



Rewriting the Rural Narrative: Rural Living in 2025

Speak softly and carry statistics

Benjamin Winchester
Rural Sociologist
Extension Department of Community Development

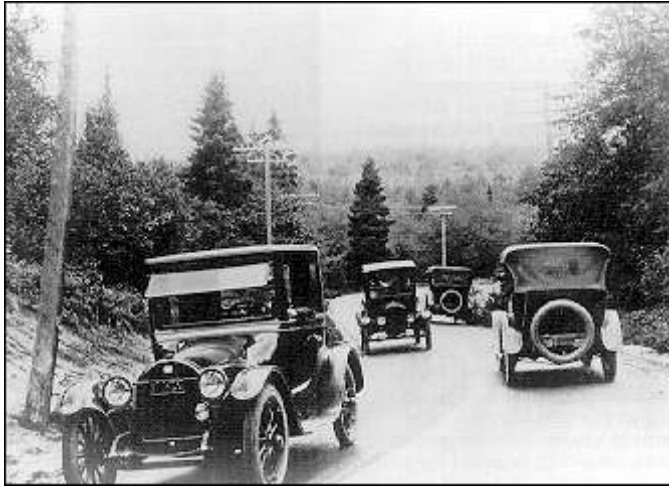
THE NARRATIVE



- There's a brain drain
- **We live in the middle of nowhere**
- We are a sleepy town
- Everyone knows one another
- Nobody locks their doors
- The lucky few escape



1900-1950



- Mechanization of agriculture
- Roads and transportation
- Educational achievement

*It drives like a horse; does the work of ten
but eats only when at work*

That's the Detroit Tractor, the machine that represents fifteen years and thousands of dollars spent in actual field work to find the right principle to apply in a tractor for BOTH the small and large farmer.

It Drives Like a Horse—

This exclusive feature enables a man to drive the tractor home—it won't tear up the roads—hitch it to the plow, mowing machine, binder, spreader, wagon or ANY implement in use on any horse-farmed estate, and ONE MAN WILL OPERATE BOTH TRACTOR AND IMPLEMENT WITH EASE. No other tractor will do it. It is the ONLY ONE MAN TRACTOR.

You can change hitch from one implement to another as quickly as with a team. It will do with the belt what ANY OTHER TRACTOR WILL DO.

Does the Work of Ten Horses—

The Detroit tractor can work from sun up to sun down and the night through, and will outwork four teams of horses. That means that four teams can't endure to get over the ground the Detroit can in any given length of time. The tractor will do much better work than horses—for instance, it will plow any depth and allow its owner to farm according to modern methods.

The Detroit Tractor

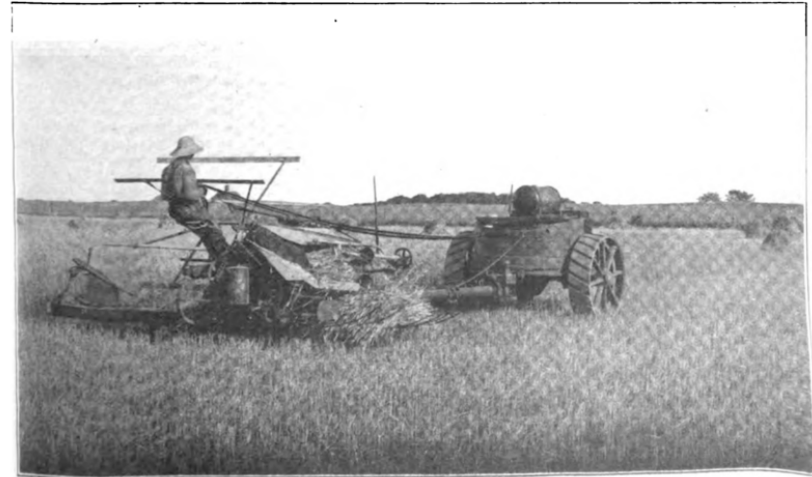
Eats Only When It Works—

Most farmers are compelled to keep several horses that are used only at rush times—the rest of the year they "eat their heads off." By working the Detroit long hours the farmer takes care of his rush work. When the work is done the tractor eats nothing. We'll demonstrate that the Detroit will cut horse farming costs in half.

We want the chance to tell you more about the Detroit Tractor. Our catalog shows several views of it in actual use on small farms. Write today.

DETROIT TRACTOR COMPANY
Department T
LA FAYETTE, INDIANA

One Man Controls It All



1950+



1958 Interstate Highway

- 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.”



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.

The Media Idyll Persists



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

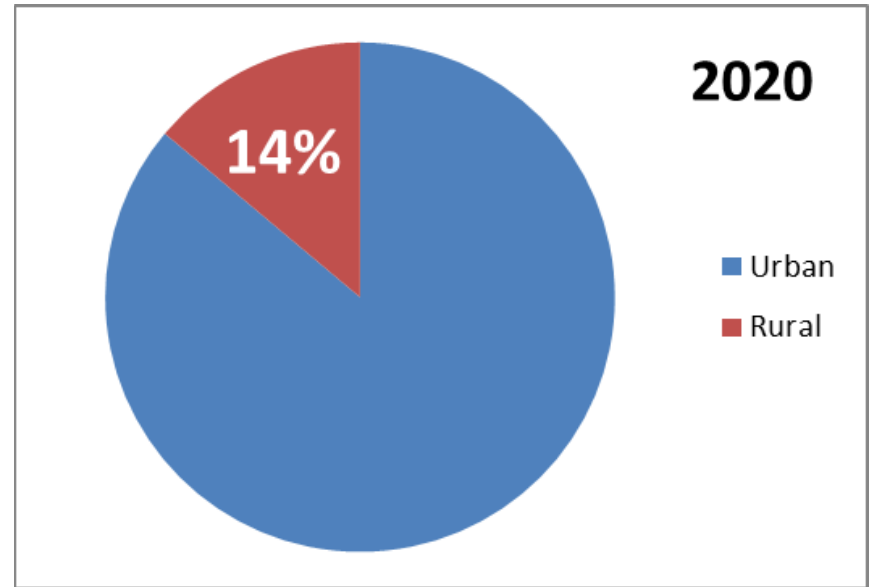
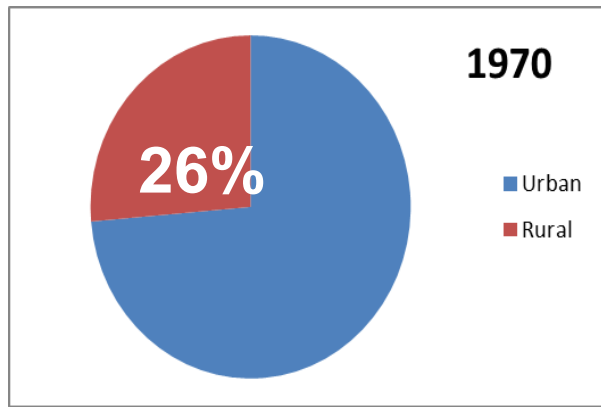
Rumors of my death have been greatly exaggerated. –Mark Twain



Rural is **changing**,
not dying.



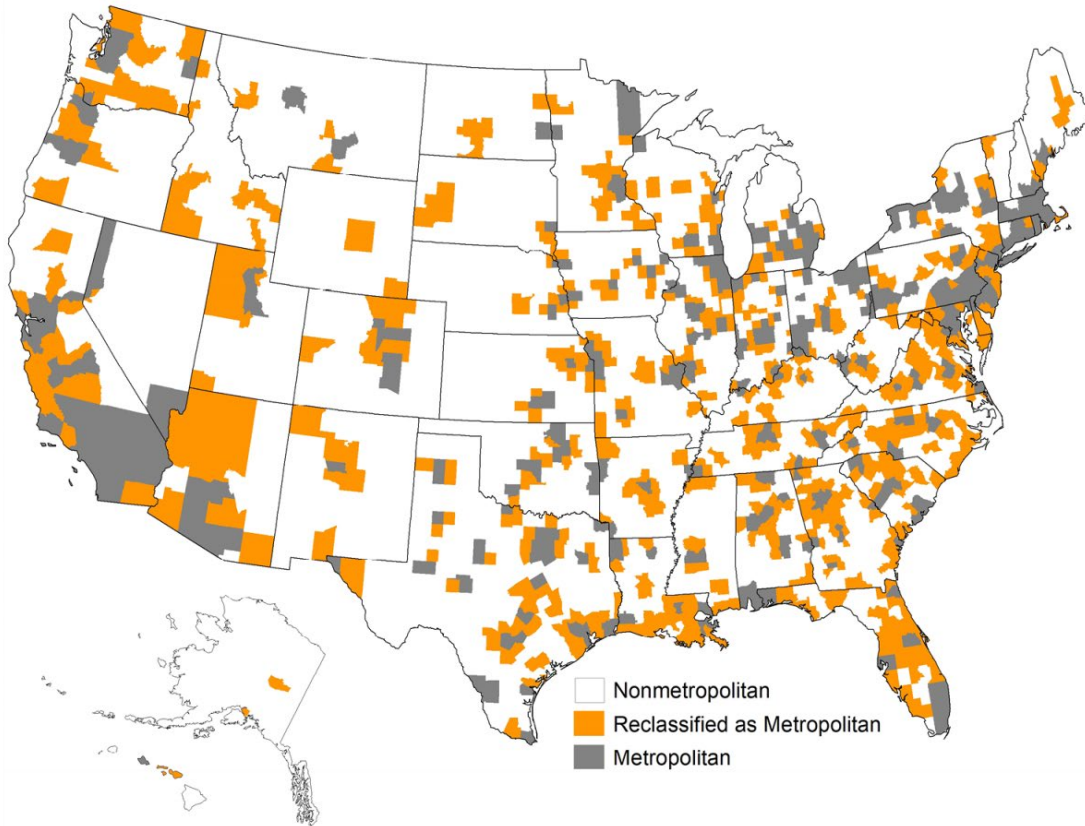
In the U.S. the rural population has
increased by 11%
since 1970.



As rural populations grow, residents get
reclassified.



As rural populations grow, residents get **reclassified.**



753 nonmetropolitan counties that were redefined as metropolitan between 1963 and 2013 shifted nearly 70 million residents from nonmetropolitan to metropolitan America by 2017. This represents 21% of the entire 2017 U.S. population. In fact, *all* the proportionate growth in metropolitan America from 67% of the population in 1970 to 86% in 2017 resulted from metropolitan reclassification.

Population figures reduced by formerly nonmetro places now designated as metro.

