

Rewriting the Rural Narrative: the “Brain Gain” of Rural America

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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
EXTENSION

Driven to DiscoverSM

What is our future?

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. Be stories, both of the people who left their small percentage of Americans who still nation. There are stories, too, of people who left for myriad reasons. We want to know those reasons, and the story of rural life that they tell.

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 populations decline outstate, the Twin Cities area, especially the suburbs, booms.

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.

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.

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.



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



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Deficit Approach

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



1900-1950

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



1950+

- Main street restructuring
- School consolidations
 - MN 432 districts in 1990 to 337 in 2010
- Hospitals closings



The rural idyll



“Agriculture is no longer the mainstay of the rural economy.”



The Media Idyll Persists

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



"It looks like a ghost town," said Bill Gibson, a 74-year-old farmer, whose grandfather broke ground on the family's land with a team of oxen in the middle of the 19th century. "I sure miss the people."

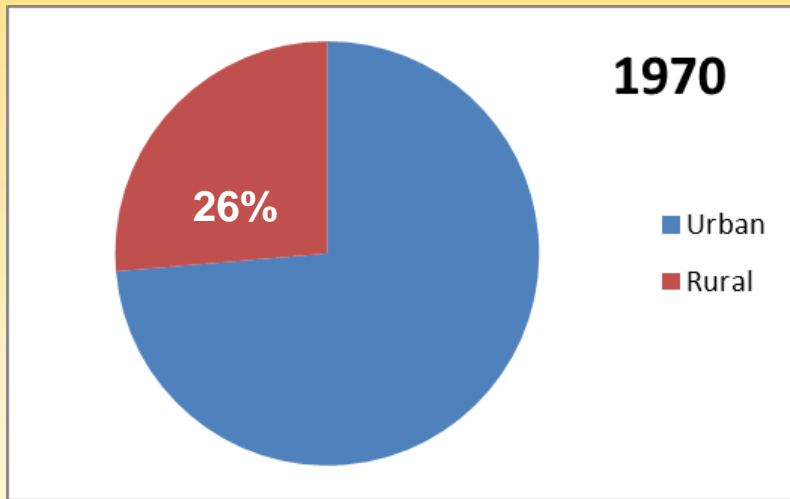
Rural is Changing, not Dying

- 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

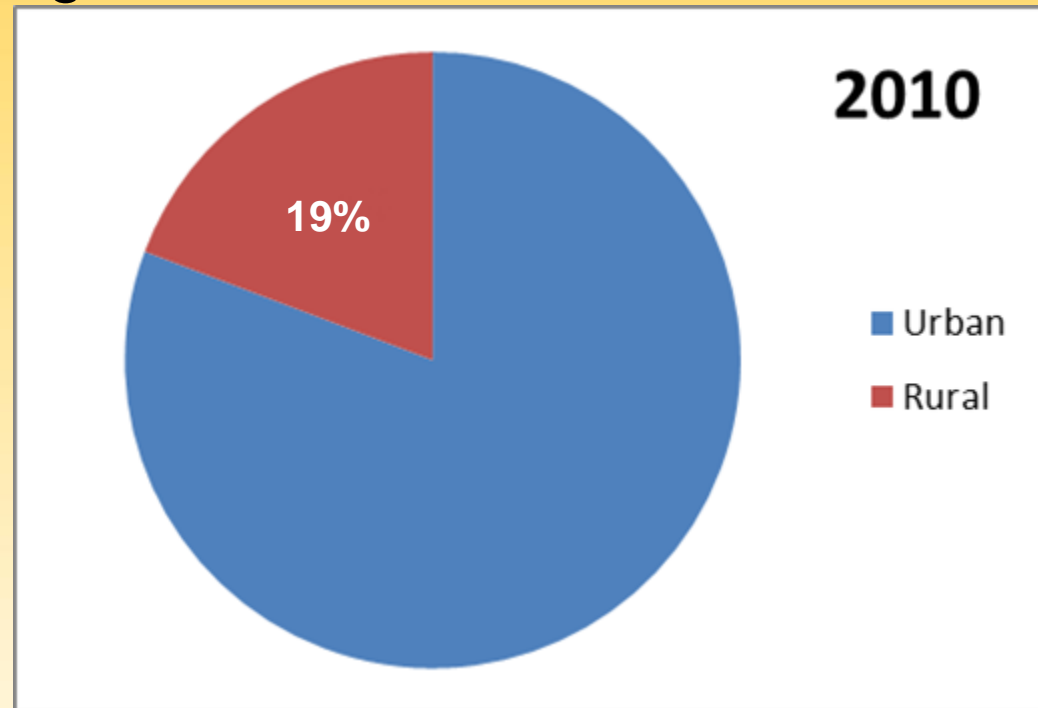


Rural Rebound

- 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)

- Minnesota 352,224 rural residents now classified urban
- Montana 120,261
- Nebraska 170,855
- South Dakota 207,790
- Texas 1,339,142

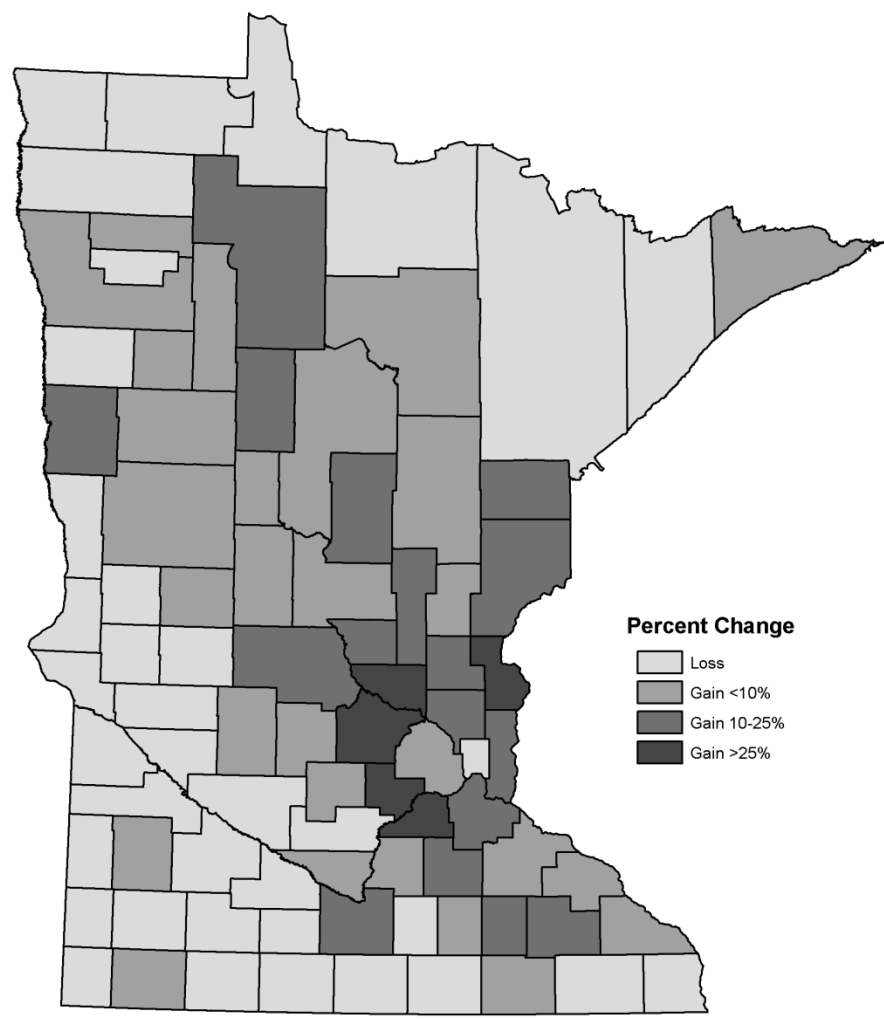
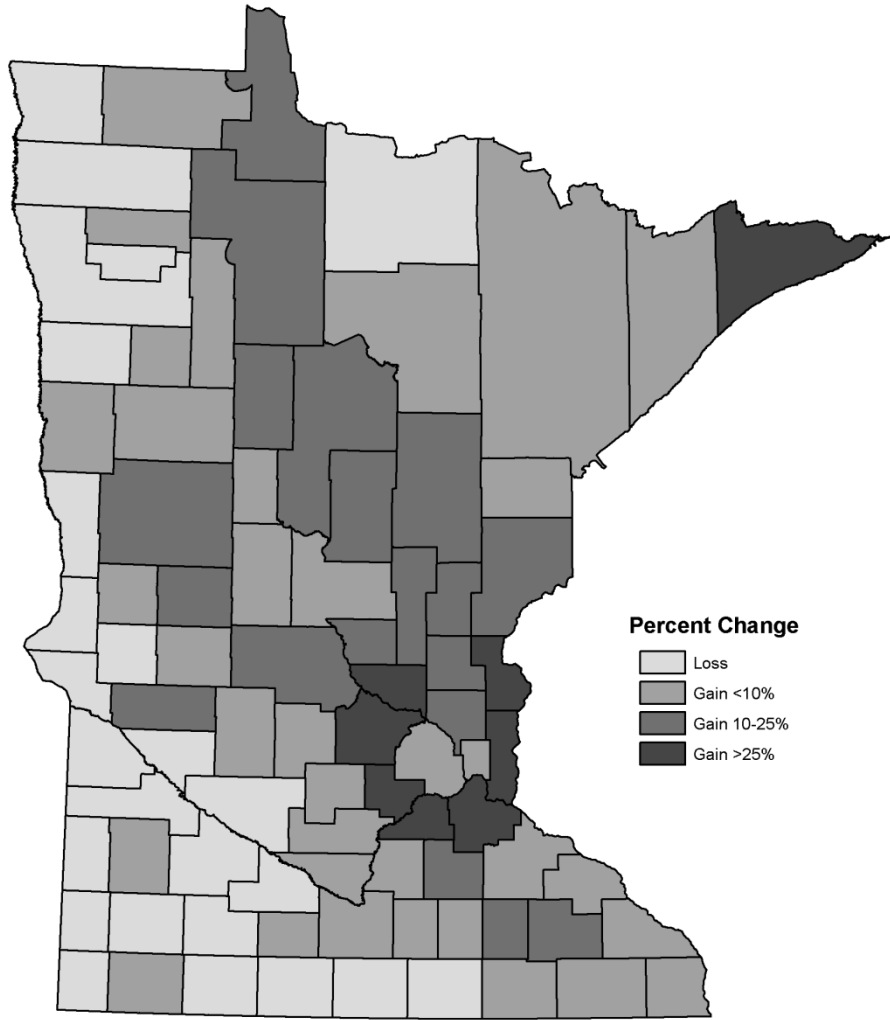
Urban areas have grown **WIDER**, not **TALLER**



Population Change

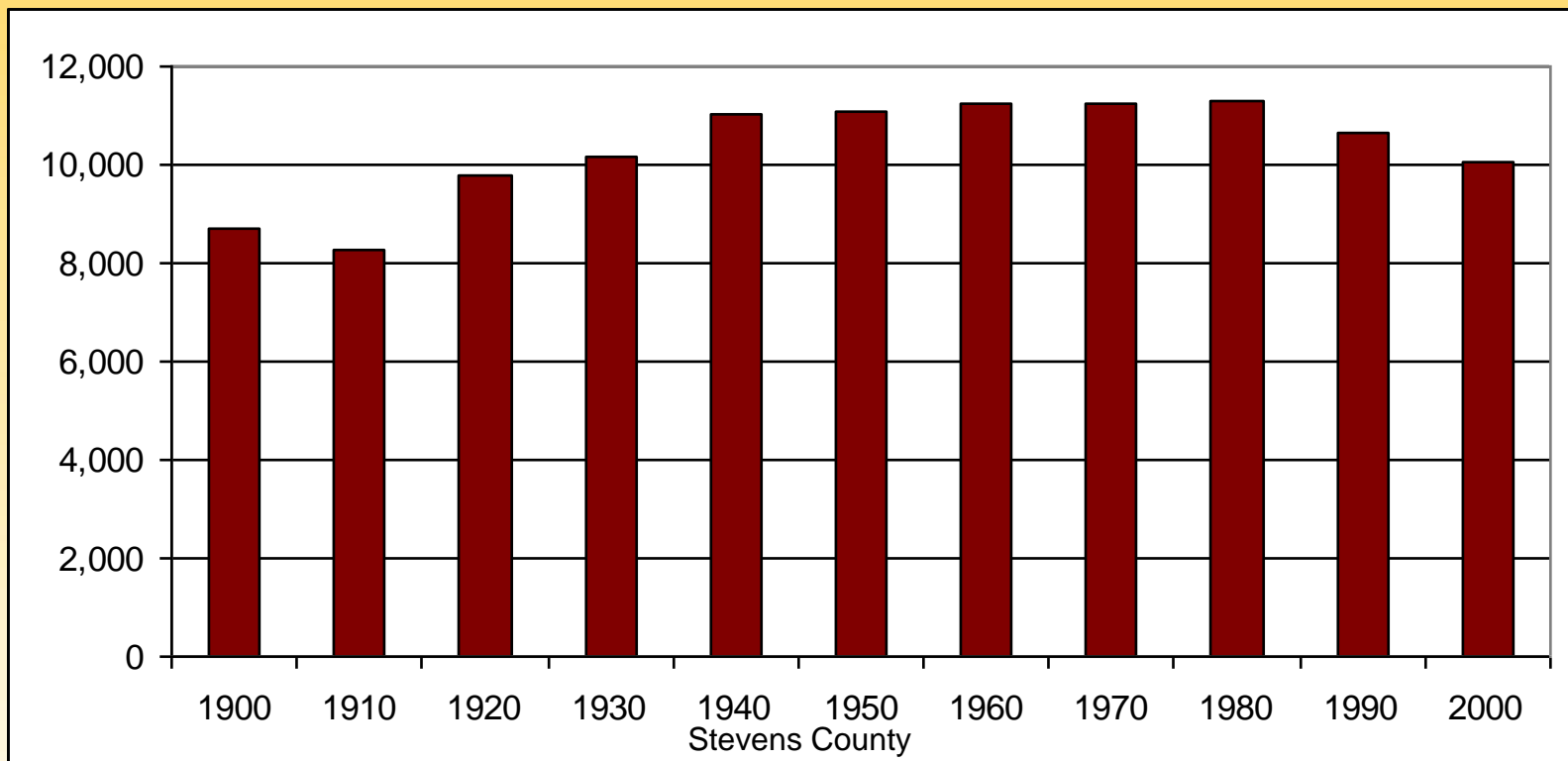
1990-2000

2000-2010



Does decline mean decline?

We have generally examined total population change from year to year (or decade to decade)



Mobility



Households Moving Between 1995 and 1999:

44% Iowa

46% Minnesota

North Dakota

Wisconsin

47% Nebraska

48% South Dakota

49% United States



U.S. Census Data



Dig Deeper



Simplified Cohort Analysis

This is not the usual model:
population

+ births – deaths

+ in-migration (estimate)

– out-migration (estimate)

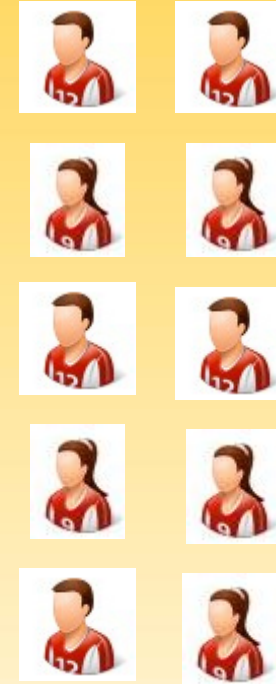
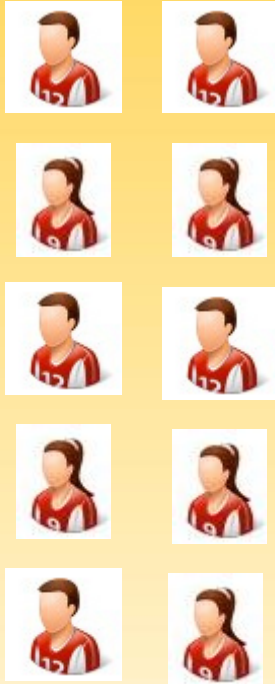


If nobody even moved in or out...

20-24

Age

30-34



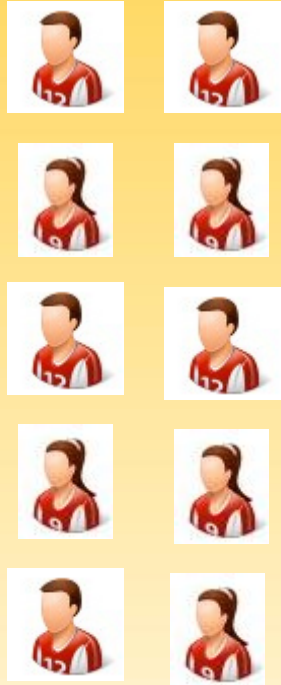
2000

2010

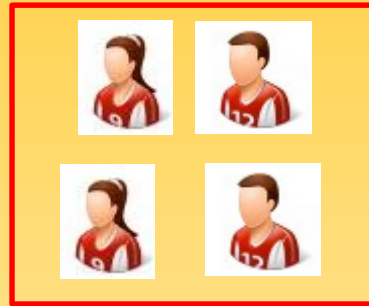


But in reality people do move...

