Population Change and Community Vitality

Developing a Roadmap for the Future of Mississippi

Advancing Mississippi Conference

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Focus

- The agriculture and forestry sectors both contribute to and depend on strong, vibrant communities.
- Major fluctuations in local and regional populations can present significant challenges.
- Understanding the relationship between population change and community vitality is critical for the future.

Population Change and Community Vitality Taskforce

- The taskforce is one of six convened for the Mississippi State University Division of Agriculture, Forestry, and Veterinary Medicine's Vision 2030.

- The taskforce's work is intended to raise population change as an important issue for the State of Mississippi and to offer avenues for building community vitality in the future.

VISION 2030

Taskforce Members

- Latara Arterberry
  Department of Biochemistry, Nutrition, & Health Promotion
- Jason R. Barrett
  MS Water Resources Research Institute
- Devon Brenner
  Social Science Research Center
- Rachael Carter
  Extension Center for Government & Community Development
- Sumner Davis
  Extension Center for Government & Community Development
- John J. Green (Chair)
  Southern Rural Development Center/Department of Agricultural Economics
- Steve Grice
  National Strategic Planning & Analysis Research Center
- Devon Mills
  Department of Agricultural Economics

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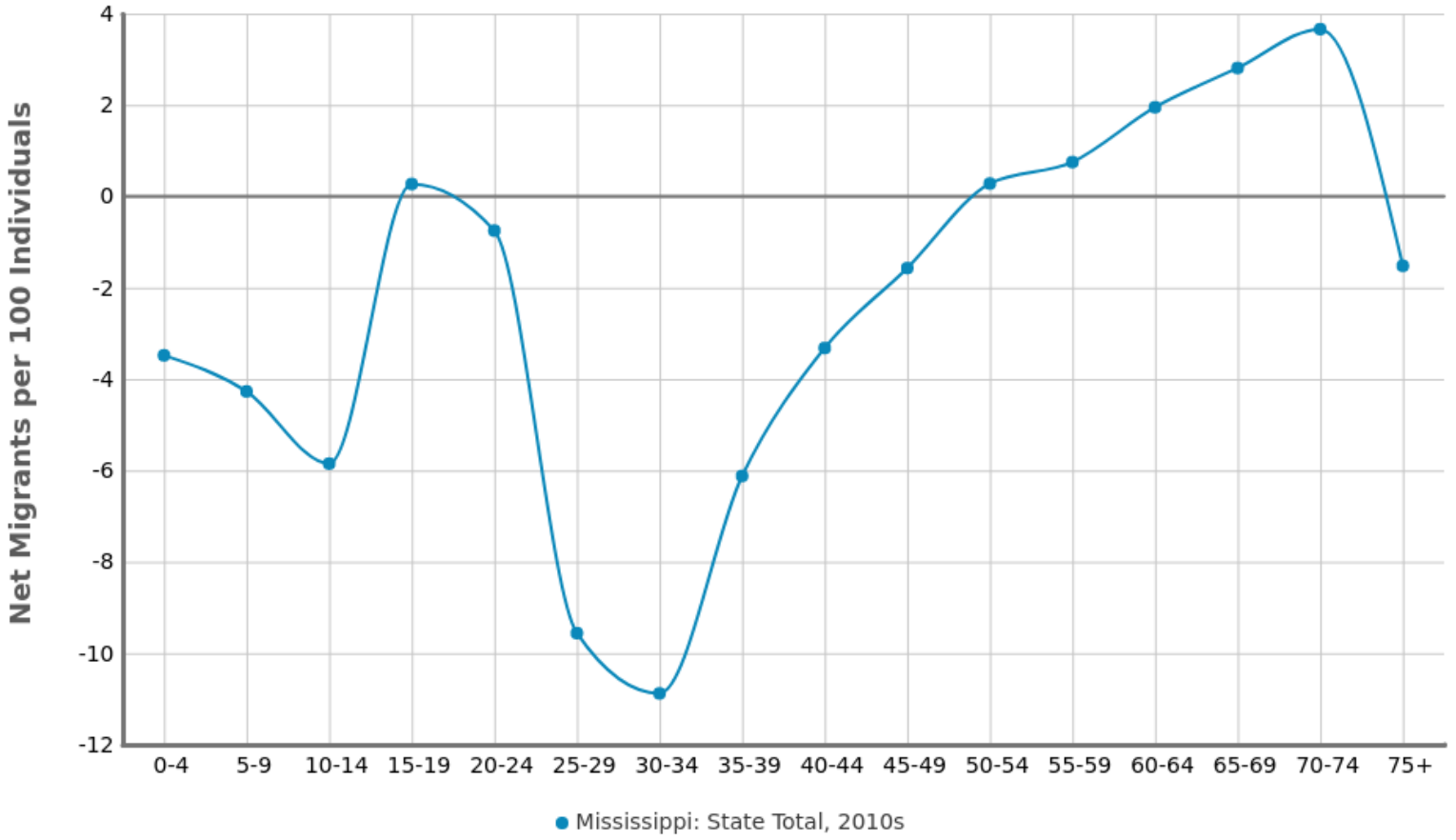
Why Population Trends are Relevant to Community Vitality

- Population change—particularly decline—presents structural challenges for communities, especially in rural areas of Mississippi.
- It is driven by a range of economic and demographic factors and is closely tied to infrastructure and public services:
  - What people and businesses need;
  - How those needs are funded (e.g., taxes, user fees); and
  - The overall quality of what is delivered.
- Whether infrastructure and services improve or deteriorate directly affects community livability, which in turn influences future population trends.
- Understanding the nature and impact of population change is essential for informed planning.