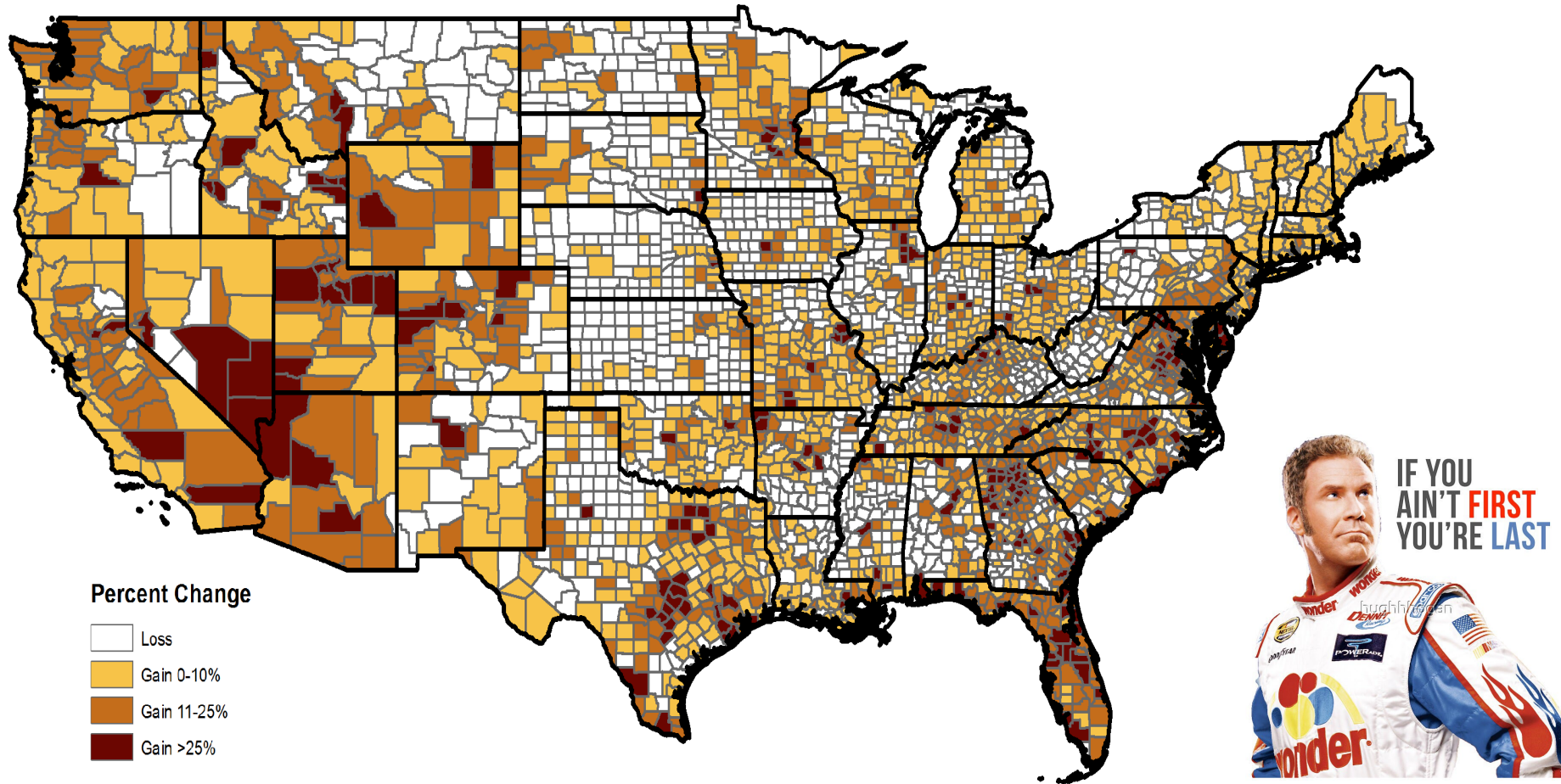
(25% all counties since 1974)

Success is taken away from rural as urban areas have grown **WIDER**, not taller.



Total Population Infatuation

a.k.a. If you're not growing you're dying



Total Population Infatuation

Wait, what?

Comparison Historical Population from 1960 to 2010

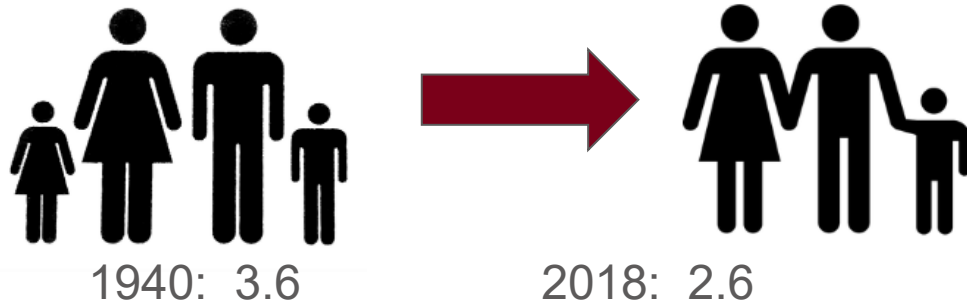
Community	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	% Change
UMVRDC Region	69,063	61,806	59,822	50,845	50,011	45,190	-34.57%
<i>Households</i>	19,428	19,367	22,026	20,088	19,846	20,039	3.14%
Big Stone County	8,954	7,941	7,716	6,285	5,820	5,269	-41.15%
Chippewa County	16,320	15,109	14,941	13,228	13,088	12,441	-23.77%
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

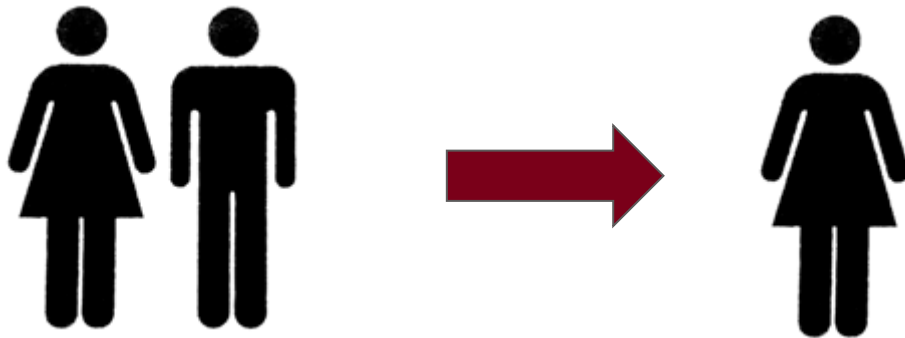


Why is my community not growing? It's LOSING population!

Avg. HH Size



*With a fixed # homes,
it is your **DESTINY** to
lose 29% of your
population.*



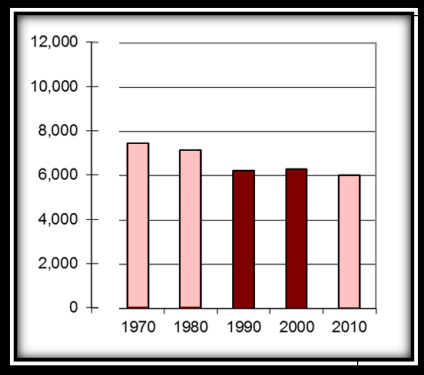
Spouse passes

Population: -1

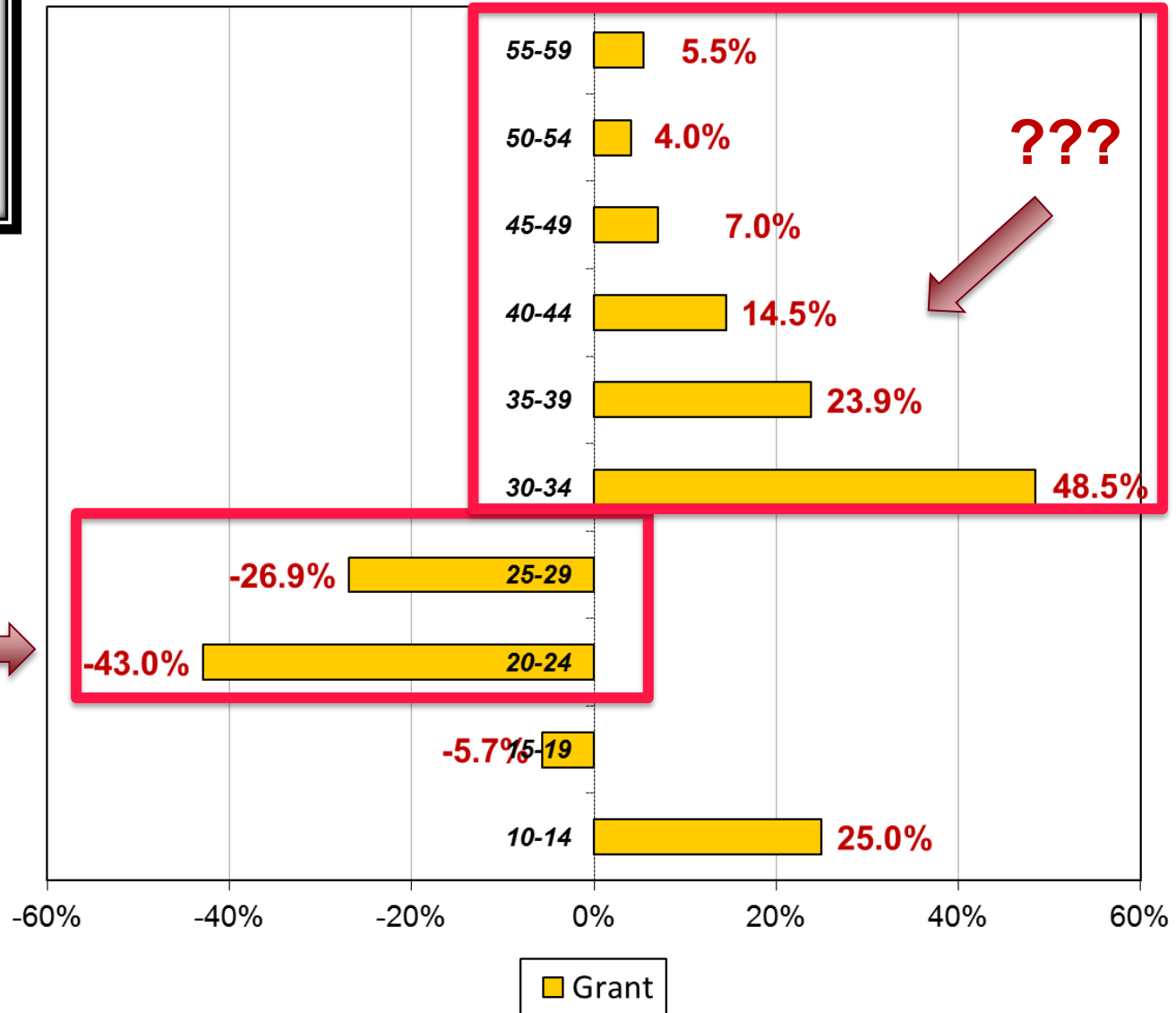
Households: NC

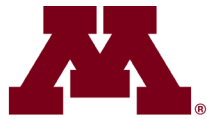
Yes there is outmigration but demographics work against growth and even stability (stagnation).