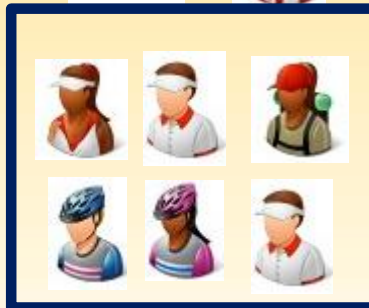
Age 20-24



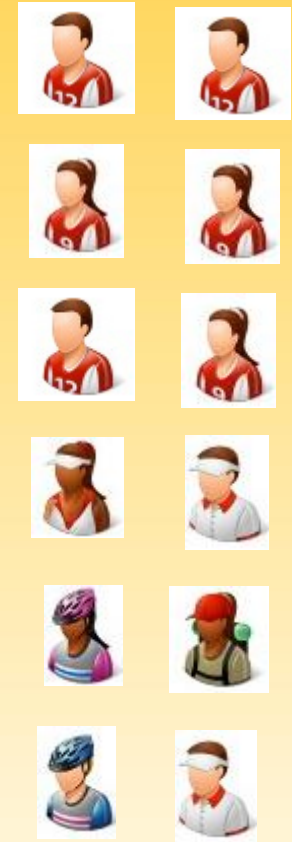
Moving out
- 4



Moving in
+ 6



Age 30-34

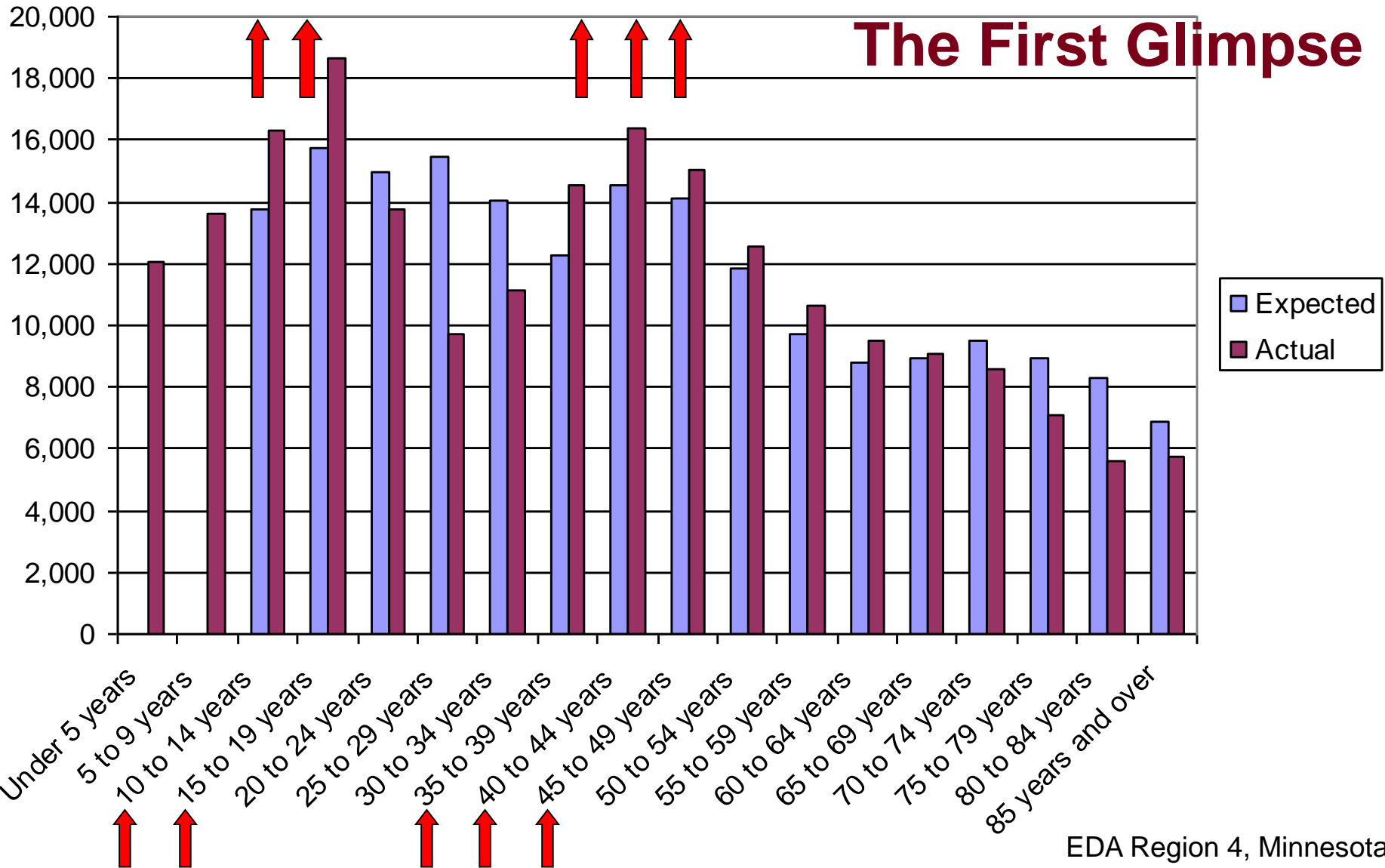


2000

2010



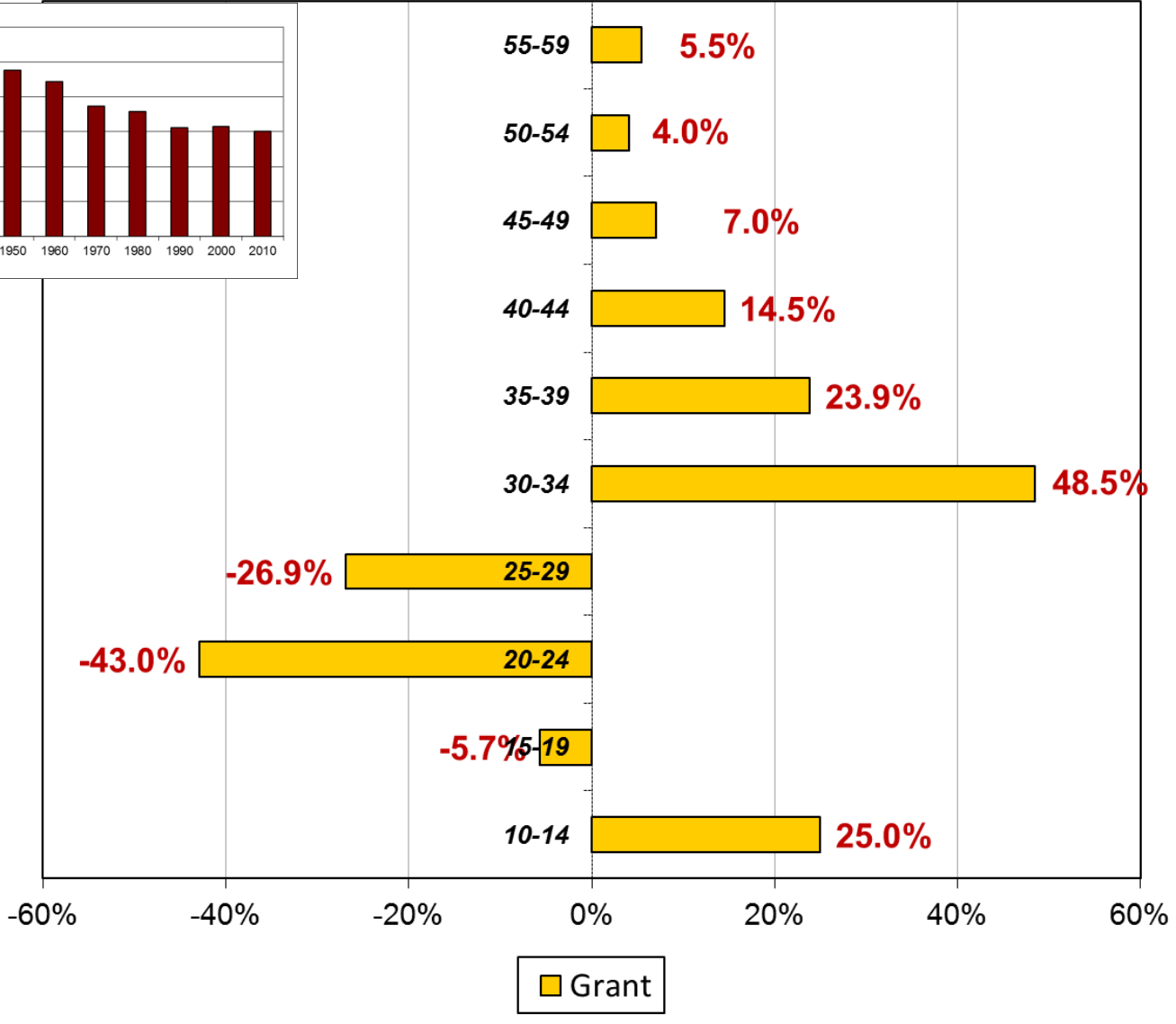
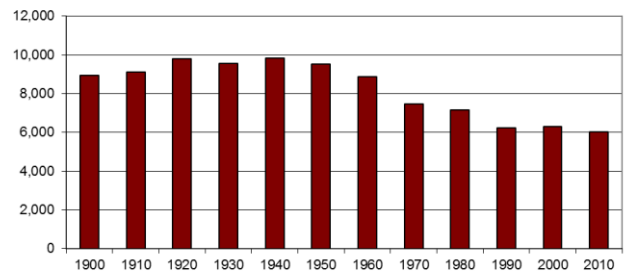
The First Glimpse



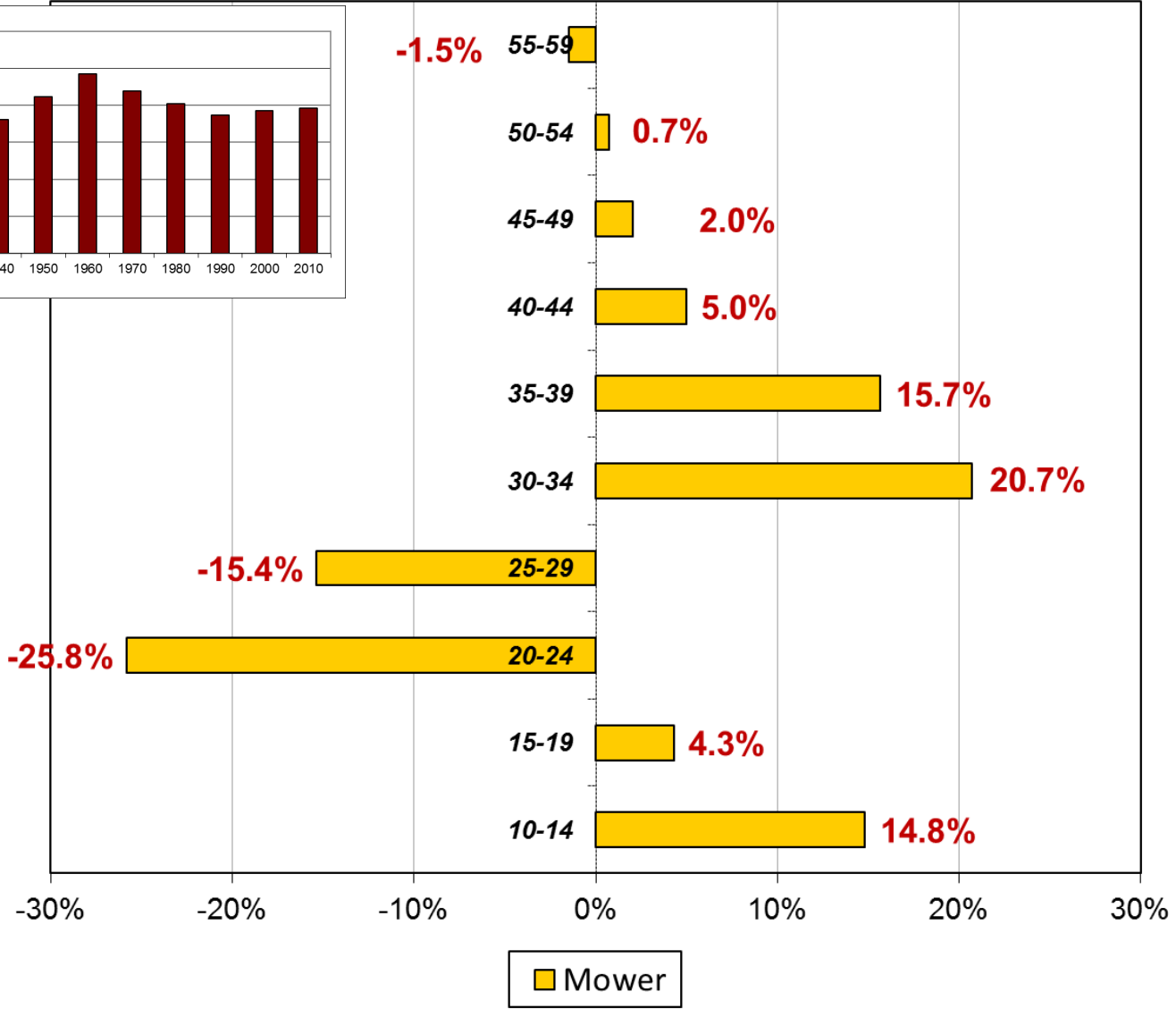
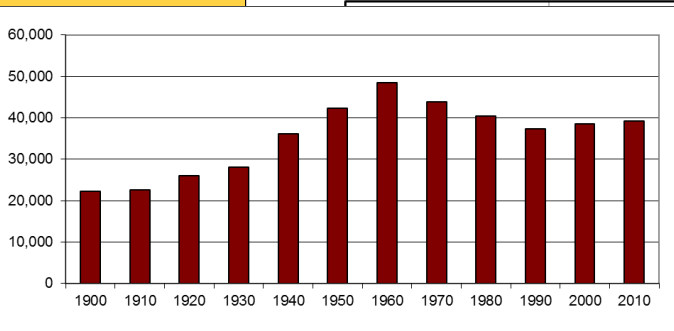
EDA Region 4, Minnesota



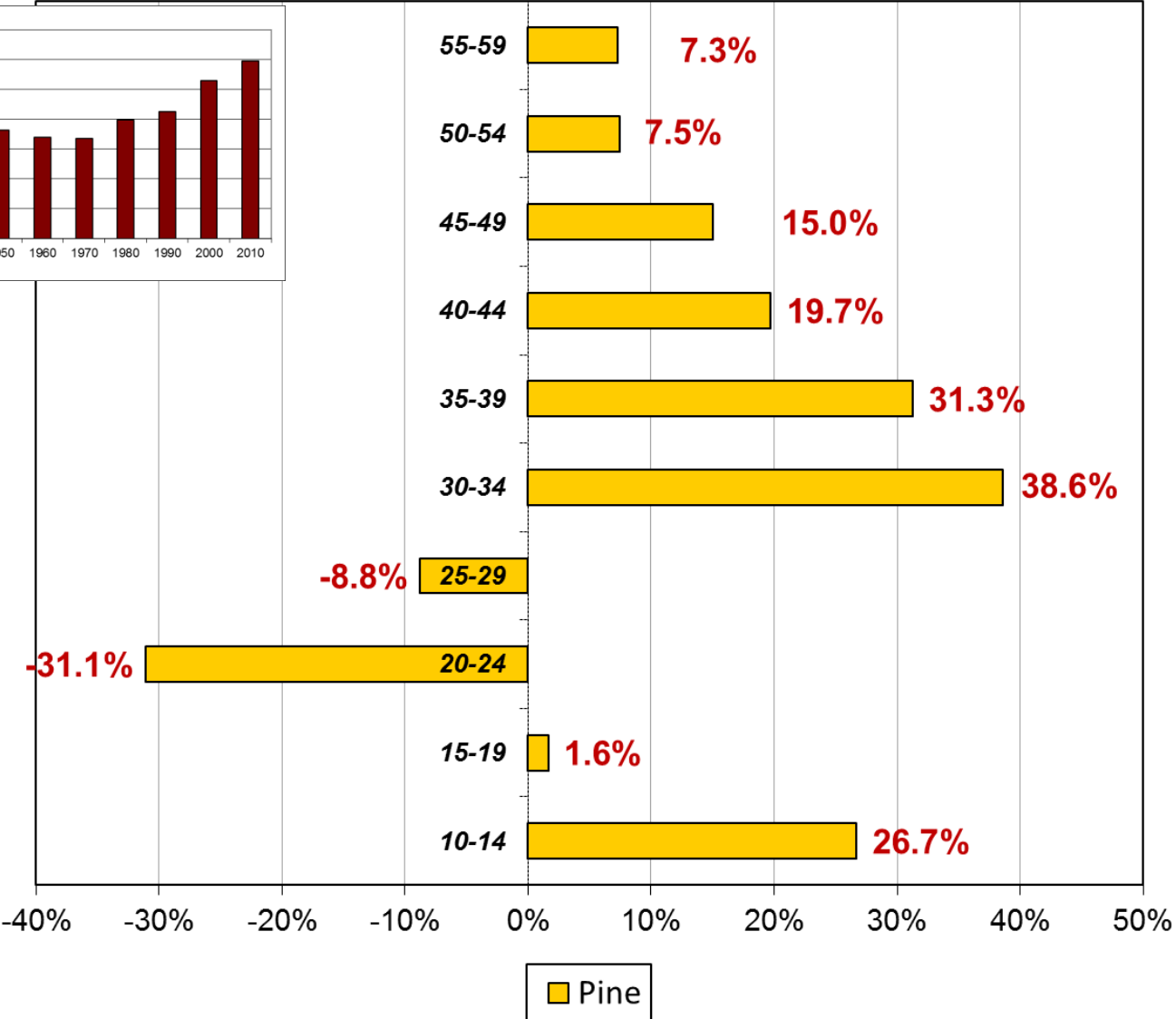
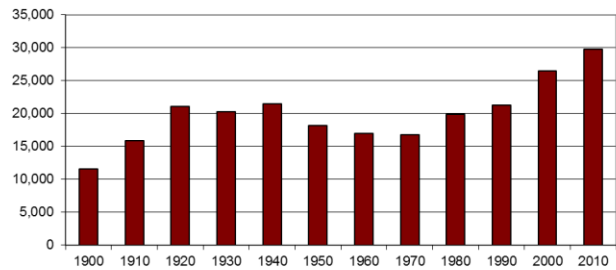
1990-2000, Percent Cohort Change



