

# BOOM TOWN

AMENITY MIGRATION IN THE RURAL WEST  
& THE RISE OF THE “ZOOM TOWN”

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# DR. JOHN CROMARTIE

GEOGRAPHER - USDA RURAL ECONOMIC RESEARCH SERVICE



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## Modest Improvement in Nonmetro Population Change During the Decade Masks Larger Geographic Shifts

by John Cromartie



Natural change — fewer births, more deaths, and an aging population — is creating a major demographic challenge for many regions across rural and small-town America, according to USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) research. But nonmetropolitan (nonmetro) areas that border on metropolitan areas seem to fare better in attracting new people and

*The findings and conclusions in this presentation are those of the author and should not be construed to represent any official USDA or U.S. Government determination or policy.*



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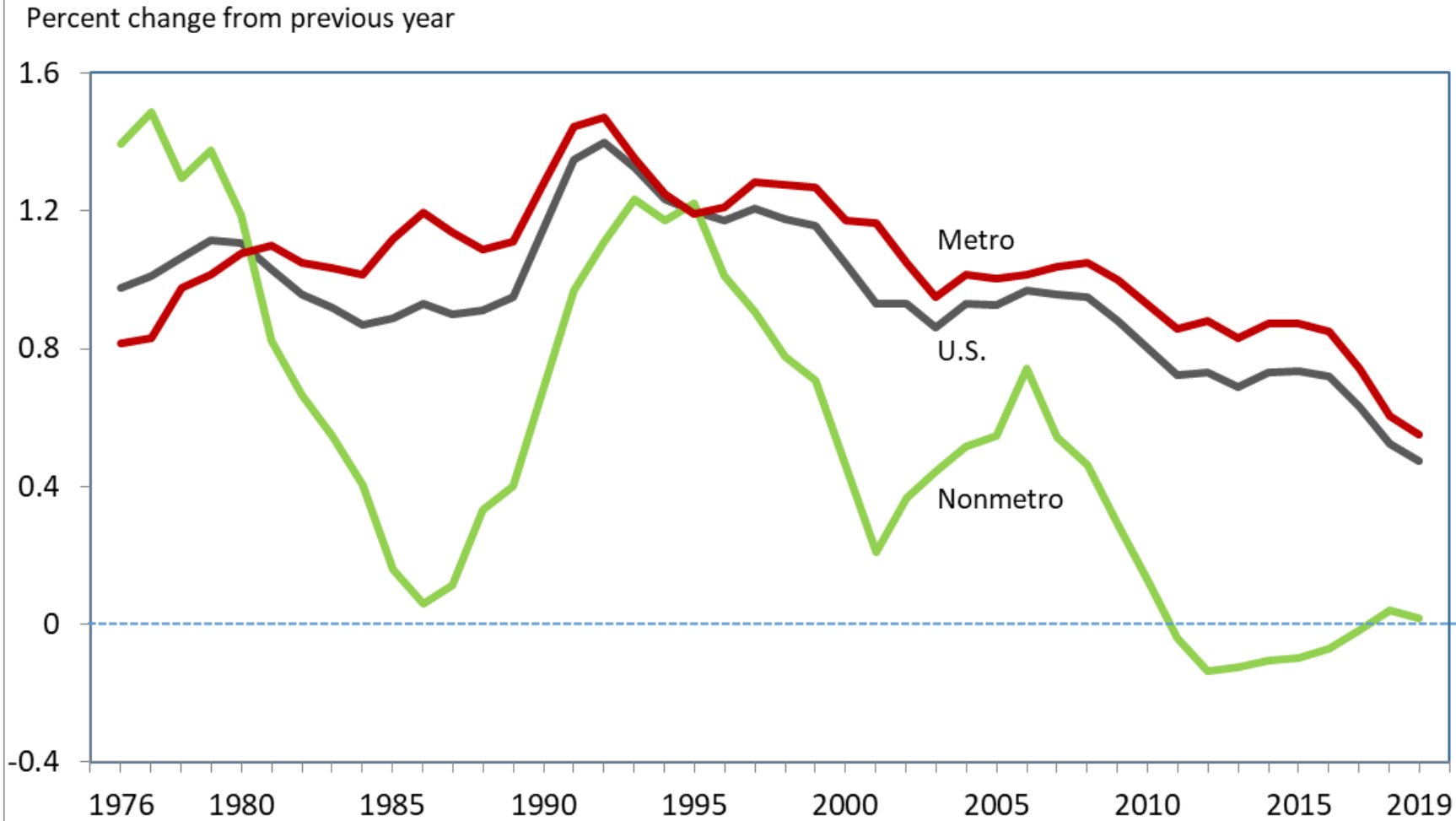
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## Nonmetro areas end the decade with near-zero population change



