



CENSUS BRIEF 1: POPULATION CHANGES ON THE GREAT PLAINS

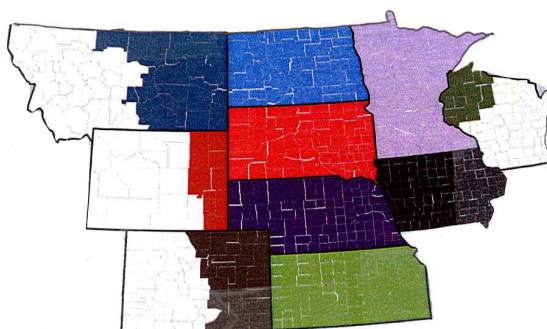
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This Brief is part of a series examining socio-economic aspects of the 2010 Census for the Great Plains and parts of the Midwest.

Data from the 2010 Census show that rural areas in the Great Plains and Midwest continue to lose population, while smaller cities and metropolitan areas continue to expand. That is the topic of this Issue Brief, the first in a series of briefs examining data from the 2010 Census. Since the 1980 Census, the Center for Rural Affairs has analyzed Census data for a multi-state region.¹ For the 2010 Census analysis, selected counties in Colorado, Montana, Wisconsin and Wyoming have been added to the examined region to obtain a broader view of the region. The region of this analysis is shown in the map below.



Data included herein is on the county level for each of the 10 states in the region. Data is broken down for three county types: metropolitan, micropolitan and rural. Definitions of each are in the box below.

Metropolitan: Any county designated as part of a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) based on the 2010 Census. Each MSA must have at least one urbanized area of 50,000 or more inhabitants.

Micropolitan: Counties based around a core city or town with a population of 10,000 to 49,999. A micropolitan area may consist of more than one county depending upon economic, social and cultural connections.

Rural: Counties with a population center of less than 10,000 inhabitants and not included in either a metropolitan or micropolitan area.

Rural Population Declines; Micropolitan and Metropolitan Populations Grow

With limited exceptions in the 10 state region, the 2010 Census figures show a continued decline in rural populations and a continued rise in more urbanized locations of the region. Only three states in the region—Minnesota, Wisconsin and Wyoming—witnessed rural county population growth from 2000 to 2010, but all were minor increases either in percentages or actual inhabitants. Overall, the rural counties of the region declined in population by three percent from 2000 to 2010 and from 1990 to 2010.

Rural counties, of course, make up the vast majority of the region's landmass. They also still comprise a significant portion of the region's population. About one in six of the region's inhabitants reside in rural counties. And based on the 2010 Census figures, though declining in population, rural counties comprise a larger portion of the region's population than do micropolitan counties.

Meanwhile, micropolitan and metropolitan counties witnessed significant population surges from both 2000 to 2010

¹Funk, Patricia, *A Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile of the Middle Border*. Center for Rural Affairs, 1989; Strange, Marty et. al., *Half a Glass of Water: State Economic Development Policies and the Small Agricultural Communities of the Middle Border*. Center for Rural Affairs, 1990; Funk, Patricia and Bailey, Jon, *Trampled Dreams: The Neglected Economy of the Rural Great Plains*. Center for Rural Affairs, 2000; Bailey, Jon and Preston, Kim. *Swept Away: Chronic Hardship and Fresh Promise on the Rural Great Plains*. Center for Rural Affairs, 2003.

and from 1990 to 2010. Micropolitan counties of the region grew by two percent from 2000 to 2010, and by eight percent from 1990 to 2010. But it was the metropolitan counties—the large cities and their suburbs—that experienced explosive growth in recent years. From 2000 to 2010, metropolitan counties of the region grew by 13 percent and from 1990 to 2010 by nearly 33 percent. The region’s large cities—Denver, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Omaha, Kansas City, Des Moines, Sioux Falls, Colorado Springs, for example—added nearly 3.5 million residents between 1990 and 2010.

The tables below show population figures by county type for the region and population changes by county type and by state. For all the tables below it should be noted that data for Colorado, Montana, Wisconsin and Wyoming are for selected portions of each state; data for the other six states are for the entire state.

County Type	No. of Counties	Pct. of Counties	2010 Population	Pct. of Population	2000 Population	Pct. Change 2000-10	1990 Population	Pct. Change 1990-2010
Rural	382	65.6%	3,121,281	15.7%	3,225,341	(3.2%)	3,207,631	(2.7%)
Micro	97	16.7%	2,592,519	13.0%	2,534,994	2.3%	2,397,768	8.1%
Metro	103	17.7%	14,163,558	71.0%	12,566,620	12.7%	10,671,168	32.7%
Total	582		19,877,358		18,326,955	8.5%	16,276,567	22.1%

Table 1. Regional Population 2010, 2000, 1990 by County Type

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Table 2 below outlines population changes from 2000 to 2010 and from 1990 to 2010 for rural counties in each state of the region. Minnesota, Wisconsin and Wyoming are the only states that experienced consistent rural population growth since 1990. But from 2000 to 2010, rural population in Minnesota and Wisconsin were essentially stagnant, and Wyoming rural population grew by about 4,200 residents during that decade. It is also again important to note that the Wisconsin and Wyoming figures are for a limited number of counties that may have unique circumstances contributing to population growth. All other states experienced significant rural population loss from 2000 to 2010, accelerating rural population loss from 1990 for most states of the region.

