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Briefing Report 6

Nebraska Legislative Issues Symposium
University of Nebraska at Omaha

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1987

BRIEFING REPORT

6

NEBRASKA LEGISLATIVE ISSUES SYMPOSIUM

SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF NEBRASKA'S URBAN AND RURAL AREAS

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Nebraska's rural areas have social and economic characteristics which differ from urban areas. Many of the state's rural-urban differences are similar to those of the nation, but others are distinct. Generally, a lack of data about Nebraska makes direct comparisons with current national trends impossible. Because of this, many of the items presented below are derived from 1980 census information. Since 1980, economic conditions in most rural areas have worsened. Although the following characteristics are listed separately, they are inter-related.

Although most of the comparisons are for the state's metropolitan and nonmetropolitan counties, in some instances information was available for the rural portion of nonmetropolitan counties. Nebraska's five metro counties consist of Lancaster County (Lincoln metropolitan area); Douglas, Sarpy, and Washington Counties (Omaha metropolitan area); and Dakota County (Sioux City metropolitan area). The remaining 88 counties are classified as nonmetropolitan. In addition, nonmetro counties can be divided into rural and urban components, where the rural portion is made up of all persons living in cities and towns with less than 2,500 persons or in unincorporated areas.

Demographic Patterns

- Nonmetro areas in Nebraska have a long history of population loss. Between 1980 and 1986, the population declined by 1.6 percent, as metro counties added 5.9 percent. Although nonmetro counties grew 3.3 percent during the 1970s, reversing decades of losses, rural nonmetro areas continued to decline, falling 0.3 percent during the 1970s.

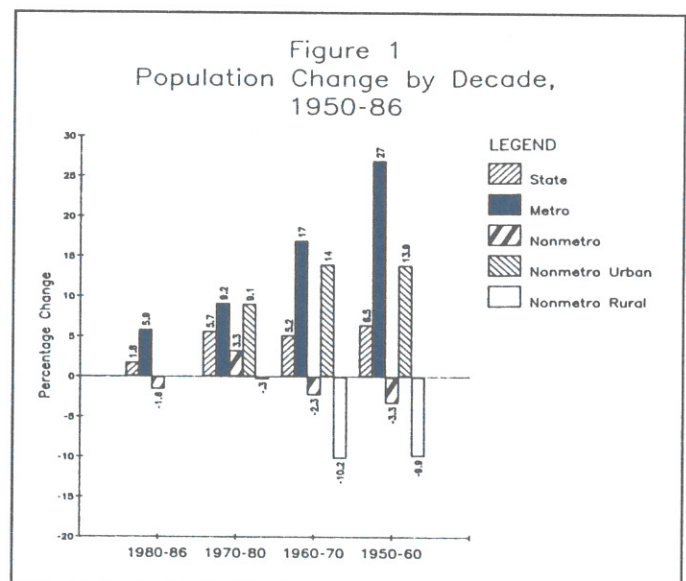


Table 1
Selected Characteristics of Nebraska's Metropolitan
and Nonmetropolitan Areas

