Rewriting the Rural Narrative

Speak softly and carry statistics

Benjamin Winchester
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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 t[hese] stories, both of the people who left their rural [home and the] small percentage of Americans who still live i[n the] nation. There are stories, too, of people who've [left. They've] left for myriad reasons. We want to know those [stories, and we want to] 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.

HOLLOWING OUT THE MIDDLE

The Rural Brain Drain and What It Means for America

[...] kind of the poster child for the war on poverty, [...so when] somebody wanted to do a story about poor [...we] were the first stop.

THE LARGER 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
- The lucky few escape

- What we had
- What we don't have
- What we wish we had
- What we could have had…

NO MORE ANECDATA!

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

Mechanization of agriculture

Roads & **transportation**

On Main Street, Sleepy Eye, Minn.

Main street restructuring
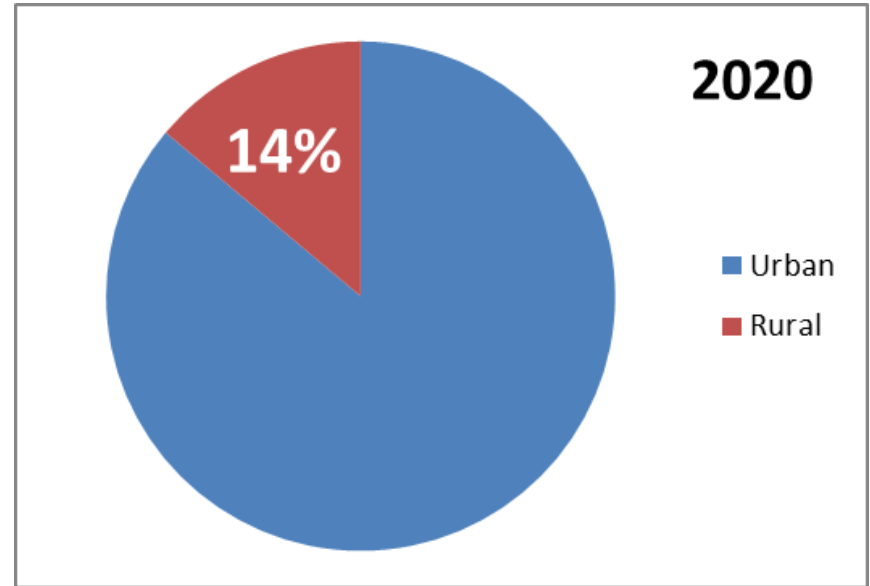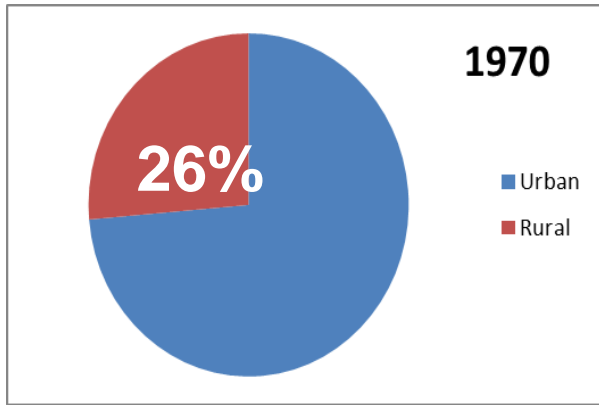
School **consolidations**

Rumors of my death have been greatly exaggerated. –Mark Twain
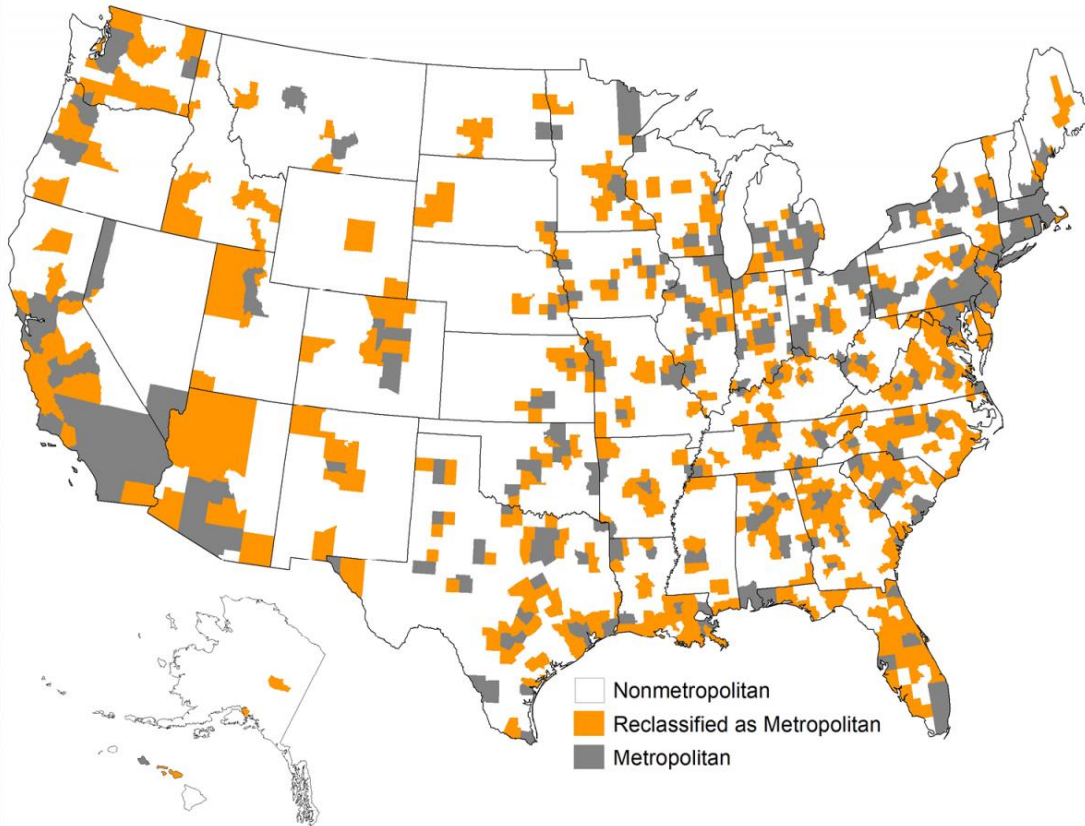
Rural is **changing**, not dying.

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.

Nonmetropolitan
Reclassified as Metropolitan
Metropolitan

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)

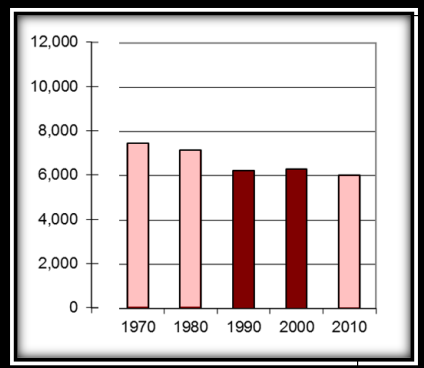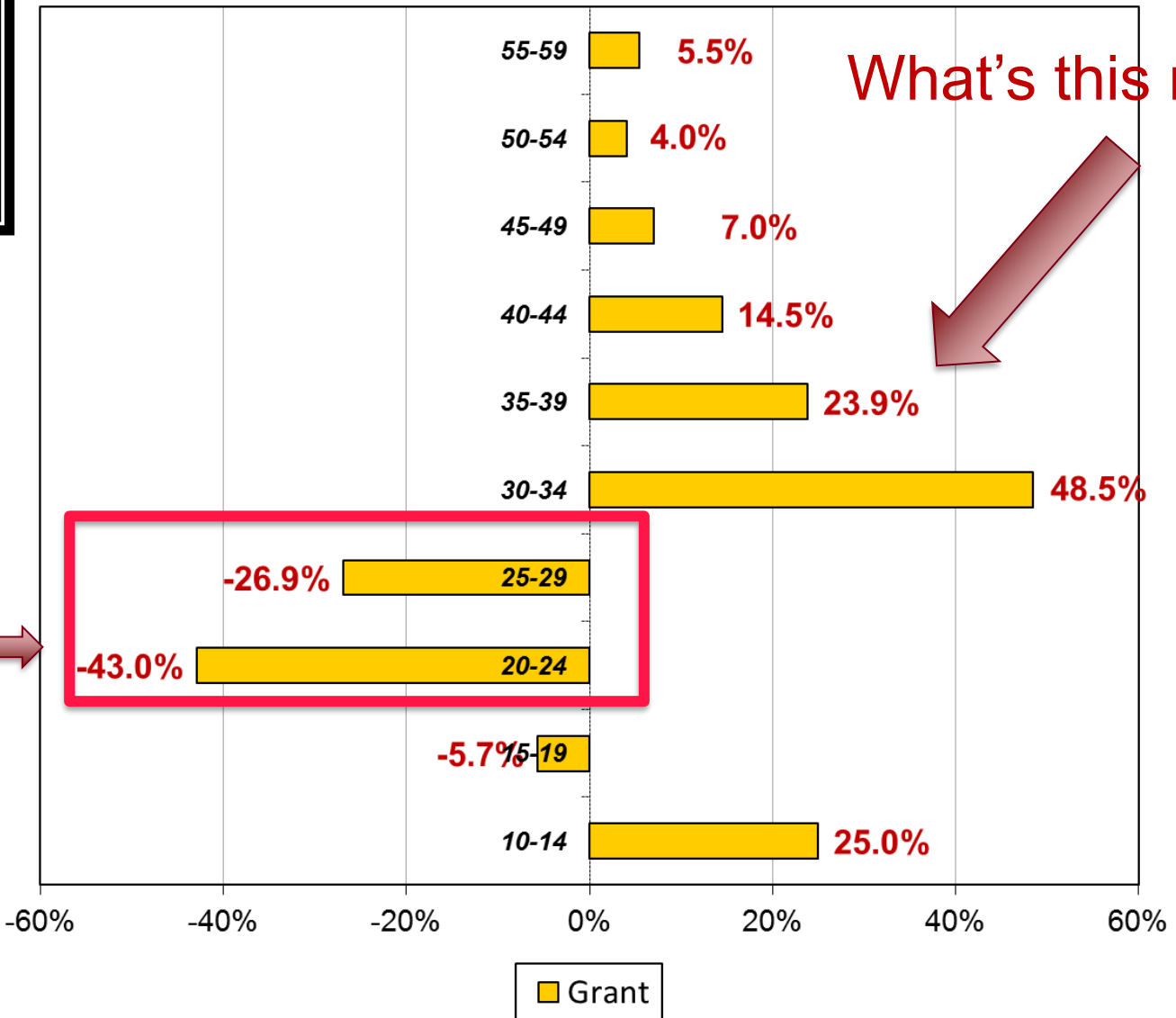Success is taken away from rural as urban areas have grown WIDER, not taller.