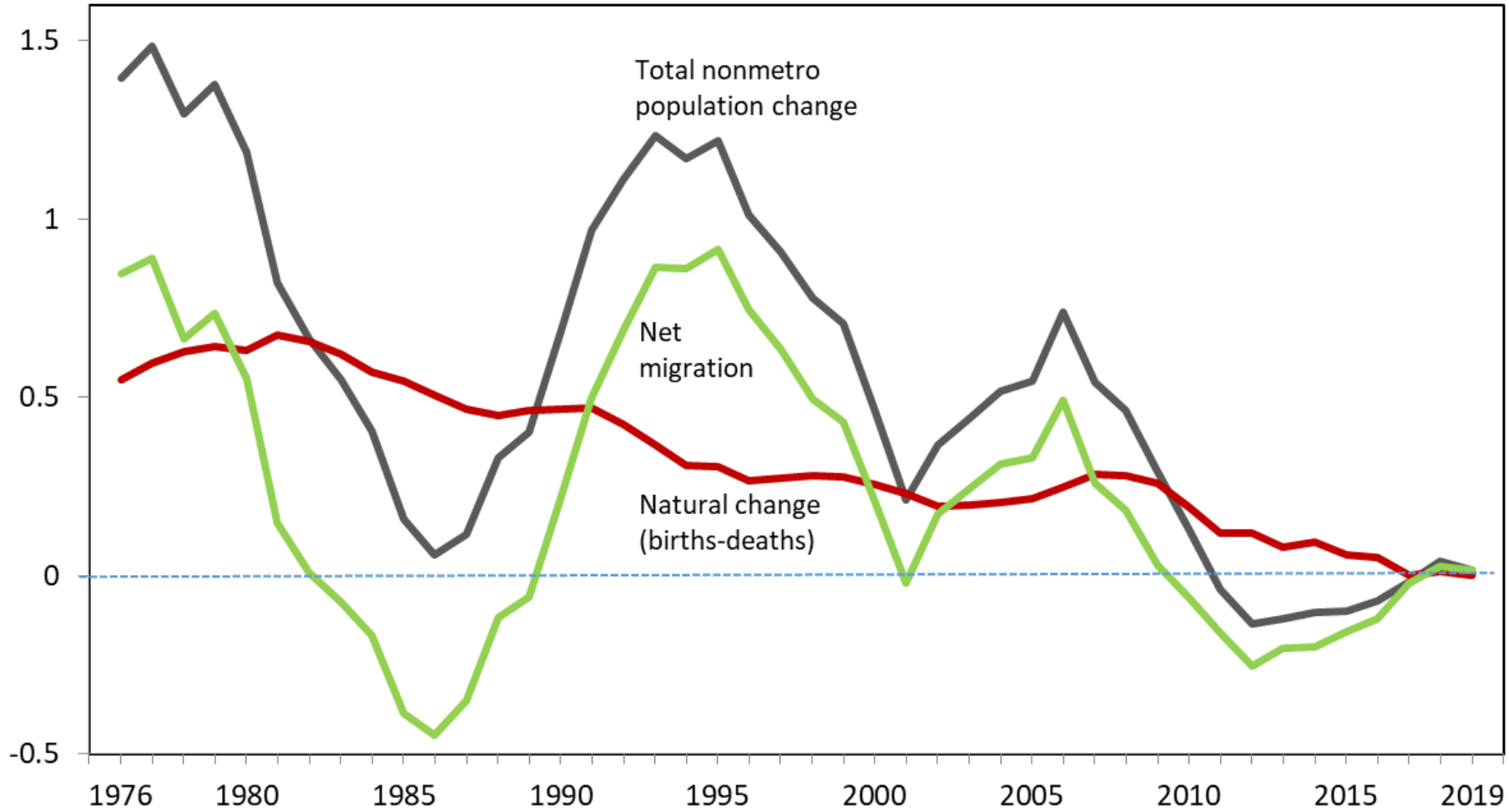
Note: Metro and nonmetro status are determined by metro area designations from the Office of Management and Budget that are updated following each decennial census. Some counties change status in 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2010.  
Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Census Bureau.



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# Increasing rates of nonmetro net migration offset by reductions in natural change

Percent change from previous year



Note: Metro and nonmetro status are determined by metro area designations from the Office of Management and Budget that are updated following each decennial census. Some counties change status in 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2010.

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Census Bureau.



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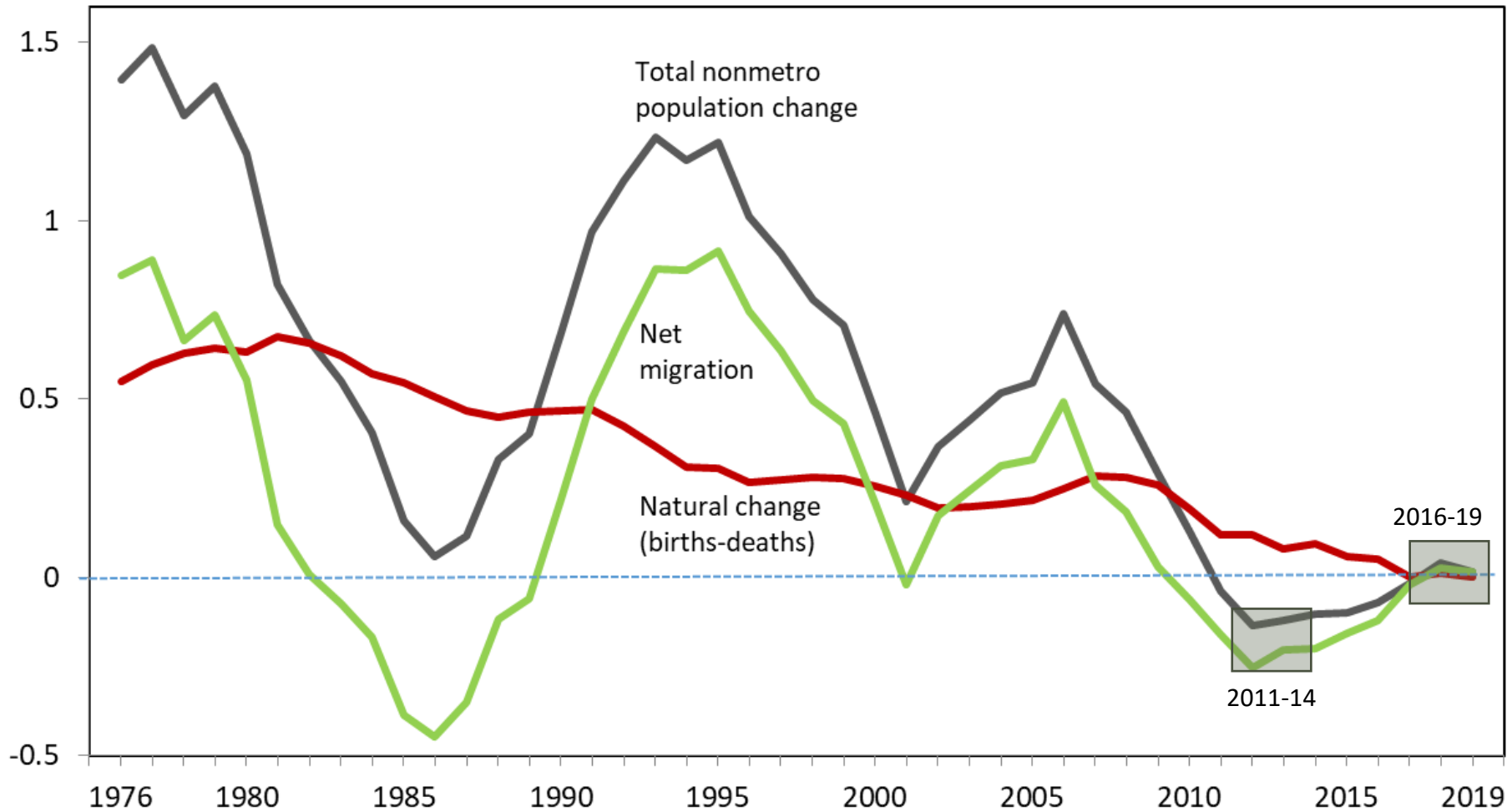