1990-2000, Percent Cohort Change





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**Nebraska Buffalo Commons
Research 2012**

**Workforce Movers
University of Minnesota,
2004, 2012, 2019**



MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY

EXTENSION



MONTANA
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION



Montana Movers Study, 2021



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Newcomers: Why?

Simpler pace of life



Safety and Security



Low Housing Cost



Newcomers: Who?



	MN 2019	MT 2021
Moved primarily for a job	41%	35%
Lived in the community before	25%	34%*
Have children in household	47%	39%
Household income >\$50k	75%	78%

*** Social
housing
supply?**

Source: 2020 University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality. Rural workforce movers study. Funded by the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

2021 Montana State University Extension Movers Study.

The Rural Brain Gain

They choose rural age

30-49

And also when they are 50-64
(since the 1970s)





Rural Living in 2023

Speak softly and carry statistics

Benjamin Winchester
Senior Research Fellow
Extension Center for Community Vitality

Move Factors with Preference

Proportion of households that indicated it was important in some way.

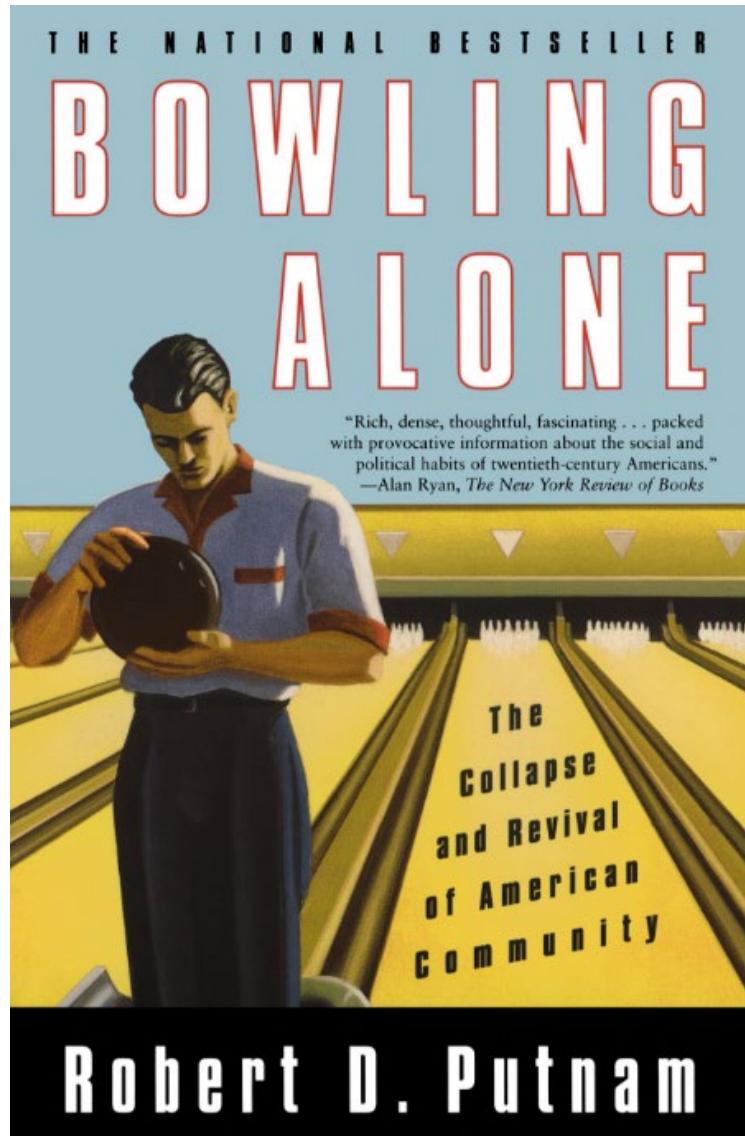
	Percent
Take advantage of the slower pace of life	71
To live closer to relatives	70
To find a less congested place to live	69
To live among people with similar values	68
To find lower priced housing	67
To find a safer place to live	67
To live in a smaller community	66
To find a lower cost of living	65
To find a good environment for raising children	65
To find a job that allowed a better work-life balance	61
To find a job that matches my skills	60
To take on a new job	58
To find a higher paying job	56
To live closer to friends	50
To find higher quality schools	49

Source: 2020 University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality. Rural workforce movers study. Funded by the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