Mobility

49% of U.S. Households Moving Every 5 Years!

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EXTENSION

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

Nebraska Buffalo Commons Research 2012

Workforce Movers University of Minnesota, 2004, 2012, 2019

Montana Movers Study, 2021

Newcomers: Why?

Simpler pace of life

Safety and Security

Low Housing Cost

Newcomers: Who?

- 41% moved primarily for a job
  (50% youngest/ 35% oldest)
- 25% lived there previously
- 91% have some college or bachelor's
- 75% household incomes over $50k
- 47% have children in household
- 14% telecommute!

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

Newcomers: Who?

	MN	MT
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%

14% telecommute (pre-pandemic!)

* Social housing supply?

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

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ACTIVITY: Interviews

[In pairs] **Take turns interviewing each other using these questions:**

If you have moved to the community where you now live...	If you have always lived in your current community...
1. When did you move here? Have you lived in the community before?	1. Describe your connection to the community where you live?
2. What **push factors** were at work? Were there things pushing you away from where you lived before?	2. Are there **push factors** that are (or might be) nudging you to move to another community? If yes, what are those factors?
3. What **pull factors** were at work? Were there things that pulled you towards your new destination?	3. Are there **pull factors** that would entice you to consider moving towards a new destination?
4. When you chose to move to this community, which factors were important for your household? Why? *Choose the top three to five from the list below.*	4. If you needed to move from your current community, which factors would be most important for your household? Why? *Choose the top three to five from the list below.*

- ☐ *to live closer to relatives*
- ☐ *to live closer to friends*
- ☐ *to find higher quality schools*
- ☐ *to find lower priced housing*
- ☐ *to buy available land*
- ☐ *to find a lower cost of living*
- ☐ *to find a safer place to live*
- ☐ *to find a good environment for children*
- ☐ *to take advantage of a slower pace of life*
- ☐ *to live in a smaller community*

- ☐ *to live in a larger community*
- ☐ *to live among people with similar values*
- ☐ *to find a less congested place*
- ☐ *to live to find a higher paying job*
- ☐ *to find a job that matches my skills*
- ☐ *to find a better job for my spouse/partner*
- ☐ *to find a job for better work-life balance*
- ☐ *to take a new job to buy/begin a business*
- ☐ *to retire*

The Rural Brain Gain

They choose rural age

30-49

And also when they are 50-64

(since the 1970s)

Diversifying the **rural economy**

Jobs by Industry

Professional & business services, Trade, Health & social services, Government, Manufacturing, Leisure & hospitality, Other services, Construction, Transport & warehouse, Agriculture, Utilities, Mining

Twin Cities ■ Greater MN

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Megaregions

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

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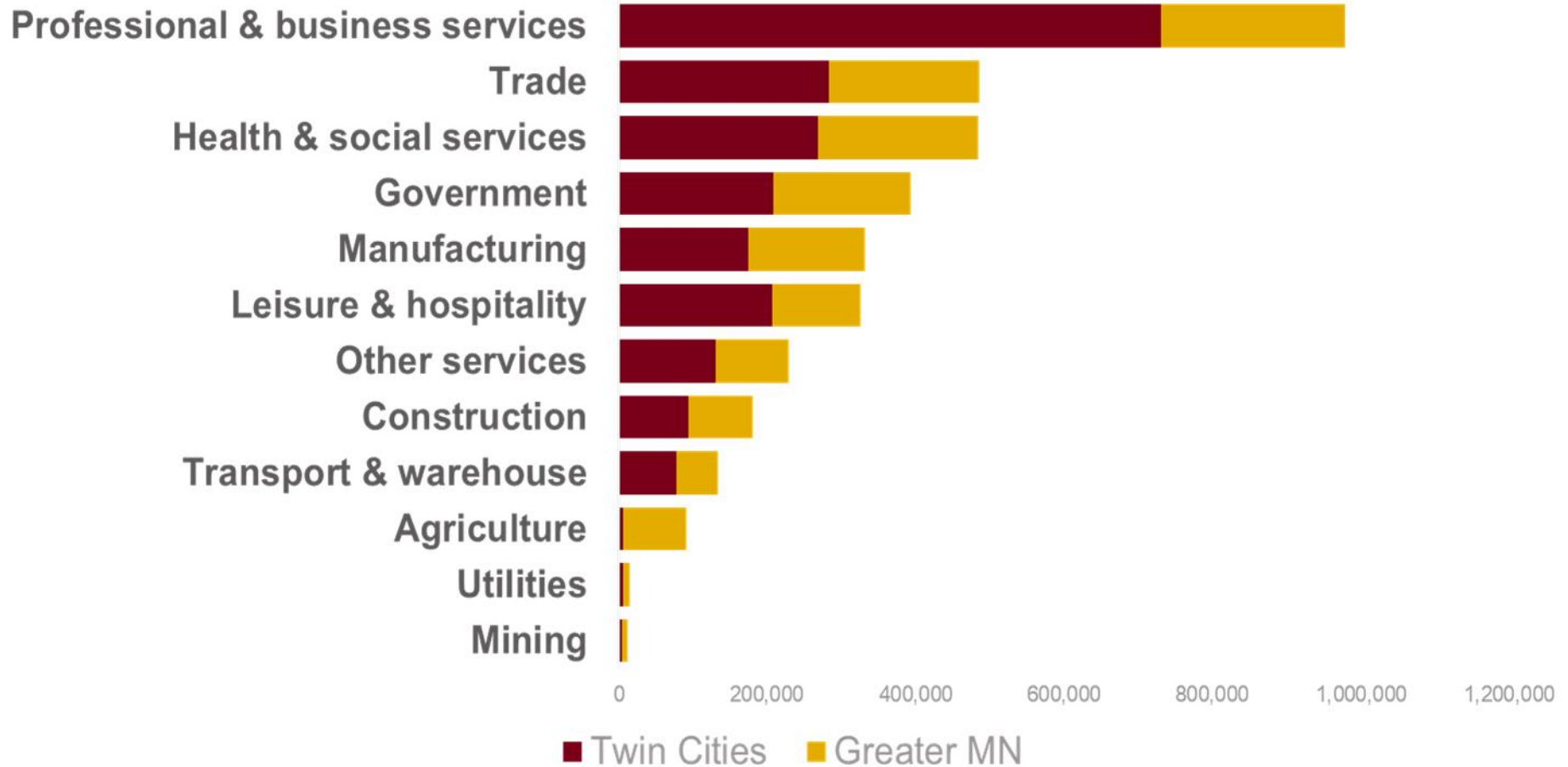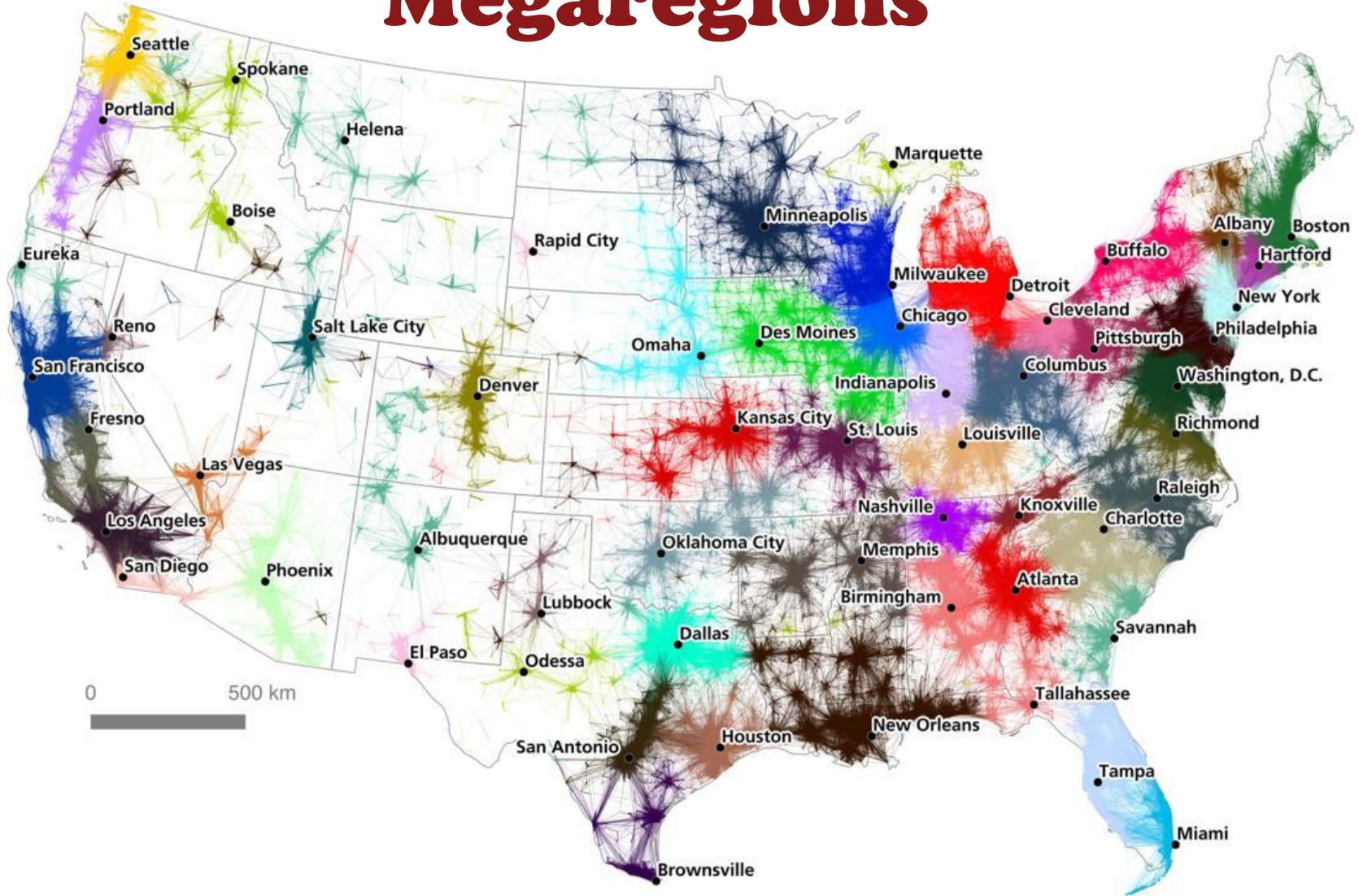
Benton County, OR