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# Increasing rates of nonmetro net migration offset by reductions in natural change

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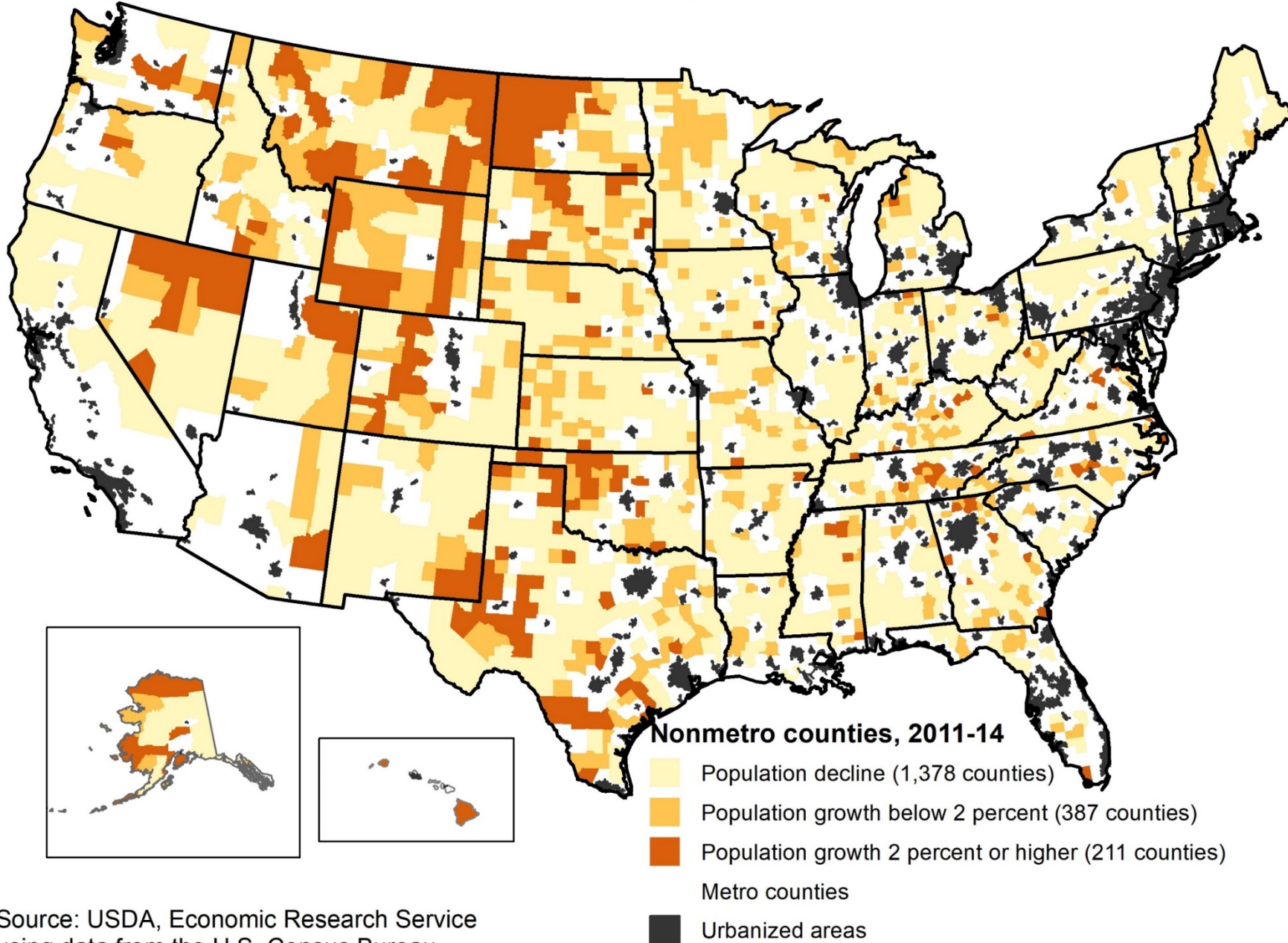
Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Two time periods compared in following maps and charts



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# Nearly 1,400 nonmetro counties lost population from 2011 to 2014