State	No. of Counties	Pct. Change 2000-2010	Pct. Change 1990-2010
Colorado	14	(4.1%)	4.5%
Iowa	61	(3.5%)	(3.8%)
Kansas	69	(6.2%)	(7.9%)
Minnesota	46	0.3%	4.8%
Montana	23	(2.8%)	(6.7%)
Nebraska	64	(5.9%)	(7.9%)
North Dakota	41	(7.1%)	(15.6%)
South Dakota	46	(4.4%)	(4.0%)
Wisconsin	12	0.5%	10.7%
Wyoming	6	8.7%	14.3%

Table 2. Rural Population Change 2010, 2000, 1990

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Table 3 below outlines population changes from 2000 to 2010 and from 1990 to 2010 for micropolitan counties in each state of the region. In general, micropolitan counties of the region experienced either solid population growth or small population declines (especially compared to rural counties). In states that experienced larger growth or decline, the number of micropolitan counties is too small to render any analysis beyond unique local circumstances.

State	No. of Counties	Pct. Change 2000-2010	Pct. Change 1990-2010
Colorado	2	6.7%	20.7%
Iowa	18	(1.6%)	0.2%
Kansas	16	(0.7%)	4.7%
Minnesota	18	4.9%	14.4%
Montana	1	(3.5%)	(8.8%)
Nebraska	20	2.1%	9.2%
North Dakota	8	2.5%	0.8%
South Dakota	13	5.4%	12.1%
Wisconsin	0	NA	NA
Wyoming	1	36.9%	14.7%

Table 3. Micropolitan Population Change 2010, 2000, 1990

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Table 4 below outlines population changes from 2000 to 2010 and from 1990 to 2010 for metropolitan counties in each state of the region. These figures show the strong population growth in the cities and suburbs of the region over the past 20 years.

State	No. of Counties	Pct. Change 2000-2010	Pct. Change 1990-2010
Colorado	12	16.7%	53.6%
Iowa	20	10.1%	21.1%
Kansas	20	11.2%	24.9%
Minnesota	23	9.7%	25.8%
Montana	1	14.4%	30.5%
Nebraska	9	13.7%	29.5%
North Dakota	4	14.6%	26.4%
South Dakota	7	18.6%	38.7%
Wisconsin	6	13.0%	25.6%
Wyoming	1	12.4%	25.4%

Table 4. Metropolitan Population Change 2010, 2000, 1990

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Taken together, these figures clearly show that cities—both large and, in some cases, small—and suburbs are the population growth engines of the region. And the 2010 population figures show the continuation of a long-standing trend of declining rural population. In many parts of the region the decline in rural population is more pronounced than the aggregate figures would leave one to believe. In 112 rural counties of the region population between 2000

and 2010 decreased by 10 percent or more, including 20 or more such counties in Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota. More dramatically, 179 rural counties in the region suffered 10 percent or more population loss between 1990 and 2010. Nearly half of the region’s counties, therefore, are suffering a slow, sure emptying.

State	No. of Rural Counties	Counties with 10% or more Population Loss, 2000-2010	Counties with 10% or more Population Loss, 1990-2010
Colorado	14	6	4
Iowa	61	5	15
Kansas	69	23	39
Minnesota	46	6	12
Montana	23	6	12
Nebraska	64	22	38
North Dakota	41	22	33
South Dakota	46	20	26
Wisconsin	12	0	0
Wyoming	6	0	0

Table 5. Rural County Population Loss of 10 Percent or More

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Hispanic Population Growth Across the Region

While total population changes vary across states and types of counties in the region, one common factor all types of counties in all states of the region have is the striking growth in Hispanic population. Hispanic residents now represent over nine percent of the region’s total population. Table 6 below shows the aggregate Hispanic population for county types in the region and the rate of growth for each county type. There is little significant difference in Hispanic population growth for the county types, with each type having over 50 percent growth. Between 2000 and 2010, rural counties of the region lost a total of over 104,000 residents, but gained over 48,000 Hispanic residents. But for Hispanic population gains, the rural population of the region would have been significantly greater—one and a half percentage points greater for the 2000 to 2010 decade. This demonstrates the growing diversity of many rural areas of the region and the importance of Hispanic immigration into the region’s rural areas.

County Type	2010 Hispanic Population	2000 Hispanic Population	Pct. Change Hispanic Population 2000-2010	Hispanic Population as Pct. of 2010 Total Population
Rural	136,808	88,745	54.2%	4.3%
Micropolitan	225,299	147,762	52.5%	8.6%
Metropolitan	1,493,955	959,375	55.7%	10.5%
Total	1,856,062	1,195,882	55.2%	9.3%

Table 6. Total Hispanic Population

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Table 7 below shows Hispanic population change from 2000 to 2010 by county type. With a limited exception of rural and small city Colorado (which already had relatively large Hispanic populations), the Hispanic population growth is dramatic across the board. Nearly 43 percent of the region’s total population growth from 2000 to 2010 is attributable to Hispanic population growth.

State	Rural Counties—Hispanic Population Change, 2000-2010	Micropolitan Counties—Hispanic Population Change, 2000-2010	Metropolitan Counties—Hispanic Population Change, 2000-2010
Colorado	8.3%	19.7%	42.1%
Iowa	123.6%	68.9%	83.3%
Kansas	47.4%	32.4%	79.0%
Minnesota	69.6%	76.0%	77.3%
Montana	32.4%	140.7%	44.5%
Nebraska	80.1%	61.4%	88.8%
North Dakota	73.0%	79.0%	80.0%
South Dakota	86.0%	164.0%	106.0%
Wisconsin	56.8%	NA	181.5%
Wyoming	30.7%	231.9%	34.3%

Table 7. Hispanic Population Change 2000 to 2010 by County Type

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR RURAL AFFAIRS

This is a publication of the Rural Research and Analysis Program of the Center for Rural Affairs. Established in 1973, the Center for Rural Affairs is a private, nonprofit organization with a mission to establish strong rural communities, social and economic justice, environmental stewardship, and genuine opportunity for all while engaging people in decisions that affect the quality of their lives and the future of their communities.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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