Every day:
18,114 commute in
19,276 commute out
…
and 17,636 (48%) both
live and work in the
county
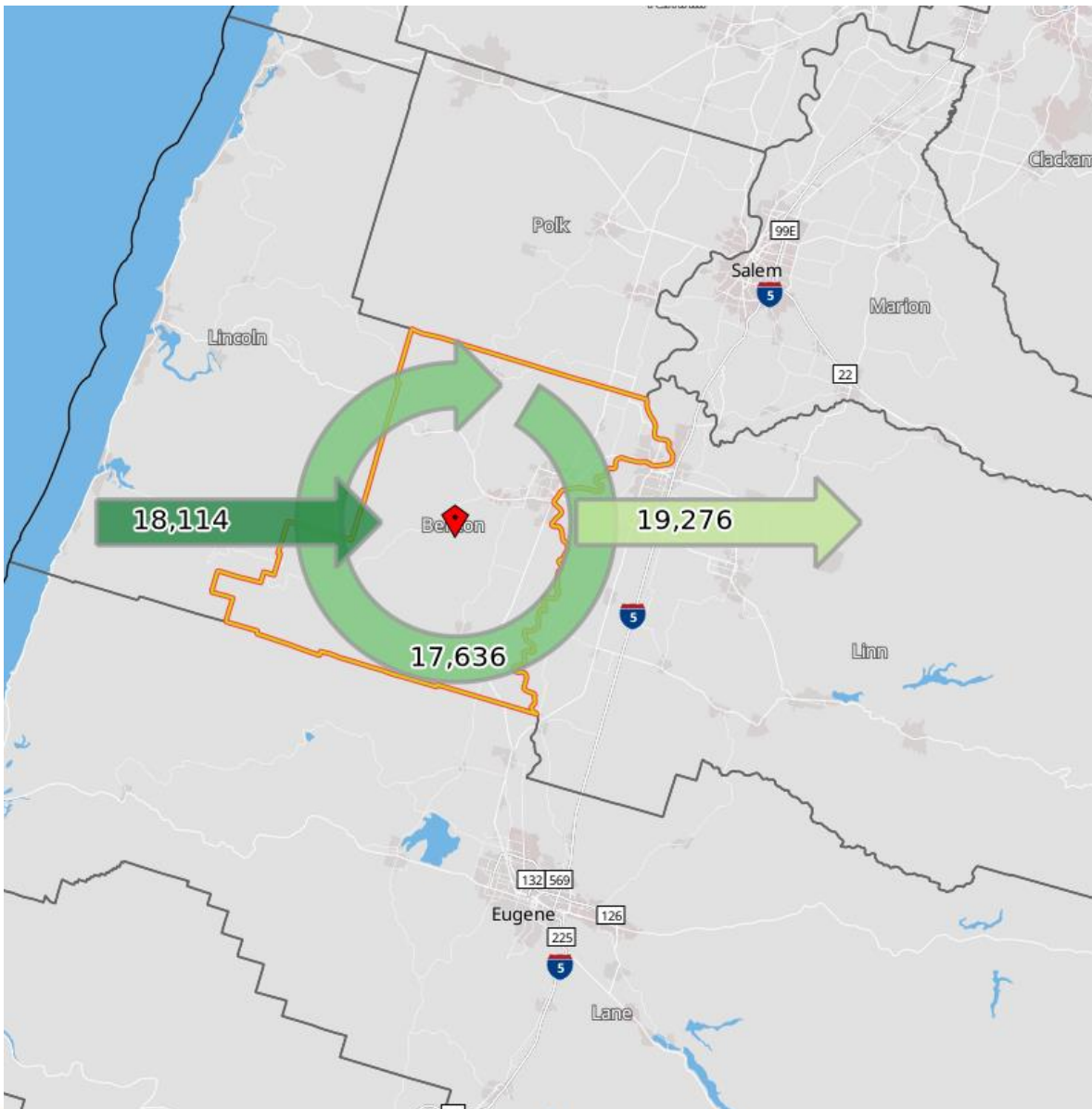
Source: U. S. Census Bureau, LEHD
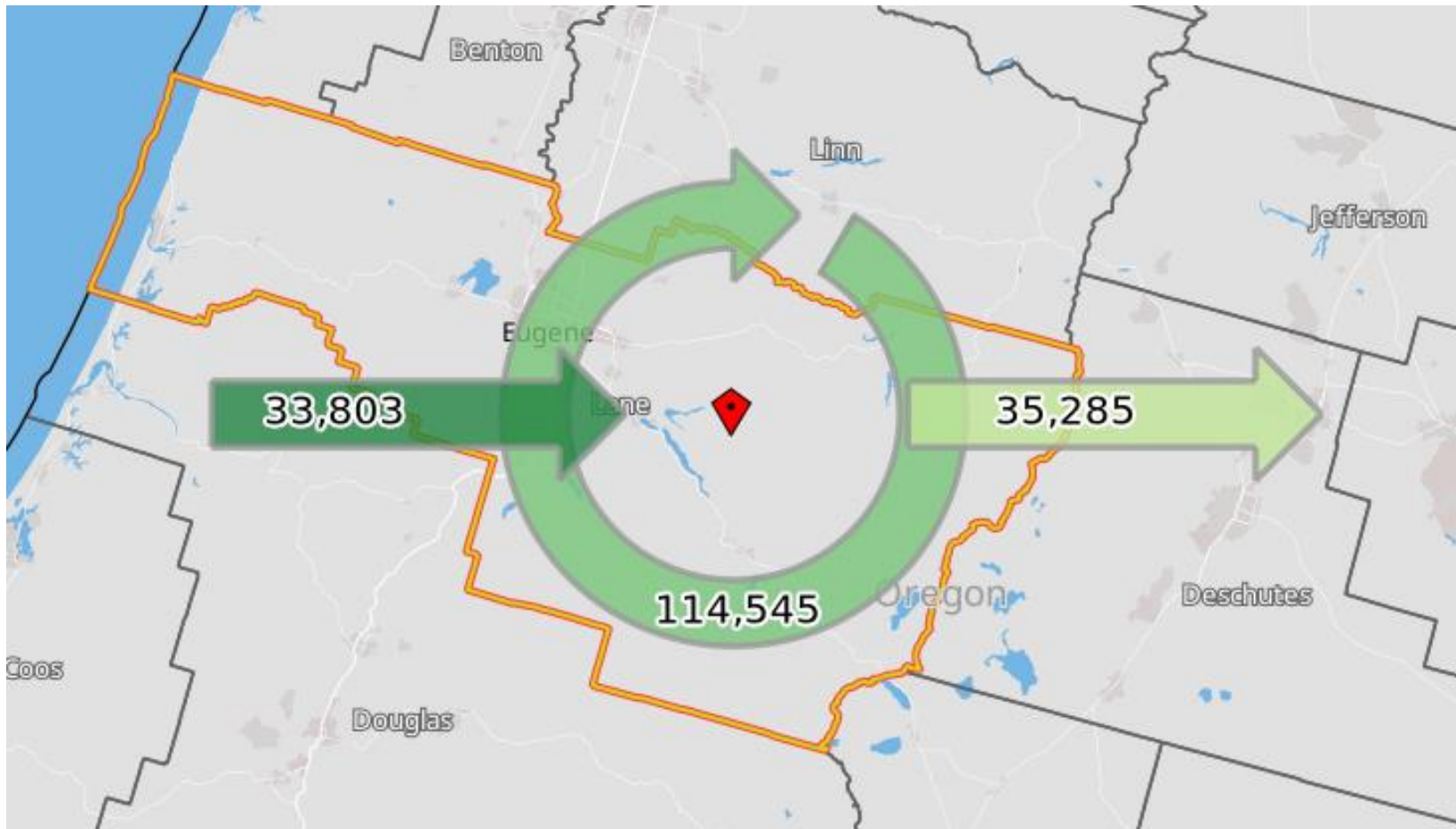
Lane County, OR
76% both live and work in the county