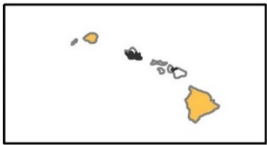
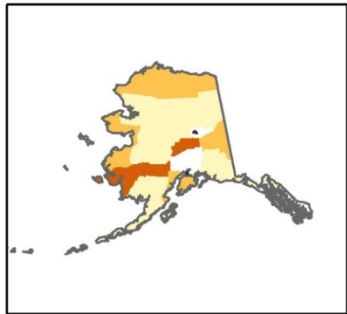
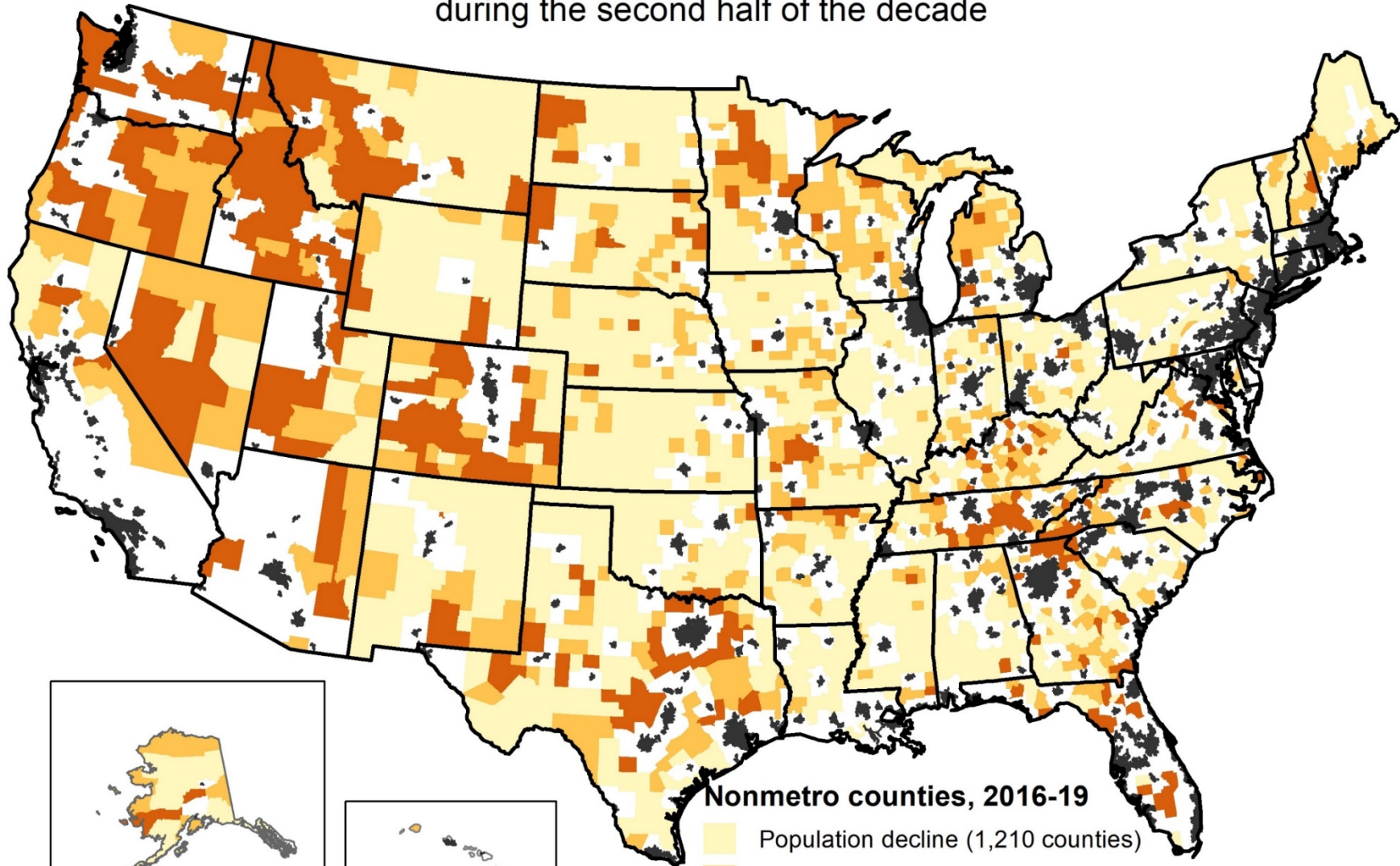
Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Census Bureau.



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# Population rebounded in counties adjacent to metro areas during the second half of the decade



## Nonmetro counties, 2016-19

- Population decline (1,210 counties)
- Population growth below 2 percent (458 counties)
- Population growth 2 percent or higher (308 counties)
- Metro counties
- Urbanized areas

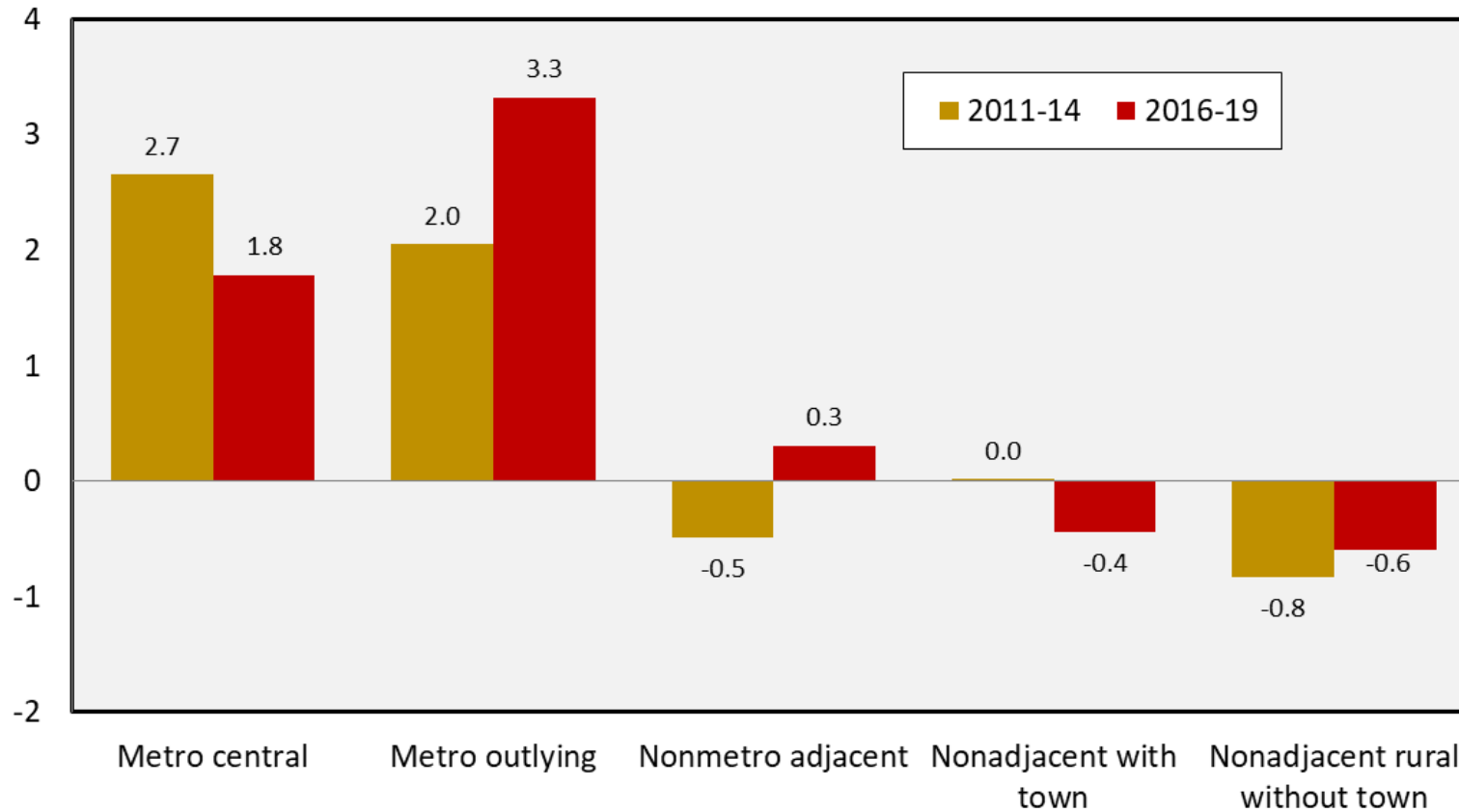
Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Census Bureau.