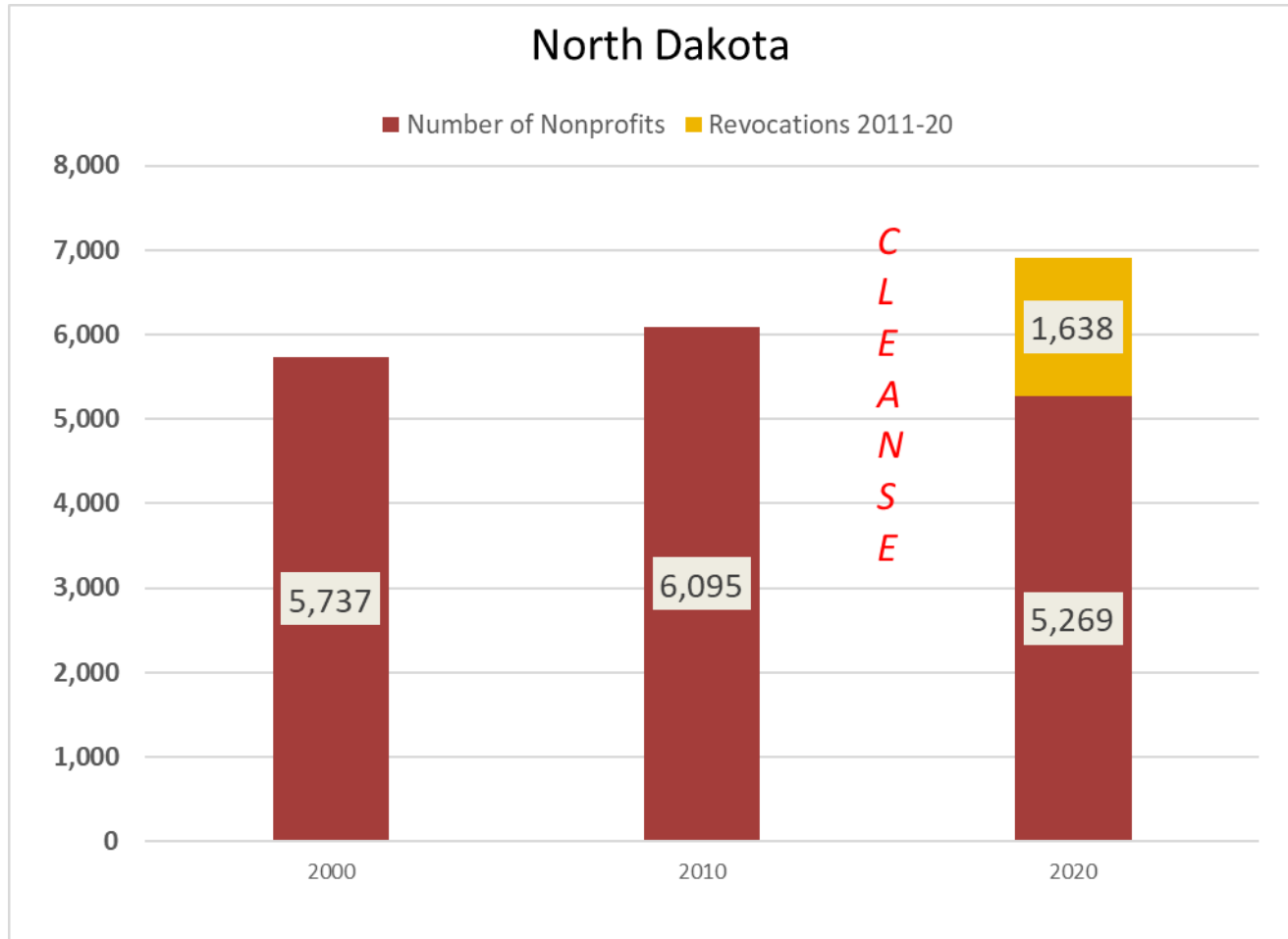


Middle of Everywhere

Social Life



Social Life is Not Dying

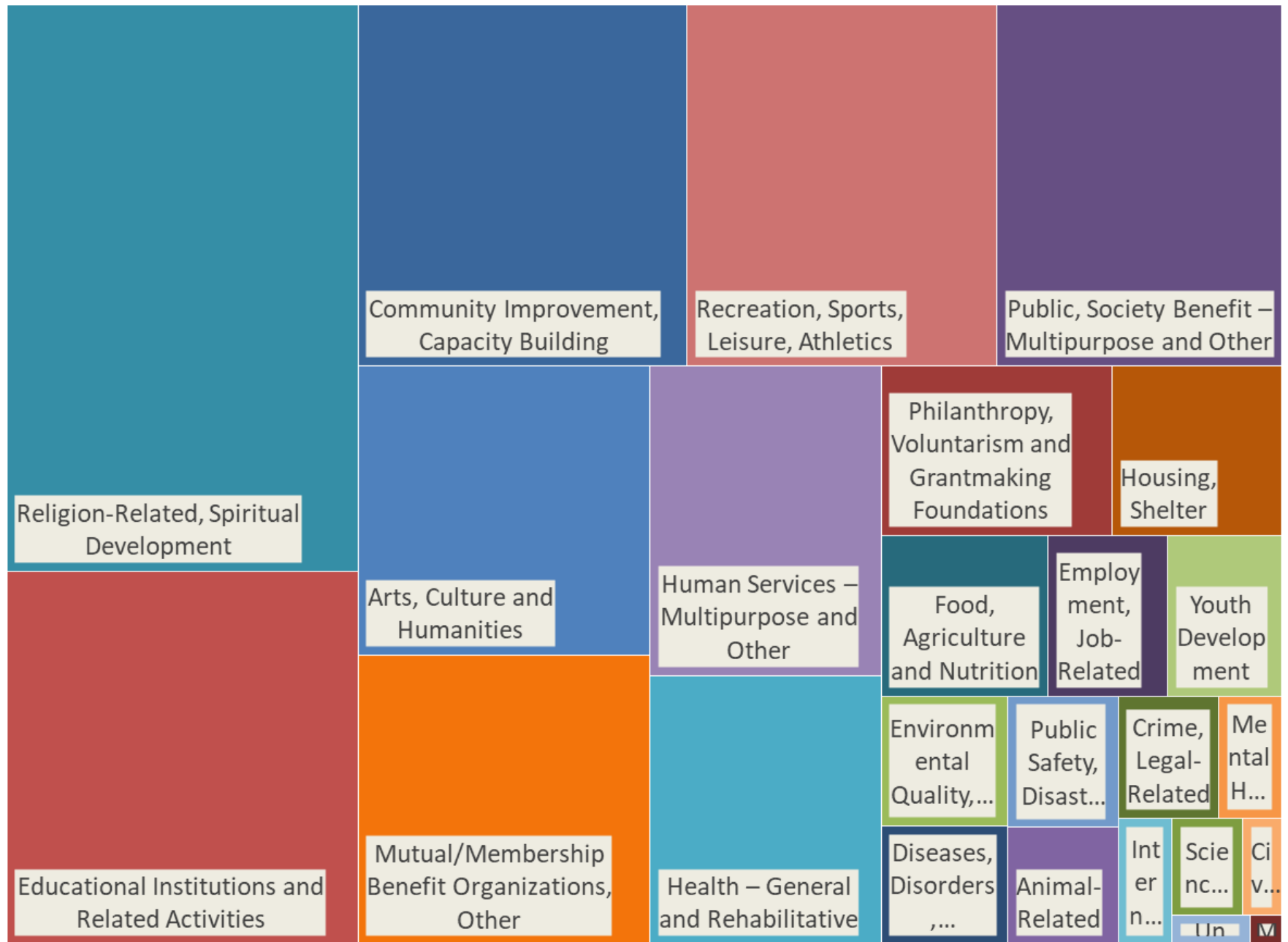


National Center for Charitable Statistics, U.S. Census Bureau



North Dakota

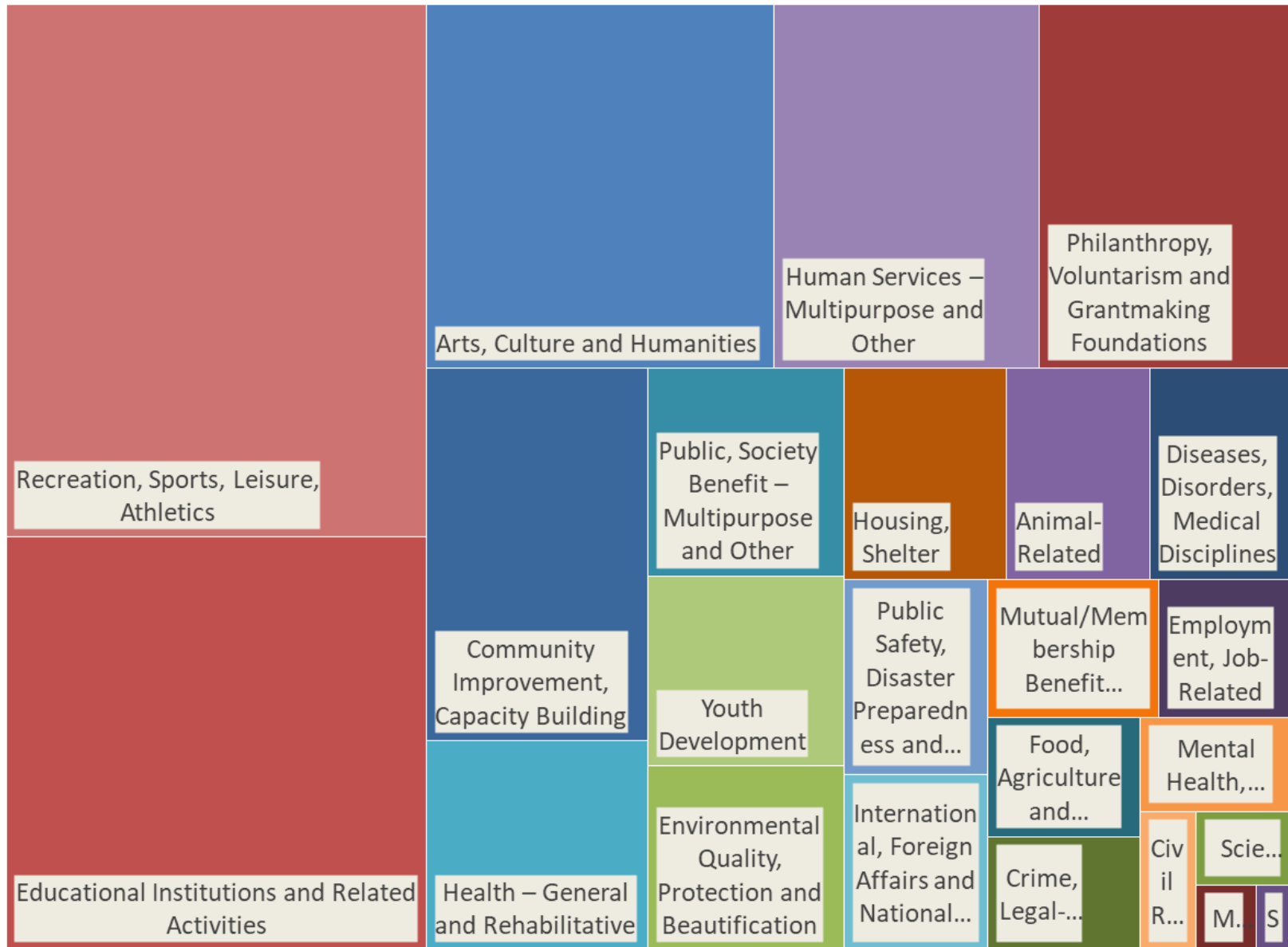
2020 Nonprofit NTEE composition



41% of all nonprofits have been created since 1990!

North Dakota

2020 Nonprofit NTEE composition not including Religion, groups formed last 30 years



SHIFT in Engagement



Narrow geography
Broad focus
Action: consensus

Broad geography
Narrow focus
Action: the small



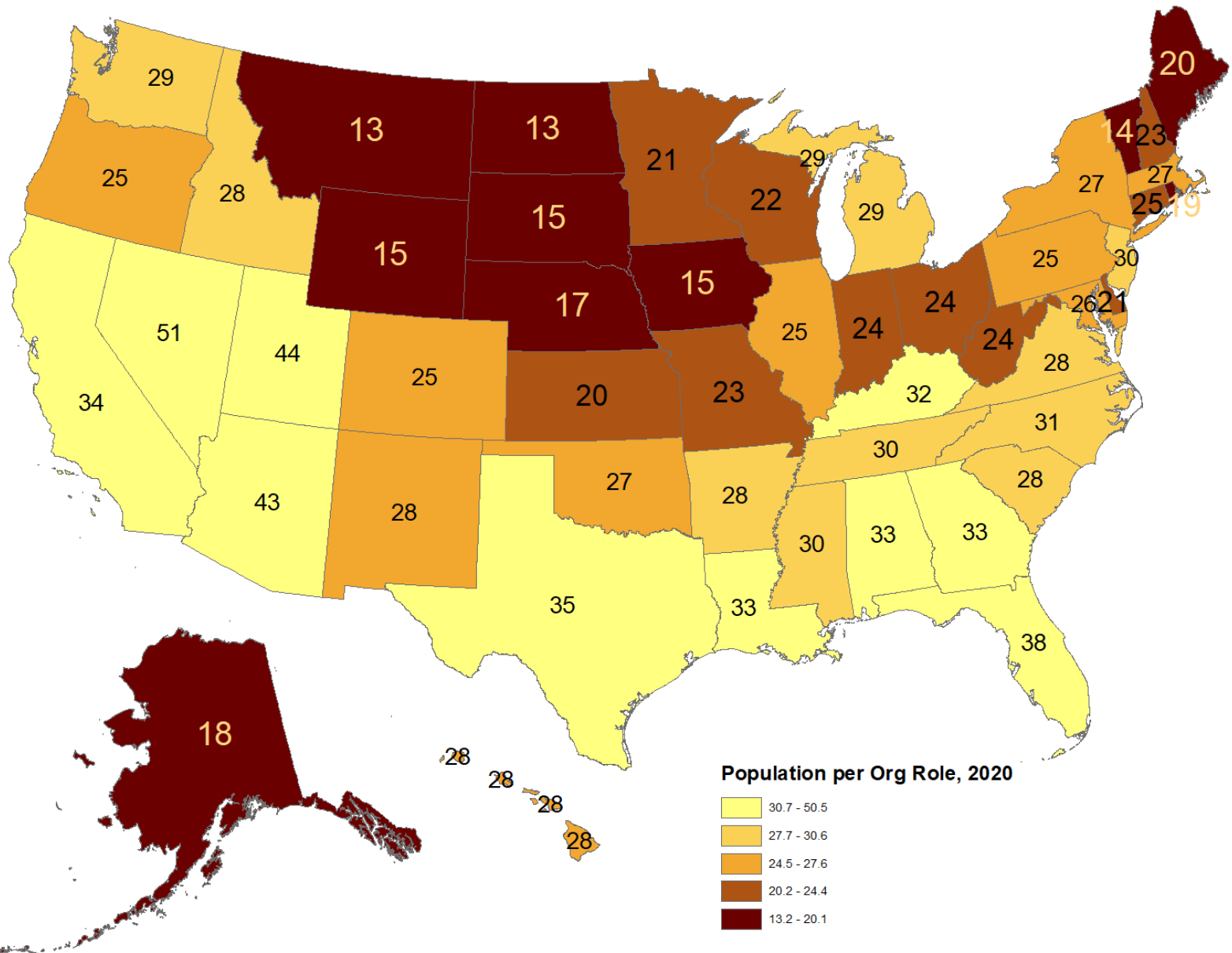
Supply and Demand, 2020

	Demand: Total Orgs	Supply: Pop Age 18 +	Org Demand	National Rank Overall/ Just NPs
Iowa	28,210	2,450,103	1 in 15	4 / 2
Kansas	18,940	2,229,316	1 in 20	11 / 15
Minnesota	35,246	4,389,033	1 in 21	13 / 12
Montana	10,817	850,123	1 in 13	2 / 1
Nebraska	14,999	1,476,127	1 in 17	7 / 8
North Dakota	7,933	596,093	1 in 13	1 / 7
South Dakota	7,782	660,650	1 in 15	6 / 5
Wisconsin	35,326	4,612,300	1 in 22	14 / 13