1990-2000, Percent Cohort Change

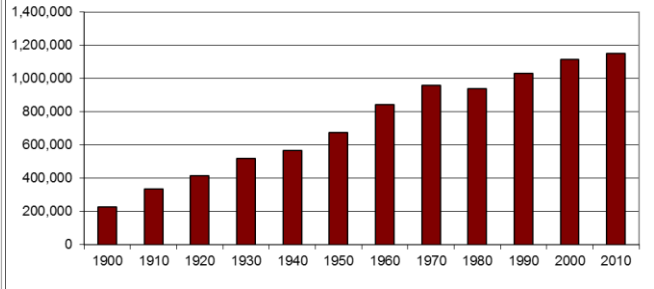
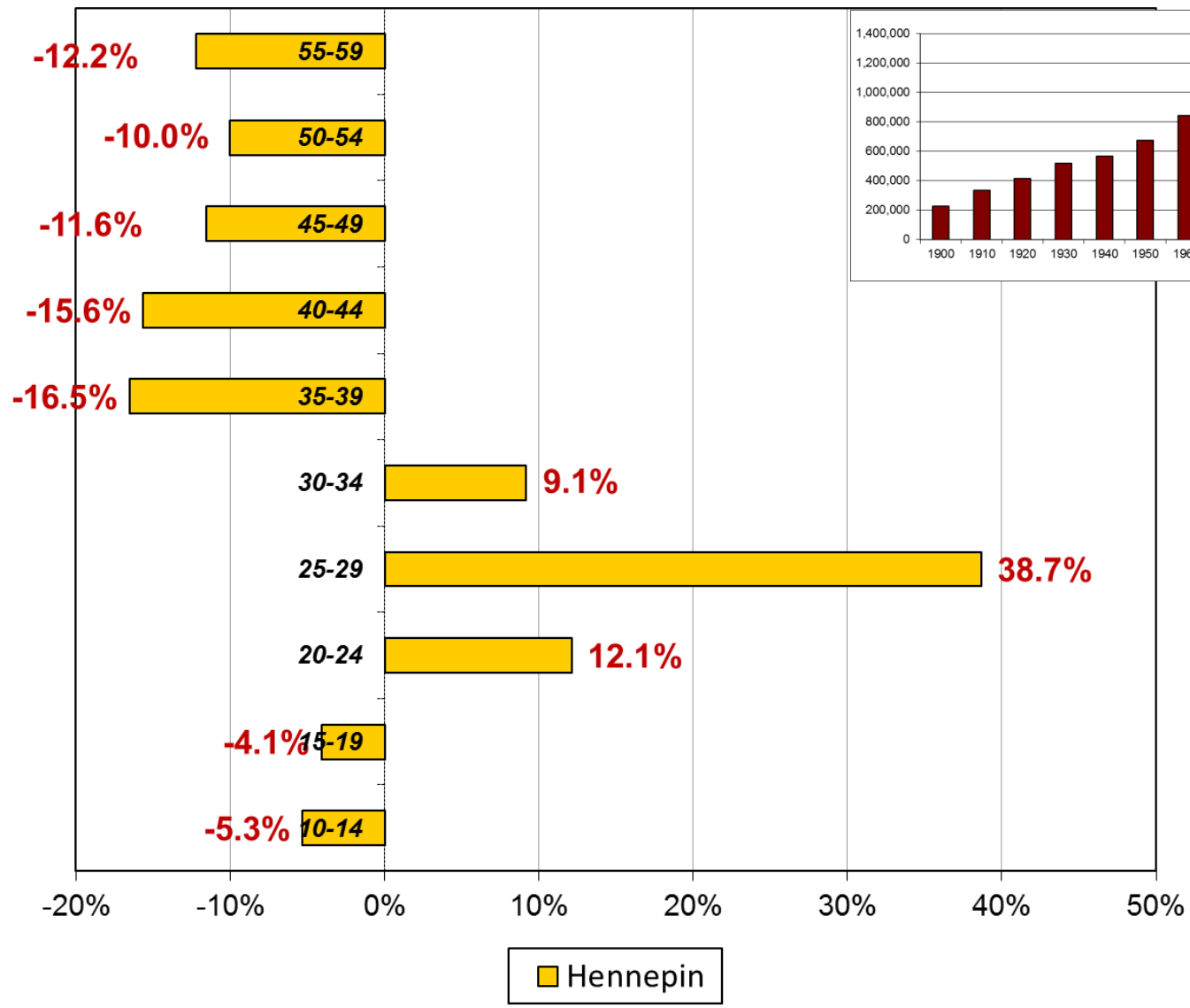


2000-2010, Percent Cohort Change

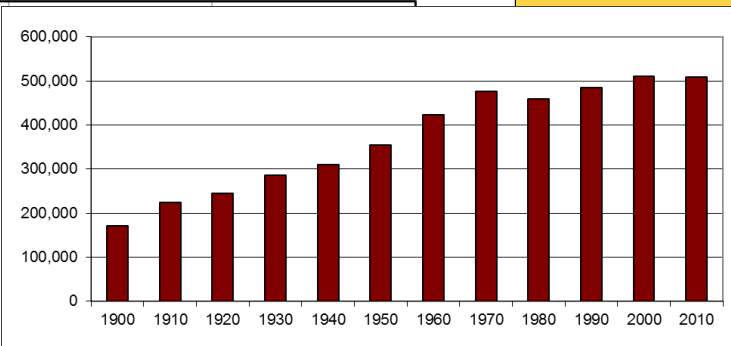
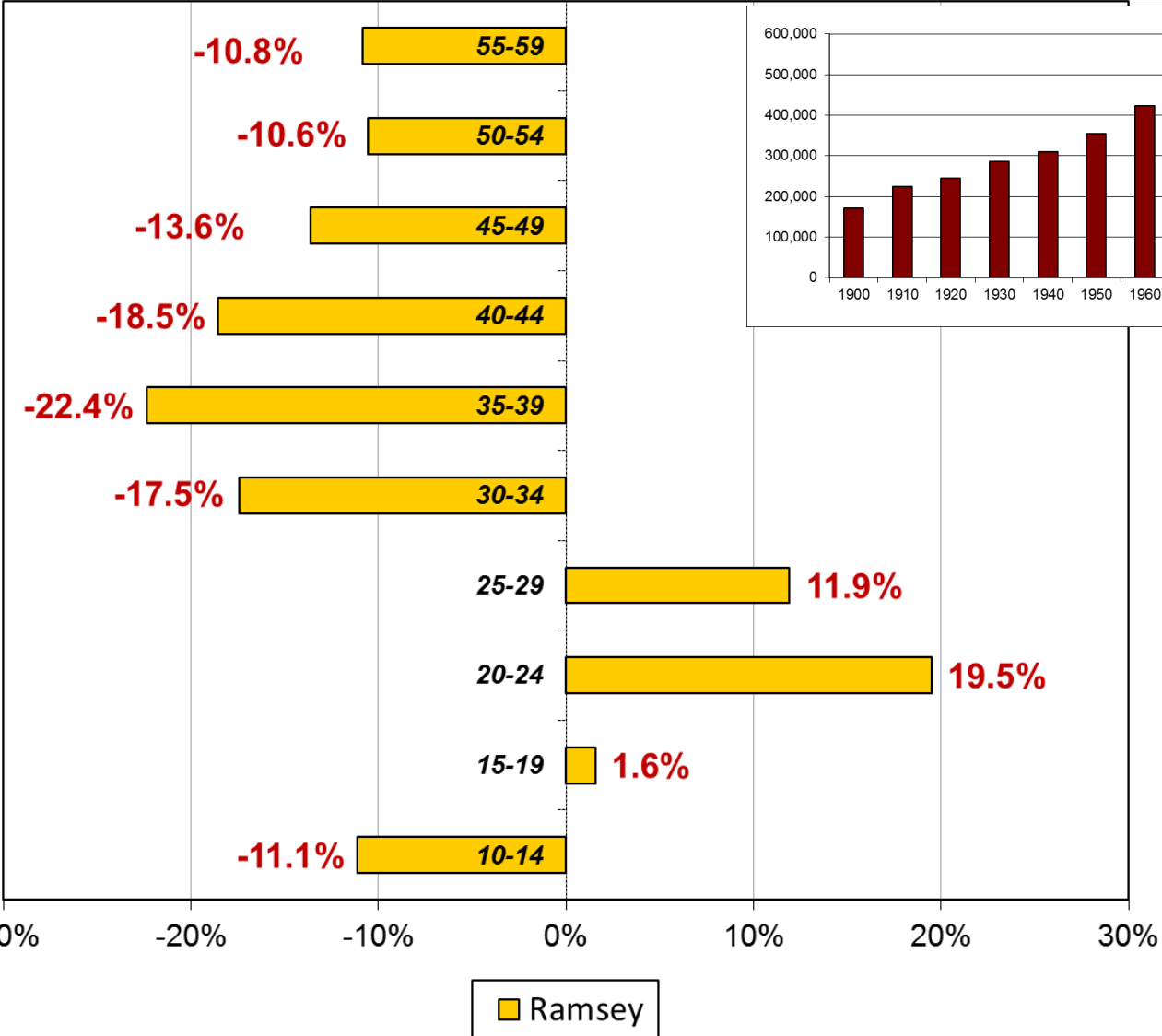


■ Pine

2000-2010, Percent Cohort Change

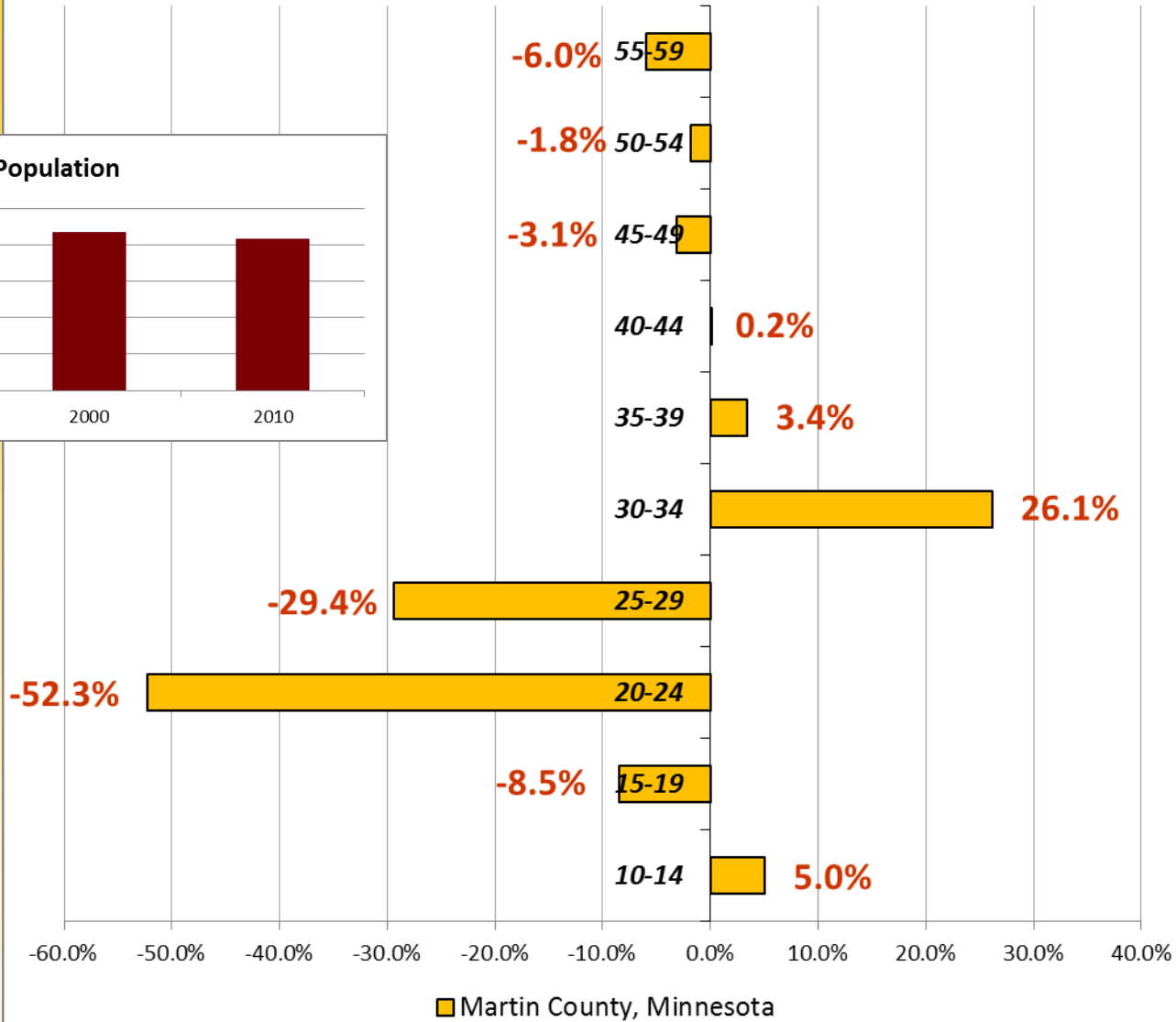
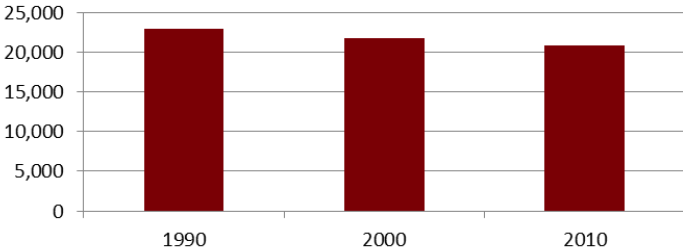


