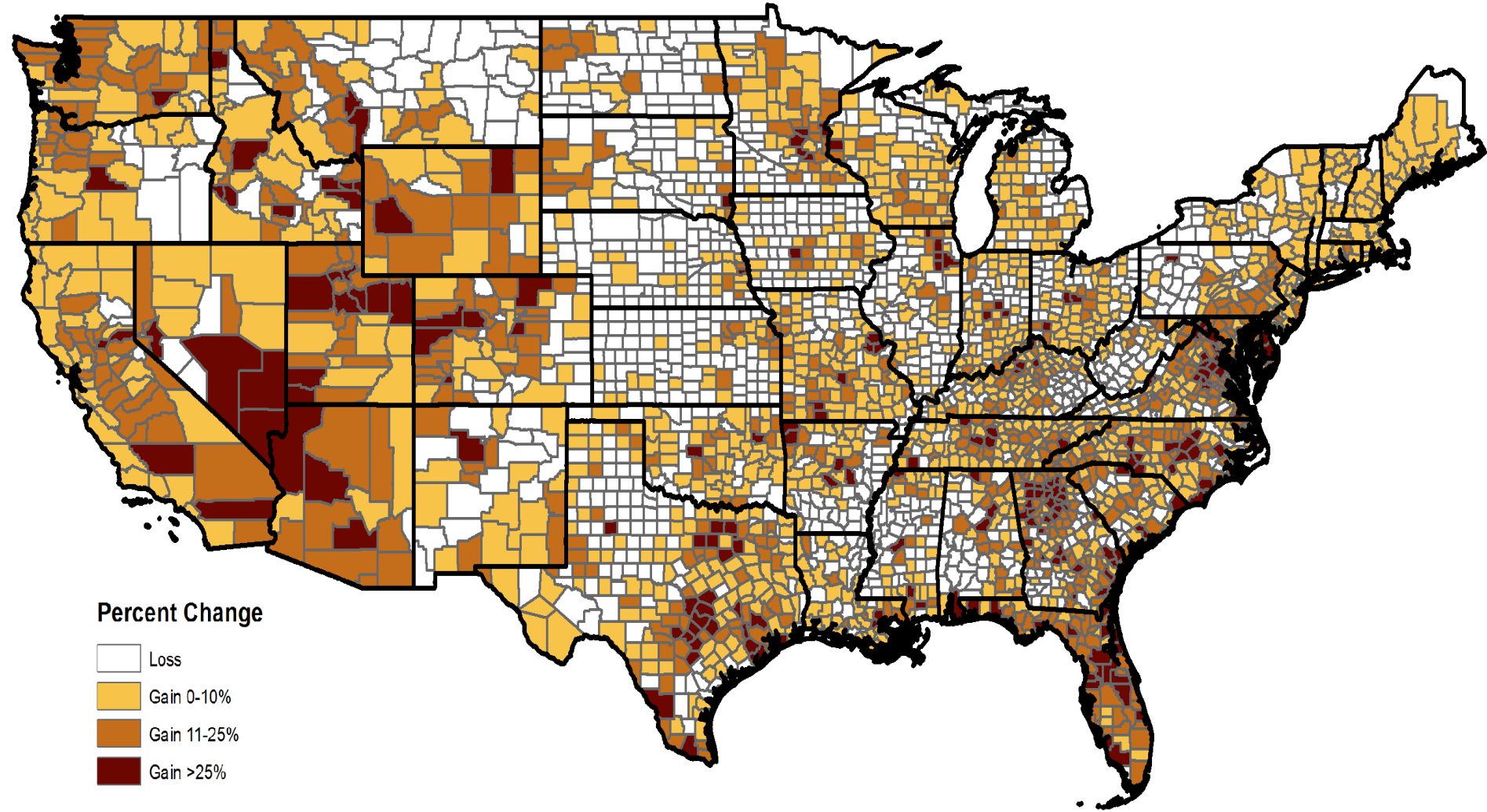
2000-2010, Percent Cohort Change



Core Metropolitan County



Population Change 2000-2010



Buffalo Commons Research

Dr. Randy Cantrell and Cheryl
Burkhart-Kriesel
University of Nebraska



Newcomers: Why?

Simpler pace of life



Safety and Security



Low Housing Cost





Newcomers: Who?

- 36% lived there previously
- 68% attain bachelors degree
- 67% household incomes over \$50k
- 51% have children in household

May be leaving their career or underemployed

Yet, Quality of Life is the trump card



Cohort Lifecycle



*Avg. American moves 11.7 times in lifetime
(6 times at age 30)*

CHOOSING RURAL

- Brain Gain: migration to rural age 30-49
 - Also 50-64 but not as widespread
 - Brain drain is the rule, not the exception
 - Happening since the 1970s
- Newcomers look at 3-5 communities
 - Topical reasoning (local foods regions)
 - Assets vary by demographic
- **Employee recruitment must get past “warm body” syndrome**



Rewriting the Rural Narrative: The Demand for Leadership in Rural America



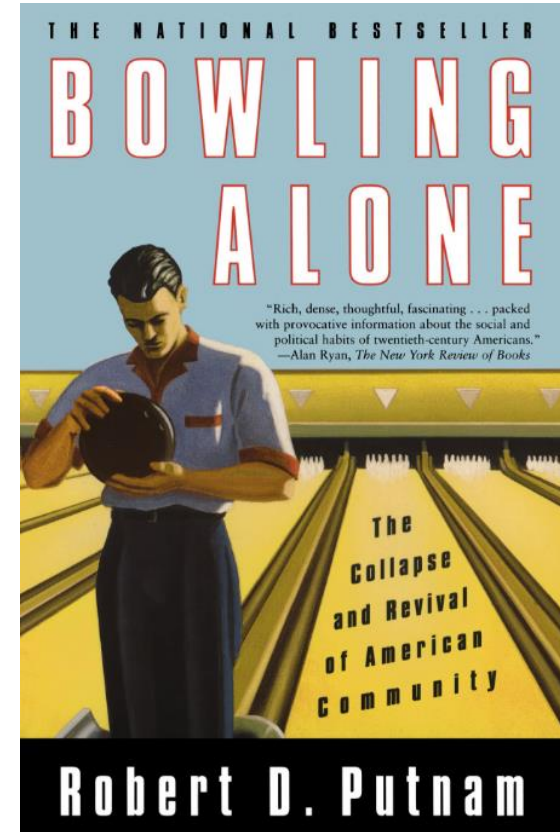
de Tocqueville

- 1831
- *Democracy in America*
- In towns he was amazed at how associations rise up to meet a challenge and then dissipate



SOCIAL LIFE IS DYING!