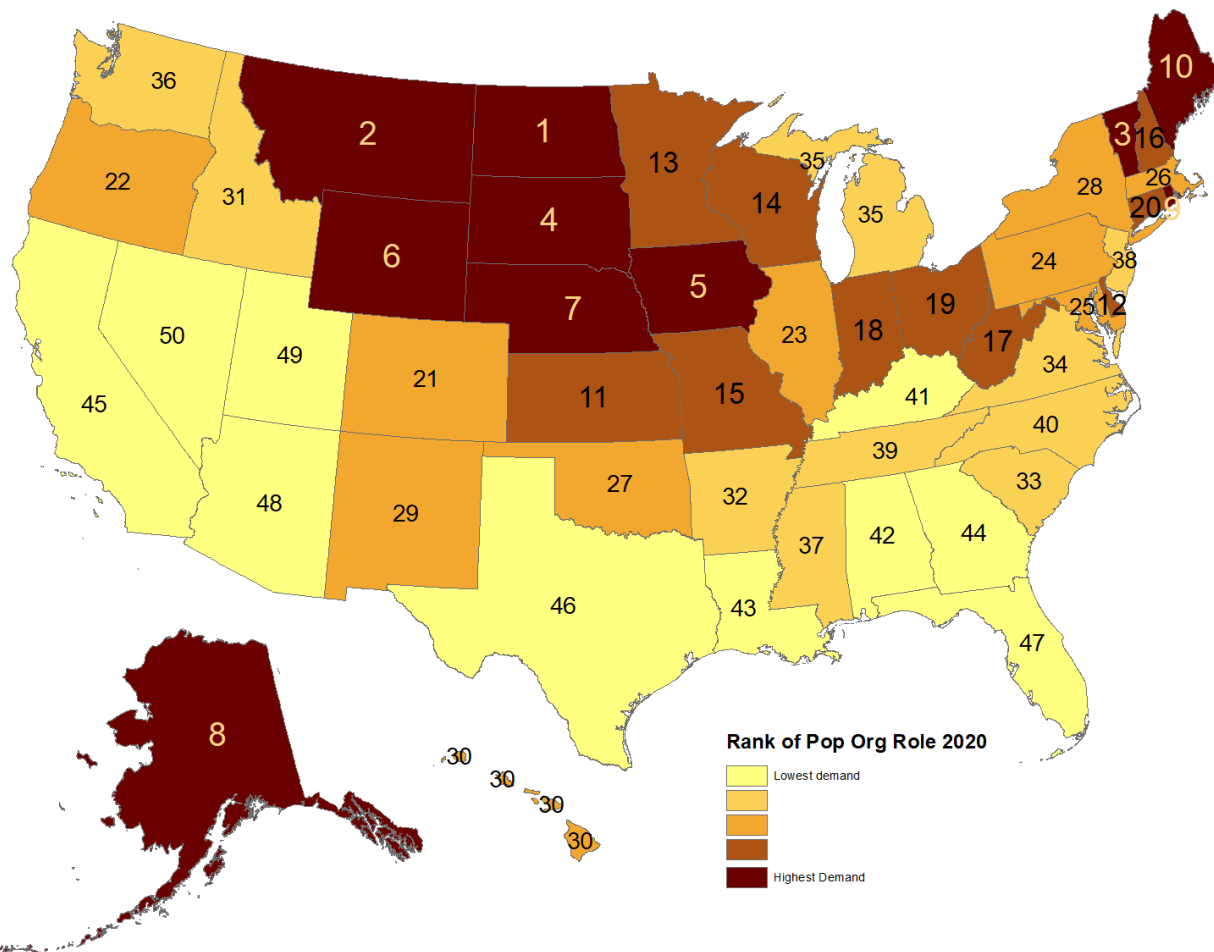
In North Dakota, 1 in 13 adults must serve as a leader in a governmental or nonprofit position. TOP DEMAND IN U.S.



POPULATION PER ORGANIZATIONAL ROLE, 2020



Rank of Organizational Demands, 2020



How Many People Run Our Towns?

Fact Sheet: Positional Leadership Across Rural and Urban North Dakota

May 20, 2023
Benjamin Winchester, Rural Sociology Educator, Community Vitality
benw@umn.edu

Governmental Leadership

Positional leaders are crucial components of our communities and there are many governmental positions – both elected and appointed – to fill. In North Dakota there are 53 counties, 357 municipalities, 1,308 townships, 179 school districts, and 767 “special” districts which provide oversight functions related to water, sewer, cemeteries, highways, airports, fire protection, soil and water conservation, and hospitals. This amounts to a total of 2,664 governmental agencies requiring leadership. Of the 596,093 residents in the state over the age of 18 (eligibility for positional leadership) we find that 1 in every 45 adults in North Dakota need to serve as a government leader. North Dakota has the highest demand for governmental positional leaders in the country.

Nonprofit Leadership

Social life as seen through the nonprofit lens reflects who we are as communities. We recognize many of these groups such as the American Red Cross, 4-H Clubs, and Humane Societies. There are also community-specific groups such as bicycling associations, community improvement groups, libraries, arts and cultural groups, and lake associations. The nonprofit sector in North Dakota is thriving, and in 2020 there were a total of 5,269 registered nonprofits across the state. These social organizations also require positional leaders. We find in North Dakota that 1 in every 19 people need to serve as a nonprofit leader. North Dakota ranks seventh in highest demand for nonprofit positional leaders in the country.

1 in 13 North Dakota adults must serve as an elected or appointed government or nonprofit leader.