2000-2010, Percent Cohort Change

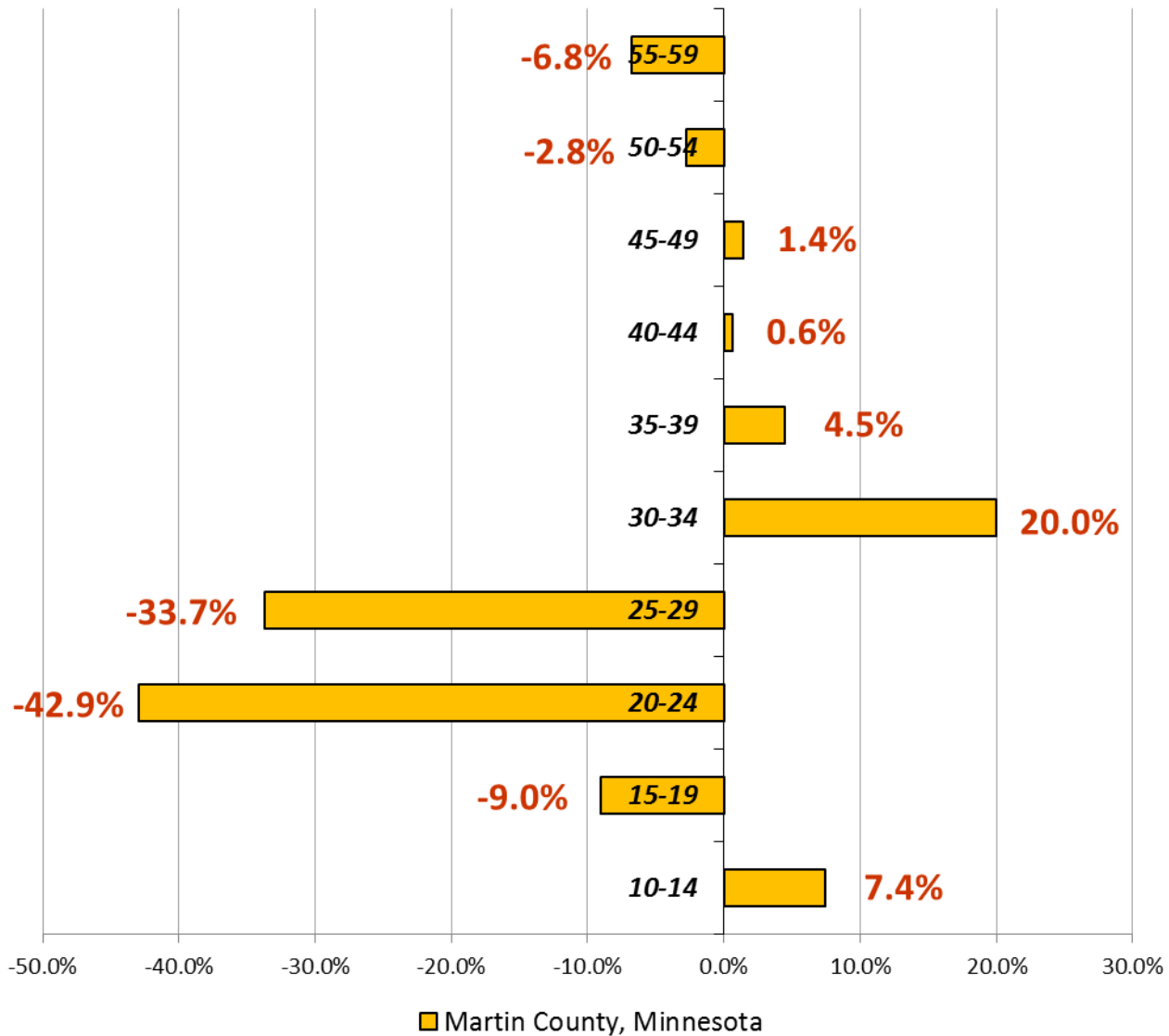


Percent Cohort Change, 1990-2000

Population



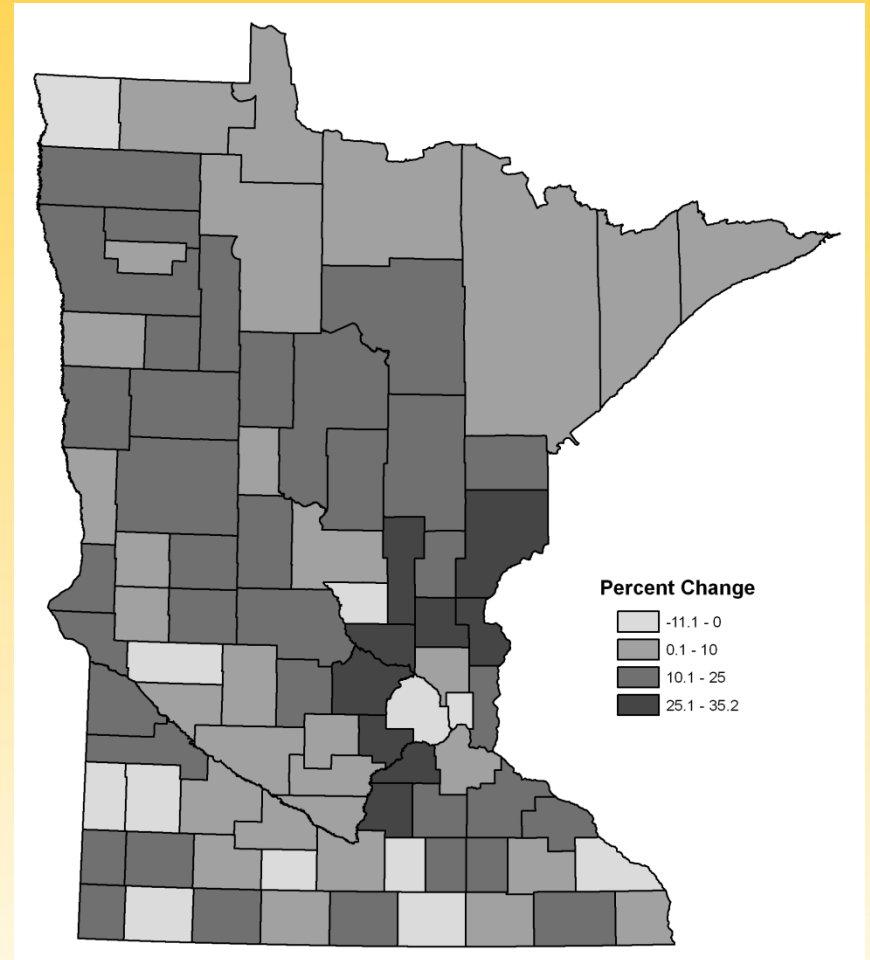
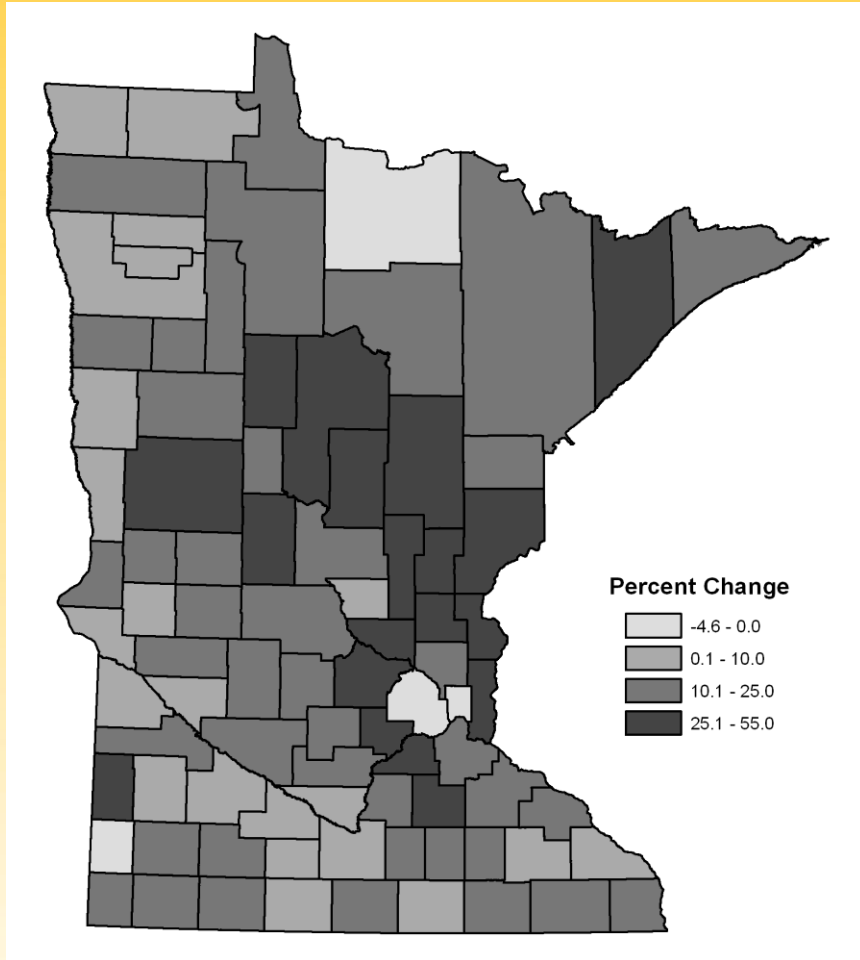
Percent Cohort Change, 2000-2010



Age 10-14

1990-2000

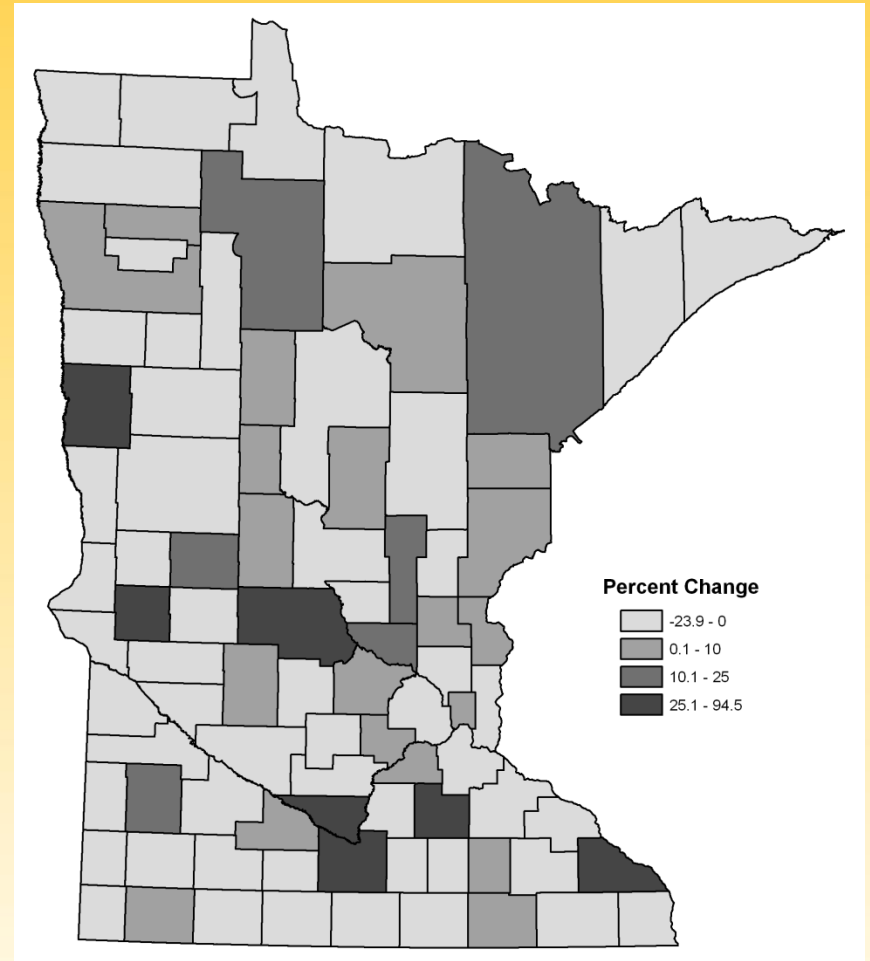
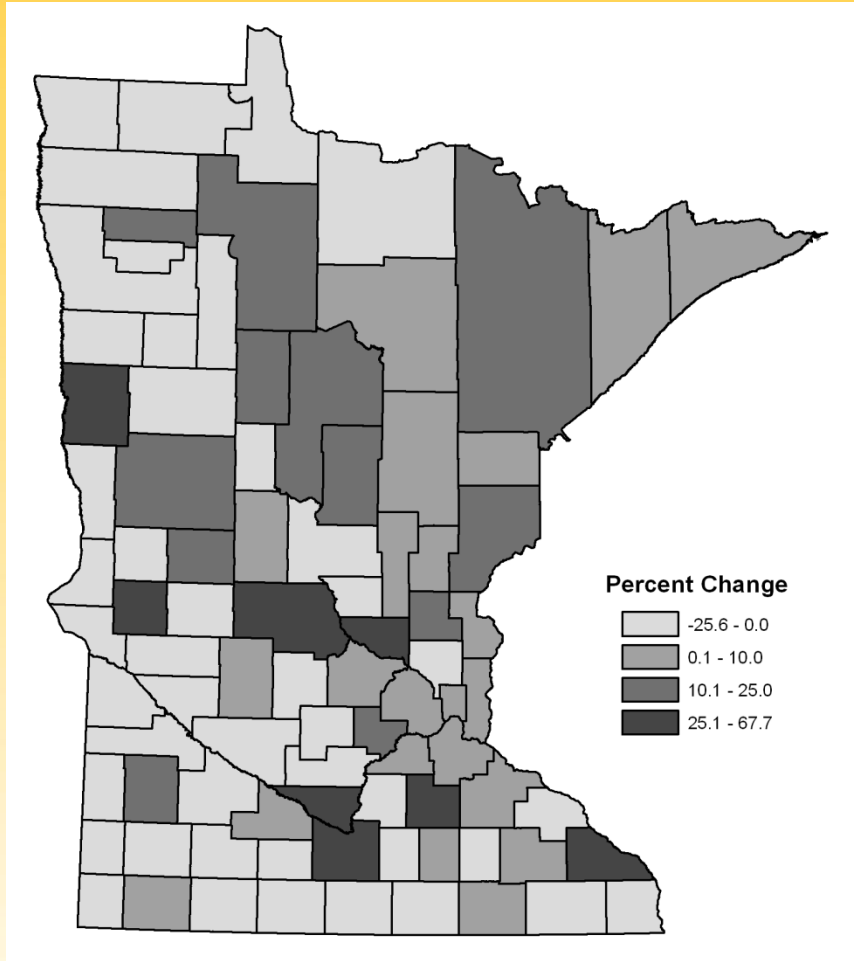
2000-2010



Age 15-19

1990-2000

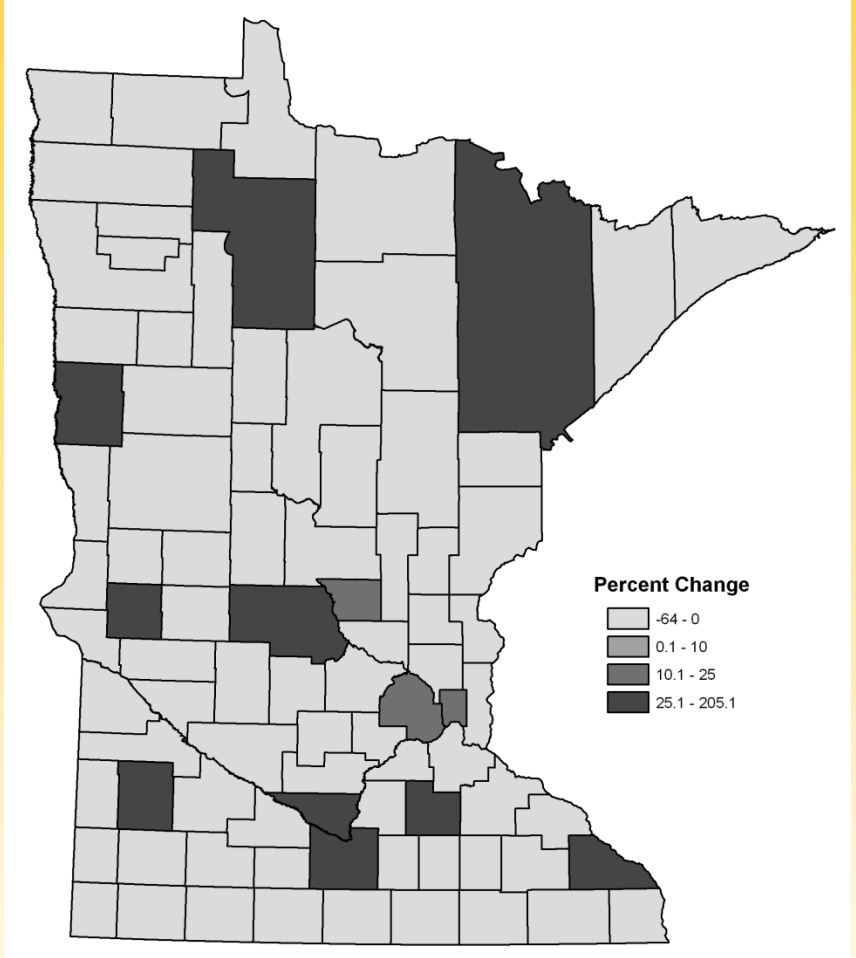
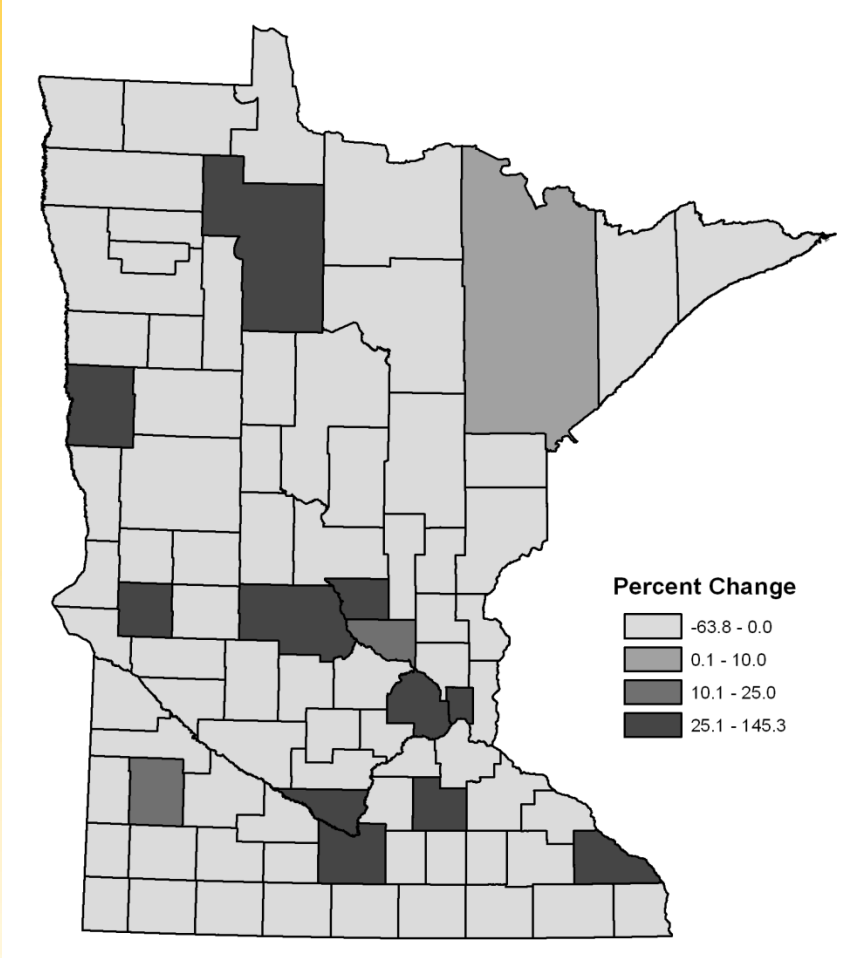
2000-2010



Age 20-24

1990-2000

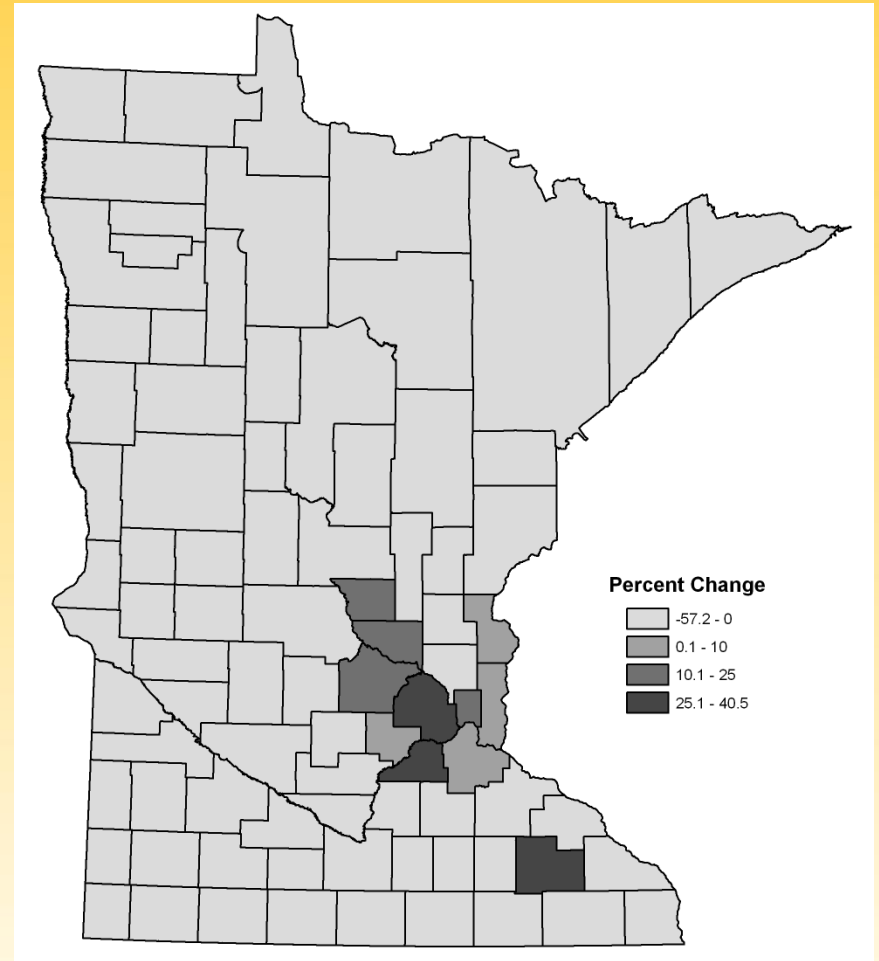
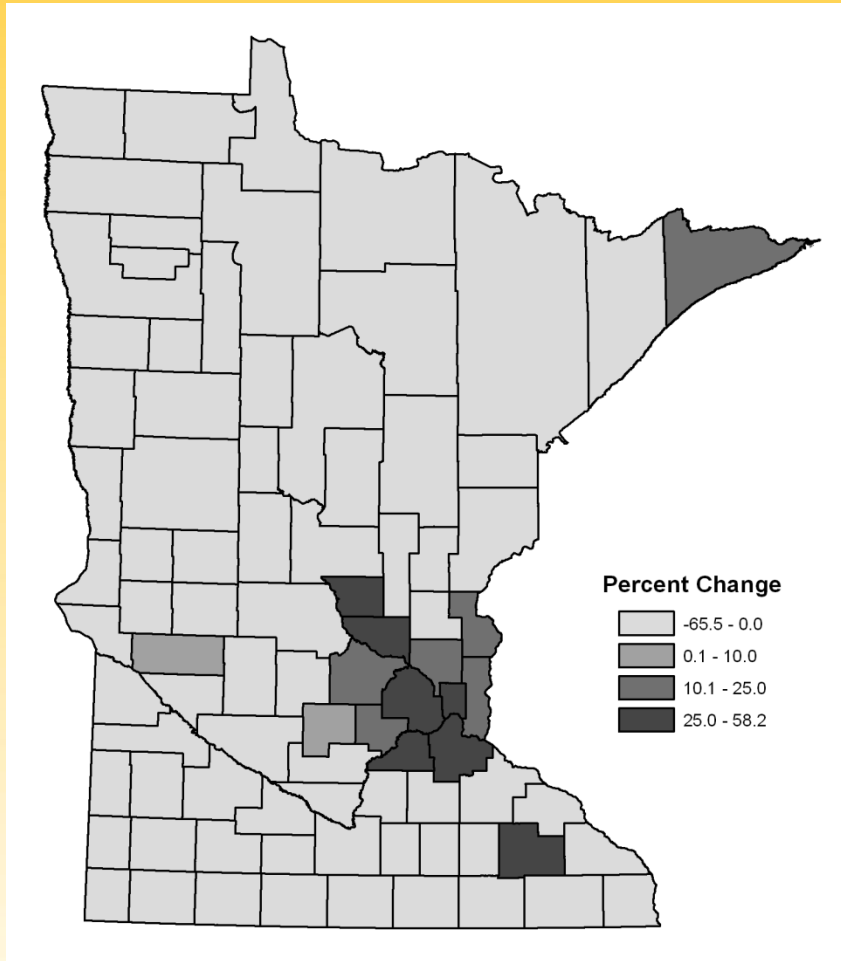
2000-2010