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## Population growth returns to nonmetro counties near metro areas but continues to decline in more remote settings

Percent change



Note: Categories are based on 2013 metro definitions. Metro central counties contain urbanized areas of 50,000 or more. Metro outlying counties are tied to central counties through high commuting levels (25% or higher). Nonmetro adjacent counties are both physically adjacent to a metro area and have 2-25 percent commuting to the central counties. Nonadjacent counties are divided into those with and without urban populations.

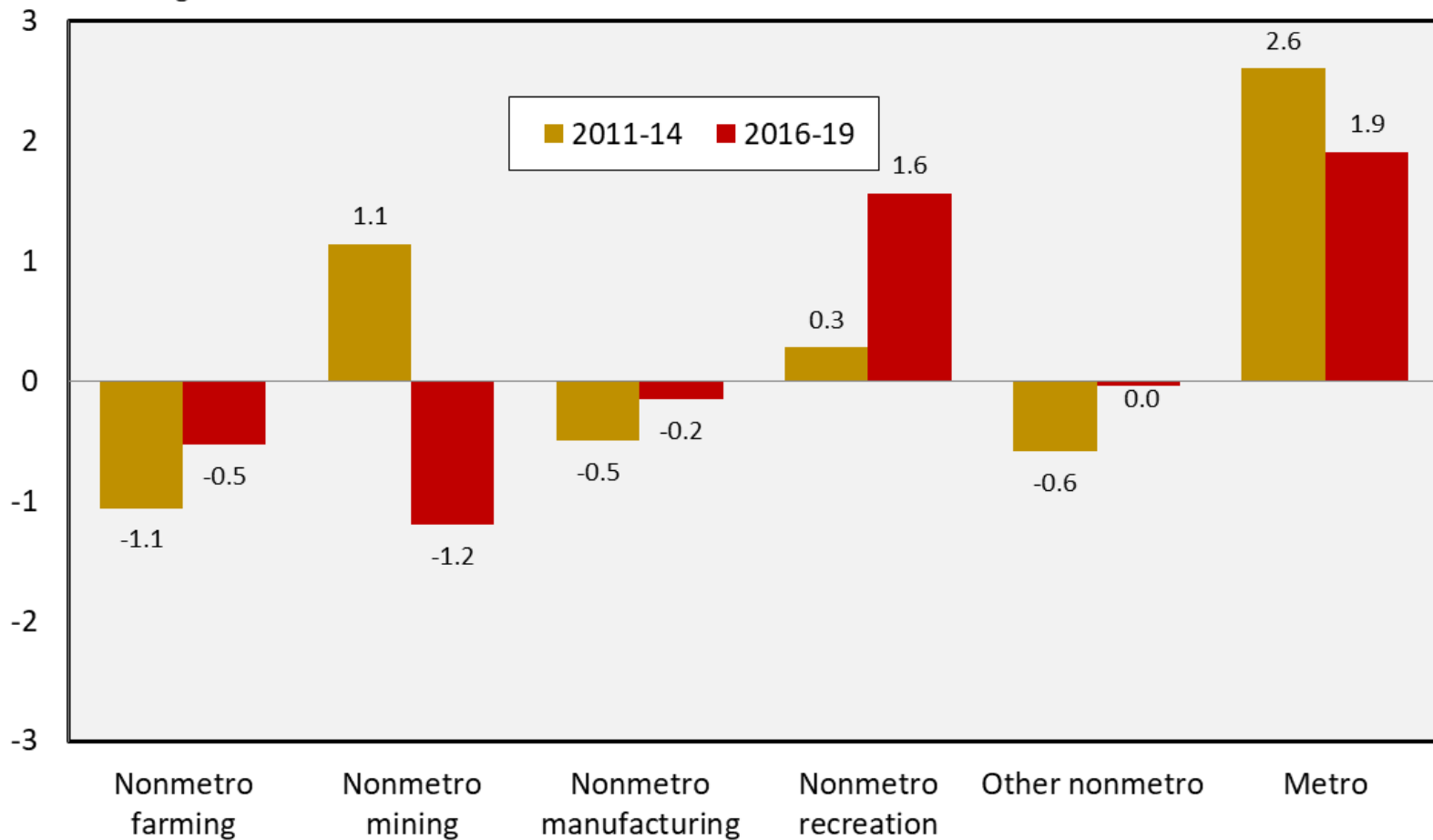
Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Census Bureau.



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## Population shifts reflect cut-backs in energy-sector employment and renewed migration to recreation destinations

Percent change



Note: County types are described in the 2015 ERS County Typology Codes data product:  
<http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/county-typology-codes.aspx>  
Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Bureau of Economic Analysis.