- First question: How many people do we need to run our town?
- We have numerous leadership programs currently training **leader supply**, but are we keeping up with the **organization demand**?



DEMAND TRENDS

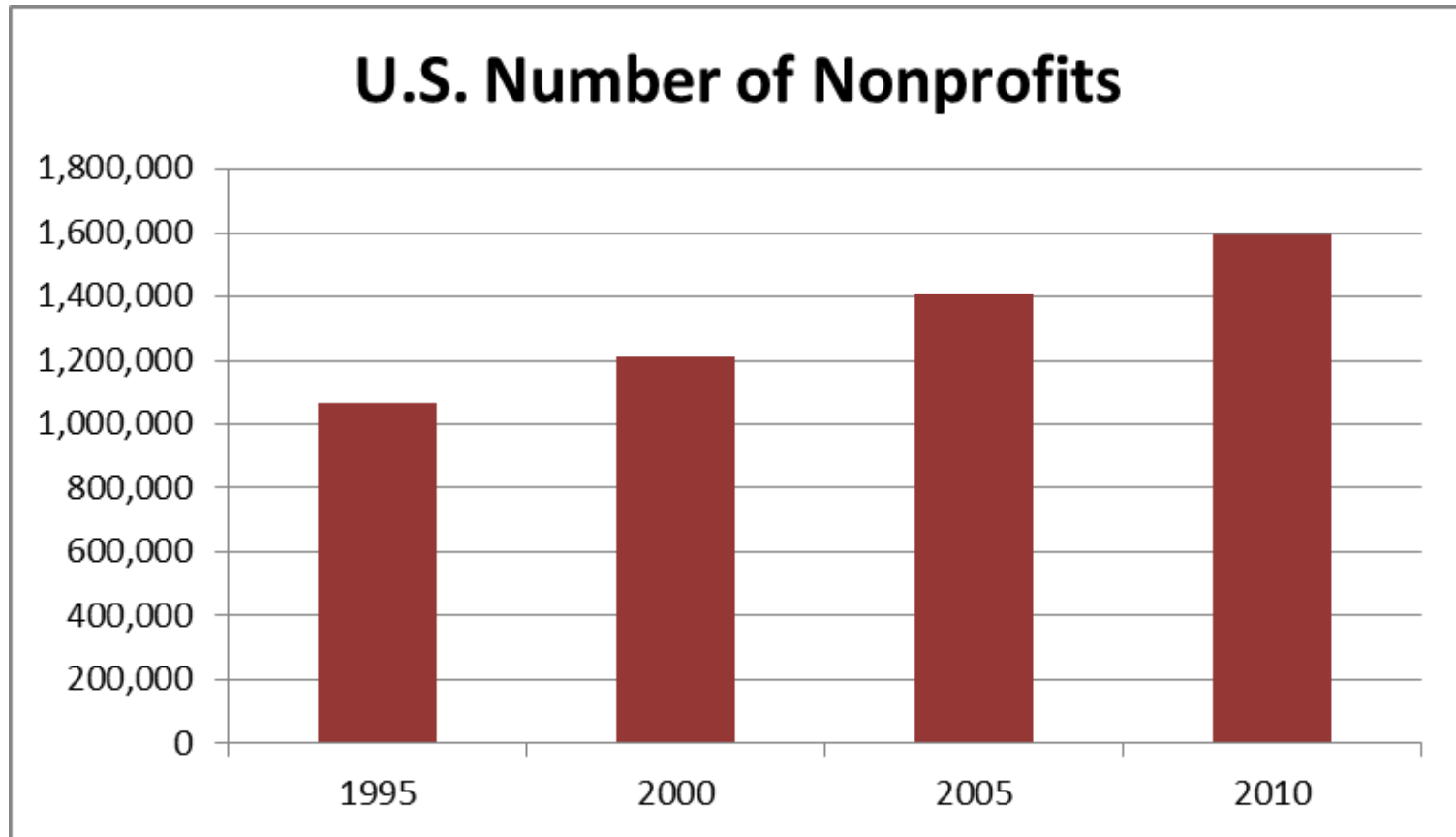
LEADERSHIP DEMAND

- How do we measure the demand that organizations make upon the resident population?
- In the US, there are 90,052 governmental units
 - These government units include counties, cities, townships, school districts, and “special districts” such as those providing oversight for cemeteries, highways, water/sewer systems, and soil/water conservation areas.
- We also have a vibrant nonprofit sector...

U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 Government Integrated Directory.

Social Life is Not Dying

Nonprofit Growth: 1995-2010



1995-2000	13.6%
2000-2005	16.3%
2005-2010	13.1%

National Center for Charitable Statistics, U.S. Census Bureau



Social Life is **Not Dying**

Nonprofit Growth: 2000-2010

Kansas: Population + 6%
 # Nonprofits +18%

The most rural counties

Population - 10%
Nonprofits +22% !!!

This growth can be both good and bad news for rural places.

National Center for Charitable Statistics, U.S. Census Bureau



Social Life is **Not Dying**

Nonprofit Growth: 2000-2010

The U.S. gained 10% in population and gained 32% in the number of nonprofits.