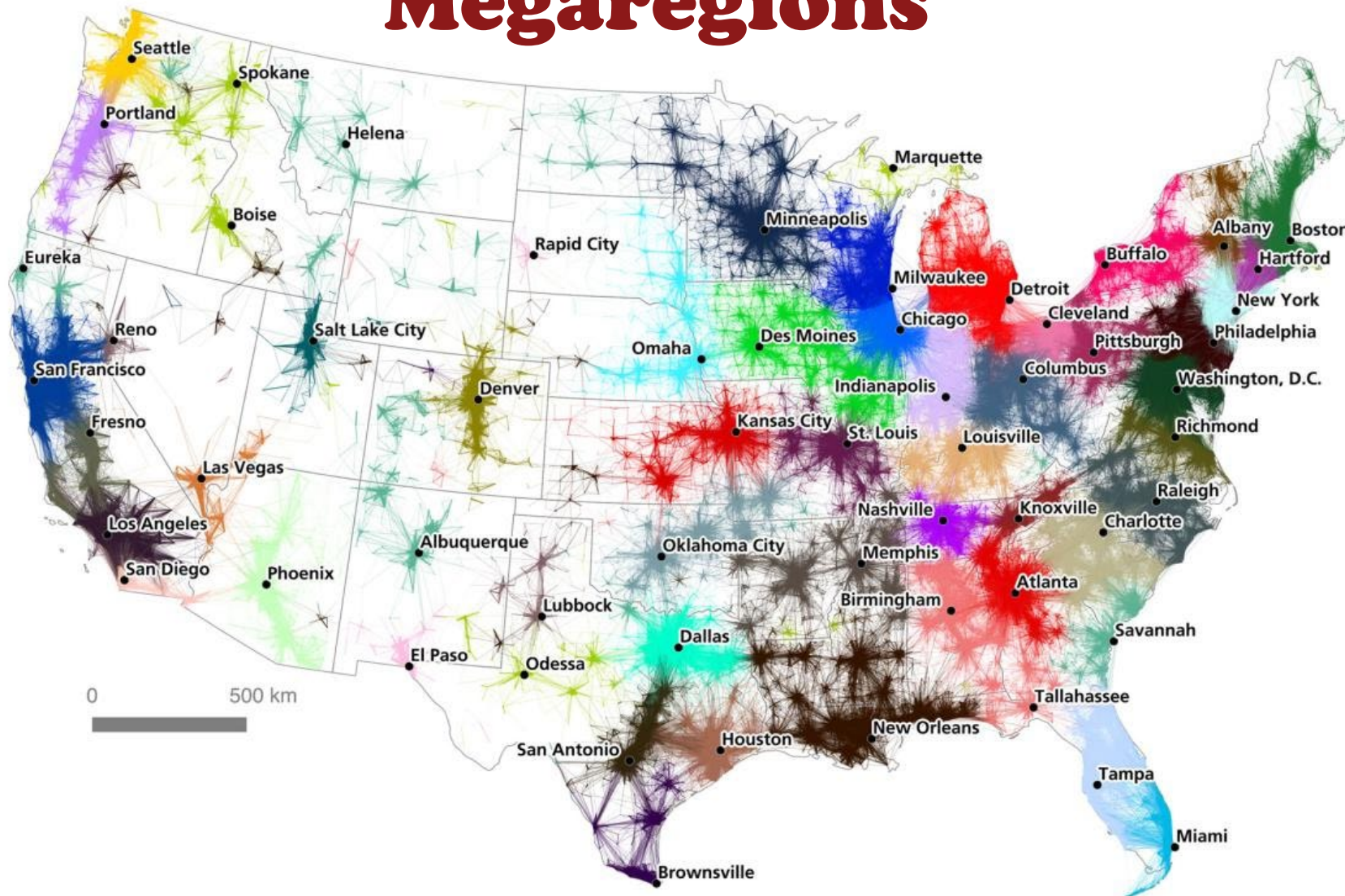


Middle of Everywhere

Jobs and the Economy



Megaregions

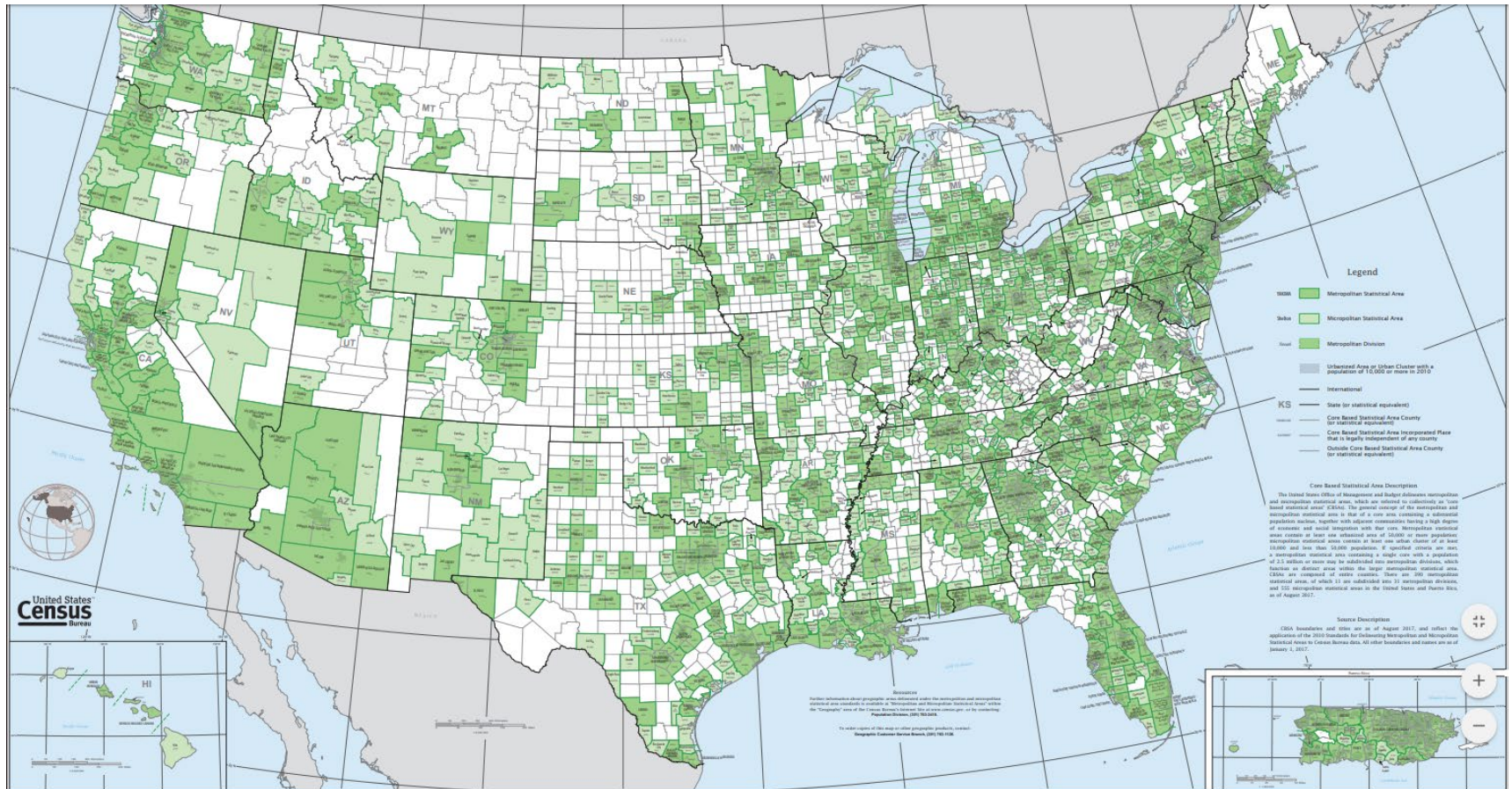


<http://discovery.dartmouth.edu/megaregions/>



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REGIONAL CENTERS

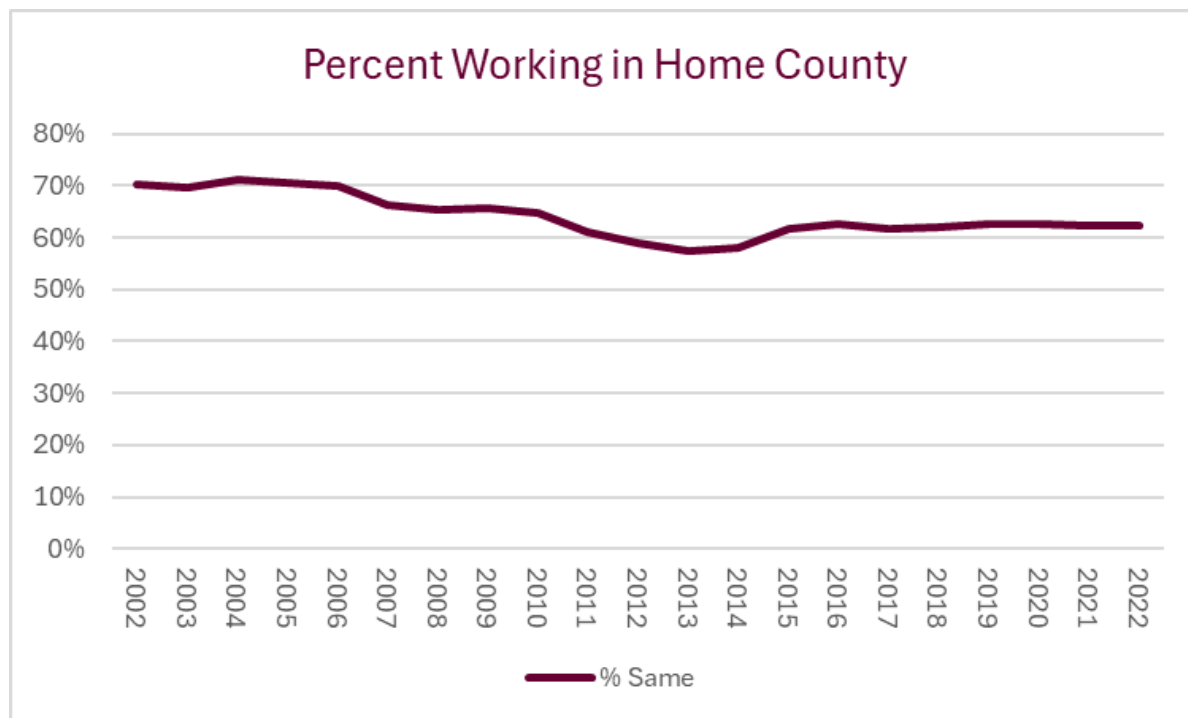


Economic growth in regional centers



Kathryn Leys

Extension Educator, Community Economics
Regional Office Marshall



Decoupling of Home and Work, 2022: Across North Dakota, 62% work in their home county, down from 70% in 2002.



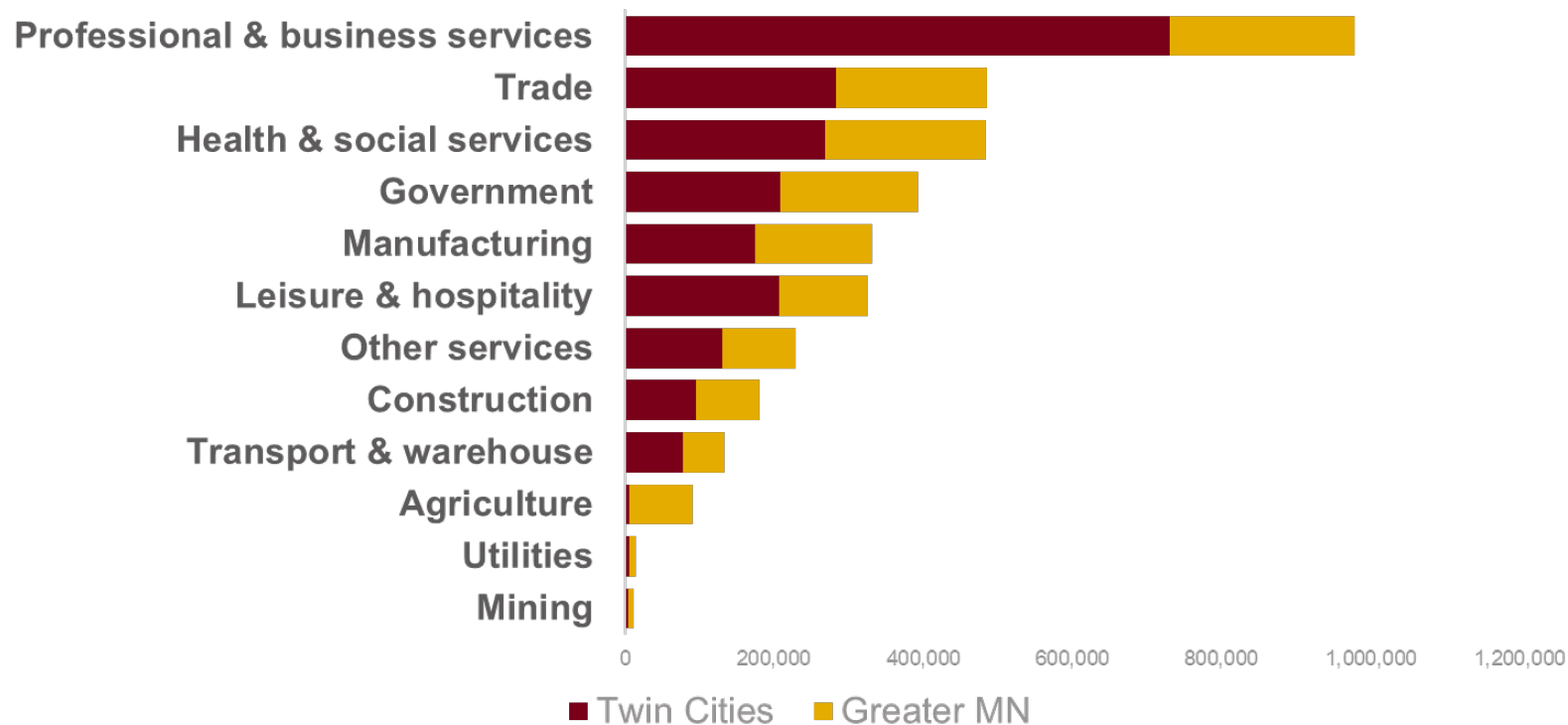


Brigid Tuck

Applied Research Specialist, Community
Economics
Regional Office Mankato

Diversifying the rural economy

Jobs by Industry

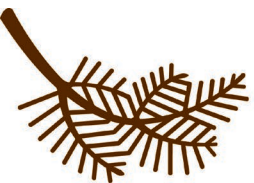


TELECOMMUTING

Question: Do you typically telecommute or work remotely for a company not located in your region?
(of those in workforce)

Respondent	14%
Spouse	16%

21% of Households have a member that telecommutes!



Blandin Foundation™
STRENGTHENING RURAL MINNESOTA

**We live in a REGIONAL
COMMUNITY.**



in the Middle of Everywhere



MIDDLE OF EVERYWHERE

How can we make local decisions while at the same time respect the reality of lives?

The REGION is the primary unit of interest

Mayor, how do you market your town if you don't know what's going on around you?