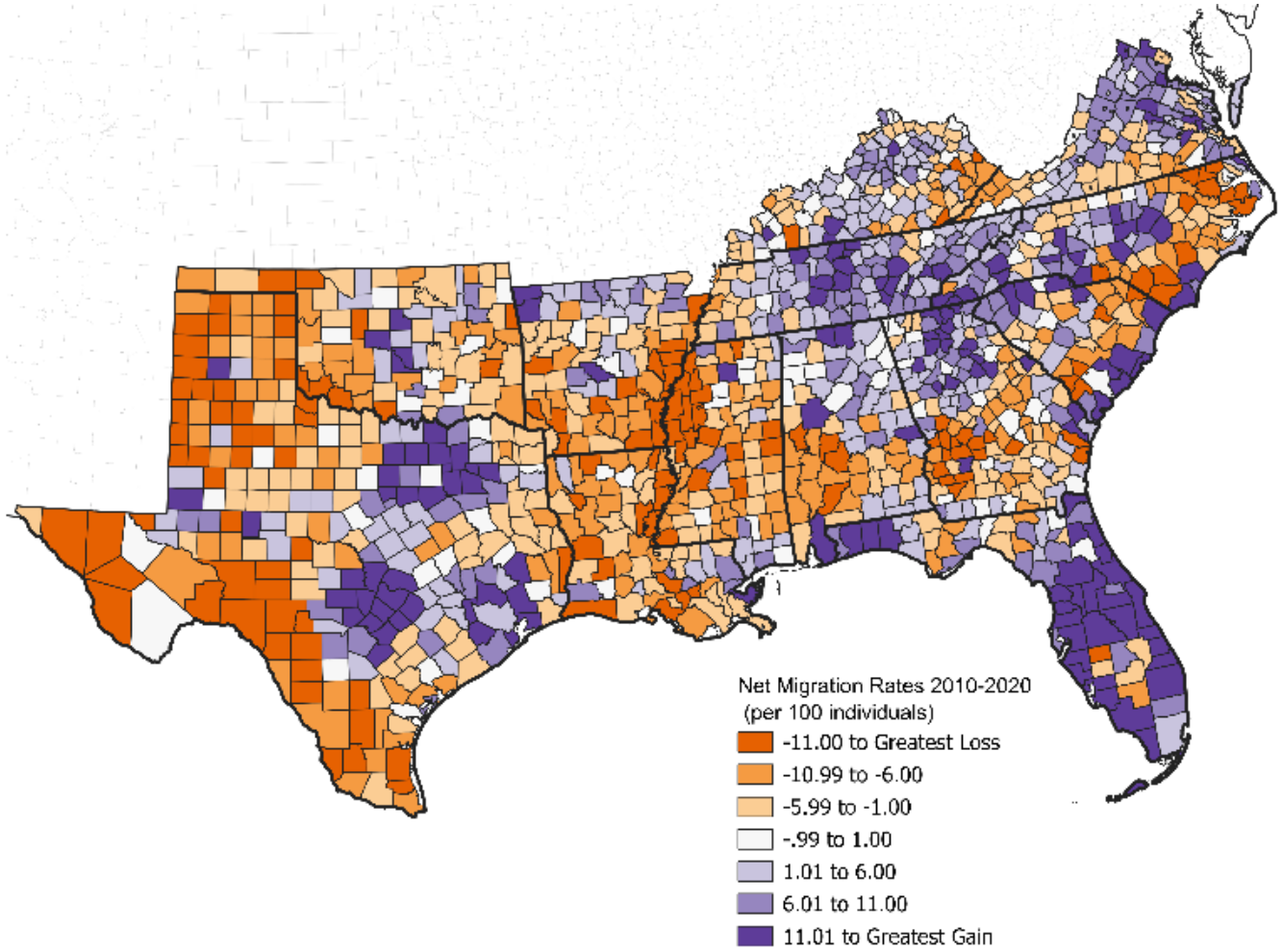
Population Change – Net Migration by Age in MS



Egan-Robertson, David, Katherine J. Curtis, Richelle L. Winkler, Kenneth M. Johnson, and Caitlin Bourbeau, Age-Specific Net Migration Estimates for US Counties, 1950-2020. Applied Population Laboratory, University of Wisconsin - Madison, 2024. Web.