Source: U. S. Census Bureau, LEHD
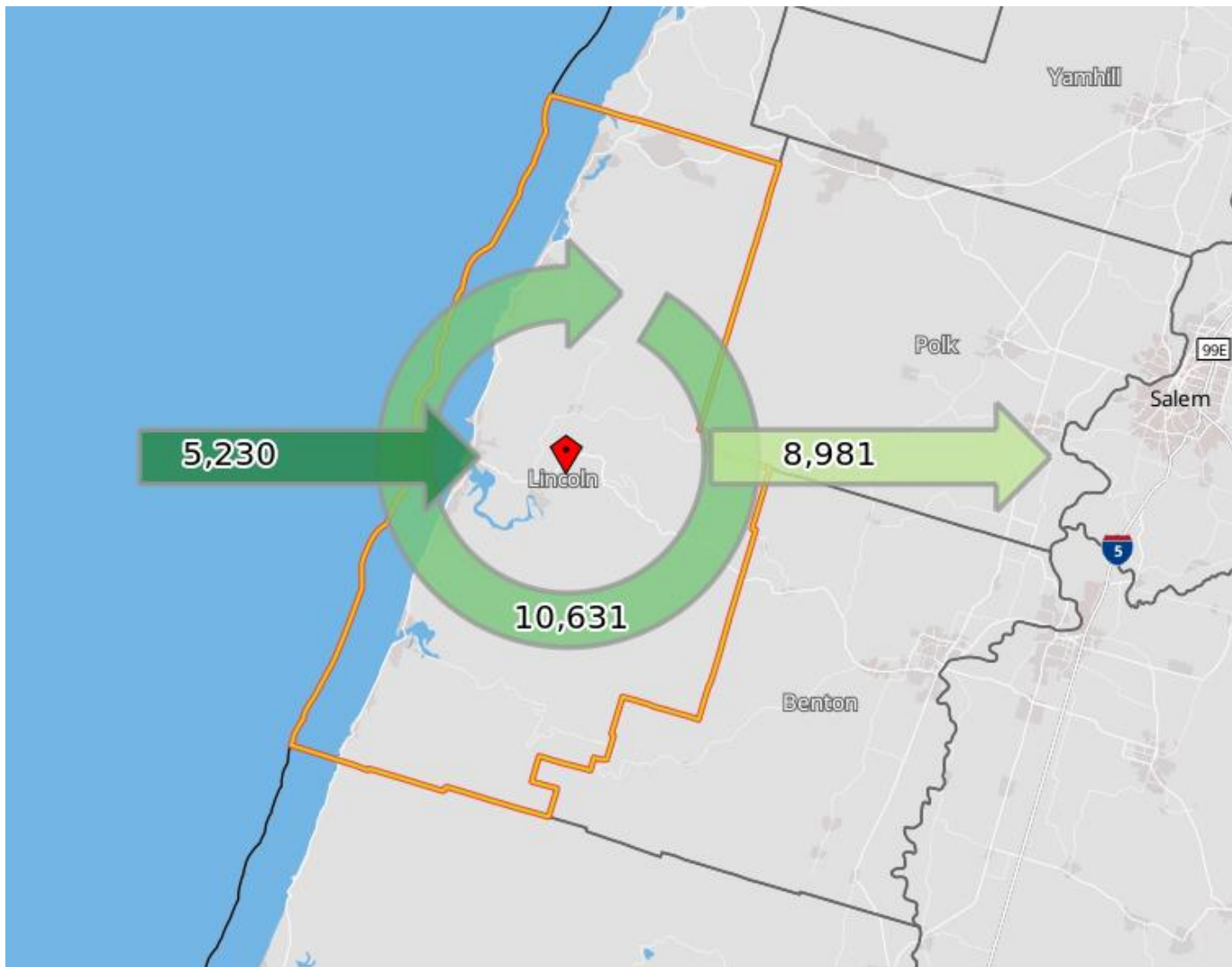
Lincoln County, OR
54% both live and work in the county

Source: U. S. Census Bureau, LEHD
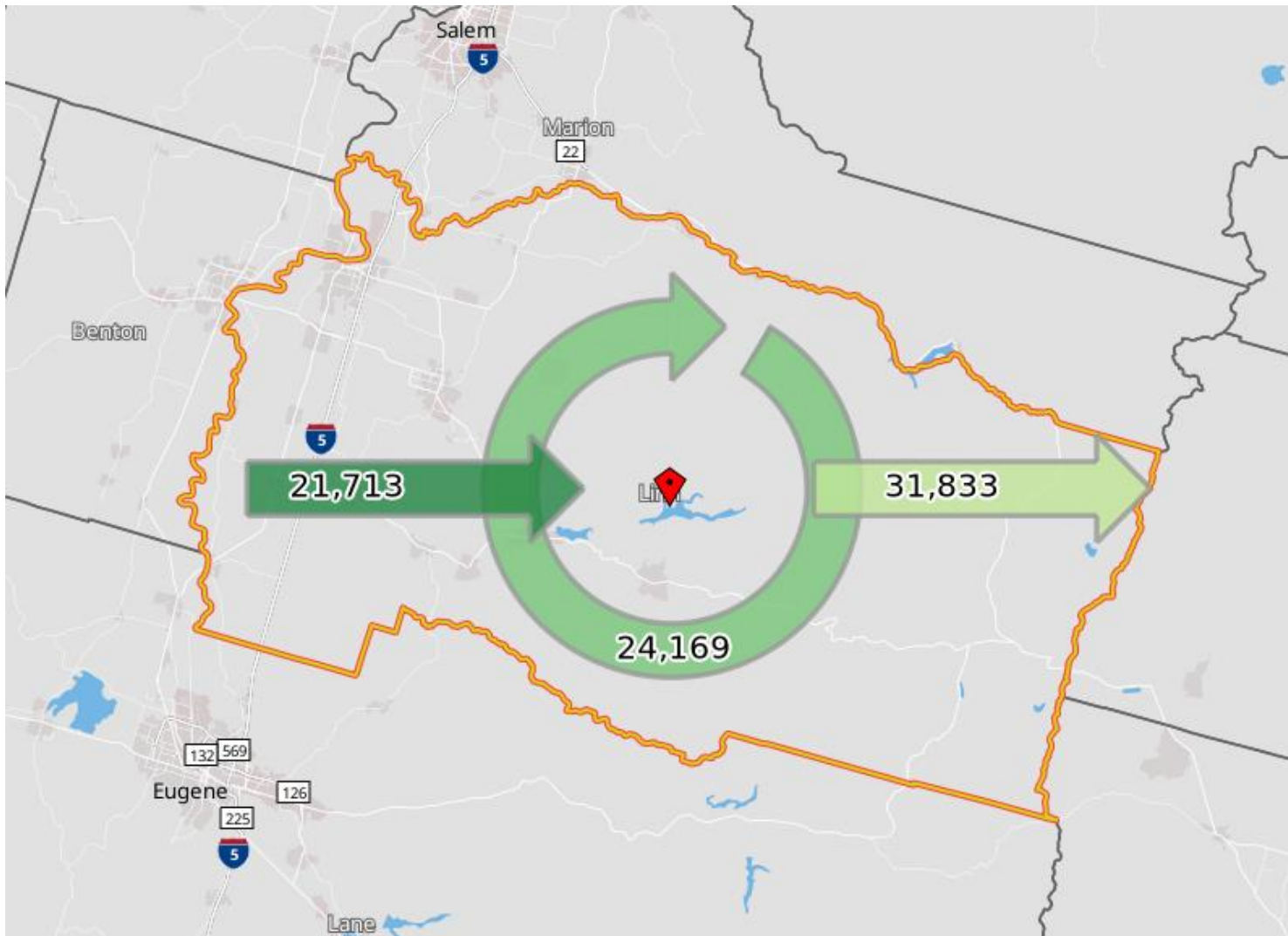
Linn County, OR
43% both live and work in the county

Source: U. S. Census Bureau, LEHD

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

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**

If there are these new people, where are they?
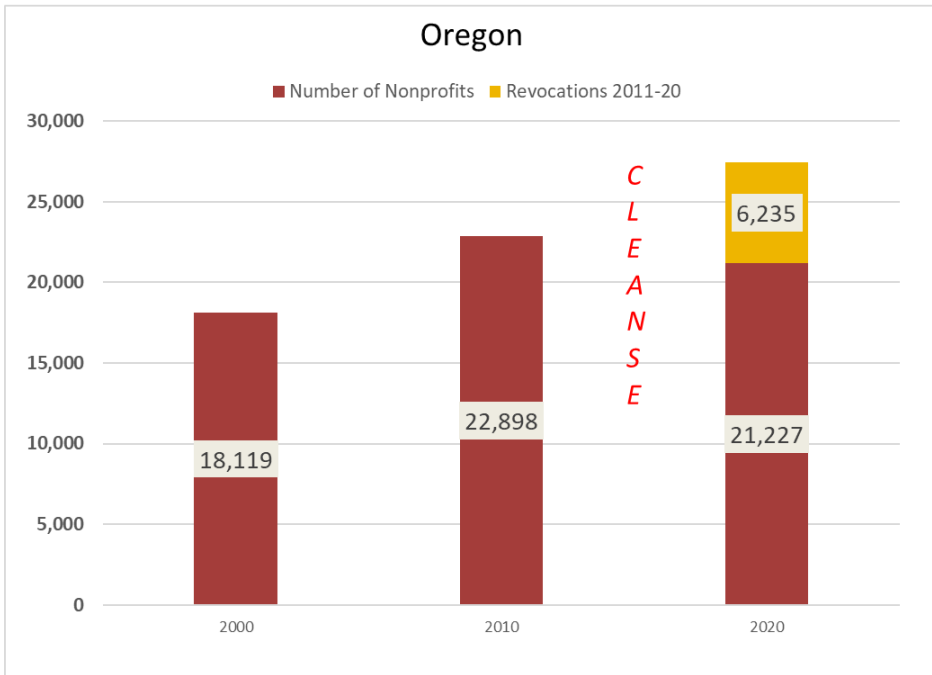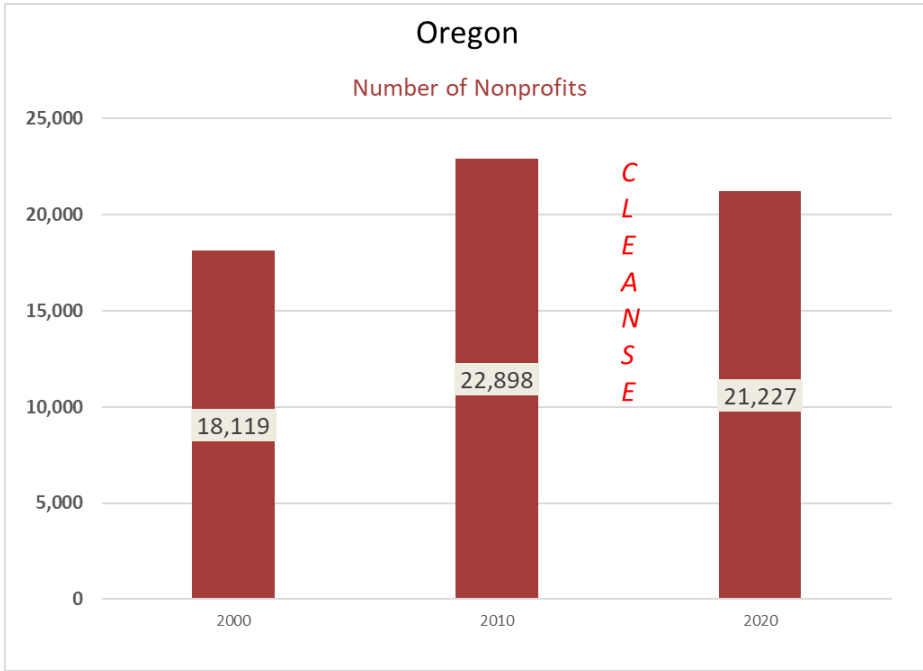
The "cleanse" occurred when the IRS aggressively removed inactive organizations beginning 2011-2012.