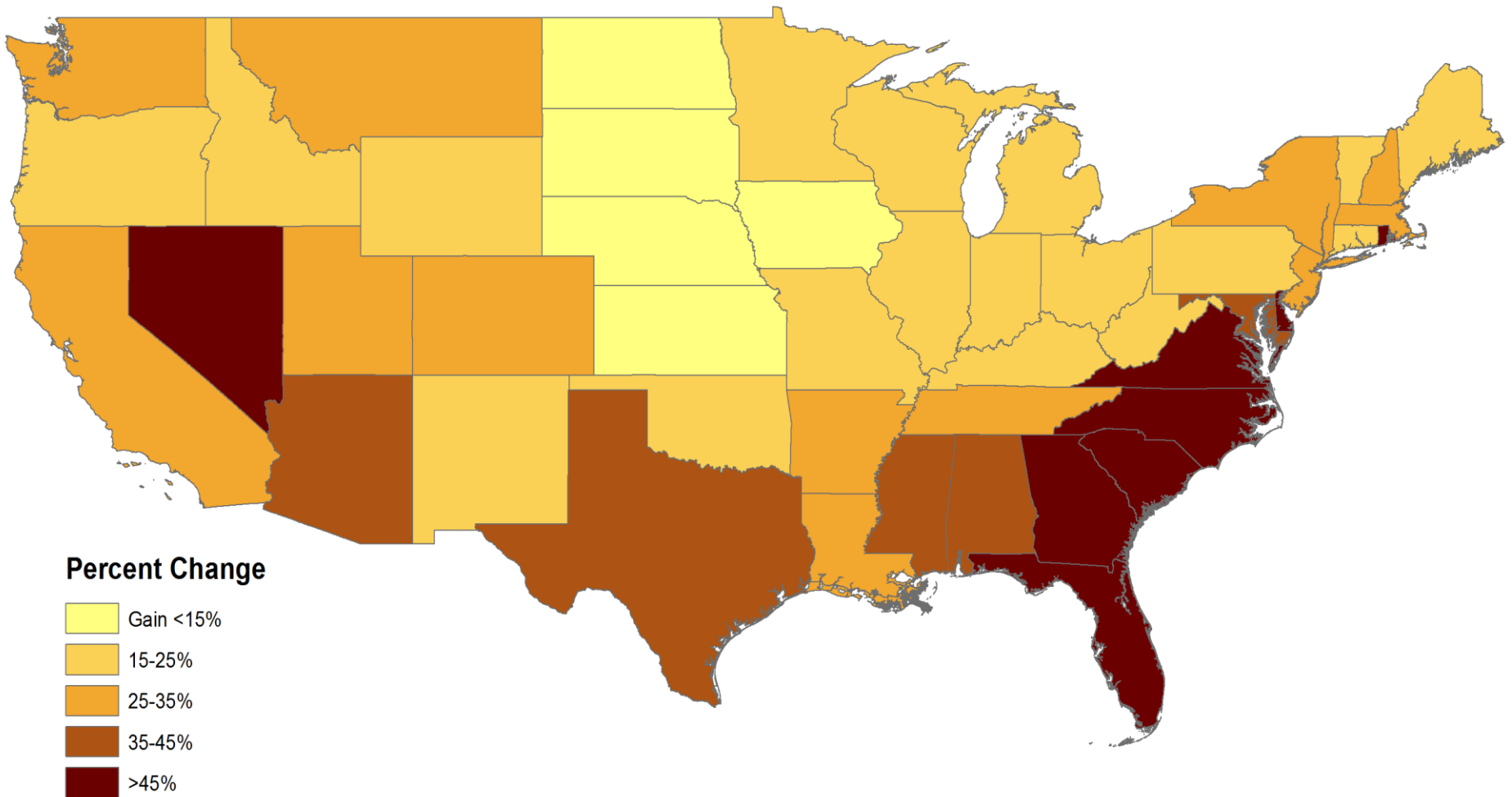
- The most rural counties experienced a loss of 1% in population, yet the number of nonprofits increased 15%.

This growth can be both good and bad news for rural places.