Age 25-29

1990-2000

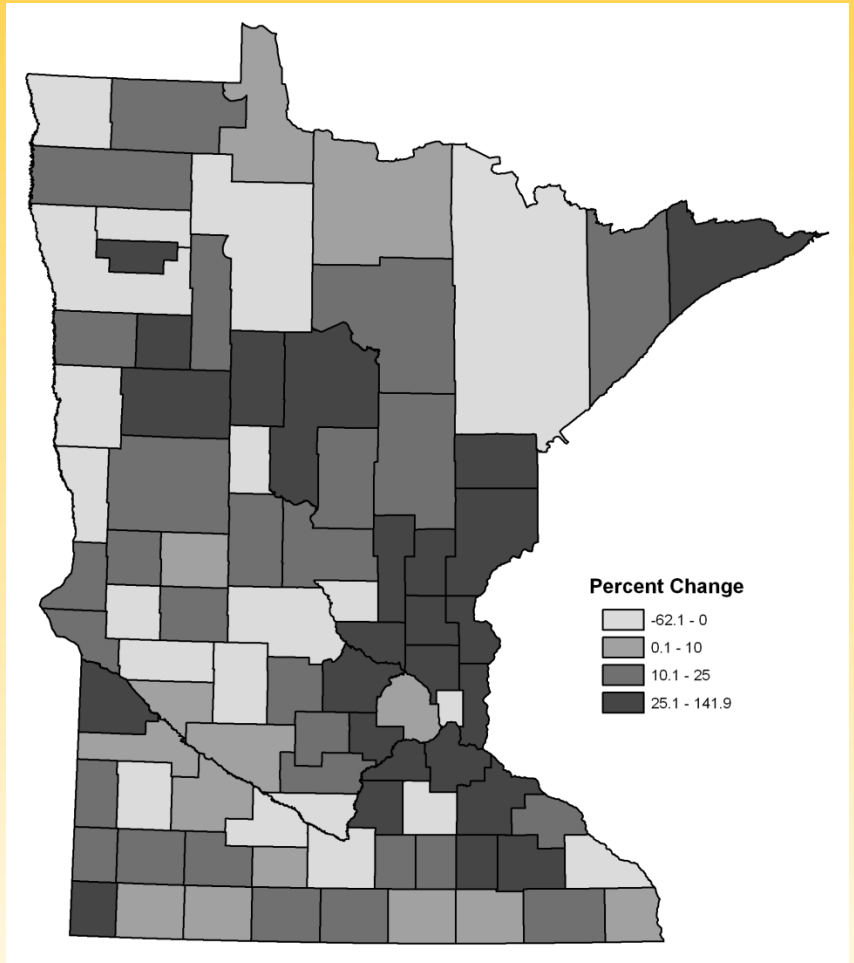
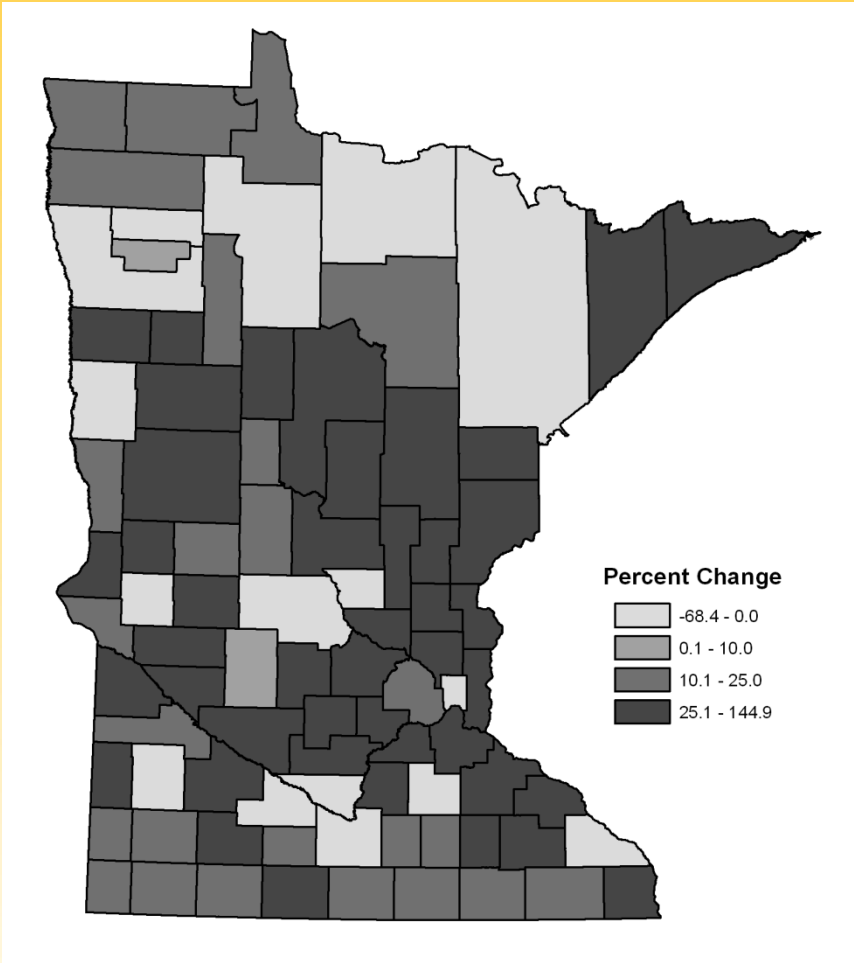
2000-2010



Age 30-34

1990-2000

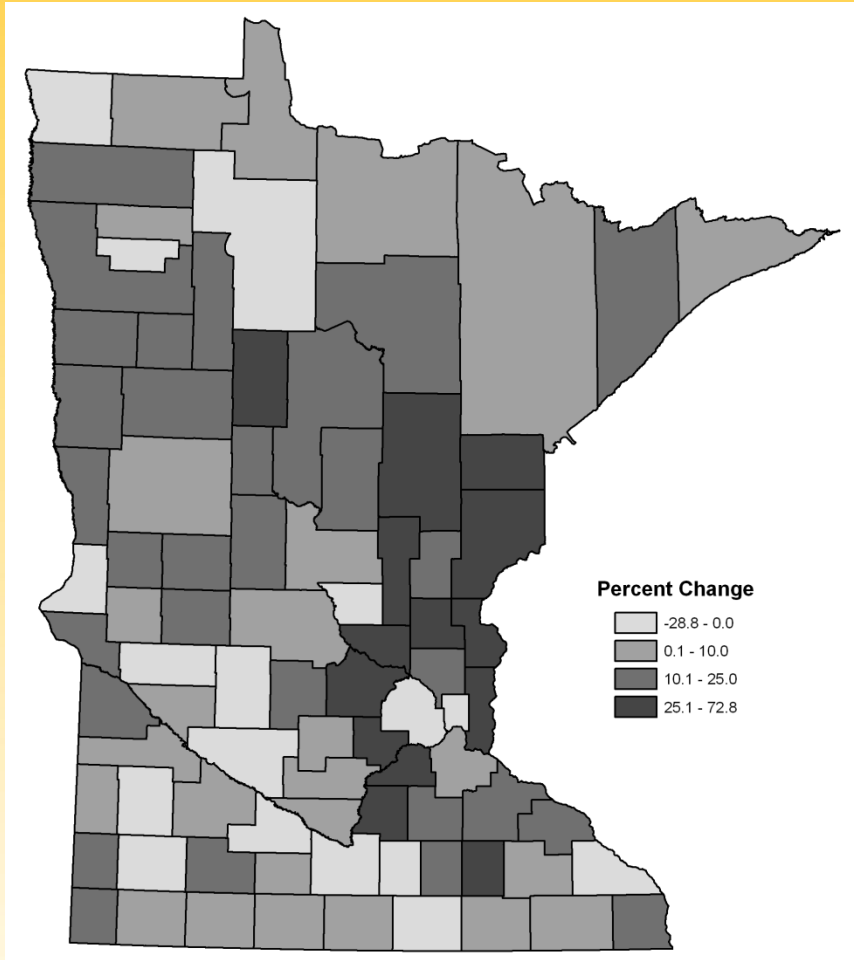
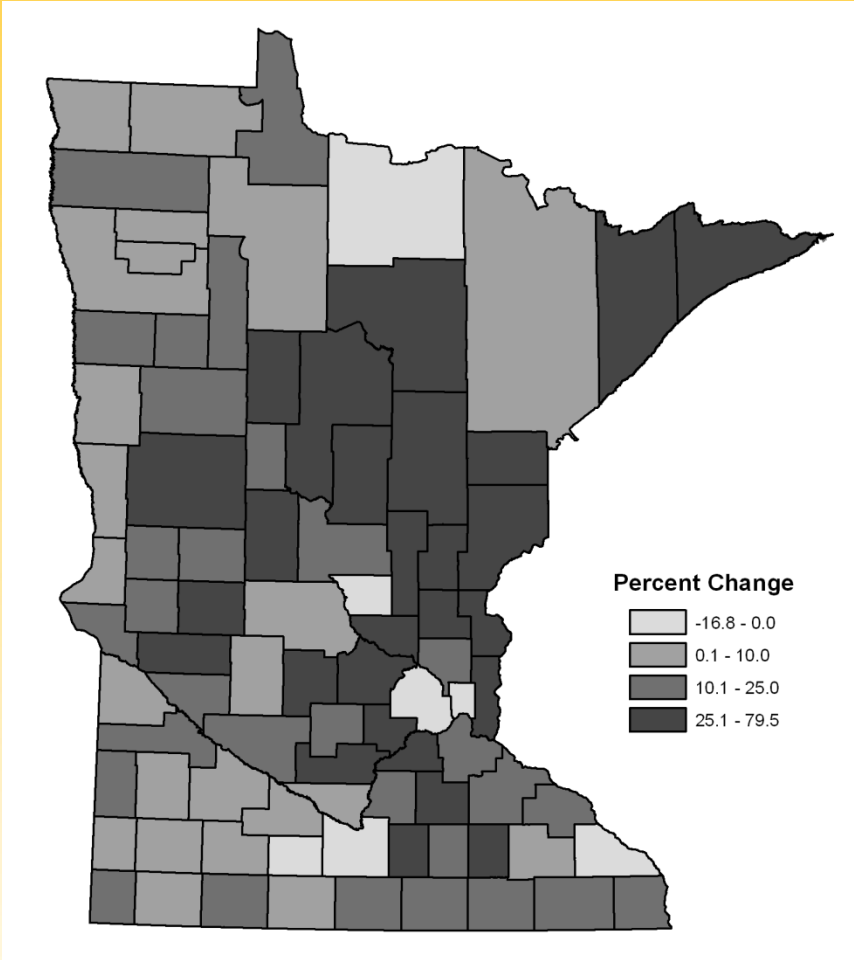
2000-2010