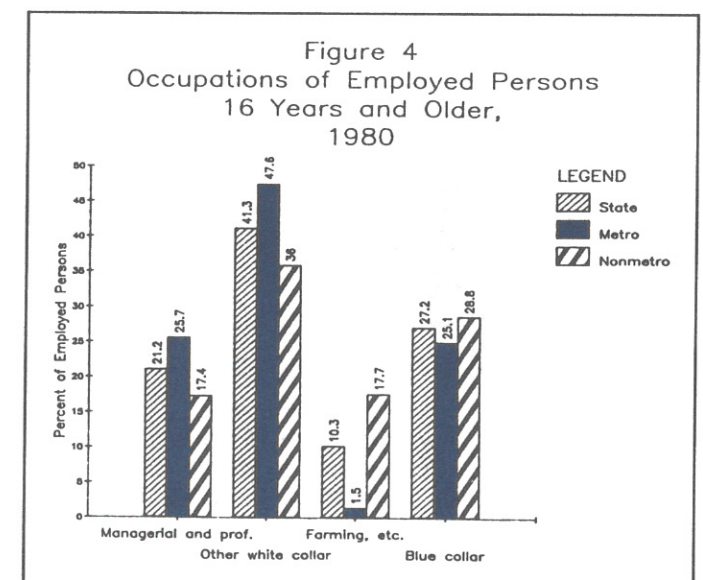
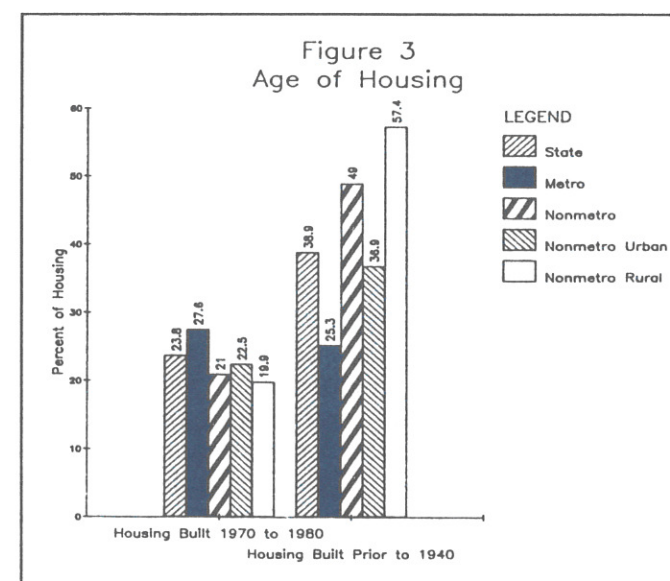
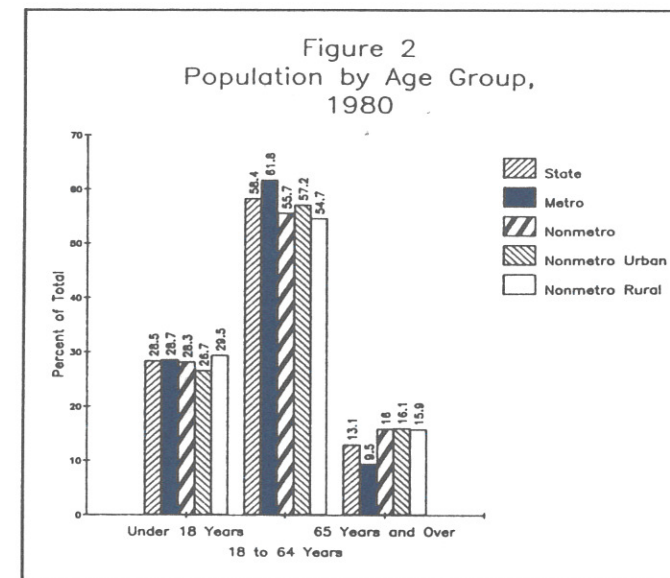
| Item | Area | | | | |
|---|----------------|---------|----------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | State Total | Metro | Nonmetro | Nonmetro Urban | Nonmetro Rural |
| Total population: | | | | | |
| 1980 | 1,569,825 | 692,510 | 877,315 | 353,709 | 523,606 |
| 1986 | 1,598,000 | 749,700 | 848,300 | | |
| Percentage change: | | | | | |
| 1980-86 | 1.8 | 5.9 | -1.6 | | |
| 1970-80 | 5.7 | 9.2 | 3.3 | 9.1 | -0.3 |
| 1960-70 | 5.2 | 17.0 | -2.3 | 14.0 | -10.2 |
| 1950-60 | 6.5 | 27.0 | -3.3 | 13.9 | -9.9 |
| Age: | | | | | |
| Percent under 5 years | 7.8 | 7.8 | 7.9 | | |
| Percent 5 to 17 years | 20.7 | 20.9 | 20.4 | | |
| Percent under 18 years | 28.5 | 28.7 | 28.3 | 26.7 | 29.5 |
| Percent 18 to 64 years | 58.4 | 61.8 | 55.7 | 57.2 | 54.7 |
| Percent 65 years and older | 13.1 | 9.5 | 16.0 | 16.1 | 15.9 |
| Median | 29.7 | 27.8 | 31.7 | 30.6 | 32.5 |
| Percent of population born in Nebraska | 71.6 | 62.4 | 78.7 | 73.7 | 82.0 |
| Education of persons 25 years and older: | | | | | |
| Percent high school graduates | 73.4 | 78.9 | 69.4 | 71.2 | 68.2 |
| Percent completed 4 or more years of college | 15.5 | 21.1 | 11.4 | 13.9 | 9.7 |
| Employment of persons 16 years and older: | | | | | |
| Nonworkers per 100 workers | 107 | 95 | 118 | 105 | 128 |
| Percent employed year-round, full-time-- | | | | | |
| Male | 66.0 | 63.3 | 68.3 | | |
| Female | 38.8 | 41.8 | 35.9 | | |
| Occupation of employed persons: | | | | | |
| Managerial and professional | 21.2 | 25.7 | 17.4 | | |
| Other white collar | 41.3 | 47.6 | 36.0 | | |
| Farming, forestry, and fishing | 10.3 | 1.5 | 17.7 | | |
| Blue collar | 27.2 | 25.1 | 28.8 | | |
| Per capita income, 1979 as a percent of state | 100.0 | 110.0 | 92.1 | 100.5 | 86.4 |
| Type of income (percent of households, 1979): | | | | | |
| Wages, salaries, or self-employment | 84.3 | 86.0 | 82.9 | | |
| Interest, dividend, or net rental | 44.4 | 47.2 | 42.2 | | |
| Social security | 27.1 | 21.8 | 31.2 | | |
| Income below poverty, 1979: | | | | | |
| Percent of individuals | 10.7 | 8.9 | 12.2 | 8.4 | 14.6 |
| Percent of families | 8.0 | 6.3 | 9.3 | 5.3 | 11.9 |
| Housing: | | | | | |
| Percent built 1970 to March 1980 | 23.8 | 27.6 | 21.0 | 22.5 | 19.9 |
| Percent built 1939 or earlier | 38.9 | 25.3 | 49.0 | 36.9 | 57.4 |
| Nebraska Department of Labor unemployment rates: | | | | | |
| 1986 | 5.0 | 4.5 | 5.4 | | |
| 1985 | 5.5 | 5.0 | 5.9 | | |
| 1984 | 4.4 | 4.1 | 4.7 | | |
| 1983 | 5.7 | 5.6 | 5.8 | | |
| 1982 | 6.1 | 6.4 | 5.8 | | |
| 1981 | 4.1 | 4.4 | 3.9 | | |
| 1980 | 4.1 | 4.3 | 3.9 | | |