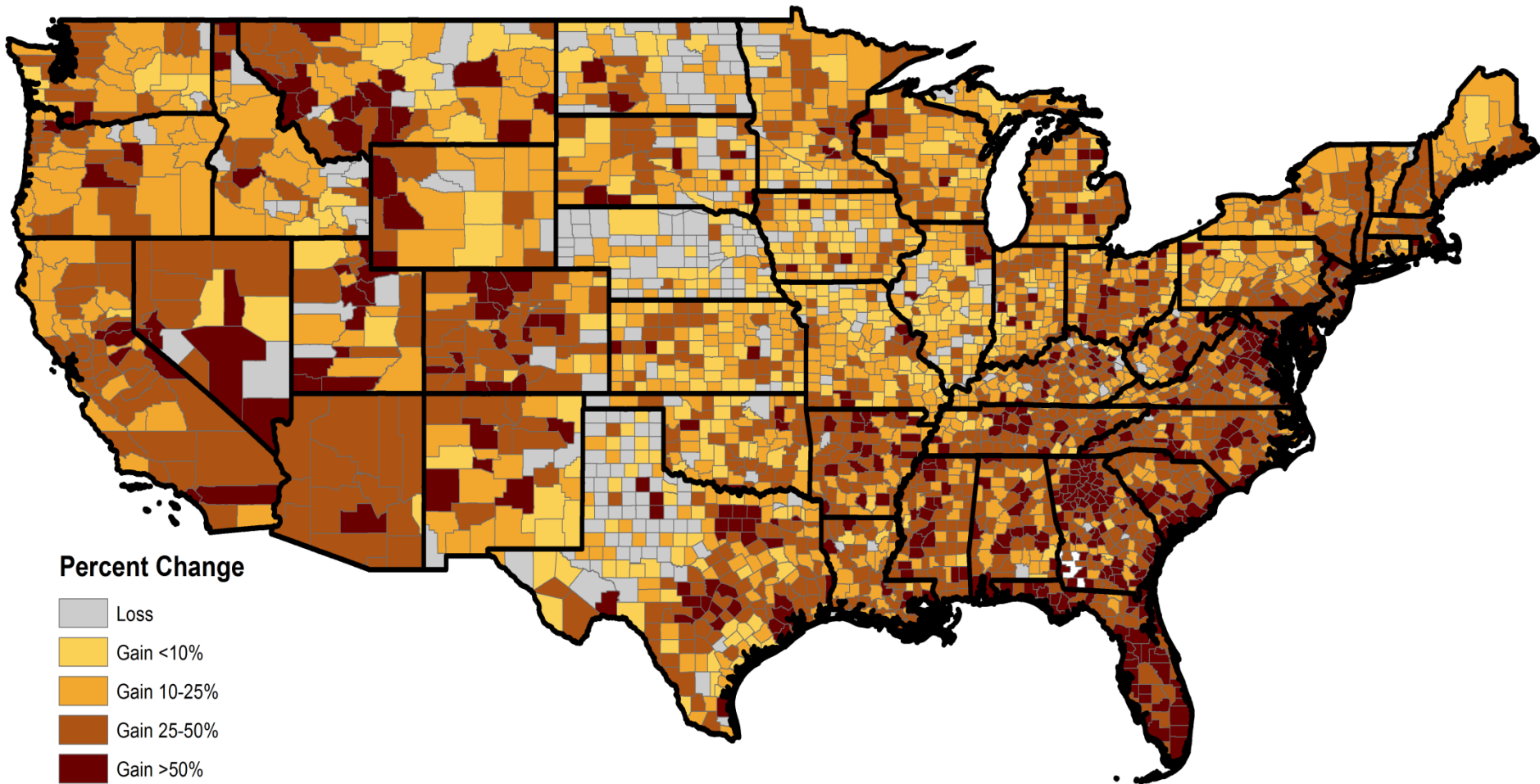
National Center for Charitable Statistics, U.S. Census Bureau



