



CENSUS BRIEF 2:

AGE DISTRIBUTION ON THE GREAT PLAINS

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October 2011

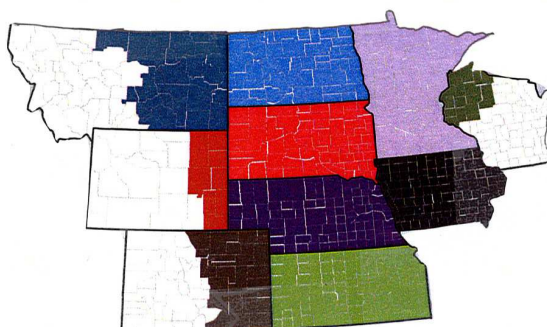


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This Brief is part of a series examining socio-economic aspects of the 2010 Census for the Great Plains and parts of the Midwest.

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. This brief will examine the age distribution of the region, an important short and long-term demographic and social and economic issue.

This is the second 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 region¹. 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 Areas Lag in Working Age Young Adults; Rural Areas Older

The chart on the following page outlines each of the county types described above and the distribution of their population by age group for the region examined (with rural-micropolitan-metropolitan from left to right in each group of bars).

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.

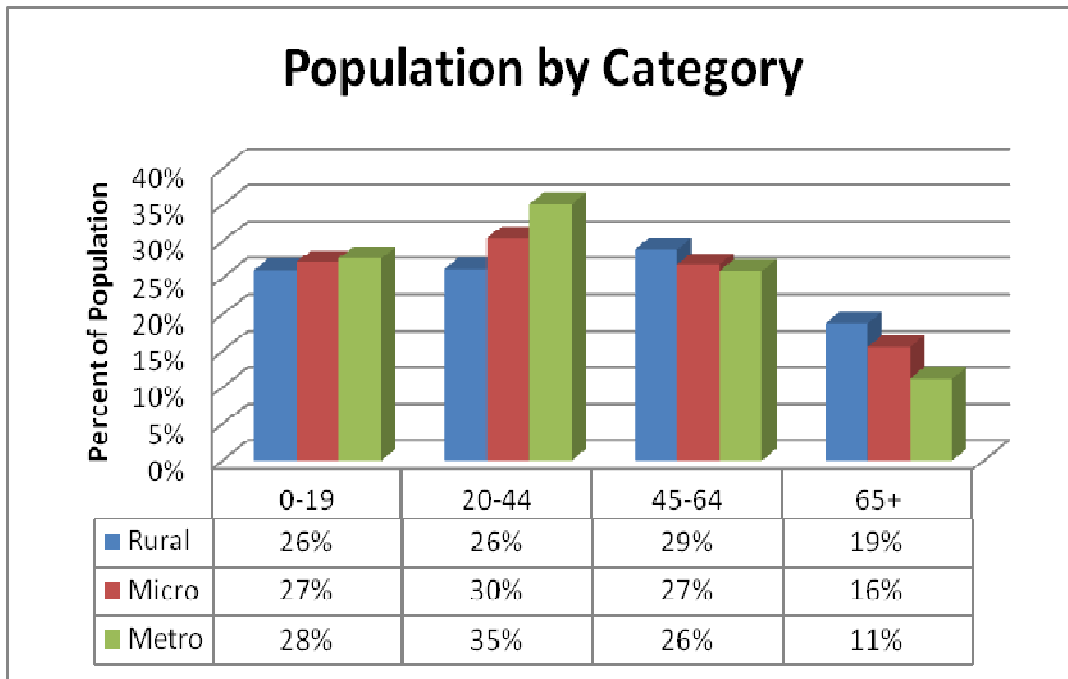


Chart 1. Regional Population by County Type and Age Category.

Source: 2010 Census

This chart shows three basic facts related to age distribution in the region:

- ◆ For the 0-19 years of age cohort the three county types are essentially equal. While metropolitan and micropolitan counties will have more children within their borders, the proportion of rural area population that is children is roughly the same.
- ◆ The 20 to 44 years of age cohort—young, working age adults—is where rural areas begin to lag behind metropolitan and micropolitan counties. While the rural proportion for this age cohort is equal to the rural proportion of the younger age group, both metropolitan and micropolitan counties significantly increase their share of the population in this age group. This is likely due to the migration of young, working age adults to these counties—often from rural areas for jobs and education—and the retention of their residents in this age group. In metropolitan counties of the region nearly two-thirds of the population is less than 45 years of age.
- ◆ Rural areas are older. Rural areas have a larger proportion of their population in the two oldest age groups (45 years of age and older) than do metropolitan and micropolitan counties. The largest portion of the regional rural county population is the “middle age” cohort—45 to 64 years of age. Both metropolitan and micropolitan counties of the region have significant portions of their population in this age group, but both slightly smaller than in rural counties. Rural counties of the region have a significantly larger portion of their population 65 years of age and older, especially compared to metropolitan counties of the region. With nearly half the rural population 45 years of age and older, the needs of rural communities of the region and the services required in those communities are significantly different than in the urban areas of the region.