National Center for Charitable Statistics, U.S. Census Bureau
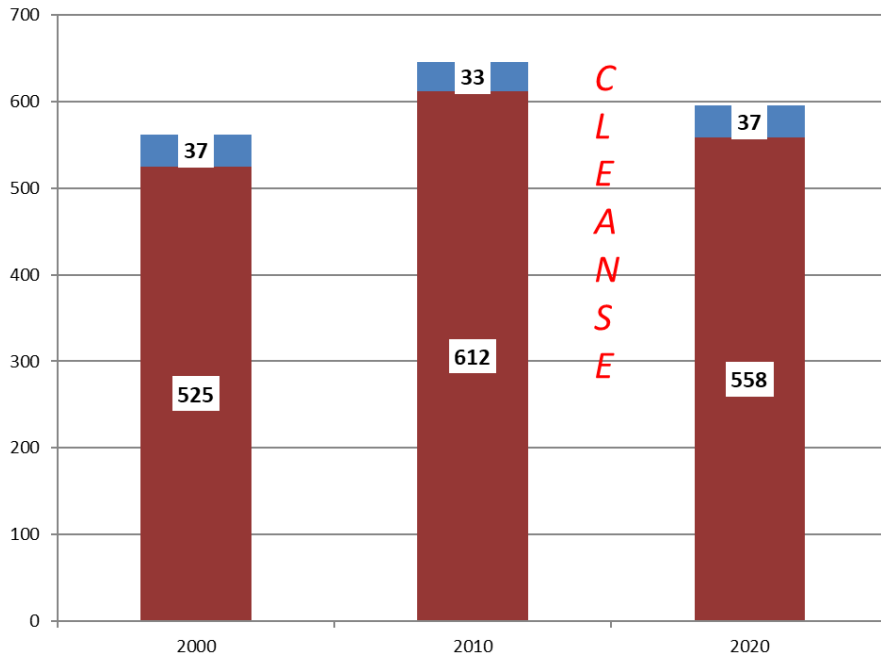
Lane County, Oregon

Nonprofits ■ Govt Units

CLEANSE

Year	# Nonprofits	Govt Units
2000	1,674	88
2010	2,021	86
2020	1,826	86

Benton County, Oregon

Nonprofits ■ Govt Units

CLEANSE

Year	# Nonprofits	Govt Units
2000	525	37
2010	612	33
2020	558	37

Linn County, Oregon — Stacked bar chart of # Nonprofits and Govt Units for 2000, 2010, and 2020. 2000: 523 Nonprofits, 46 Govt Units. 2010: 649 Nonprofits, 52 Govt Units. 2020: 595 Nonprofits, 46 Govt Units. "CLEANSE" written vertically in red.

Lincoln County, Oregon — Stacked bar chart of # Nonprofits and Govt Units for 2000, 2010, and 2020. 2000: 276 Nonprofits, 73 Govt Units. 2010: 359 Nonprofits, 68 Govt Units. 2020: 311 Nonprofits, 69 Govt Units. "CLEANSE" written vertically in red.

Benton County, Oregon

	2000	2010	2020
Number of Nonprofits	525	612	558
Number Filing 990	239	412	474
Revenue (of Filers)	$296,661,790	$935,185,869	$1,610,969,060
Assets (of Filers)	$711,891,116	$1,296,531,610	$2,313,463,981
Governmental Units	37	33	37
Total Organizations	562	645	595
Population, Total	78,153	85,579	95,184
Population Age 18+	61,495	70,330	79,692
Groups per 1,000 people	7.2	7.5	6.3
Revenue per Organization	$565,070	$1,528,081	$2,887,041
Revenue per Person	$3,796	$10,928	$16,925
Population per Org Role	18	18	23

Note: The "Number filing 990" indicates annual gross receipts of $50,000 or more.

Lane County, Oregon

	2000	2010	2020
Number of Nonprofits	1,674	2,021	1,826
Number Filing 990	623	1,176	1,431
Revenue (of Filers)	$532,988,016	$1,468,208,853	$1,162,216,460
Assets (of Filers)	$1,749,382,394	$4,028,507,093	$7,790,119,626
Governmental Units	88	86	86
Total Organizations	1,762	2,107	1,912
Population, Total	322,959	351,715	382,971
Population Age 18+	249,145	282,026	313,477
Groups per 1,000 people	5.5	6.0	5.0
Revenue per Organization	$318,392	$726,476	$636,482
Revenue per Person	$1,650	$4,174	$3,035
Population per Org Role	24	22	28

Note: The "Number filing 990" indicates annual gross receipts of $50,000 or more.

Lincoln County, Oregon

	2000	2010	2020
Number of Nonprofits	276	359	311
Number Filing 990	76	206	247
Revenue (of Filers)	$16,456,615	$26,168,485	$32,664,884
Assets (of Filers)	$49,303,228	$61,680,128	$89,271,959
Governmental Units	73	68	69
Total Organizations	349	427	380
Population, Total	44,479	46,034	50,395
Population Age 18+	34,944	38,081	42,380
Groups per 1,000 people	7.8	9.3	7.5
Revenue per Organization	$59,625	$72,893	$105,032
Revenue per Person	$370	$568	$648
Population per Org Role	17	15	19

Note: The "Number filing 990" indicates annual gross receipts of $50,000 or more.

Linn County, Oregon

	2000	2010	2020
Number of Nonprofits	523	649	595
Number Filing 990	146	358	443
Revenue (of Filers)	$150,031,344	$116,797,371	$146,528,092
Assets (of Filers)	$291,308,890	$358,964,908	$349,821,134
Governmental Units	46	52	46
Total Organizations	569	701	641
Population, Total	103,069	116,672	128,610
Population Age 18+	76,239	88,499	100,402
Groups per 1,000 people	5.5	6.0	5.0
Revenue per Organization	$286,867	$179,965	$246,266
Revenue per Person	$1,456	$1,001	$1,139
Population per Org Role	23	21	26

Note: The "Number filing 990" indicates annual gross receipts of $50,000 or more.

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
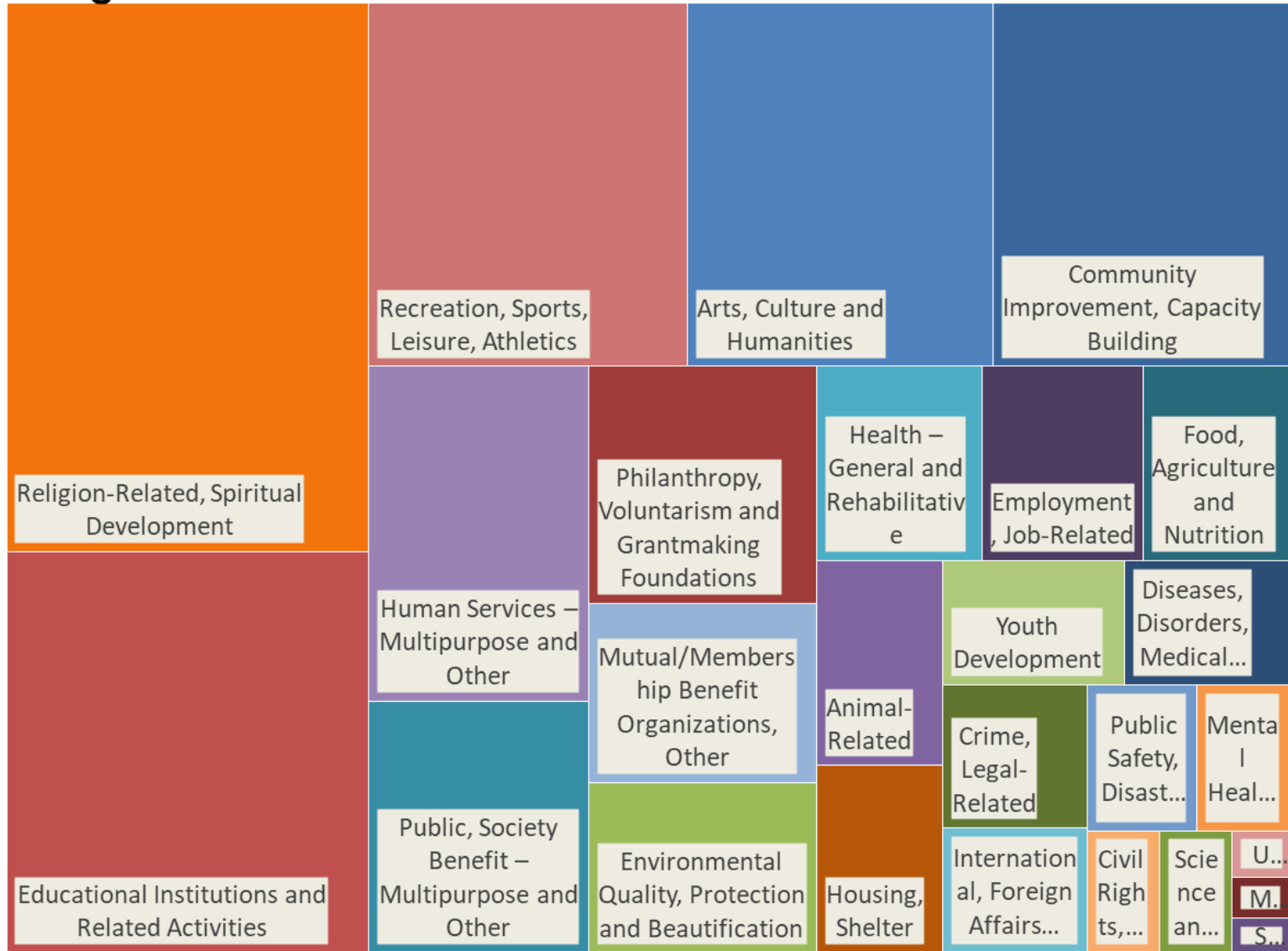- Diverse social interests
- Technological – social media