Age 35-39

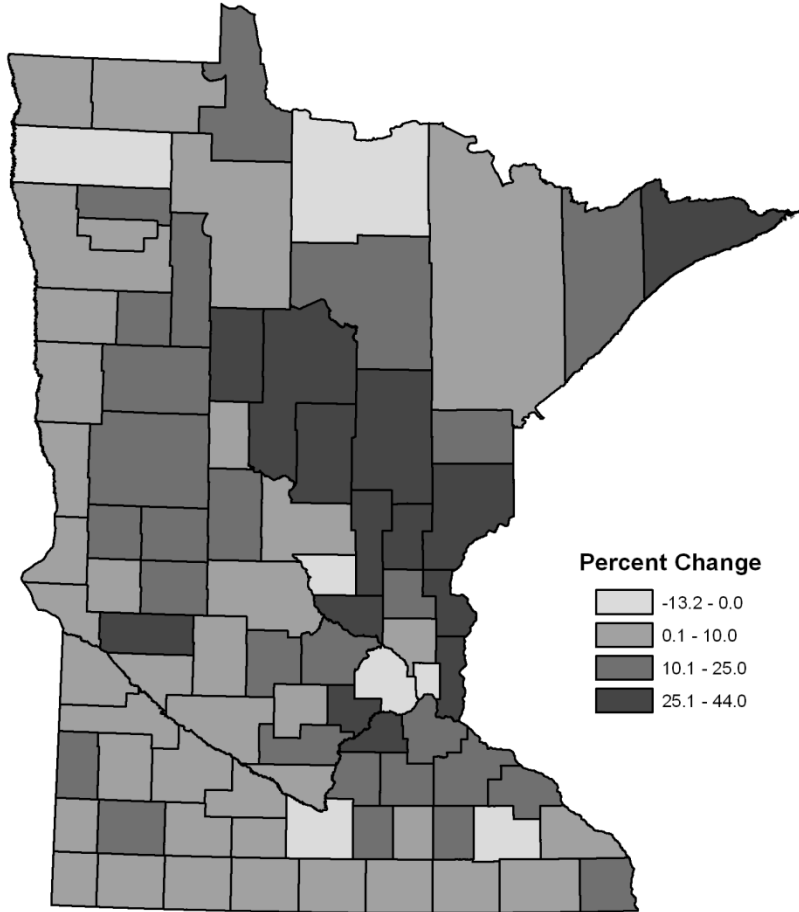
1990-2000

2000-2010

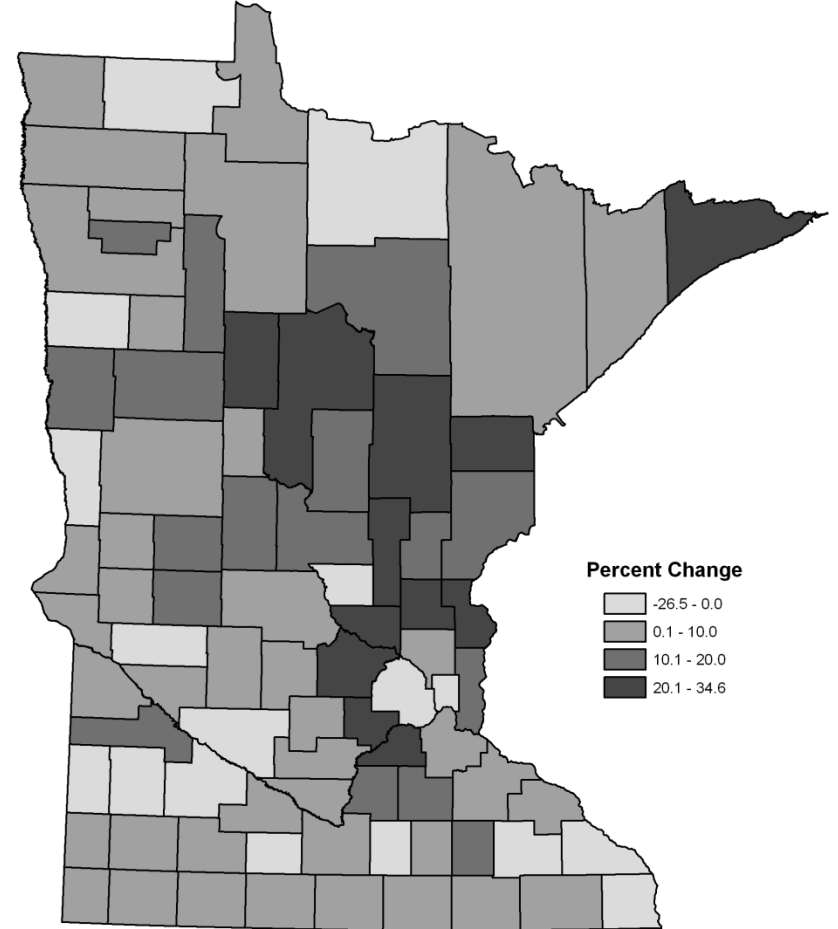


Age 40-44

1990-2000



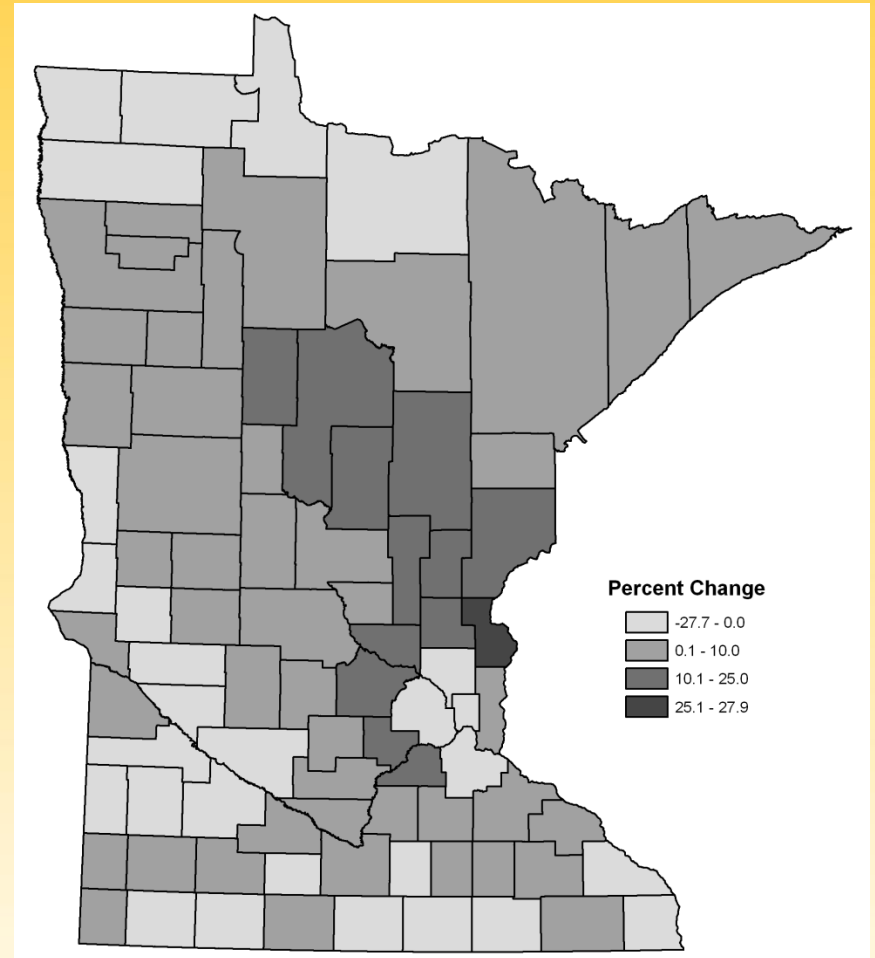
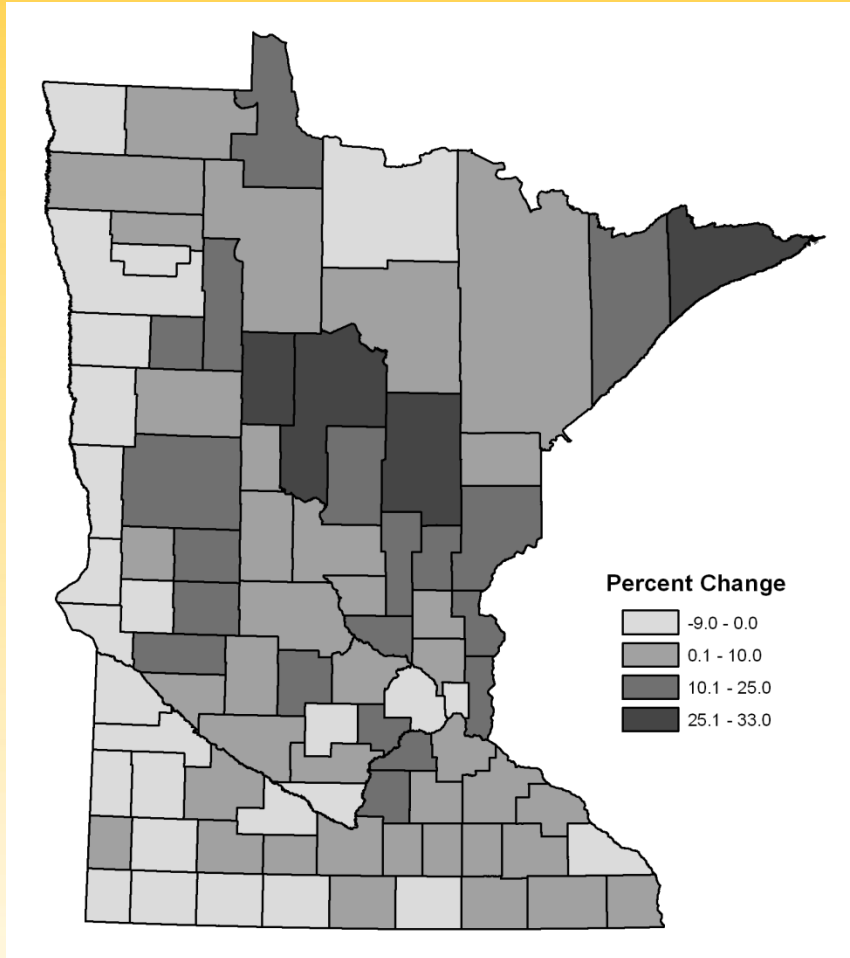
2000-2010



Age 45-49

1990-2000

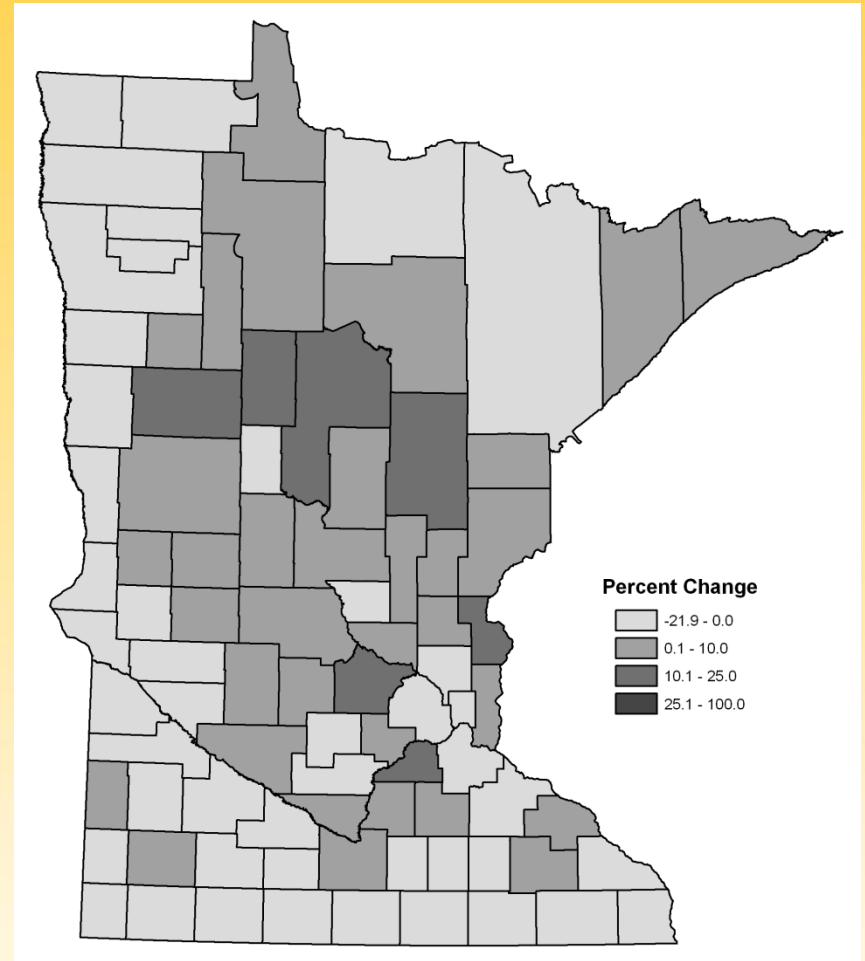
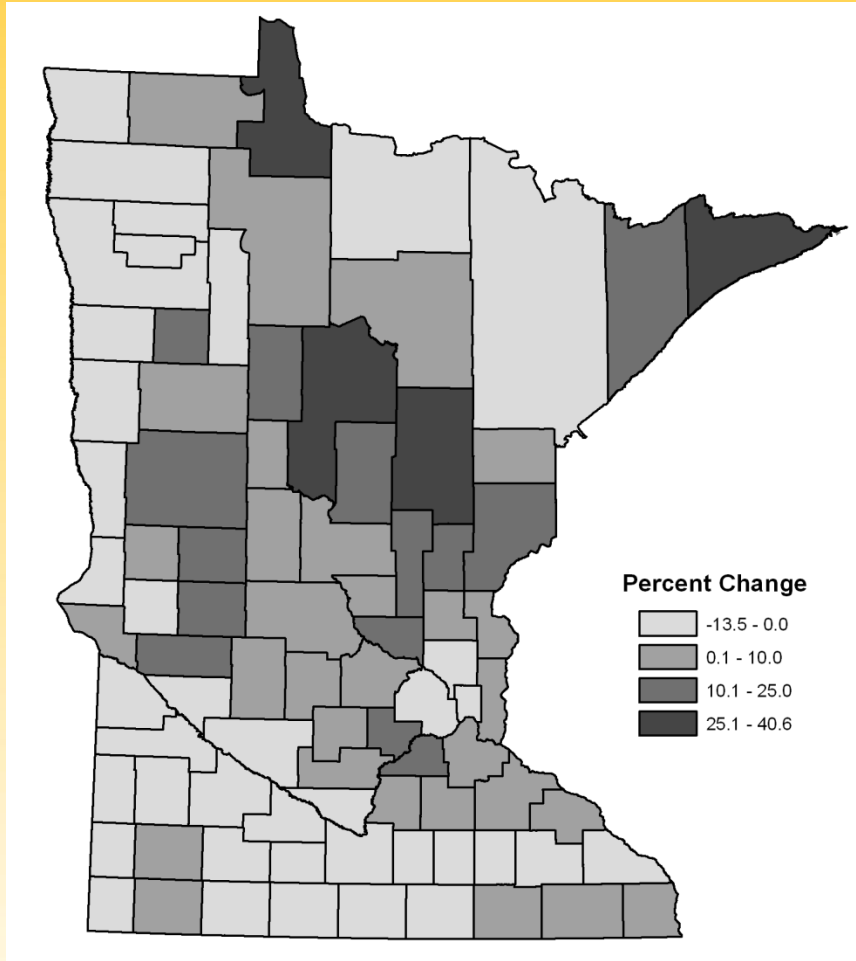
2000-2010



Age 50-54

1990-2000

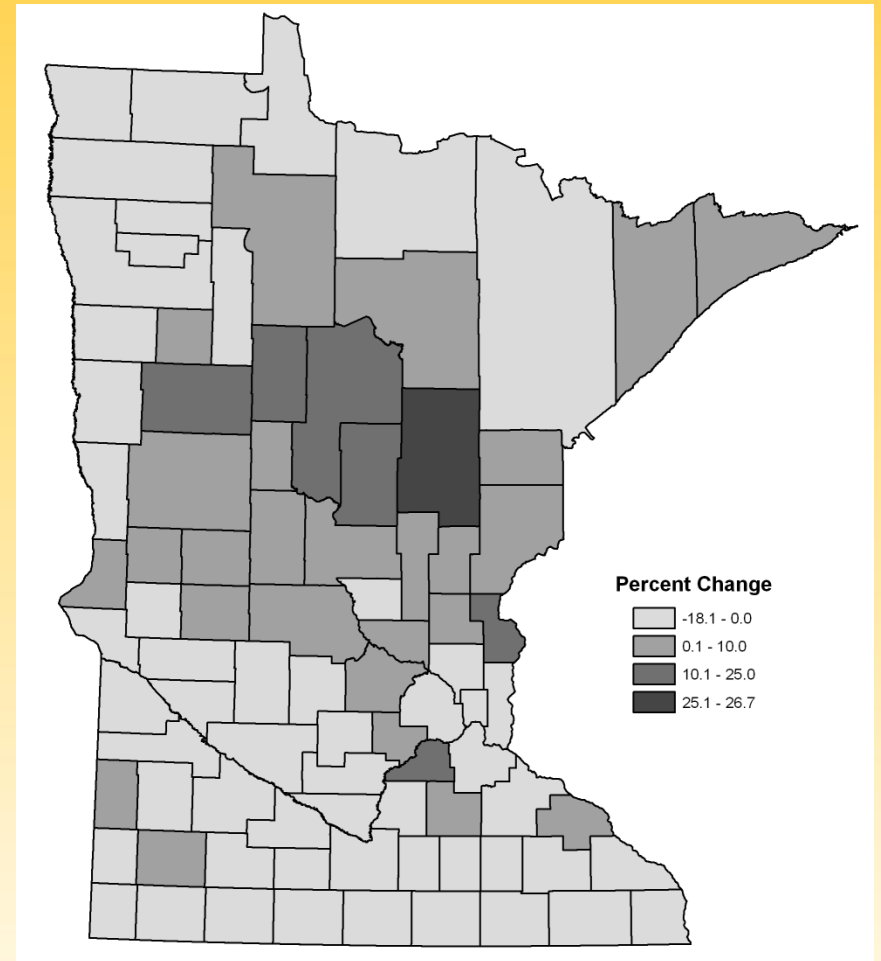
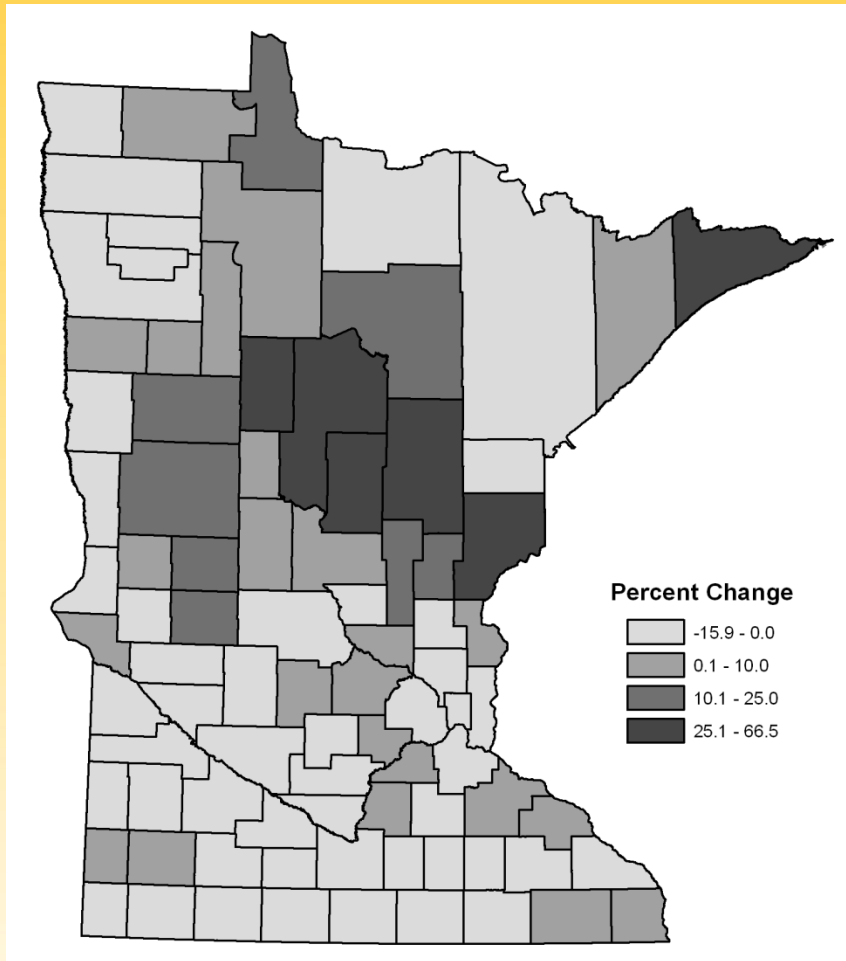
2000-2010