- Decades of outmigration of young adults have altered age distributions in rural areas, reflecting a higher portion of older residents. The median ages in 1980 were 27.8 in metro areas, 31.7 in nonmetro areas, and 32.5 in nonmetro rural areas. In many rural communities, the median age topped 40, and in several instances it topped 50.
- Rural Nebraskans are more likely to have been born in the state. In 1980, 82.0 percent of nonmetro rural residents were native Nebraskans, compared with 62.4 percent of metro residents and 78.7 percent of all nonmetro residents.
- The housing stock in rural Nebraska is aging. One-fourth of metro housing was built prior to 1940, but nearly half of the nonmetro housing and over half of the nonmetro rural housing was built before 1940.

- As a result of decades of outmigration of young adults and a higher proportion of older residents, several nonmetro counties are experiencing natural declines in population, that is, more deaths than births each year.

Economic Base

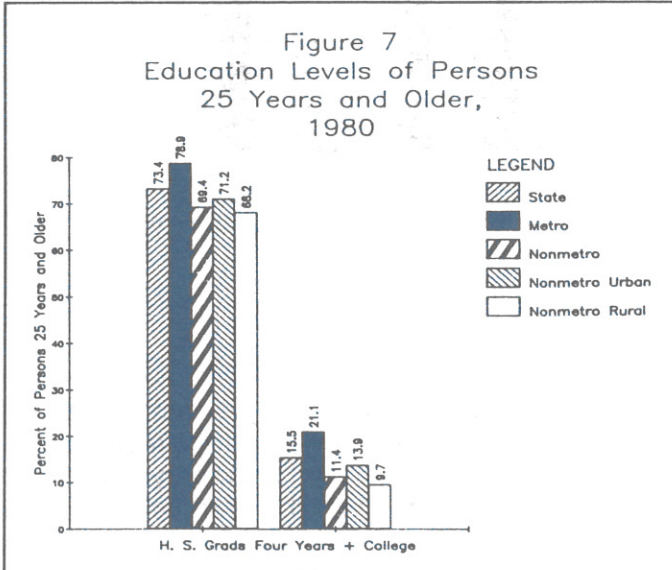
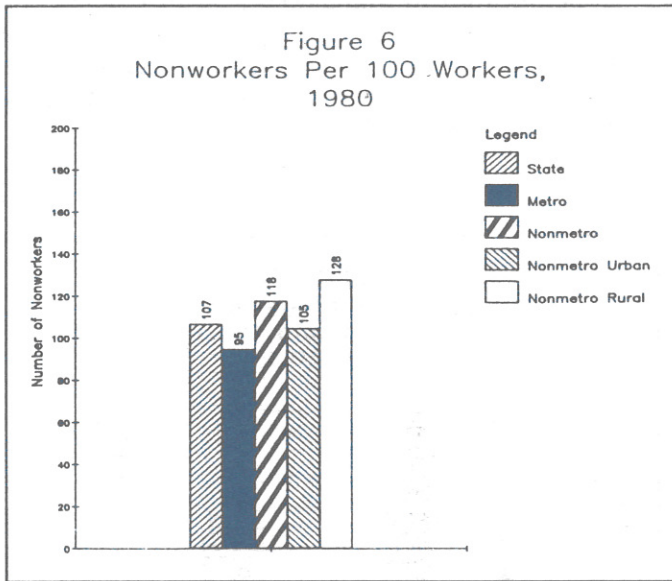
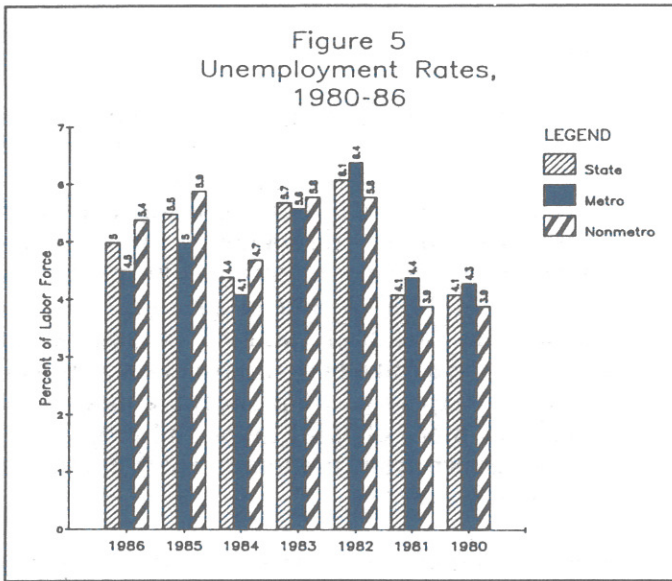
- Similar to the United States, Nebraska's rural areas generally have less diversified economies than urban areas, but Nebraska's rural areas are much more farming-dependent than rural areas throughout the country. Farming-dependent counties (20 percent or more of total labor and proprietors' income drawn from farming) total 83 percent of the state's nonmetro counties, while manufacturing-dependent counties (30 percent or more of total labor and proprietors' income drawn from manufacturing) amount to less than 6 percent.
- Jobs in nonmetro areas are relatively less concentrated in managerial, professional, and other white-collar occupations. A little more than half of the nonmetro workers, compared with three-fourths of the metro workers, fall into this category.