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

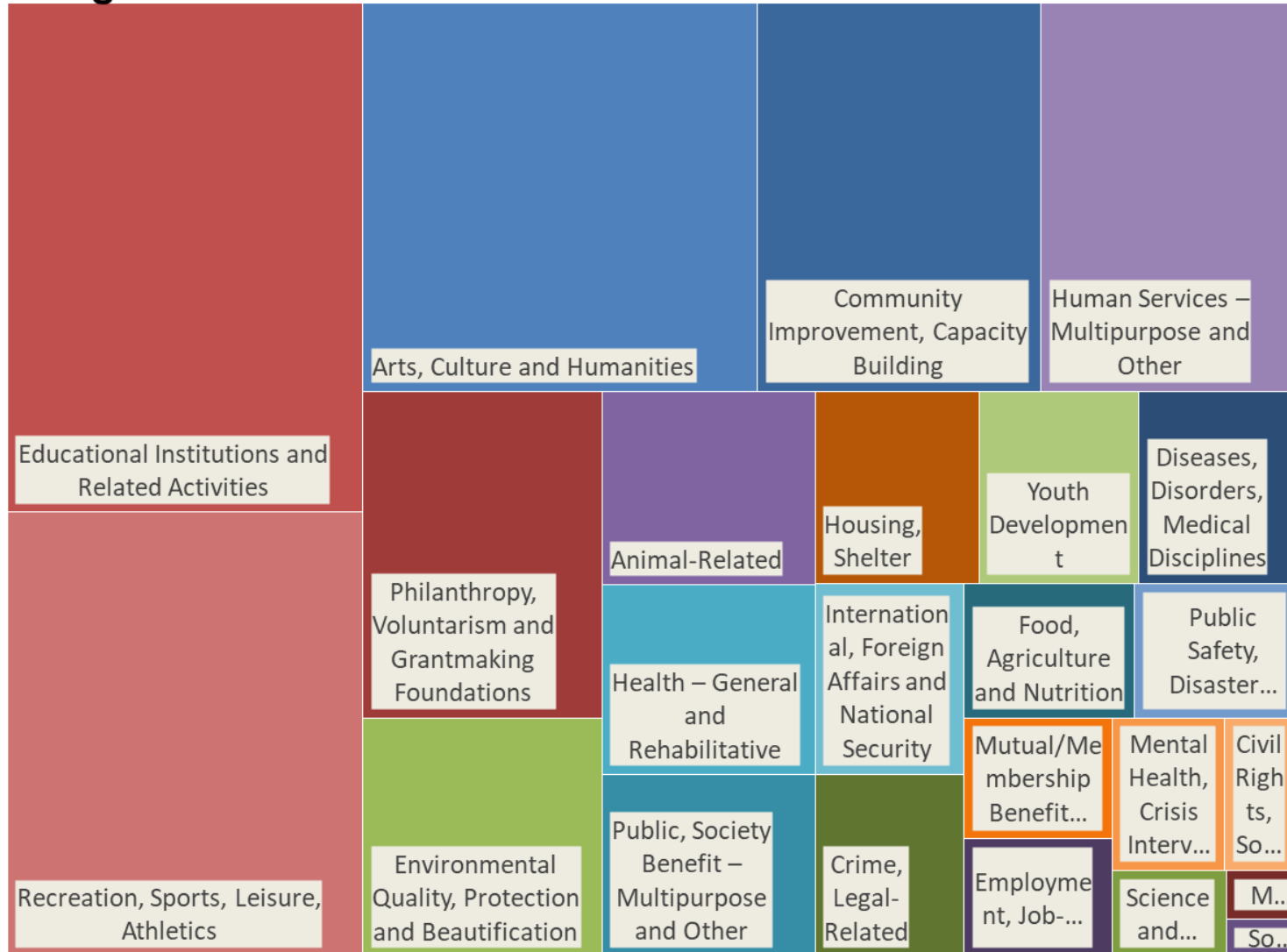Green & Haines. 2007. *Asset Building and Community Development*
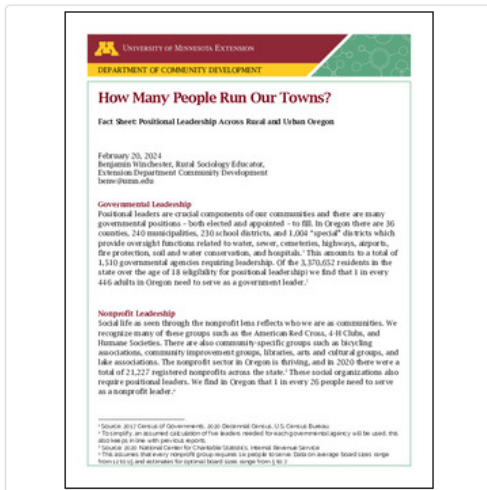
Oregon

2020 Nonprofit NTEE composition

- Religion-Related, Spiritual Development
- Educational Institutions and Related Activities
- Recreation, Sports, Leisure, Athletics
- Arts, Culture and Humanities
- Community Improvement, Capacity Building
- Human Services – Multipurpose and Other
- Public, Society Benefit – Multipurpose and Other
- Philanthropy, Voluntarism and Grantmaking Foundations
- Mutual/Membership Benefit Organizations, Other
- Environmental Quality, Protection and Beautification
- Health – General and Rehabilitative
- Animal-Related
- Housing, Shelter
- Employment, Job-Related
- Youth Development
- Crime, Legal-Related
- International, Foreign Affairs…
- Food, Agriculture and Nutrition
- Diseases, Disorders, Medical…
- Public Safety, Disast…
- Mental Heal…
- Civil Rights,…
- Science an…
- U…
- M.
- S…

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62% created last 30 years!

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

- Educational Institutions and Related Activities
- Recreation, Sports, Leisure, Athletics
- Arts, Culture and Humanities
- Community Improvement, Capacity Building
- Human Services – Multipurpose and Other
- Philanthropy, Voluntarism and Grantmaking Foundations
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- Public, Society Benefit – Multipurpose and Other
- Housing, Shelter
- International, Foreign Affairs and National Security
- Crime, Legal-Related
- Youth Development
- Food, Agriculture and Nutrition
- Mutual/Membership Benefit…
- Employment, Job-…
- Diseases, Disorders, Medical Disciplines
- Public Safety, Disaster…
- Mental Health, Crisis Interv…
- Science and…
- Civil Rights, So…
- M…
- So..

How many people run our towns? Positional leadership across rural and urban Oregon

Wi, Benjamin S (2024)

Title

How many people run our towns? Positional leadership across rural and urban Oregon

Authors

Wi, Benjamin S

Issue Date

2024-02-20

Type

Article

Newsletter or Bulletin

Report

Abstract

Positional leaders are crucial components of our communities and there are many governmental positions – both elected and appointed – to fill. This fact sheet documents the number of governmental and nonprofit organizations across Oregon by county. A rural-urban lens is also used to examine differences in leadership supply and demand.

Keywords

rural

leadership

nonprofit

Appears in collections

Department of Community Development Research Reports [106]

Suggested Citation

Wi, Benjamin S. (2024). How many people run our towns? Positional leadership across rural and urban Oregon. Retrieved from the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, https://hdl.handle.net/11299/261263.
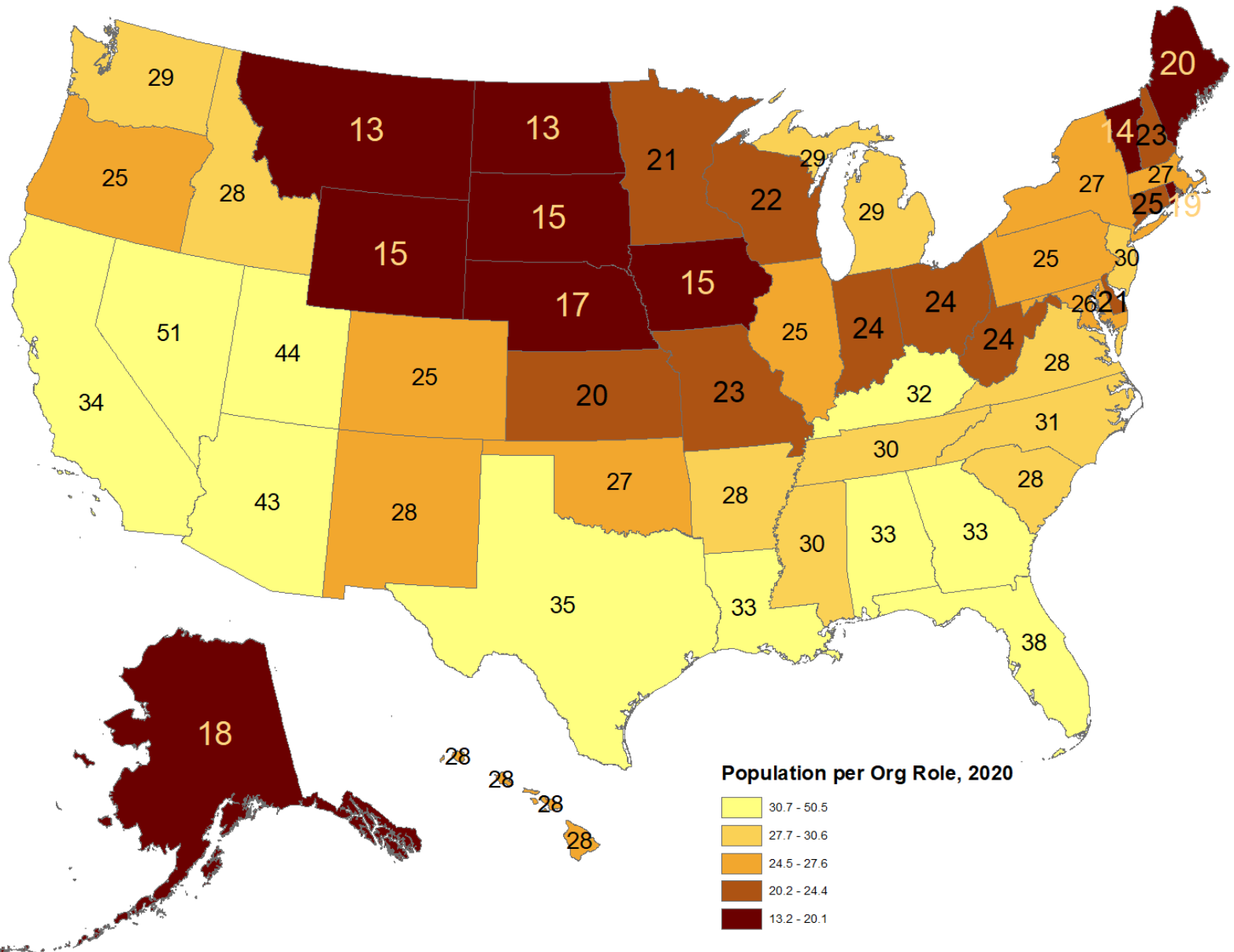
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Oregon leadership supply and demand report (360.2Kb application/pdf)