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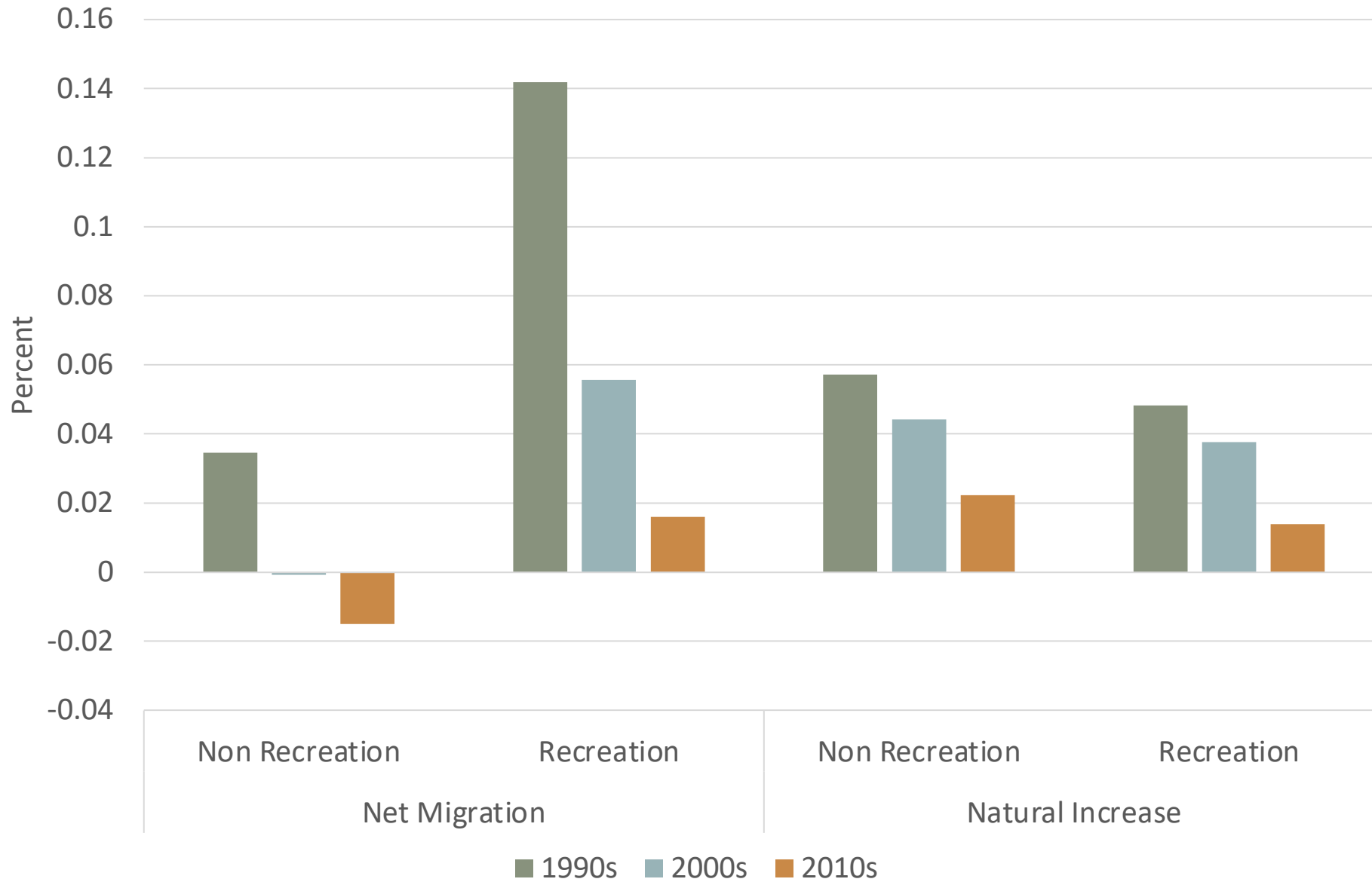


**DR. PETER NELSON**  
PROFESSOR OF GEOGRAPHY, MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE



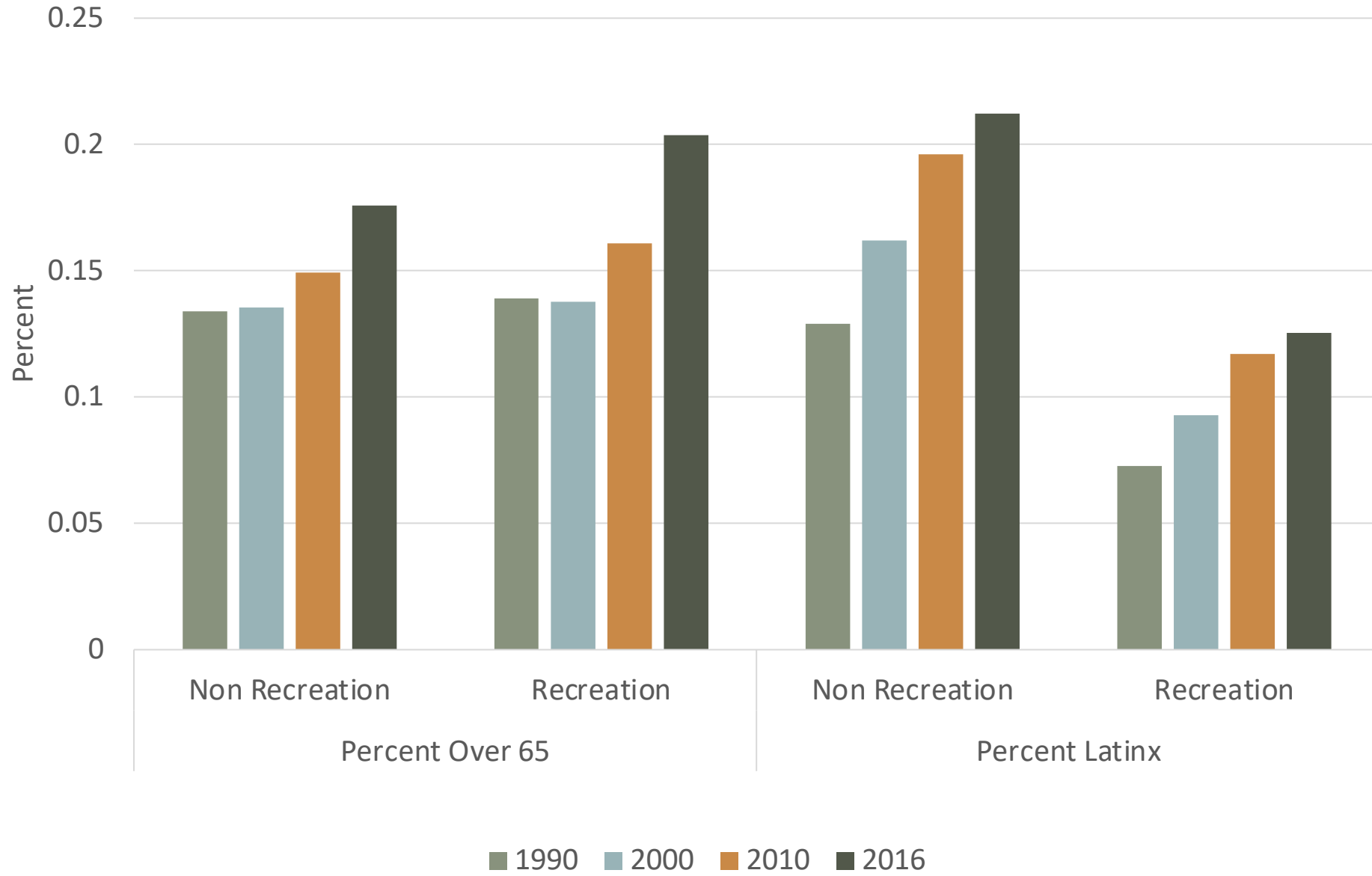
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# Components of Population Change - Nonmetropolitan West