Labor Force

- Since 1983, nonmetro unemployment has been higher than metro unemployment. In 1986, the respective unemployment rates were 5.4 percent and 4.5 percent. Prior to 1983, nonmetro unemployment was lower than metro unemployment.

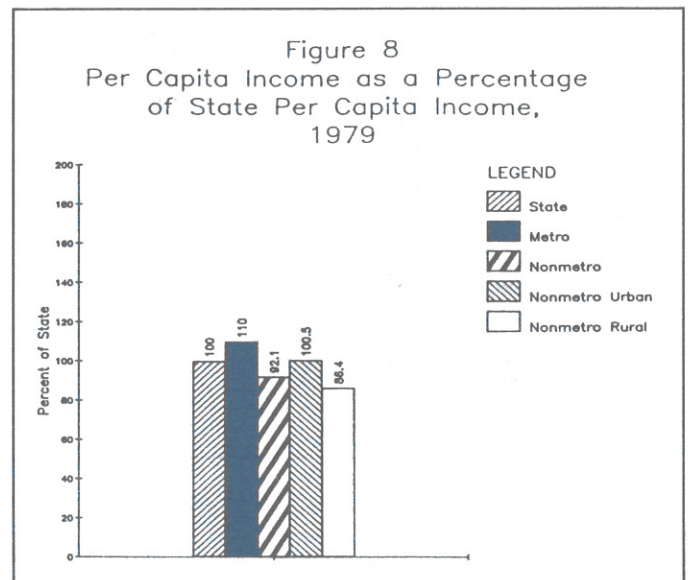
- Rural areas have more nonworkers than workers. In metro areas, the ratio of nonworkers to workers was 95, compared with a ratio of 118 in nonmetro areas and 128 in nonmetro rural areas.



- Education levels are lower in rural areas, with a wide gap in college graduates. In 1980, 21.1 percent of the metro residents 25 years and older were college graduates, while the rate was 11.4 percent in nonmetro areas and 9.7 percent in nonmetro rural areas.

Income

- Per capita incomes in nonmetro areas were 84 percent of metro areas in 1979, but incomes in the nonmetro rural areas fell below 80 percent of metro per capita incomes.
- Nonmetro areas are relatively more dependent on incomes from transfer payments, such as social security, and less dependent on income from current working activities.
- Rural residents are more likely to have incomes below the poverty level. In 1979, the comparable poverty rates were 8.9 percent in metro areas, 12.2 percent in nonmetro areas, and 14.6 percent in nonmetro rural areas.



This *Briefing Report* was developed by the Center for Applied Urban Research, University of Nebraska at Omaha for the Legislative Council Executive Board, to provide background information for the 1987 Nebraska Legislative Issues Symposium. The *Briefing Report* is intended to provide an overview, pose important questions, and identify alternative policies and strategies for a specific issue. The views and opinions expressed are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent those of the University of Nebraska at Omaha.