Persistent link to this item

https://hdl.handle.net/11299/261263

Services

Full metadata (XML)

View usage statistics

https://conservancy.umn.edu/handle/11299/261263

POPULATION PER ORGANIZATIONAL ROLE, 2020

Population per Org Role, 2020

- 30.7 – 50.5
- 27.7 – 30.6
- 24.5 – 27.6
- 20.2 – 24.4
- 13.2 – 20.1

Rank of Organizational Demands, 2020
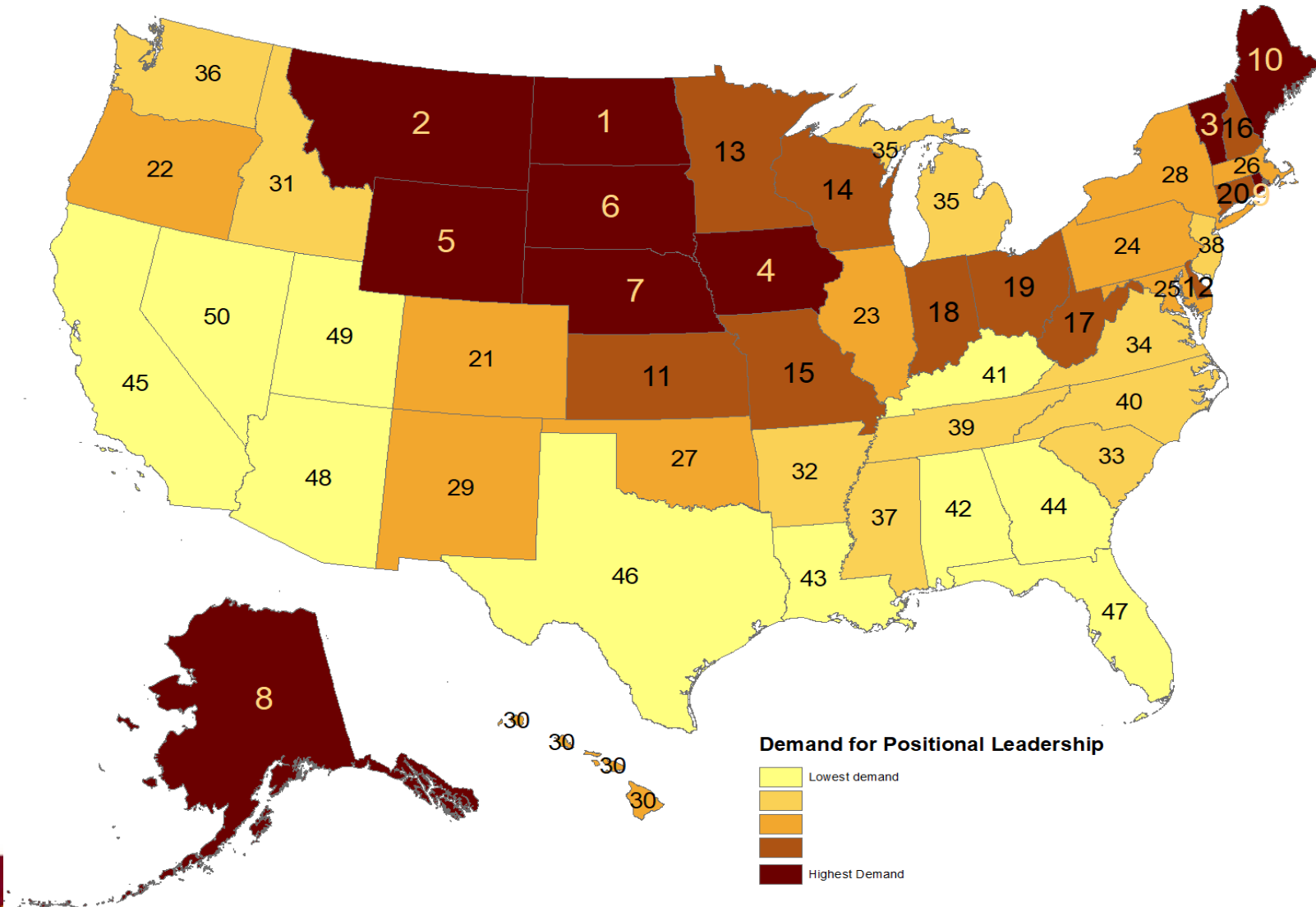
OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

- 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

Living 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?

Exercise

Living in the Middle of Everywhere

Age: _____'s

List 3-5 of your favorite assets in your region:

★ where you live
X where you work

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

Draw a ★ where you **live**, **X** where you **work** (both you and spouse/partner), and a boundary around how far you've traveled in the past year to **Shop/Eat out**, and another boundary around how for you **Play and Recreate**.

Change is coming

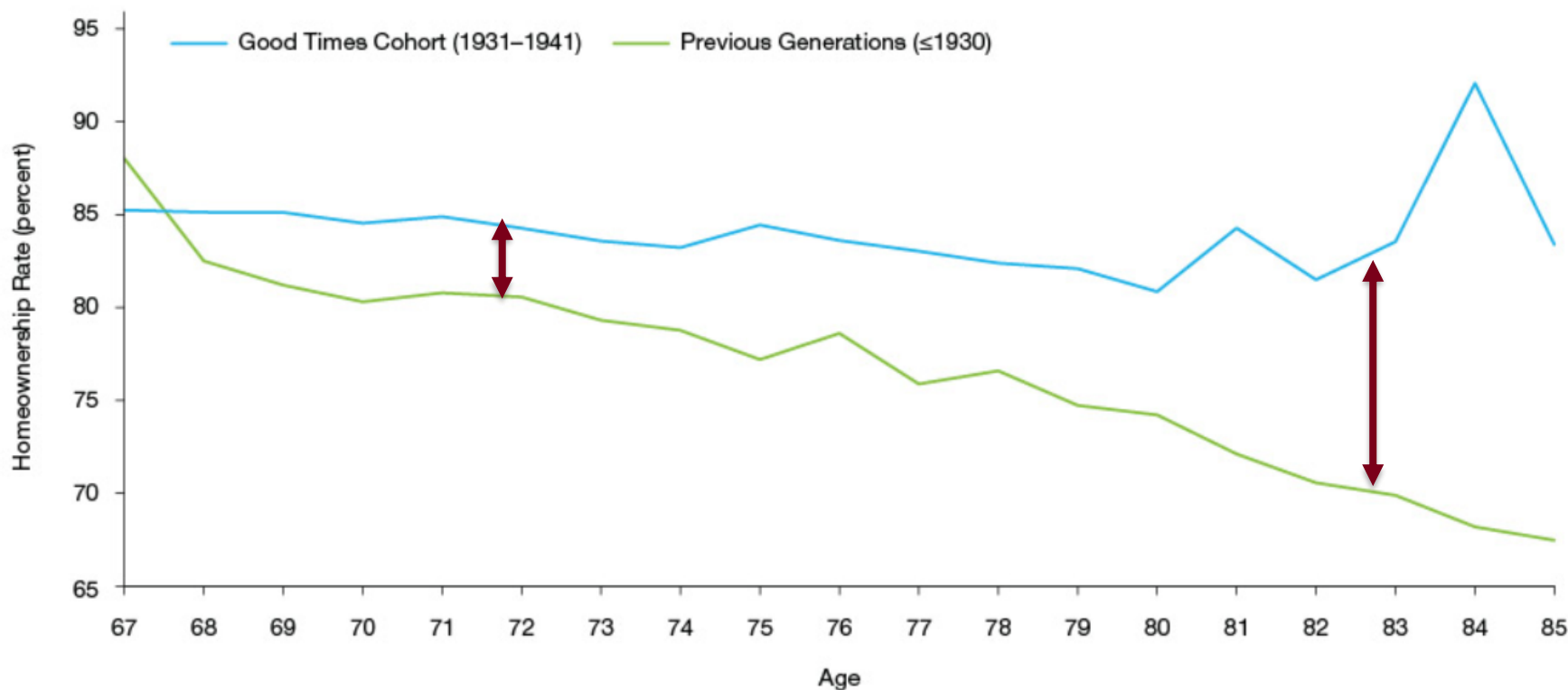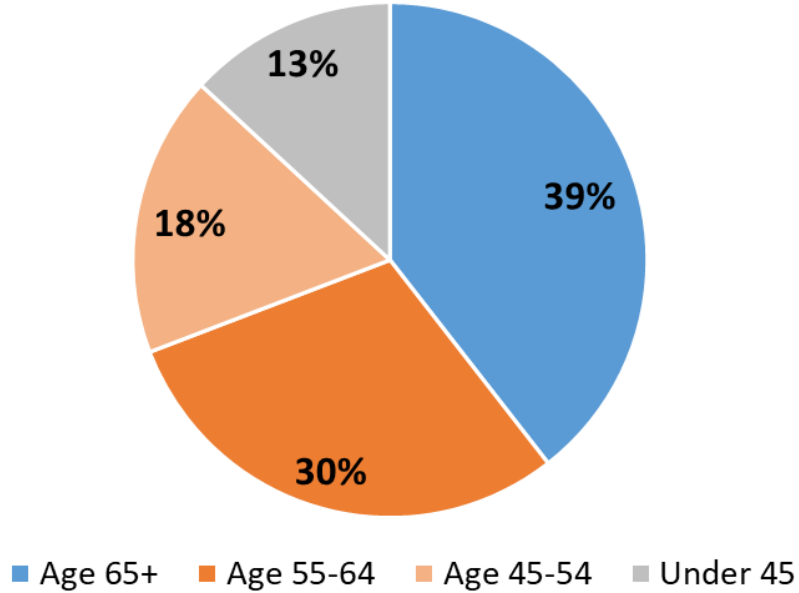## 30% of rural homeowners are 70+!