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# Demographic Composition - Nonmetropolitan West

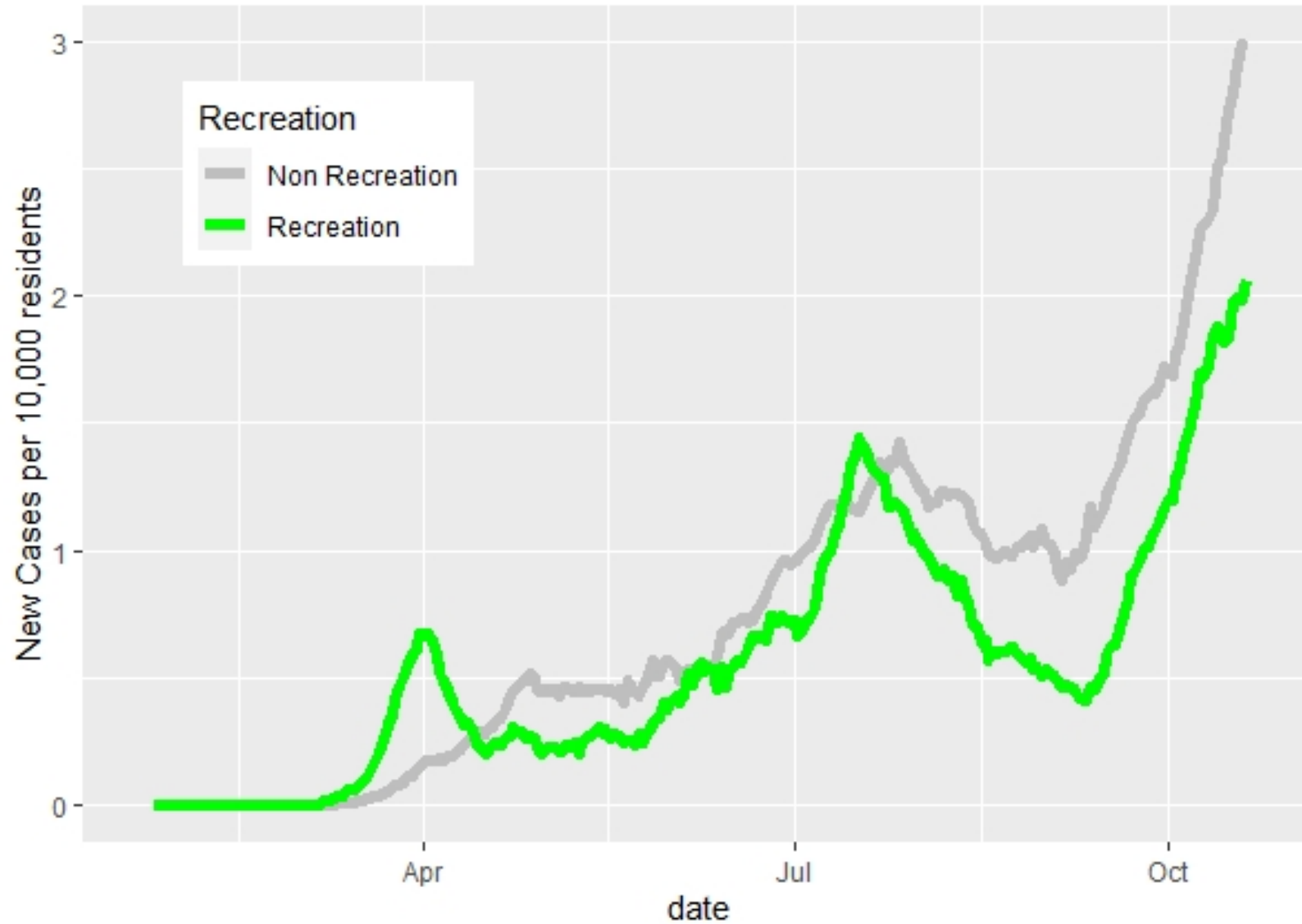


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# New Cases in Recreation Counties