The tables in Appendix A on the following page outline age distribution for each county type for each state of the region. In general, there are no significant differences in the age distribution by county types when states are compared to each other or when states are compared to the region as a whole.

Implications

The age distribution of the region’s population has significant implications for the region both immediately and in the long term. The relative youth of the urban areas of the region affects the economics of those counties and ultimately the rural counties of the region. As young, likely more educated people flock to micropolitan and metropolitan counties, investment will flow into those areas to create jobs and opportunities and to meet the needs of the expanding population. Conversely, such investments are unlikely in rural areas of the region. Rural communities and public policy must find alternative methods to create rural economic opportunities.

The relative age of rural areas of the region will also require emphasis on a different set of needs and services. Access to health care, retirement security and the stability of programs tied to senior populations will continue to be critical for large portions of the region’s rural population and economy. In addition, the relatively large rural population of children suggests the need to maintain—or in some cases, enhance—those services and resources targeted to our youngest citizens. Proportionately, all counties of the region are in need of similar children’s services and resources. However, resource equity is generally not the case in rural areas, and items such as health care and education in rural communities are often wanting.

Rural areas of the region are in some ways trapped between “bookend” generations—the youngest and oldest—with somewhat of a demographic valley in between. The “bookend” generations are those generally requiring the most services and resources in areas such as health care and education. This reality is a long-term demographic challenge facing rural areas of the region. How rural areas provide these services that are necessary for communities to thrive while simultaneously shrinking in population may be the fundamental question for decades in rural parts of the region.

APPENDIX A

Colorado	0-19	20-44	45-64	65+
Rural	25%	30%	28%	17%
Micro	28%	32%	26%	14%
Metro	28%	36%	26%	10%
Total	28%	36%	26%	11%

Iowa	0-19	20-44	45-64	65+
Rural	26%	26%	28%	19%
Micro	26%	29%	28%	17%
Metro	27%	35%	25%	12%
Total	27%	32%	27%	15%

Kansas	0-19	20-44	45-64	65+
Rural	26%	26%	28%	19%
Micro	29%	32%	25%	14%
Metro	29%	34%	25%	12%
Total	28%	33%	26%	13%

Minnesota	0-19	20-44	45-64	65+
Rural	26%	27%	29%	19%
Micro	26%	29%	27%	17%
Metro	27%	35%	27%	11%
Total	27%	33%	27%	13%

Montana	0-19	20-44	45-64	65+
Rural	28%	26%	30%	16%
Micro	30%	30%	27%	13%
Metro	26%	32%	28%	14%
Total	27%	30%	28%	15%

Nebraska	0-19	20-44	45-64	65+
Rural	26%	25%	29%	20%
Micro	28%	30%	26%	15%
Metro	29%	36%	25%	11%
Total	28%	33%	26%	14%

S. Dakota	0-19	20-44	45-64	65+
Rural	29%	34%	28%	18%
Micro	27%	33%	26%	15%
Metro	28%	34%	26%	12%
Total	28%	31%	26%	14%

N. Dakota	0-19	20-44	45-64	65+
Rural	25%	25%	30%	20%
Micro	26%	33%	26%	15%
Metro	26%	39%	24%	11%
Total	26%	33%	27%	14%

Wisconsin	0-19	20-44	45-64	65+
Rural	24%	26%	31%	19%
Micro	*	*	*	*
Metro	27%	34%	27%	12%
Total	26%	31%	29%	15%

Wyoming	0-19	20-44	45-64	65+
Rural	25%	28%	31%	17%
Micro	31%	37%	27%	6%
Metro	27%	33%	27%	13%
Total	27%	32%	28%	12%

State Age Distributions by County Type

*No micropolitan counties

Source: 2010 Census

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

Jon Bailey is Director of the Rural Research and Analysis Program at the Center for Rural Affairs. Jon has undergraduate and law degrees from Creighton University and a Masters in Public Policy from the College of William and Mary. Jon served as Legislative Fellow with U.S. Senator Kent Conrad and Special Assistant to the Associate Commissioner for Policy and Planning in the Social Security Administration. Jon has authored publications on rural health care policy, rural development policy and contributed to the Wealth Building in Rural America project sponsored by the Center for Social Development at Washington University.

Kim Preston has been with the Center for Rural Affairs since September 1999. Her work with the Rural Policy Program has included many issues at the state level including public education finance, property tax policy, microenterprise/small business and agriculture. She has worked at the grassroots level on key issues within the legislature. She has trained groups and individuals on the policymaking process and citizen advocacy. She received her B.S. in Family and Consumer Sciences from South Dakota State University, Brookings in 1997.

Jon and Kim have authored previous reports and studies affecting rural America, including *Swept Away: Chronic Hardship and Fresh Promise of the Great Plains* and *Fresh Promises: Highlighting Promising Strategies of the Rural Great Plains and Beyond*.

This publication is made possible by the generous assistance of the Otto Bremer Foundation and the Northwest Area Foundation.