75% are baby boomers and older!

Exhibit 1

Historical homeownership rates for household heads aged 67–85

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

Staying at Home

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

Lincoln County, Oregon
Percent of Owner-Occupied Homes by Age, 2010

- 39% Age 65+
- 30% Age 55-64
- 18% Age 45-54
- 13% Under 45

Lincoln County, Oregon
Percent of Owner-Occupied Homes by Age, 2020

- 51% Age 65+
- 23% Age 55-64
- 14% Age 45-54
- 13% Under 45
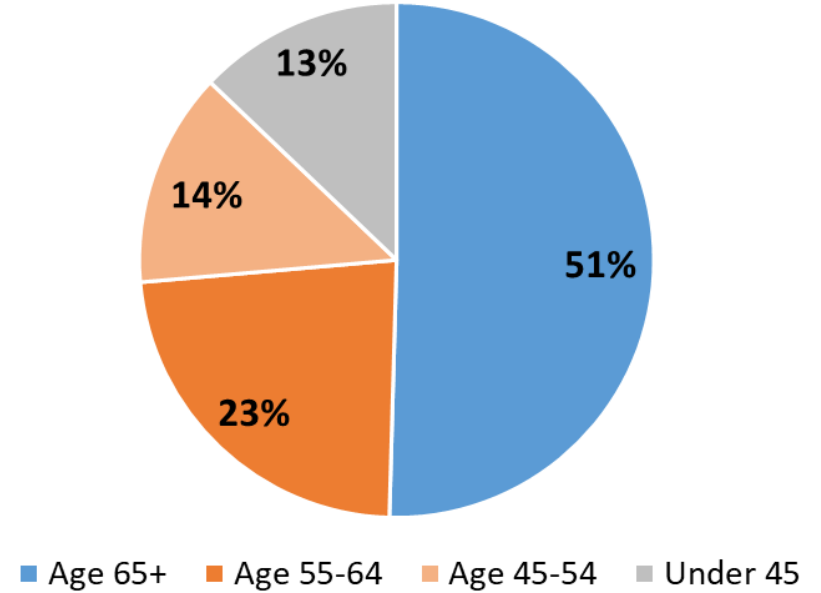
Housing Substitutions: Death brings rebirth

OUT

IN

47% of newcomer households have children

Entirely rural

Siginifcant change

518

400

0

112

-189

-401

-276

-400

-466

Natural change

Migration change

Total pop change

Percent
- Under 25%
- 25 - 30%
- 30 - 35%
- Over 35%
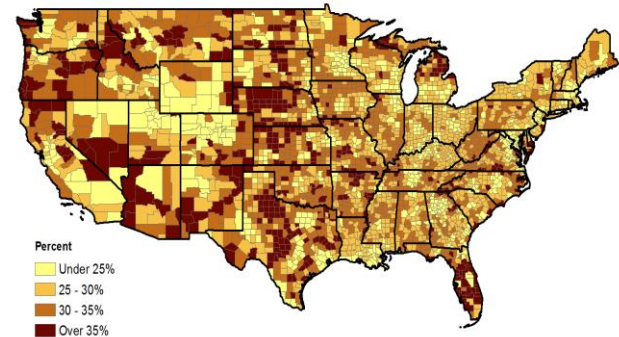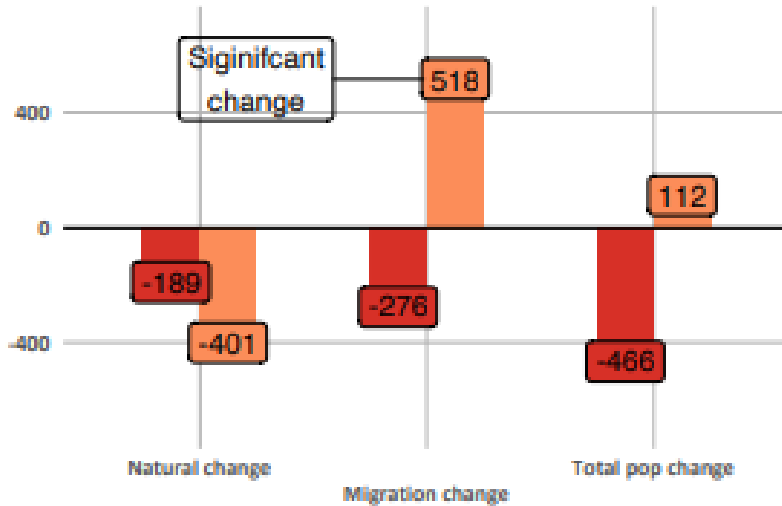
Community Succession

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.

More broadly, community succession plans for housing, leadership, and businesses

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

The coordinated economic and community development actions needed to identify, attract, and invite new residents moving to the region.

- Complement the industrial recruitment model of economic development.
- Distributes recruitment costs across the communities.
- In a tight labor market…labor has the power to choose. Why will they choose your town over another? Everything but the job matters…
- Many of the factors newcomers cite for choosing are also reasons people love to visit the area! Tourism!

HALO EFFECT: VISITATION AND IMAGE
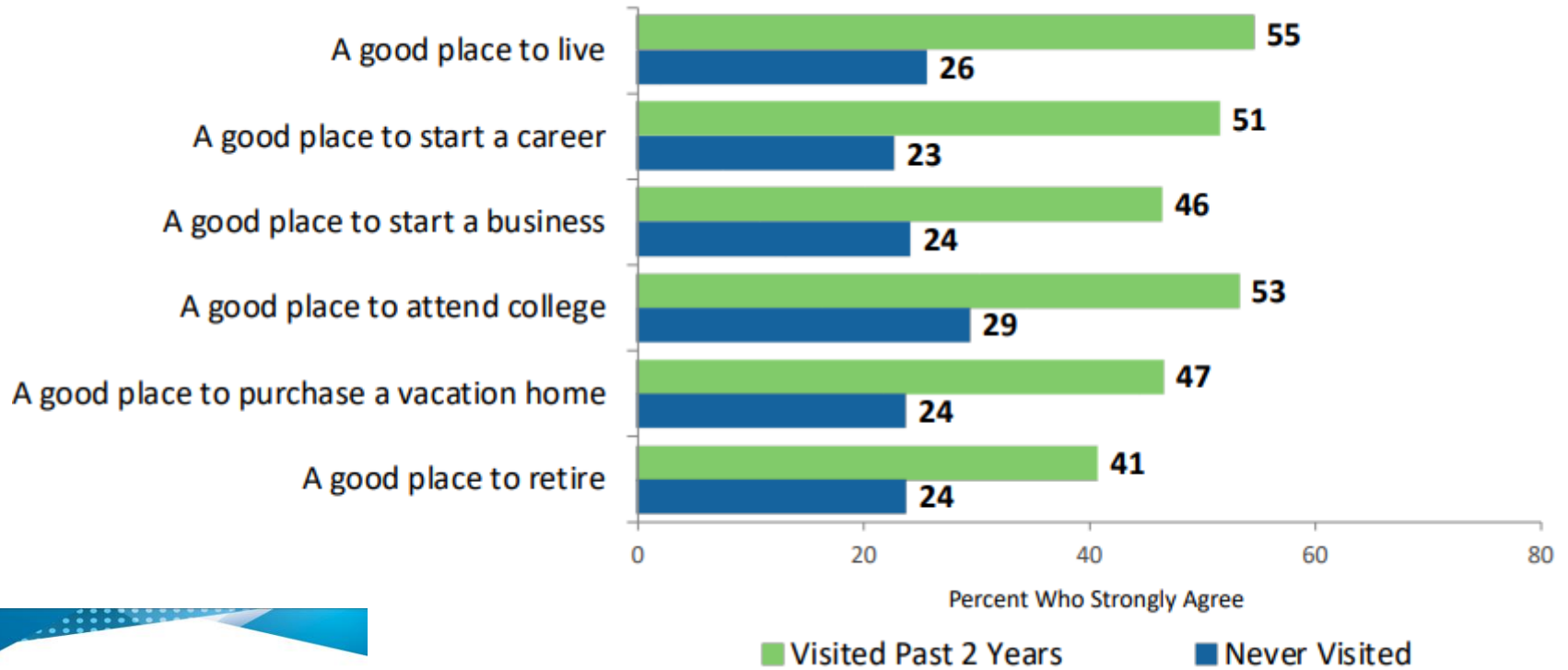
2023 Minnesota Halo Effect Research

The Rural Choice

These newcomers are:

- Creating groups, building <u>their</u> 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!

Brain Gain Landing Page

http://z.umn.edu/braingain/

Reddit: *Rural By Choice*

/r/ruralbychoice

Twitter @GrokRural

benw@umn.edu