THE COMMUNITY IS WELCOMING OF NEW RESIDENTS BY THOSE LIKELY TO STILL LIVE IN COMMUNITY IN 5 YEARS

The Community is Welcoming	Likely to Live Here in 5 Years
Strongly agree	86%
Agree	77%
Disagree	68%
Strongly Disagree	44%
All respondents	78%



resident recruitment

Community Development

Economic Development

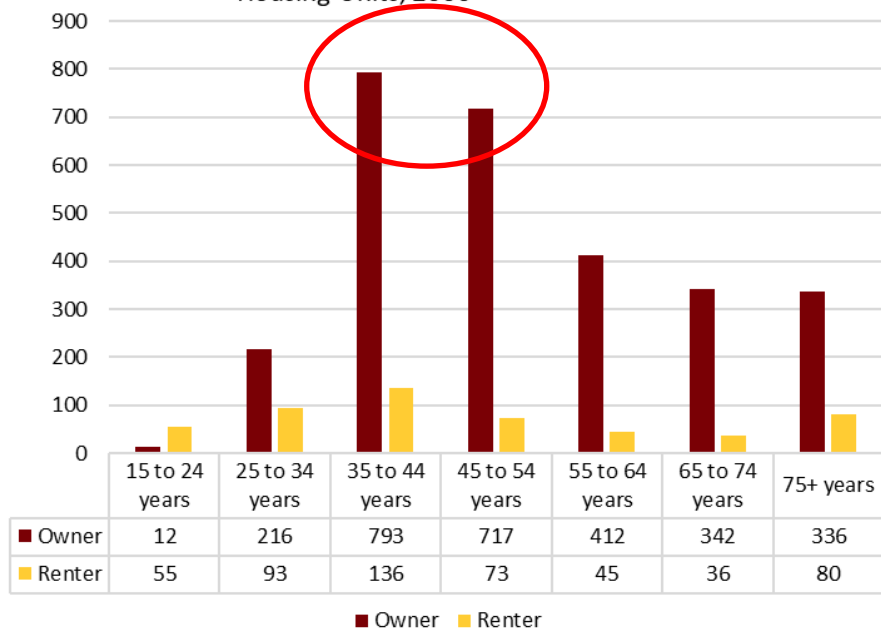
Tourism

On the Map – Over the Edge – Welcome Home

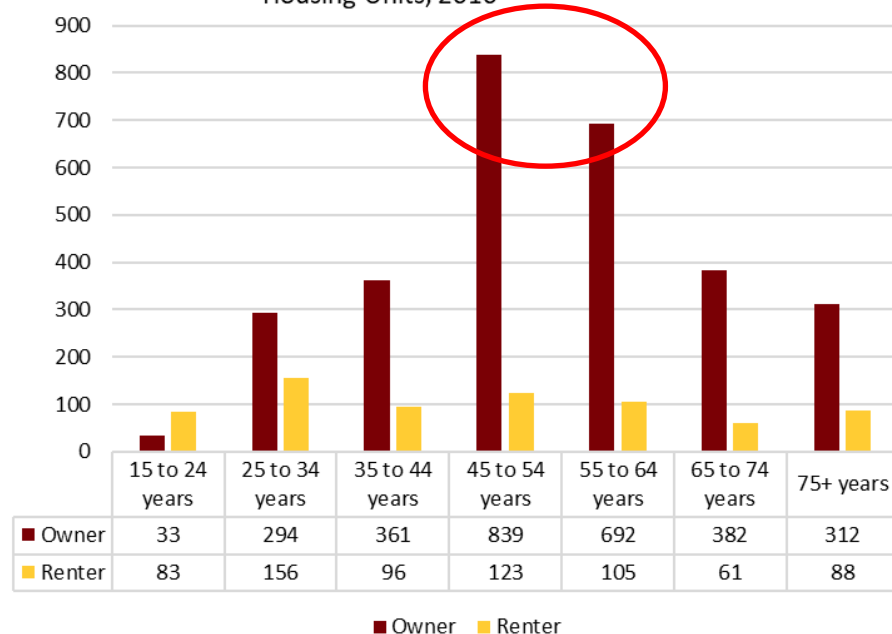


Baby Boomers

Mercer County, North Dakota
Housing Units, 2000



Mercer County, North Dakota
Housing Units, 2010

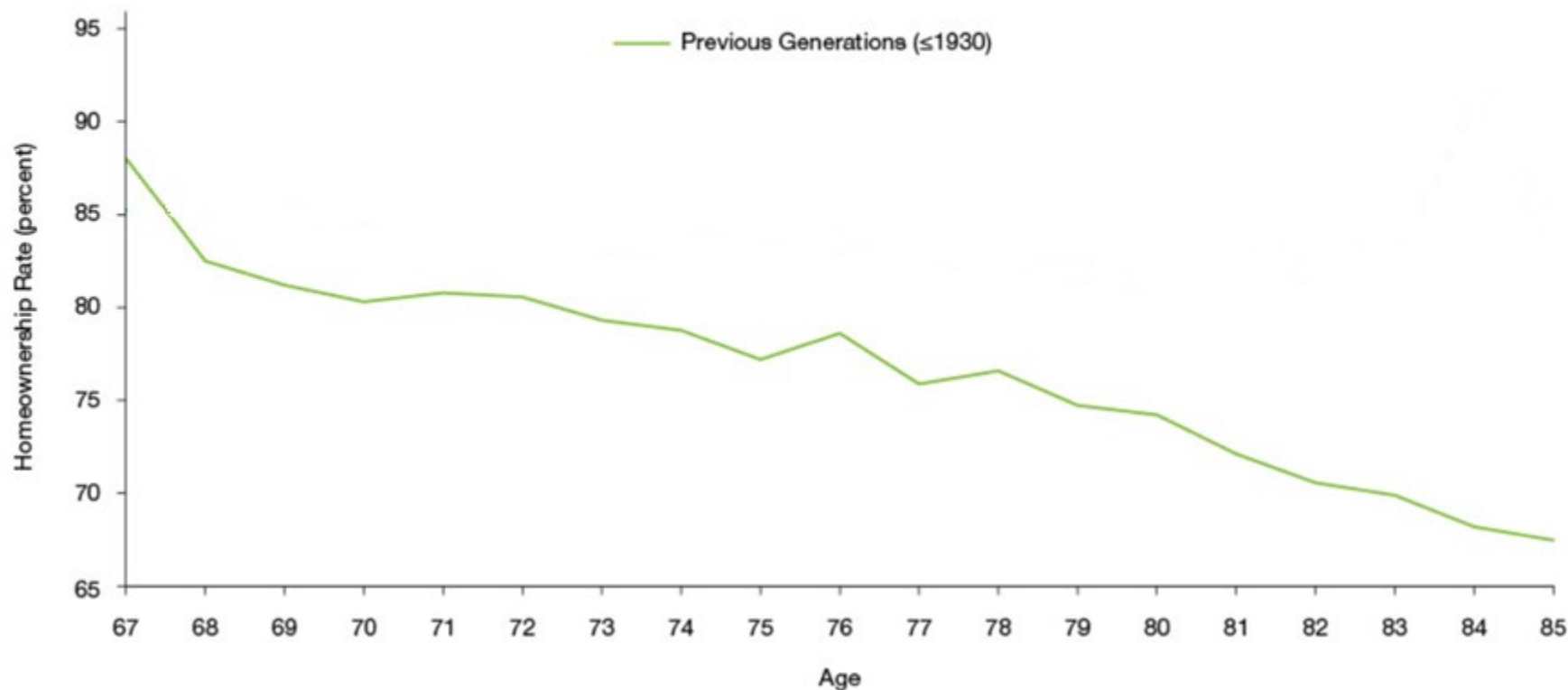


That was more than a decade ago, where is the supply!?



Historical homeownership rates for household heads aged 67–85

Current generations of older homeowners are holding onto their homes for longer than previous generations



<https://familymattershc.com/the-united-states-of-aging-survey/>
http://www.freddiemac.com/research/insight/20190206_seniors_age_millennials_wait.page?