- Net out-migration for the state as whole for 2010 to 2020.
- Included all age groups from 20 to 49 and was highest among 30 to 34-year-olds with an estimated net loss of 22,570 persons (Egan-Robertson et al., 2024).
- For the 2020 to 2024 period, there was an overall additional estimated net out-migration of 2,185 persons across all ages (USCB, 2024).
- Looking at domestic net-migration alone, there was an estimated loss of 22,153 persons due to out-migration.
- Coupled with more deaths than births in recent years, these are critical trends.

Population Change – County-Level Net Migration in the South



Data: Egan-Robertson, D., Curtis, K.J., Winkler, R.L., Johnson, K.M., & Bourbeau, C. (2024). Age-specific net migration estimates for US counties, 2010-2020. Applied Population Laboratory, University of Wisconsin - Madison. https://netmigration.wisc.edu/. Analysis and map: Green, J.J. (2024). Southern Rural Development Center.

- For 2010 to 2020, the greatest county out-migration rate in MS was -24.61 per 100 individuals and the greatest in-migration was +14.20.
- Seven counties in MS experienced relative stability (-.99 to +1.00 net migrants per 100) during that period.
- More recently, 52 counties had net out-migration from 2020 to 2024 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2025).
- MS is largely a rural state, with county-to-county differences. The nonmetropolitan/rural counties were most likely to experience general population decline and loss.

Cross-Sector and Multi-Community Collaboration

- Collaboration (Bryson & Crosby, 2008; Getha-Taylor, 2019; Korsching, Borich, & Stewart, 1992):
  - Multi-community collaboration brings communities together to pursue shared goals.
  - Cross-sector collaboration unites organizations from business, government, and nonprofits to work together.
- Why it matters:
  - Shared resources improve decision-making and yield more efficient, cost-effective solutions;
  - Multi-community strategies boost group leverage, enabling smarter purchasing and broader regional impact;
  - Cross-sector partnerships build resilience and broaden the resource network for addressing challenges; and
  - Together, they enhance regional capacity and long-term sustainability.

Sectors Explored by the Taskforce

- Local businesses
- Local governments
- Water systems
- Educational systems
- Health Care
- Nonprofit organizations
- State and federal government Agencies

Examples of the Need for Collaboration

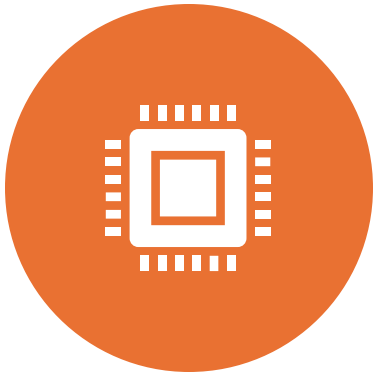
Health Care Services

- Access to general, emergency, and preventive care is essential for community vitality.
  - Long travel distances for care add burden to rural residents.
  - Healthcare access influences population retention and future economic investment.
- The viability of local healthcare services depends on sufficient insured patient volume.
- In recent years, rural hospitals have faced increased economic pressures.

Broadband in Underserved Areas

- Digital access and skills are essential for education, jobs, and accessing health care services such as telehealth.
- There are high infrastructure costs to serve rural areas with low population densities.
  - Rural population loss reduces the customer base and "take rate" for ISPs.
- Public investments and public-private partnerships are key to ensure that broadband access rates continue to increase in underserved areas.

Examples of the Need for Collaboration (cont'd)



Both systems are complex, technology-driven, and rapidly evolving

Cost-effective delivery is difficult, especially in areas with population loss

Cross-sector and regional collaborations are important to sustain and increase service access

Innovative Solutions

- Addressing these challenges will require both multi-community regional and multi-sector collaboration.

- The State of Mississippi may consider the following moves:

  - Provide proactive and regular avenues to receive research-informed input for policy makers, agency leaders, and other decision makers;

  - Systematically and regularly collect and disseminate data on employment opportunities, state development efforts, investments, and employers;

  - Attend to the needs of K-12 education as part of broader economic development efforts, addressing the need for teachers, workforce development, and student engagement;

  - Invest in development of amenities and outdoor recreation, leveraging abundant natural resources for sustainable human capital attraction, retention, and economic development.

Innovative Solutions (cont'd)

- Mississippi State University should consider the following actions:
  - Coordinate across units under a common umbrella to inform efforts with data and research for effective decision making to advance innovation;
  - Mobilize personnel and utilize university spaces to connect and facilitate dialogue among groups that traditionally do not work with each other;
  - Take an asset-based approach to go beyond documenting challenges to identify strengths and resources to inform and build vitality;
  - Conduct policy analysis to inform development of next steps or policies that build vitality;
  - Offer more live classes in remote areas, and use Extension as a model for building capacity in these places to help improve community vitality; and
  - Use the statewide reach of the University to facilitate local and regional cross-sector.

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