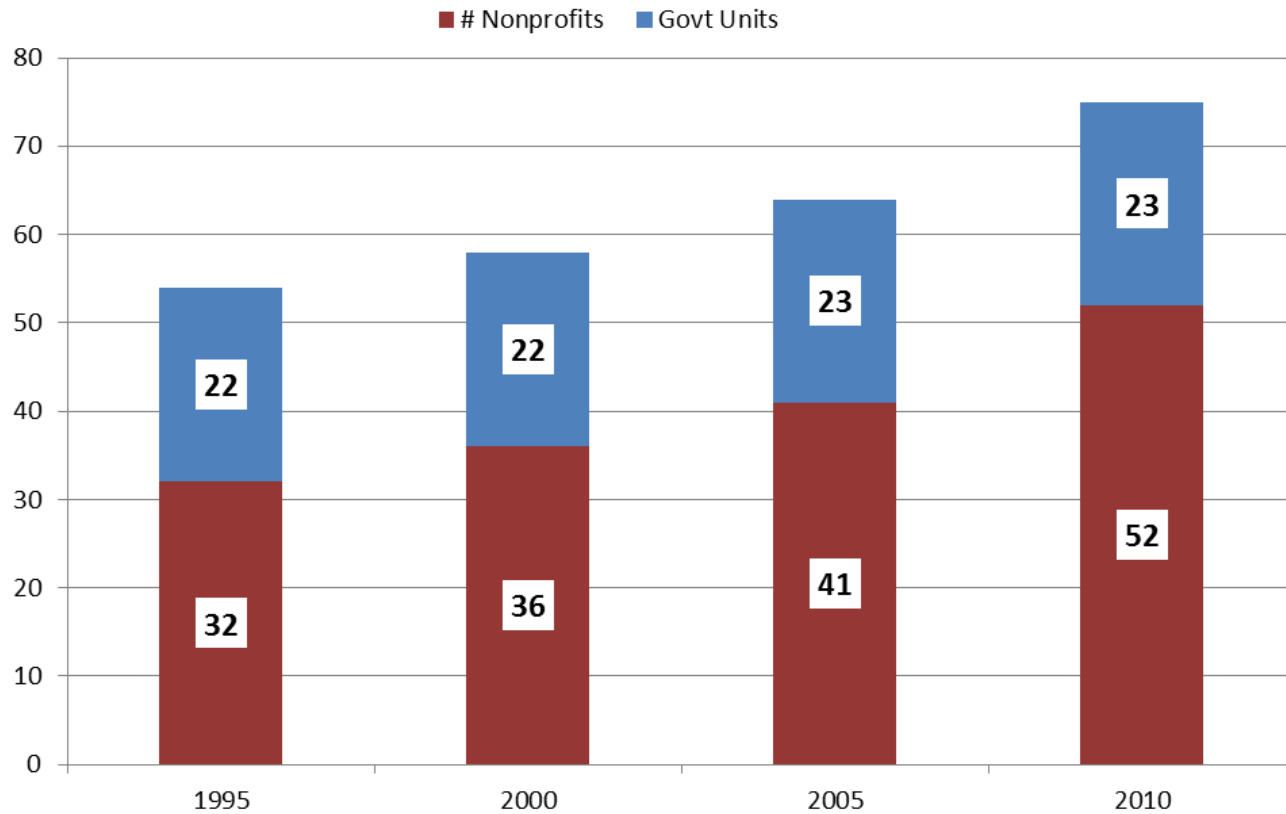
Nonprofit Change: 2000-2010



Nonprofit Change: 2000-2010

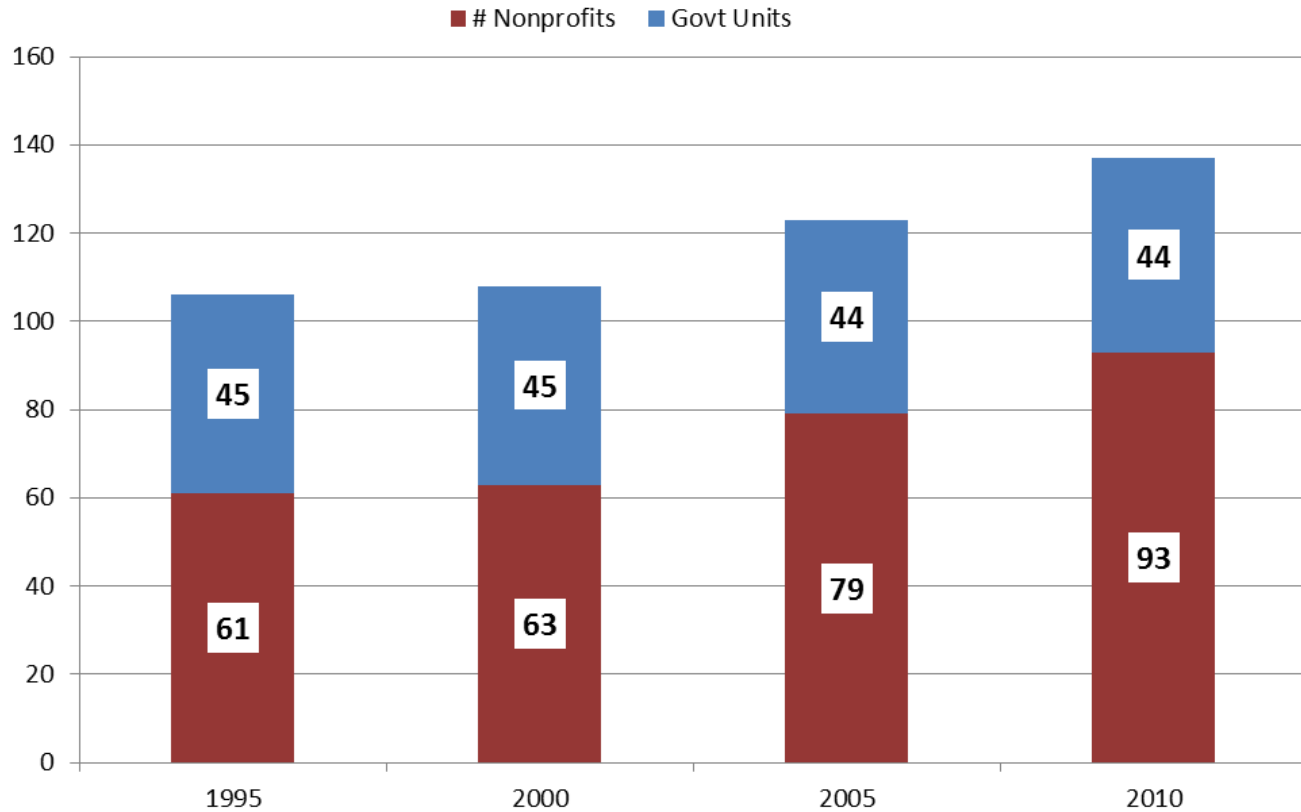


Graham County, Kansas



	2000-2010		
	Population	Nonprofits	Gov't Units
<i>Graham County</i>	-12%	44%	5%
<i>Kansas</i>	6%	18%	-3%
<i>United States</i>	10%	32%	3%

Phillips County, Kansas



	2000-2010		
	Population	Nonprofits	Gov't Units
<i>Phillips County</i>	-6%	48%	-2%
<i>Kansas</i>	6%	18%	-3%
<i>United States</i>	10%	32%	3%