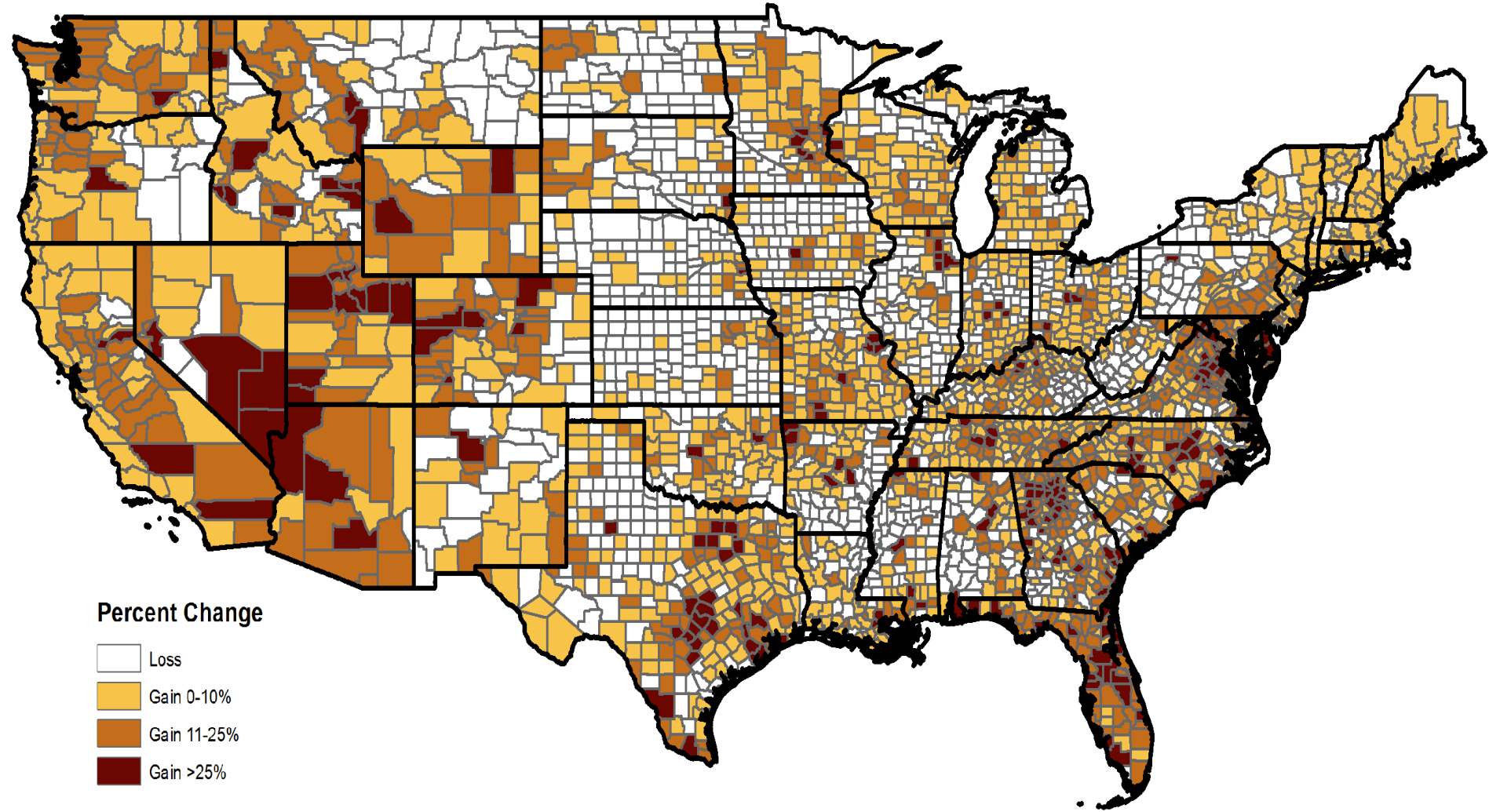
Age 55-59

1990-2000

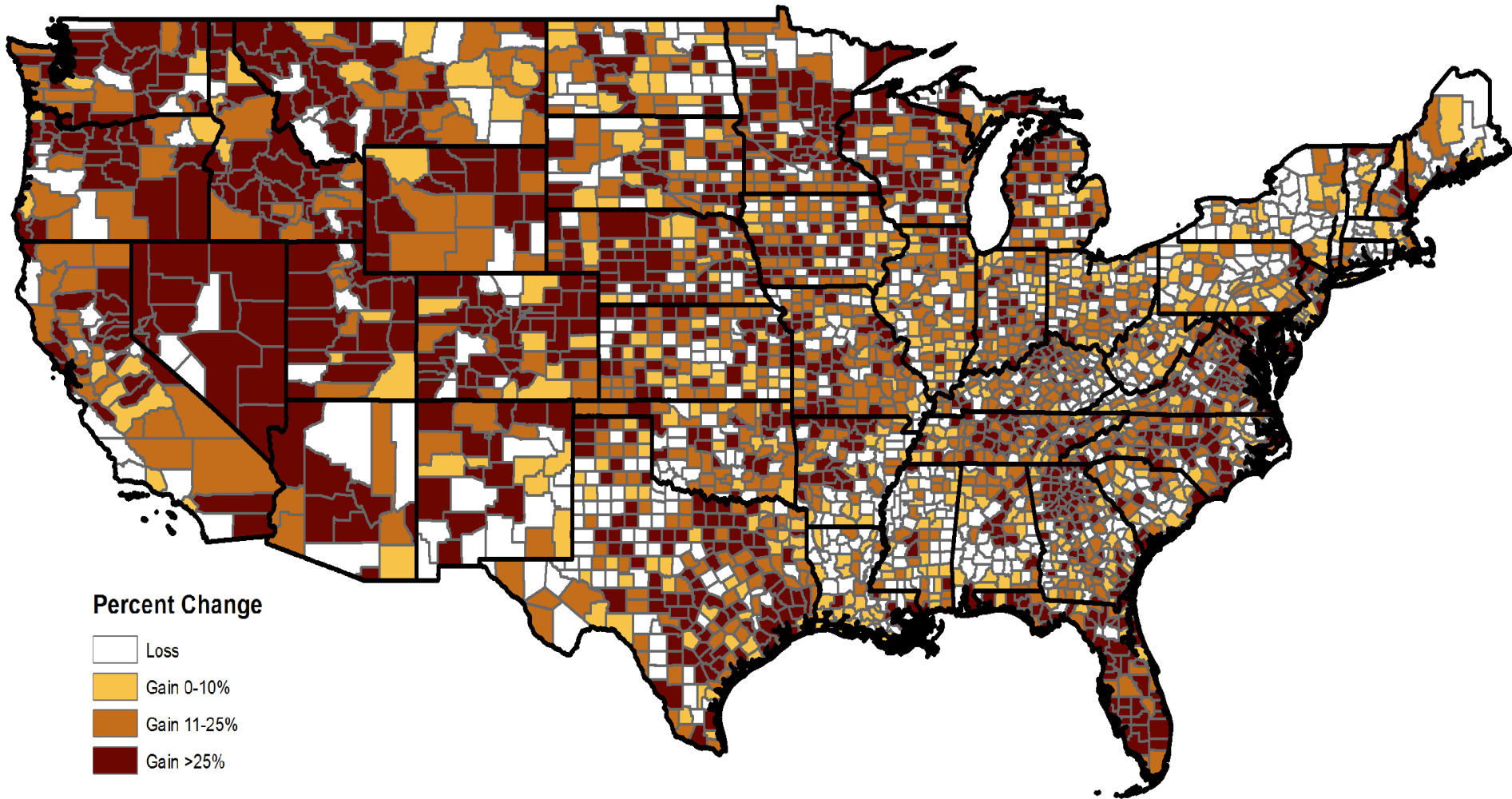
2000-2010



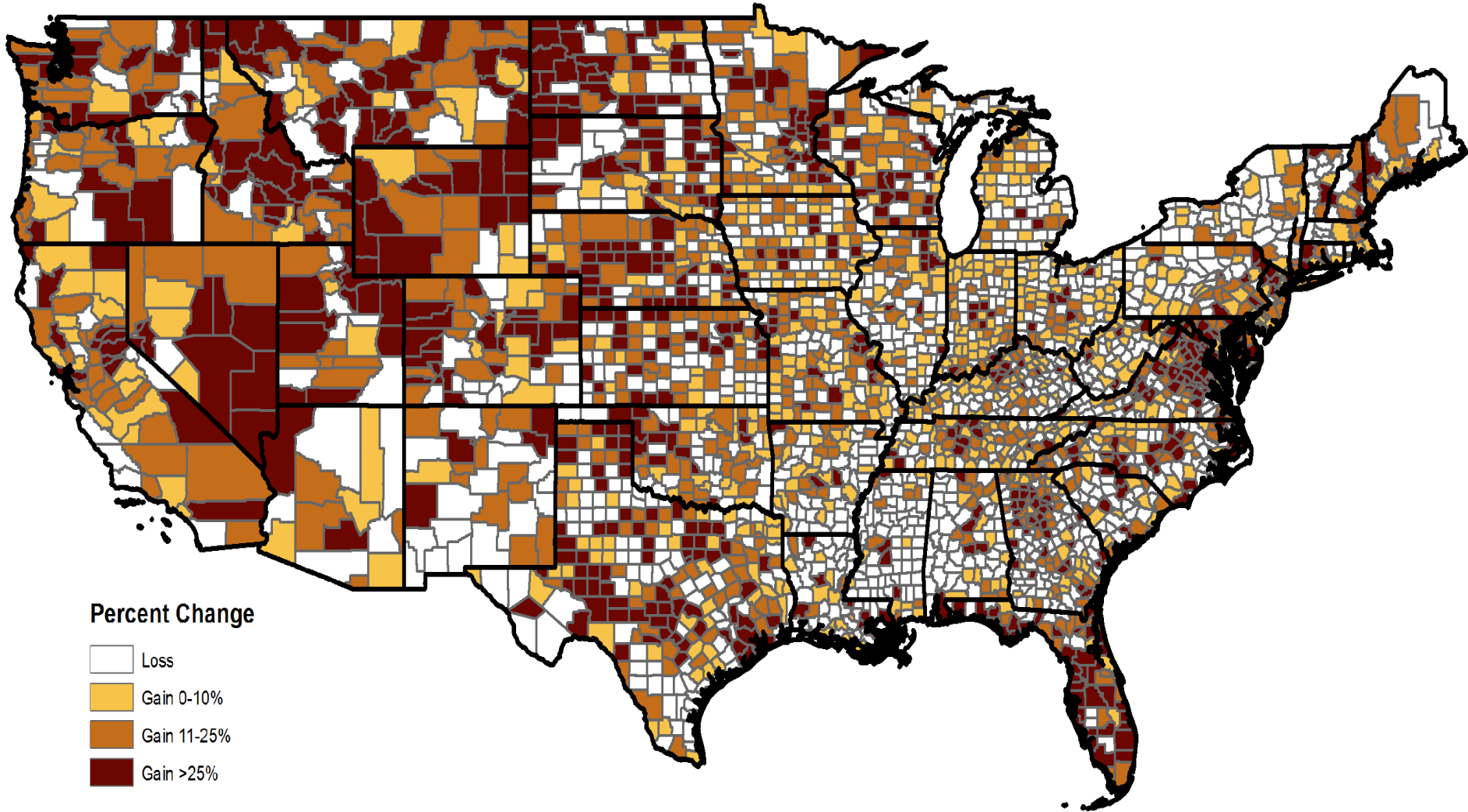
Population Change 2000-2010



Cohort Age 30-34, Percent Change 1990-2000



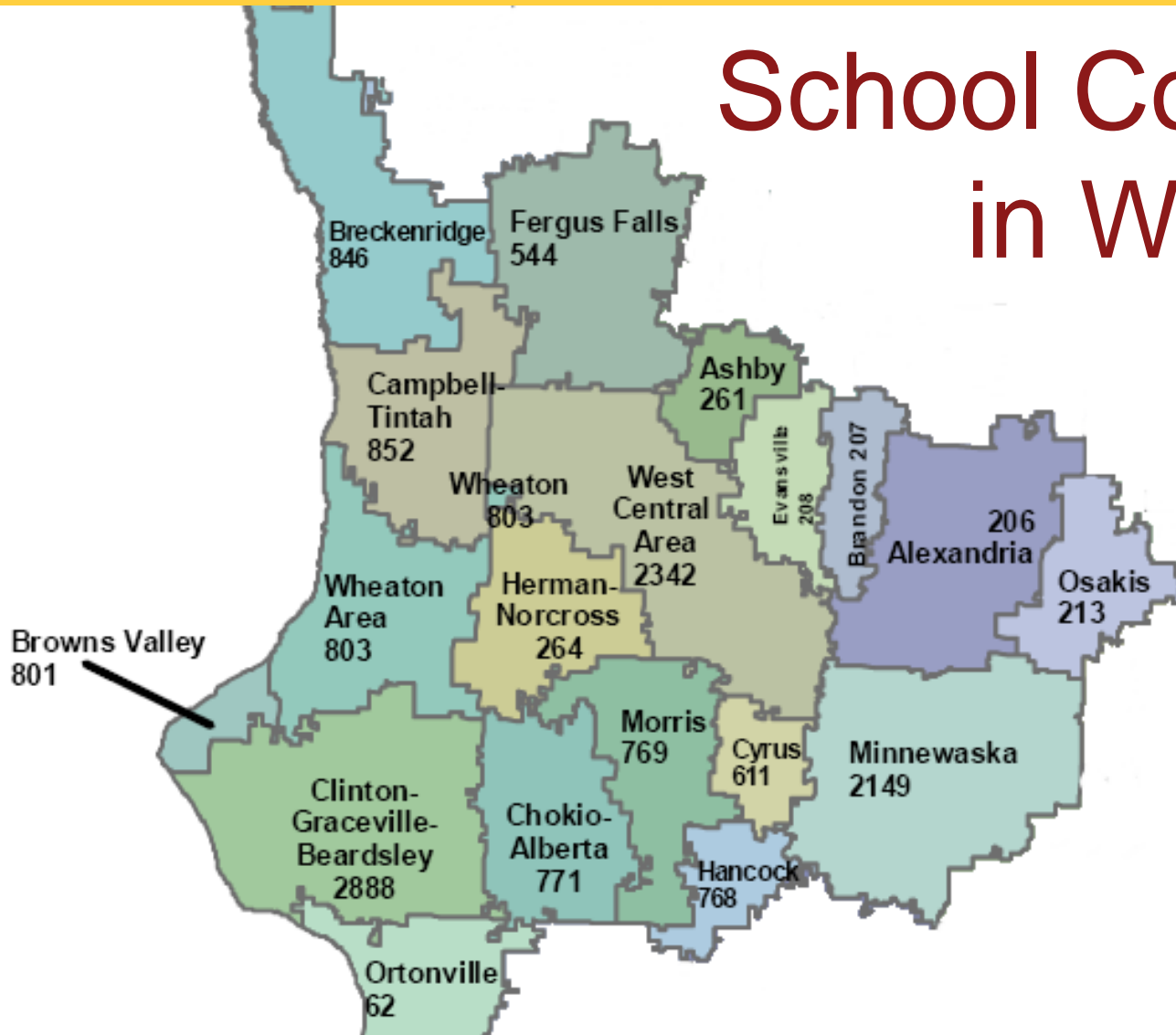
Cohort Age 30-34, Percent Change 2000-2010



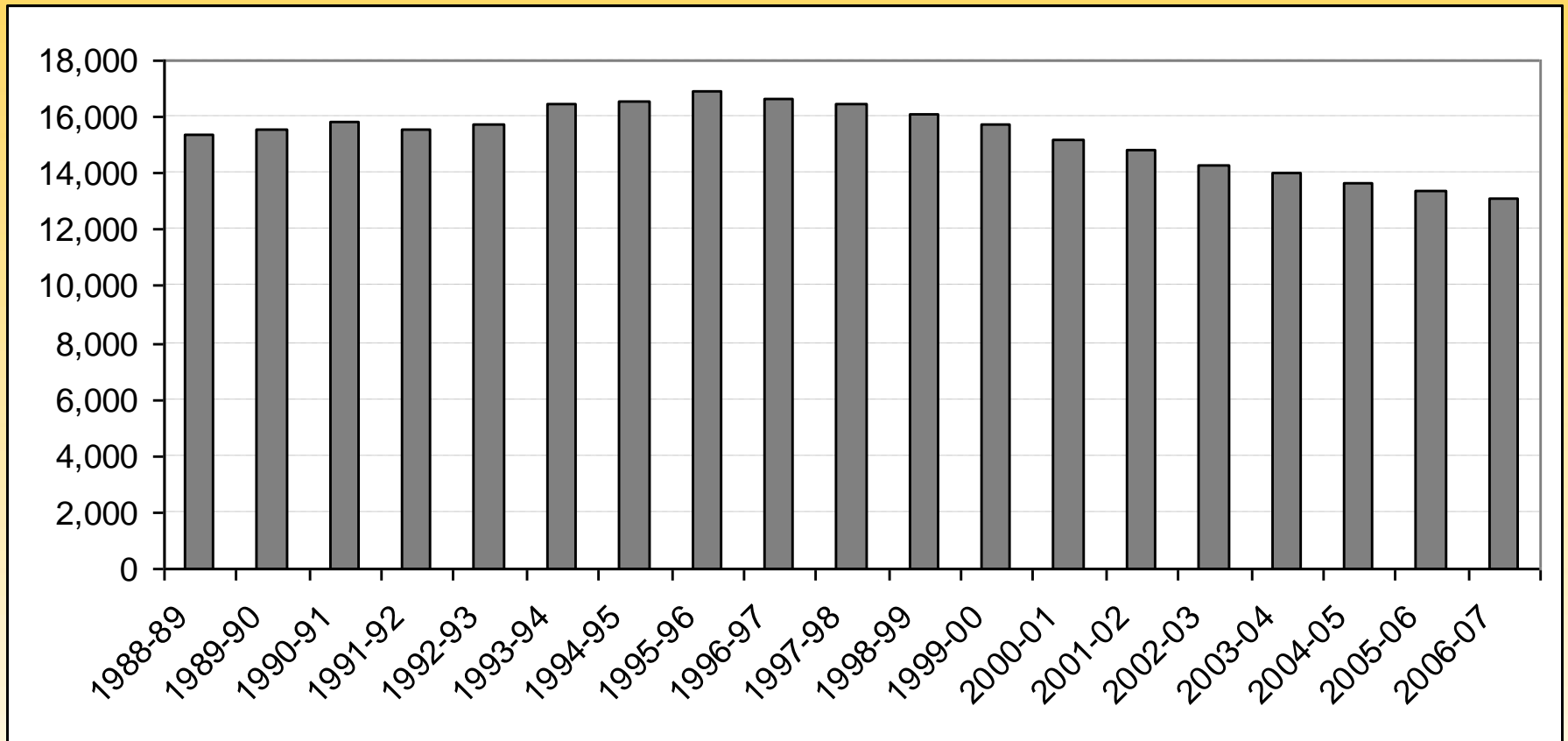
Corroborating Evidence?



School Collaborative in West Central Minnesota



Total School Enrollment in Collaborative Region



School Grade Cohort



Grade 1 → Grade 2 → Grade 3 → Grade 4

If you have 100 students enter First Grade in 1997-98,
we expect 100 students to enter Second Grade in 1998-99.

What do we observe?