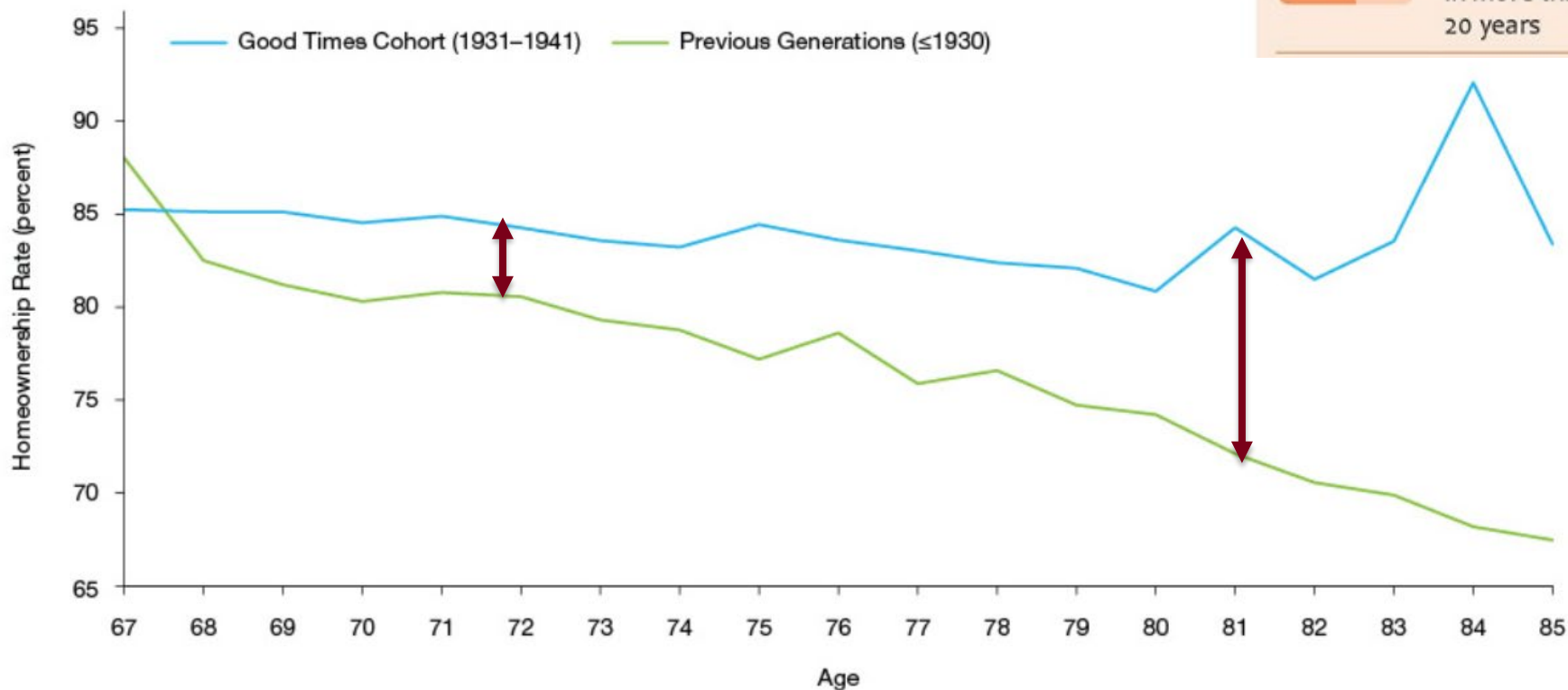


Historical homeownership rates for household heads aged 67–85

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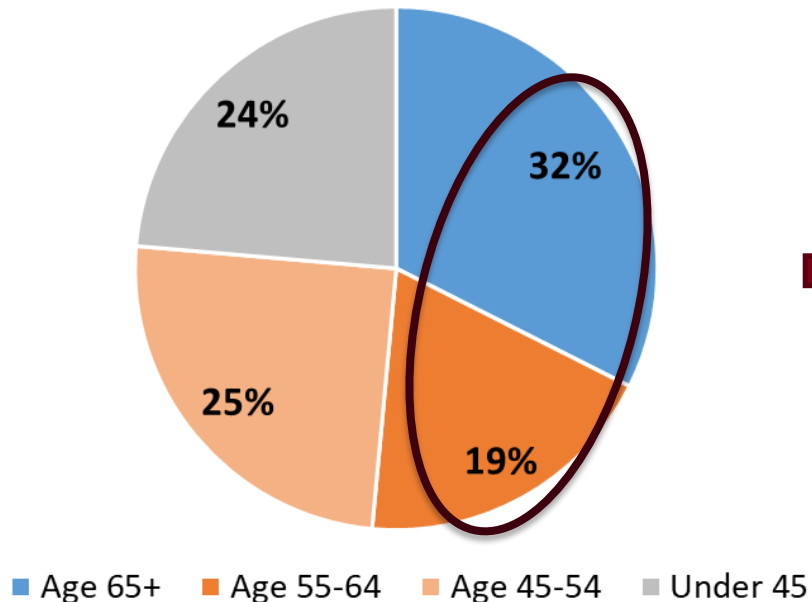


58% of older adults have not changed residences in more than 20 years

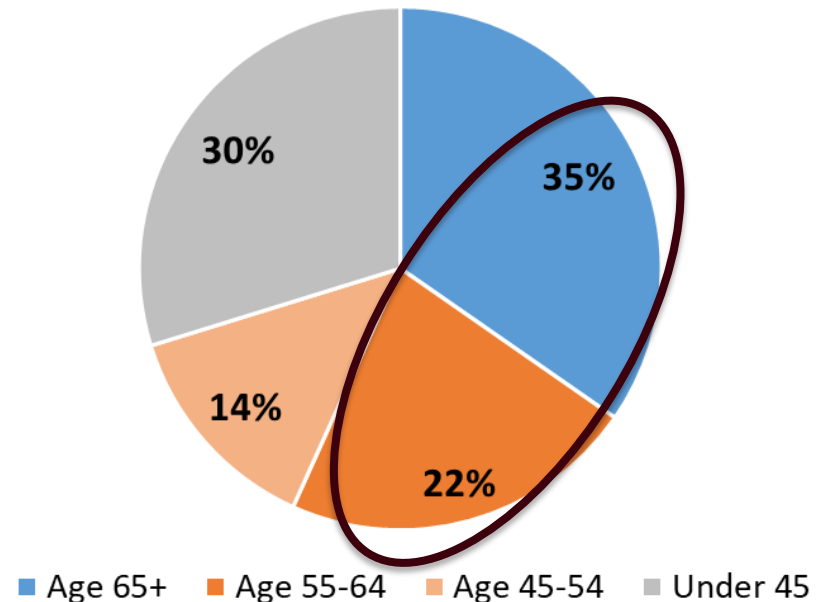


Labor shortage is confused with housing shortage.

Foster County, North Dakota
Percent of Owner-Occupied Homes by Age, 2010



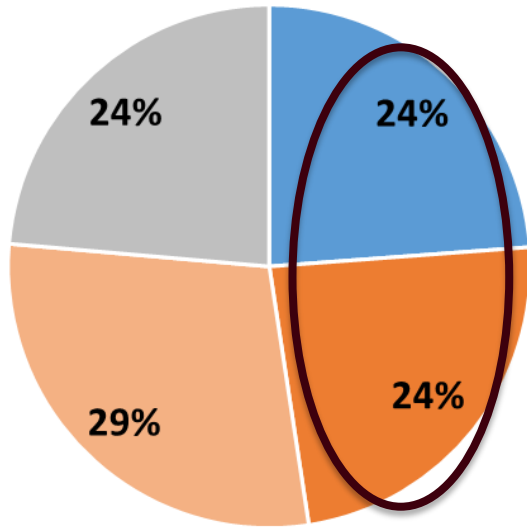
Foster County, North Dakota
Percent of Owner-Occupied Homes by Age, 2020



***(contains City of Carrington)
Circled ages: fewer (if any) children
It's hard to welcome people in when
there's nowhere for them to live.***

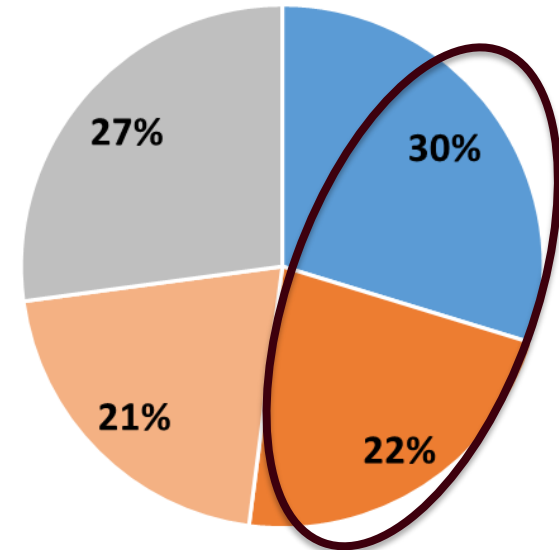


Mercer County, North Dakota
Percent of Owner-Occupied Homes by Age, 2010



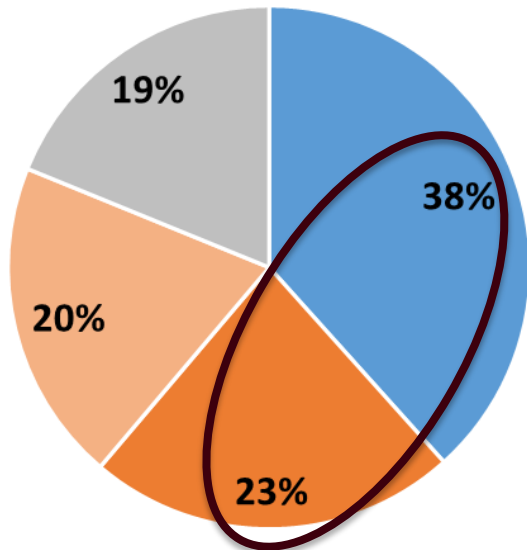
■ Age 65+ ■ Age 55-64 ■ Age 45-54 ■ Under 45

Mercer County, North Dakota
Percent of Owner-Occupied Homes by Age, 2020



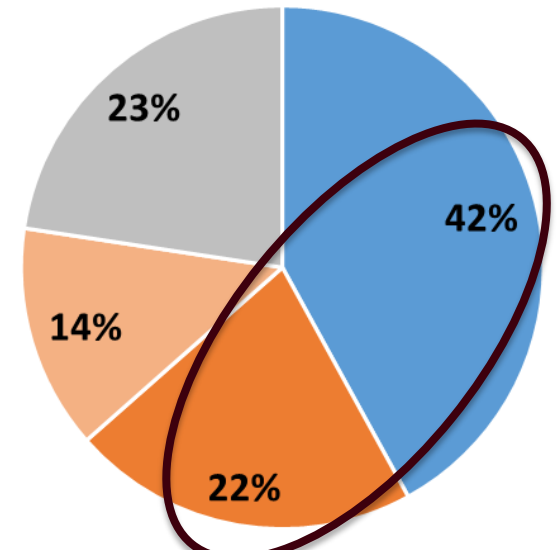
■ Age 65+ ■ Age 55-64 ■ Age 45-54 ■ Under 45

Hettinger County, North Dakota
Percent of Owner-Occupied Homes by Age, 2010



■ Age 65+ ■ Age 55-64 ■ Age 45-54 ■ Under 45

Hettinger County, North Dakota
Percent of Owner-Occupied Homes by Age, 2020



■ Age 65+ ■ Age 55-64 ■ Age 45-54 ■ Under 45

Housing Substitutions: Death brings rebirth

OUT

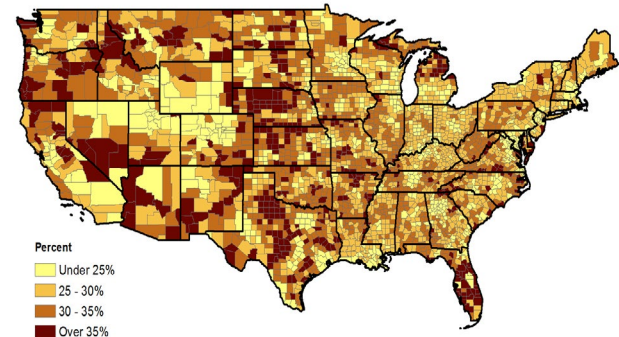
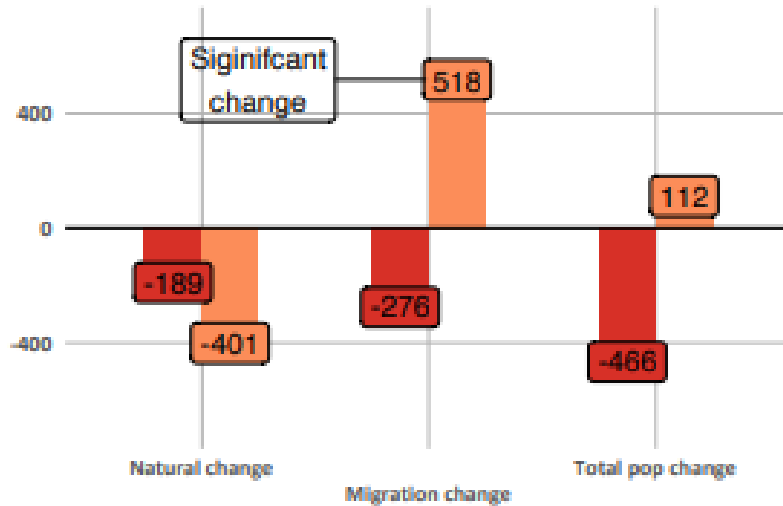


IN



47% of newcomer households have children

Entirely rural





Community Housing Succession

Maybe one of the best things you can do for the future of your community is to ensure there is somewhere for people to live.

Elevate the conversation:

Seniors / families

Councils / commissioners

Employers / youth

Economic Development / talent pipeline

Real estate agents/ property managers







Thank you.

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