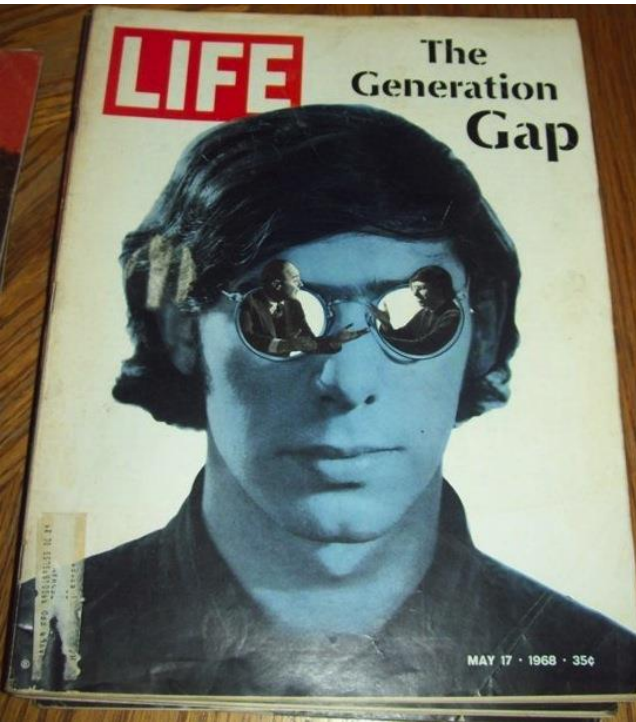
SUPPLY TRENDS

Social Organizations

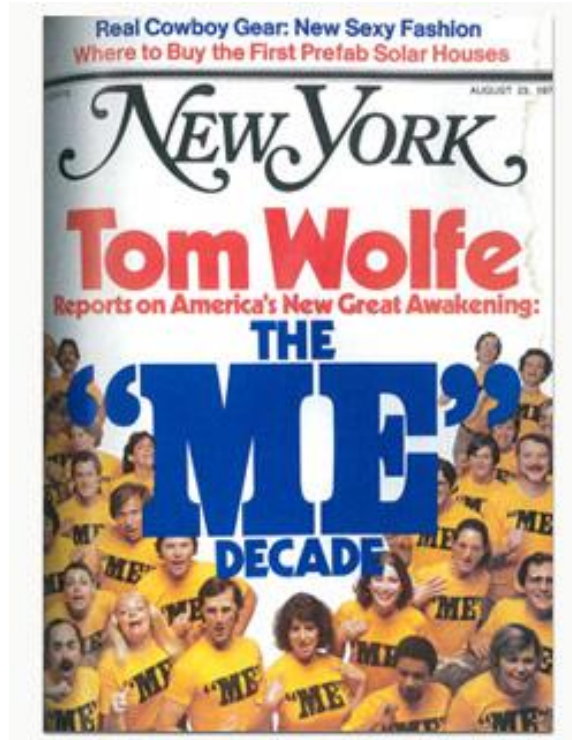
- Diversification of rural life socially, too
- Reflect the social interests at any given time
- Today is not 25 (or 50, or 100) years ago!
- The people today seem unable to “connect” with the existing social infrastructure



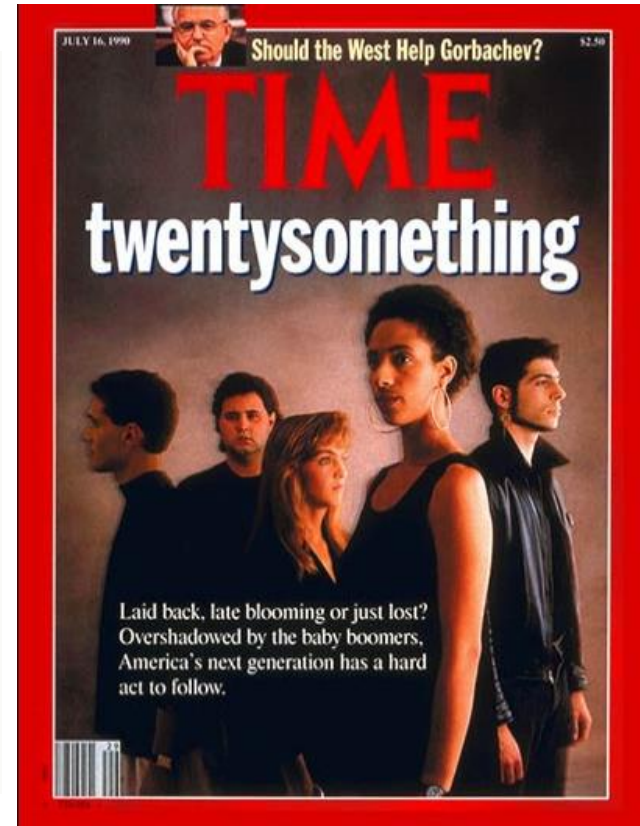
All of this has happened before...



1968



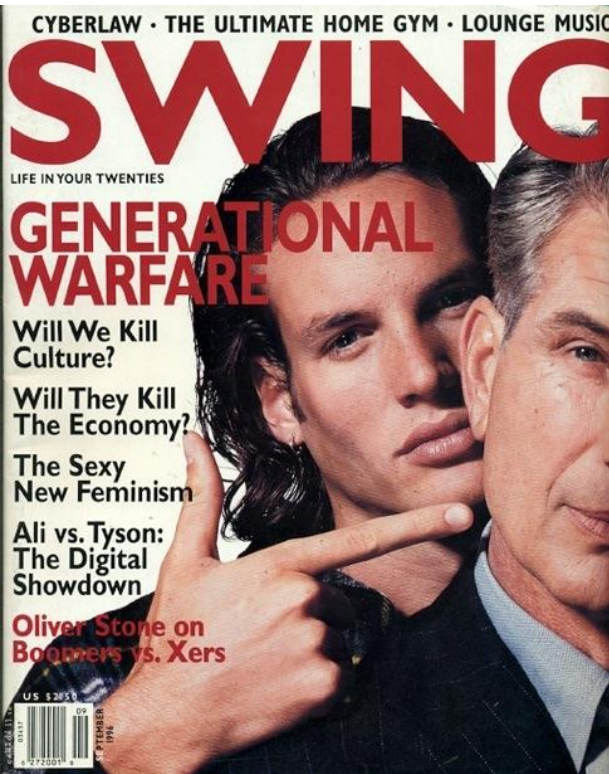
1976



1990



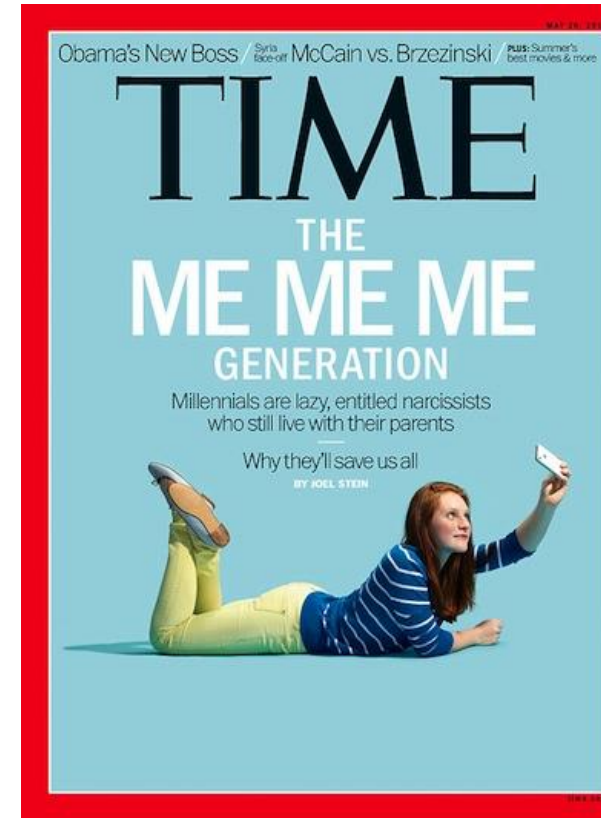
and it will happen again...