Source: U.S. Census Bureau,
Minnesota Department of Education



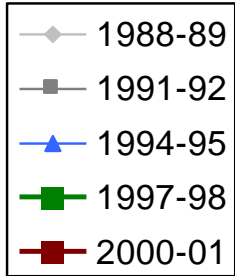
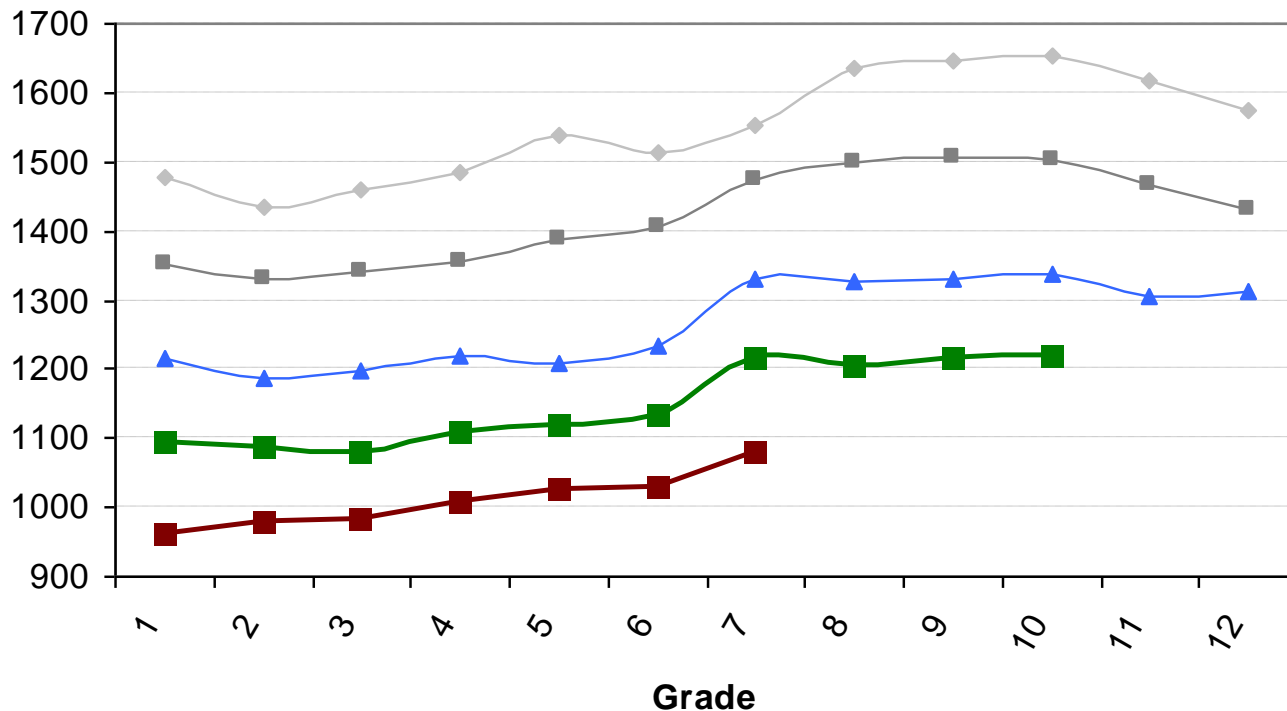
Total Enrollment by Grade

Source: Minnesota Department of Education

Grade	1997-98	2000-01	2003-04	Pct. Change 1997-2001	Pct. Change 2001-2004
PK	137	141	169	2.9%	19.9%
KG	1,043	958	980	-8.1%	2.3%
01	1,087	962	924	-11.5%	-4.0%
02	1,168	1,070	937	-8.4%	-12.4%
03	1,170	1,072	989	-8.4%	-7.7%
04	1,207	1,109	1,006	-8.1%	-9.3%
05	1,241	1,230	1,123	-0.9%	-8.7%
06	1,319	1,215	1,121	-7.9%	-7.7%
07	1,475	1,330	1,215	-9.8%	-8.6%
08	1,477	1,335	1,335	-9.6%	0.0%
09	1,555	1,407	1,309	-9.5%	-7.0%
10	1,654	1,503	1,338	-9.1%	-11.0%
11	1,509	1,453	1,344	-3.7%	-7.5%
12	1,504	1,496	1,355	-0.5%	-9.4%
<i>K-12 Sum</i>	17,409	16,140	14,976	-7.3%	-7.2%



Cohort Size by Year of Entry



Cohort Growth between grade 2 and 6

1988	107	7.5%
1991	58	7.1%
1994	20	1.7%
1997	34	3.1%
2000	45	4.6%



Rural Brain Gain Trend

- The growth is primarily in the 30 to 49 age group - this in-migration into rural communities can be just about equal to that of the out-migration of youth - the "Brain Drain".
- These people are bringing children aged 10-17.
- There is an interchange between core urban, suburban, and rural places.
- This interchange (loss and gain) is necessary for influx of new ideas to cultivate social capital.



Buffalo Commons Research

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



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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





Newcomers: Future?

- 77% say they will be living there 5 years from now.
- The % is lower for younger people.
- Those who rate community as friendly and trusting have higher %
- Expectation of staying related to job opportunities and security, feeling of belonging, suitable housing, opportunities to join local organizations, and others.



Economic Impact of Newcomers

- The surveyed newcomers reported \$6.6 million in household income in 2009 and 2010. This equates to an average household income of \$66,000.
- New, expanded, or relocated businesses owned by the newcomers reported spending \$108,000 in the region per year.
- The total economic impact of the surveyed newcomers' business and household spending is \$9.1 million, including 174 jobs and \$7.2 million in labor income (including wages, salaries, and benefits).
- The survey was not random, and therefore the results cannot be generalized beyond the study region, the average newcomer household annually contributed \$92,000 in economic activity to the region in 2009 and 2010.



The trend, continued

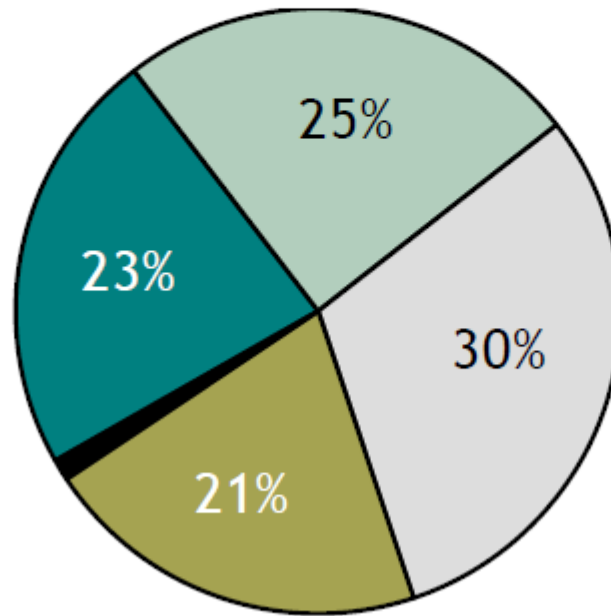
- The movement of people is consistent and large, it's not all about outmigration.
- Those moving to rural areas are in their prime earning years.
- Isn't this a net BRAIN GAIN?
- High levels of entrepreneurship and small business ownership.



Where We Live and Where We'd Like to Live

by community type

- City
- Suburb
- Small town
- Rural area



PewResearchCenter

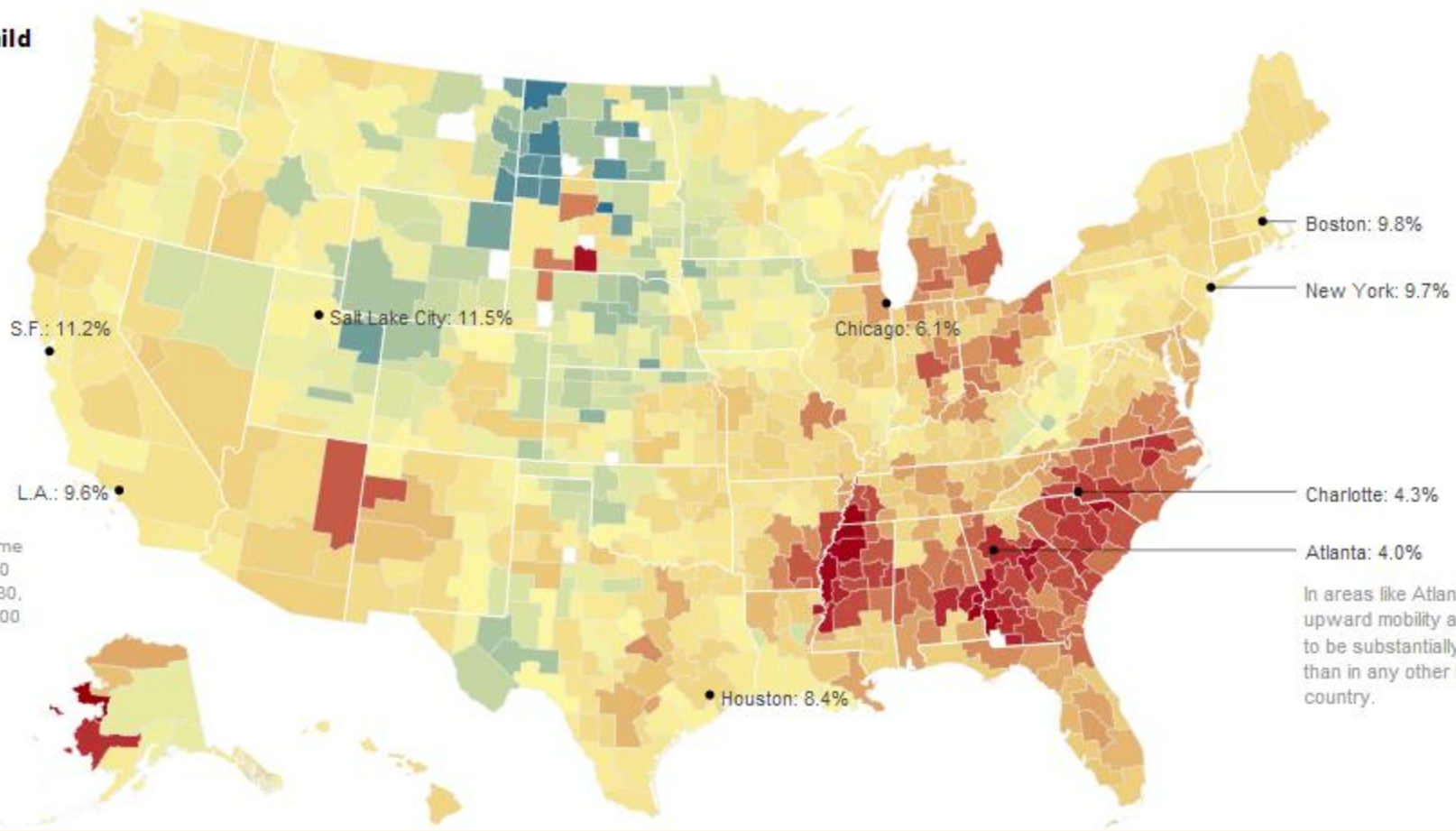
In Climbing Income Ladder, Location Matters

A study finds the odds of rising to another income level are notably low in certain cities, like Atlanta and Charlotte, and much higher in New York and Boston.

The chance a child raised in the bottom fifth rose to the top fifth

- 35%
- 20%
- 15%
- 10%
- 4%

The top fifth is equal to family income of more than \$70,000 for the child by age 30, or more than \$100,000 by age 45.



In areas like Atlanta, upward mobility appears to be substantially lower than in any other rich country.



Cohort Lifecycle



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



Rewrite the Narrative

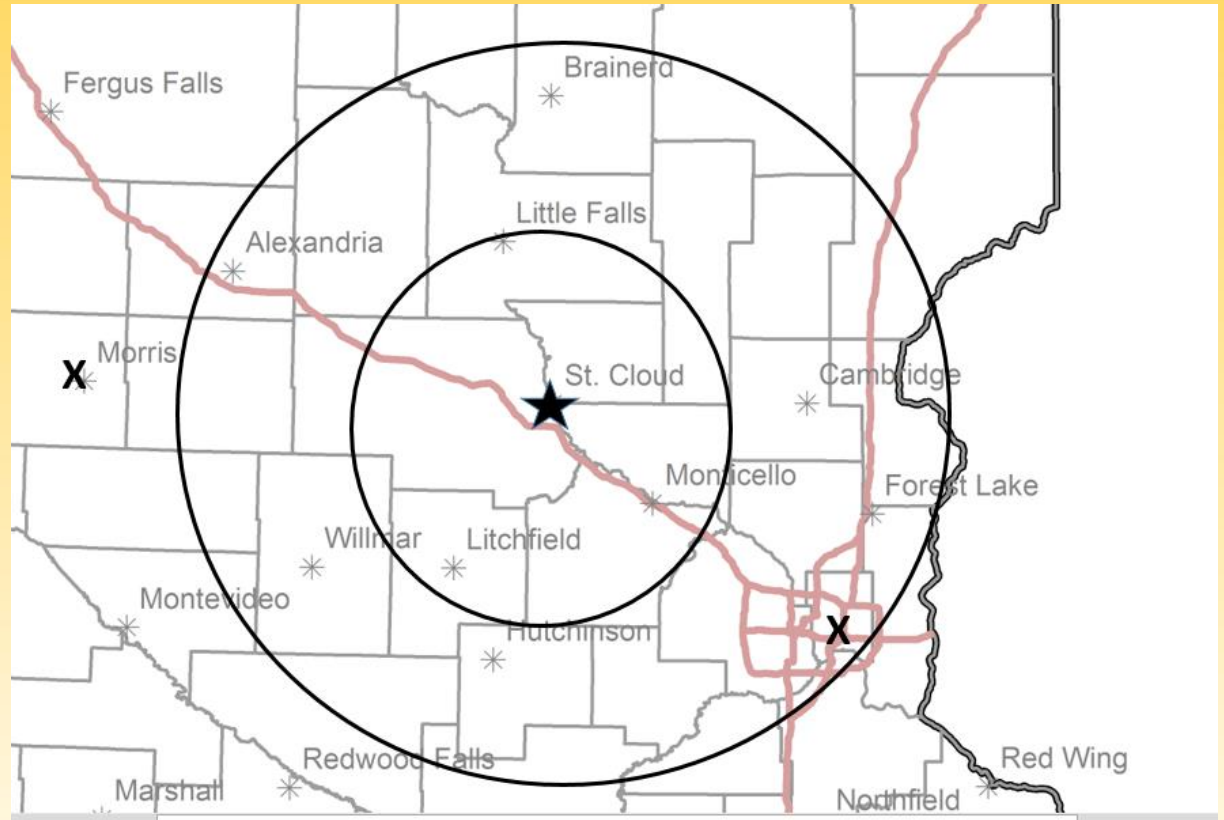
- National societal preferences to live in small towns and rural places
- Not everyone is leaving small towns
- A new urbanity is found in formerly rural places (Mankato, Willmar)
- The trend continued in the 2000s, albeit slowed
 - Fuel prices high, mortgage crisis
 - Vacant housing down



Living in the Middle of Everywhere

- ★ where you live
- X where you work

- Circle around:
1. Shop / eat out
 2. Play / recreate





- This has been happening since 1970s
- This movement has occurred without a concerted effort to recruit or attract them.



**Play. Work. Live.
Here.**

Lake of the Woods



www.GrowUpNorth.com



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Recruitment and Retention Strategies

- No sound research here, in the process of DISCOVERY
 - Mileage reimbursements
 - Profiles of newcomers in newspaper
 - Community supper (best \$150 ever spent)
 - Nonprofit creation assistance
 - Marketing Hometown America



Recruitment vs Retention

- Recruitment involves **people**
 - Regional, individualistic
 - People attraction strategies
 - Middle of everywhere
 - Small numbers mean big things
- Retention involves **places**
 - Social and economic integration, place-making activities
 - Rural survival skills
- Traditional marketing techniques struggle with this distinction



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**



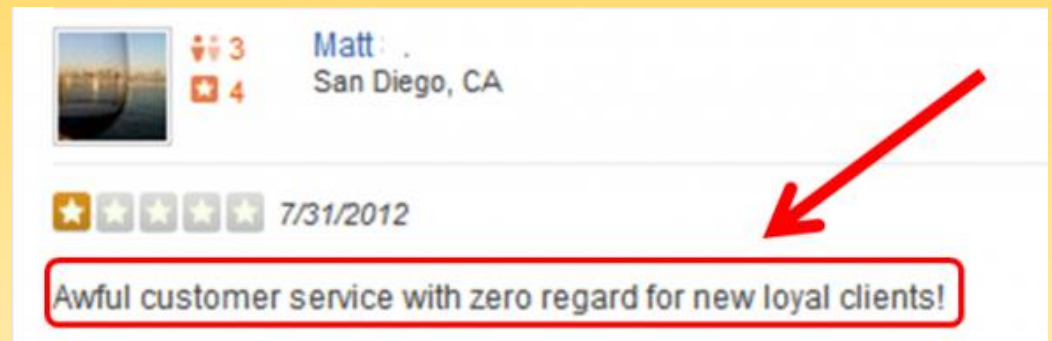
Employment Strategies

- Less about EMPLOYERS and more about EMPLOYMENT
- Build upon existing connections to metro businesses that are allowing skilled employees to telecommute
- Identify and build upon the auxiliary skills
- Integrate business transition planning



Negative Narratives

- Would we allow this negative language to permeate a product or service we were selling?



- Why do we do it?

- Cannot continue to portray rural success as the exception

VANISHING POINT; Amid Dying Towns of Rural Plains, One Makes a Stand



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)**
- **Entering large labor shortage**



The Rural Choice

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!





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- (IA) Homebase Iowa <https://www.homebaseiowa.gov/>
- (KS) Get Rural Kansas <http://www.getruralkansas.org/>
- (KS) Rural By Choice PowerUPs <http://www.ruralbychoice.com/>
- (ND) Find the Good Life <http://findthegoodlifeinnorthdakota.com/>
- (NE) Nebraska Rural Living <http://www.nebraskaruralliving.com/>
- (NE) Norfolk Now <http://www.norfolknow.org/>
- (NE) Wayne Works <http://www.waynetworks.org/>
- (SD) South Dakota Rural Enterprise <http://www.sdrei.org/bringbak.htm>
- (SD) Dakota Roots <http://www.dakotaroots.com>
- (SD) South Dakota Seeds <http://www.dakotaseeds.com/>



Rural Issues and Trends webinars

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