1996



2007



2013



Changing Types of Involvement - The Social Organization (historical)

- Place-based
- Broadly focused
- Word of mouth



Green & Haines. 2007. *Asset Building and Community Development*

Changing Types of Involvement - The Social Organization (present)






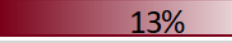



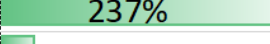





































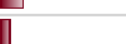























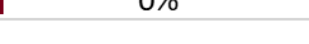



- Cover wide geographic area
- Narrowly focused goals/ self-interest
- Diverse social interests
- Technological – social media



The people today are challenged in “connecting” with the existing social infrastructure.

Green & Haines. 2007. *Asset Building and Community Development*



<i>National</i>	1995-2016*	% change 1995-2016	Size of Sector, 2016	Sector Share of Total
A - Arts, Culture & Humanities	43,652	 54%	 116,965	 7%
B - Education	85,546	 62%	 210,144	 13%
C - Environment	14,608	 66%	 35,078	 2%
D - Animal-Related	18,489	 237%	 27,301	 2%
E - Health Care	10,572	 29%	 44,962	 3%
F - Mental Health & Crisis Interve	6,099	 49%	 17,069	 1%
G - Voluntary Health Associati	13,071	 74%	 30,336	 2%
H - Medical Research: Medical Res	1,872	 70%	 4,246	 0%
I - Crime & Legal-Related	7,254	 48%	 20,857	 1%
J - Employment	-8,581	 -19%	 32,818	 2%
K - Food, Agriculture & Nutrition	5,357	 41%	 17,999	 1%
L - Housing & Shelter	12,430	 53%	 33,525	 2%
M - Public Safety, Disaster Prepar	9,677	 67%	 23,140	 1%
N - Recreation & Sports	60,928	 78%	 123,007	 8%
O - Youth Development	17,997	 106%	 32,765	 2%
P - Human Services	48,523	 86%	 98,055	 6%
Q - International, Foreign Affairs &	10,219	 91%	 21,228	 1%
R - Civil Rights, Social Action & Ad	2,597	 29%	 9,352	 1%
S - Community Improvement &	10,008	 8%	 122,656	 8%
T - Philanthropy, Voluntarism &	47,970	 76%	 108,684	 7%
U - Science & Technology	497	 5%	 10,392	 1%
V - Social Science	908	 52%	 2,575	 0%
W - Public & Societal Benefit	2,438	 3%	 70,596	 5%
X - Religion-Related	157,482	 156%	 277,181	 18%
Y - Mutual & Membership Benefit	-11,016	 -13%	 66,231	 4%
Z - Unknown	10,240	106%	4,454	0%
Total	578,838	54%	1,561,616	

IMPLICATIONS

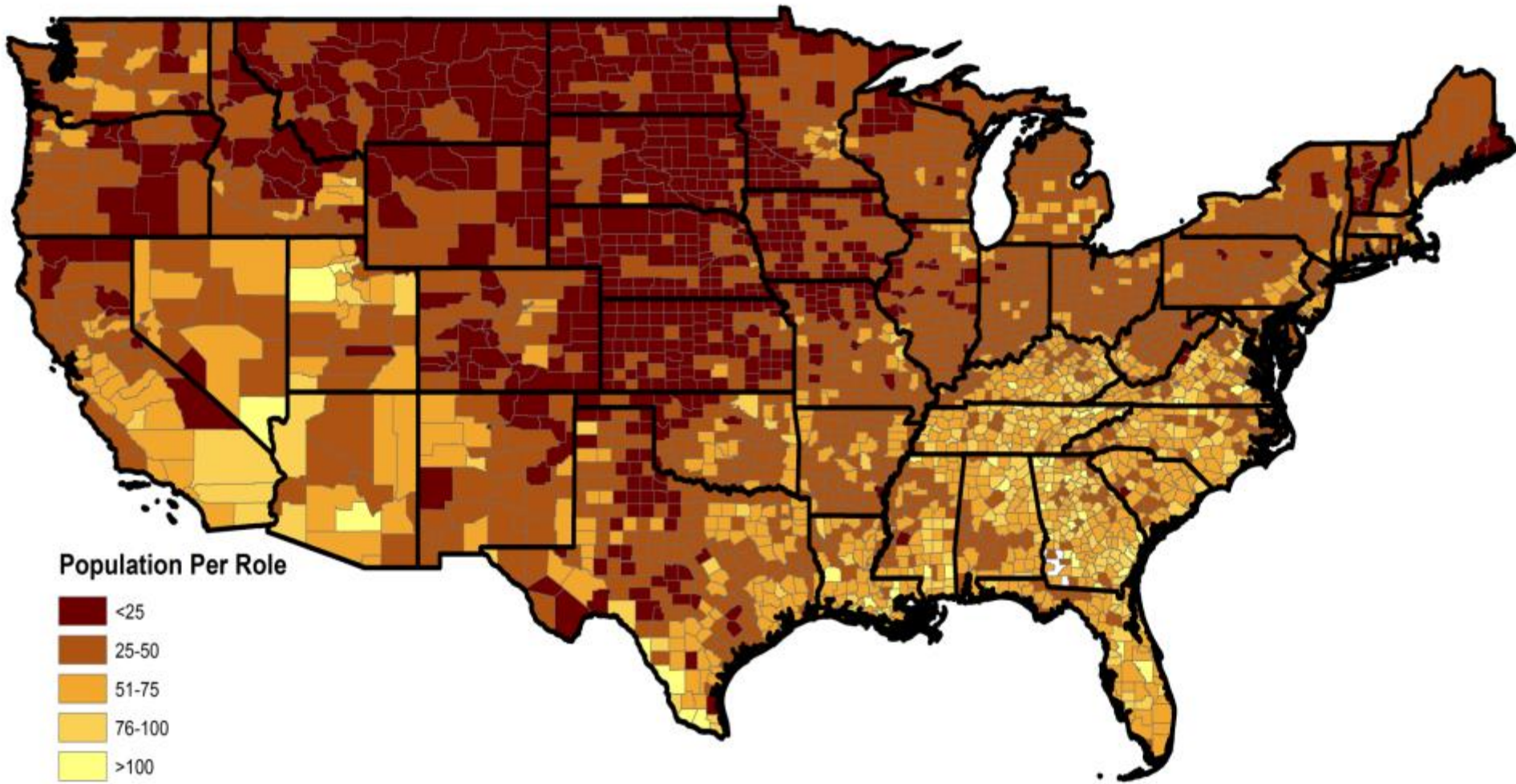
POPULATION PER ORGANIZATIONAL ROLE

Definition: Number of people each organization has available to them to locate a positional leader.

- Yes, people serve on multiple boards.
- Assumption of 3 per board is conservative.
- Age 18+ includes many age groups that are less active.



POPULATION PER ORGANIZATIONAL ROLE, 2010



Supply and Demand, 2010

	Demand: Total Public Orgs	Supply: Pop Age 18 +	Pop Per Org	Pop Per Org Role
Iowa	31,637	2,318,362	73	24
Kansas	22,578	2,126,179	94	31
Minnesota	38,415	4,019,862	105	35
Nebraska	16,070	1,367,120	85	28
North Dakota	8,780	522,720	60	20
South Dakota	9,078	611,383	67	22
Texas	110,393	18,279,737	166	55



OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

- New residents are more than warm bodies
- Younger people (Millennials age 18-34)
 - Decentralized approaches to leadership
 - Simplified methods of communication
- Generational interests change yet organizations do not
- Start with a small request
- Engagement before leadership



OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROGRAMMING?

- Increased competition for
 - Leaders
 - Volunteers
 - Donations
- Clear the slate for newcomers
- Leadership summit amongst nonprofits

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROGRAMMING?

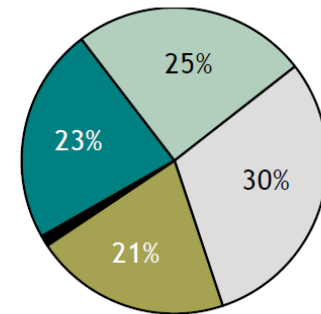
- Programming
 - Connecting organizations
 - Rebuilding a sustainable social infrastructure
- Solutions
 - Expand base of leaders (human capital)
 - Merge organizations (social capital)
 - Dissolve groups

by community type

Among those who say they'd like to move, urban residents most likely to choose a different type of community

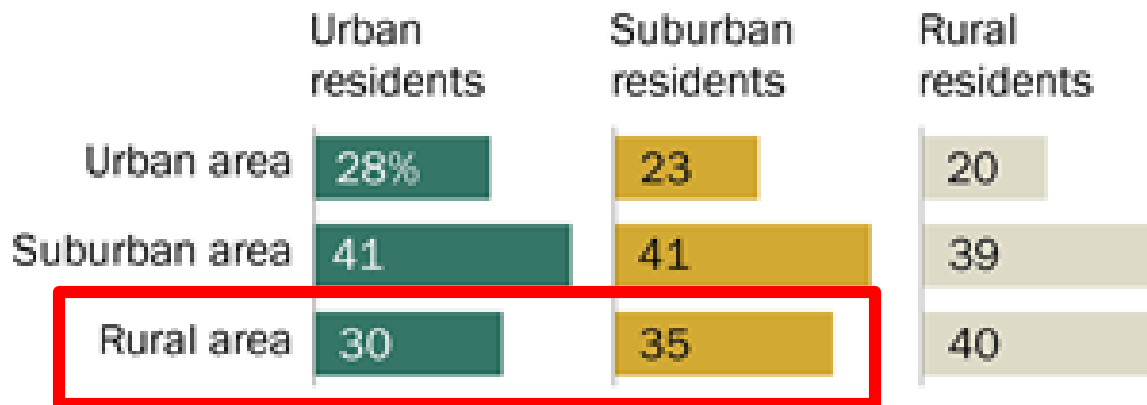
% of ____ who say they would move to a different community if they could saying they would like to move to ...

■ City ■ Suburb
■ Small town ■ Rural area



PewResearchCenter

Source: "For Nearly Half of America, Grass is Greener Somewhere Else". Pew Research Center, 2009.



Note: Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer not shown.
 Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Feb. 26-March 11, 2018.
 "What Unites and Divides Urban, Suburban and Rural Communities"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Reframing Rural Migration

- National societal preferences to live in small towns and rural places (low-density)
- Not everyone is leaving small towns
 - It's a lot of work to make this move but people are doing it
- Not everyone is flocking to the city
 - Most urban have gotten wider, not taller
- A new urbanity is found in formerly rural places



MIGRATION AND THE NARRATIVE

- Migration patterns open the door to discussing the narrative
- There are varied reasons for people to move to small towns and rural places

*Prepare for one of the **largest demographic changes to rural America since 1930***



75% of rural homeowners are

Baby Boomers and older.

30% over 70 today!



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Consider resident recruitment as a possible outcome in your marketing efforts
- Learn about newcomers in your community
- Consider that some visitors might be looking for this information already...make it easy to find when they arrive

The Rural Choice

These newcomers are:

- Creating groups, building their community
- Diversifying the economy
- Buying/starting businesses, working from home
- Living in a region (no longer a 1-stop-shop)
- More than warm bodies (employee recruitment)



The Rural Choice: Opening New Doors and Welcoming New Neighbors

The bottom line is people WANT
to live and move here for
what you are today and will be tomorrow,
not what may have been!

Rural Revitalization is Upon Us!



Rural Issues and Trends Webinars

<http://z.umn.edu/ruralwebinar/>