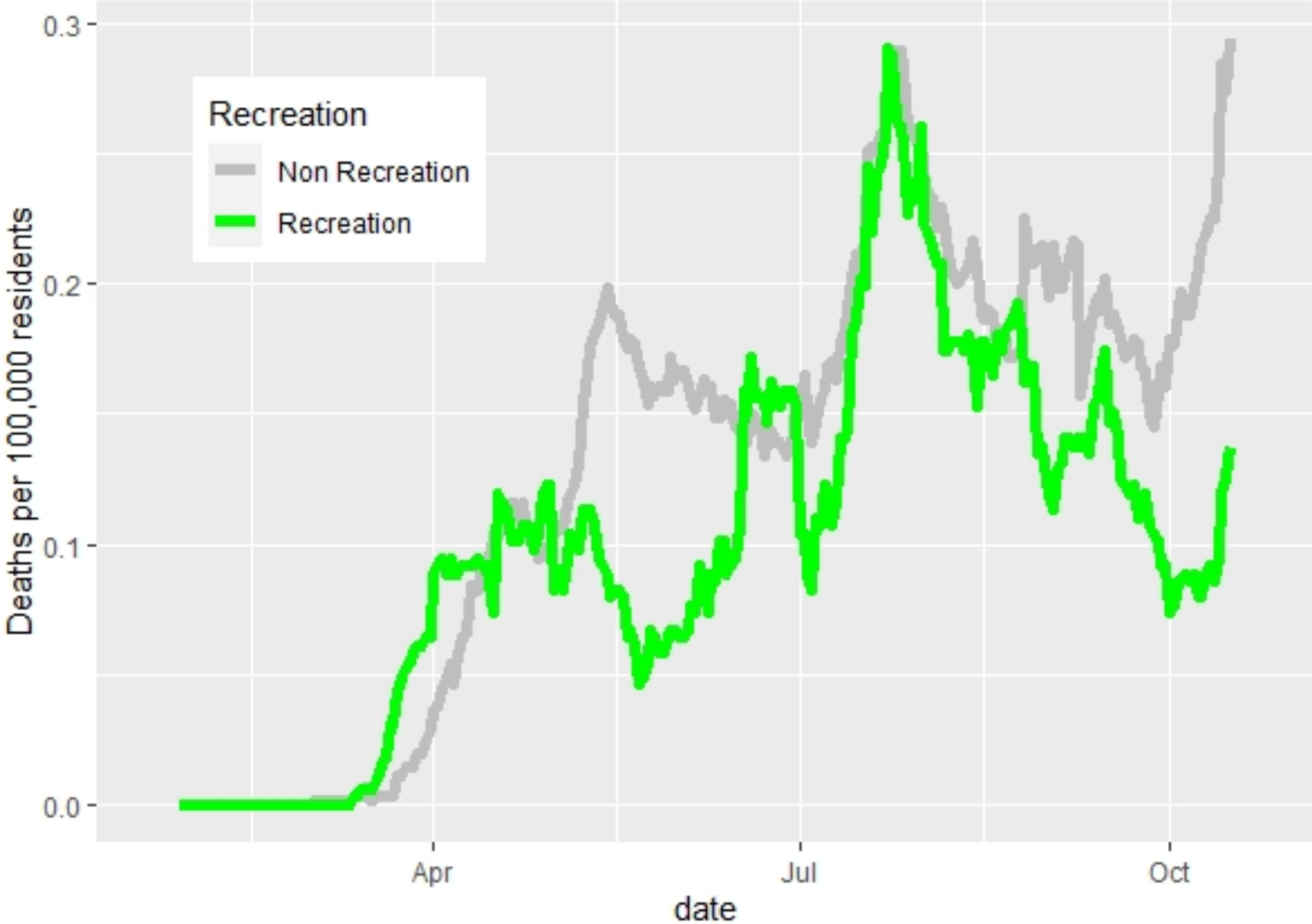
Nonmetro West



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# Deaths in Recreation Counties

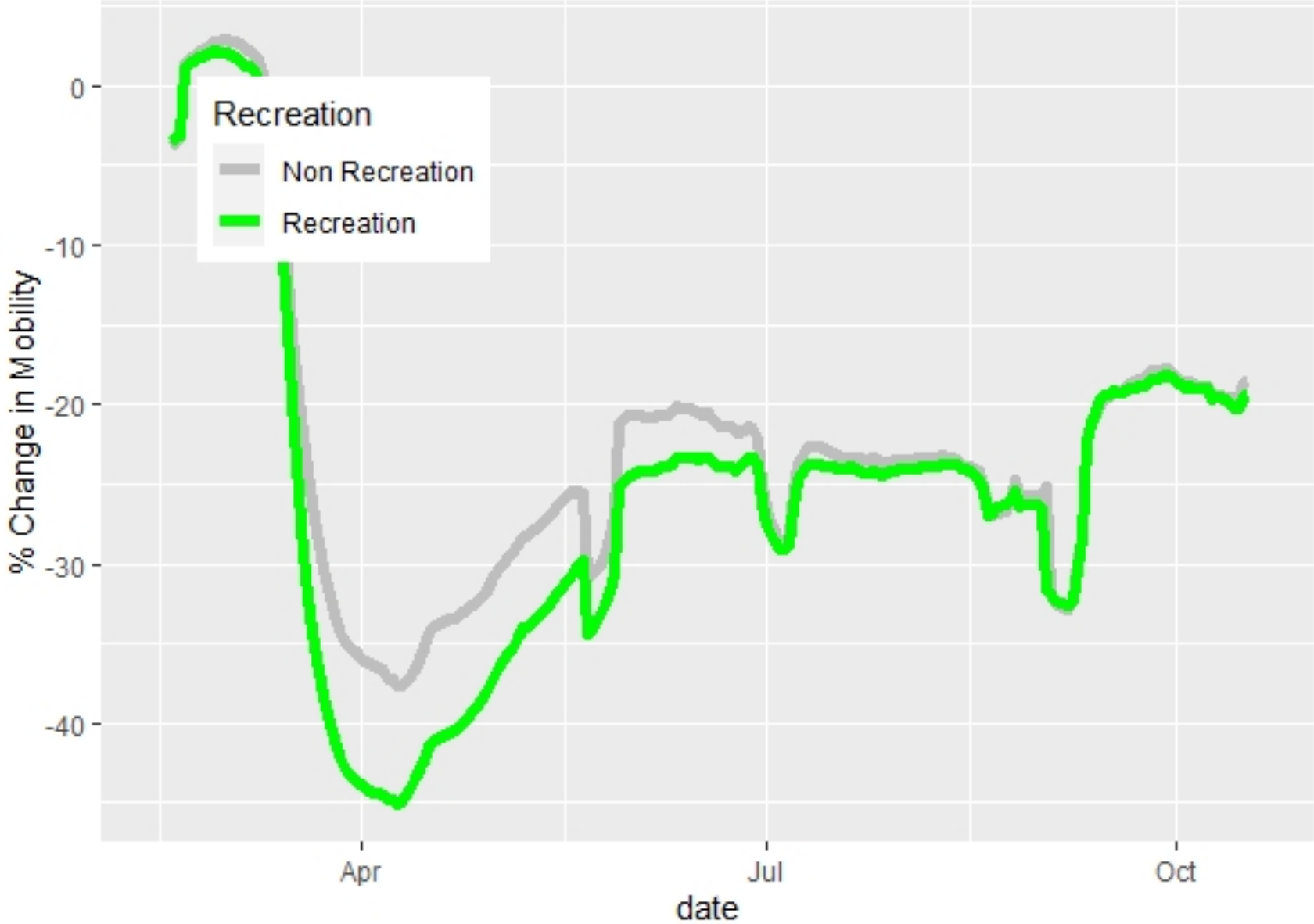
Nonmetro West



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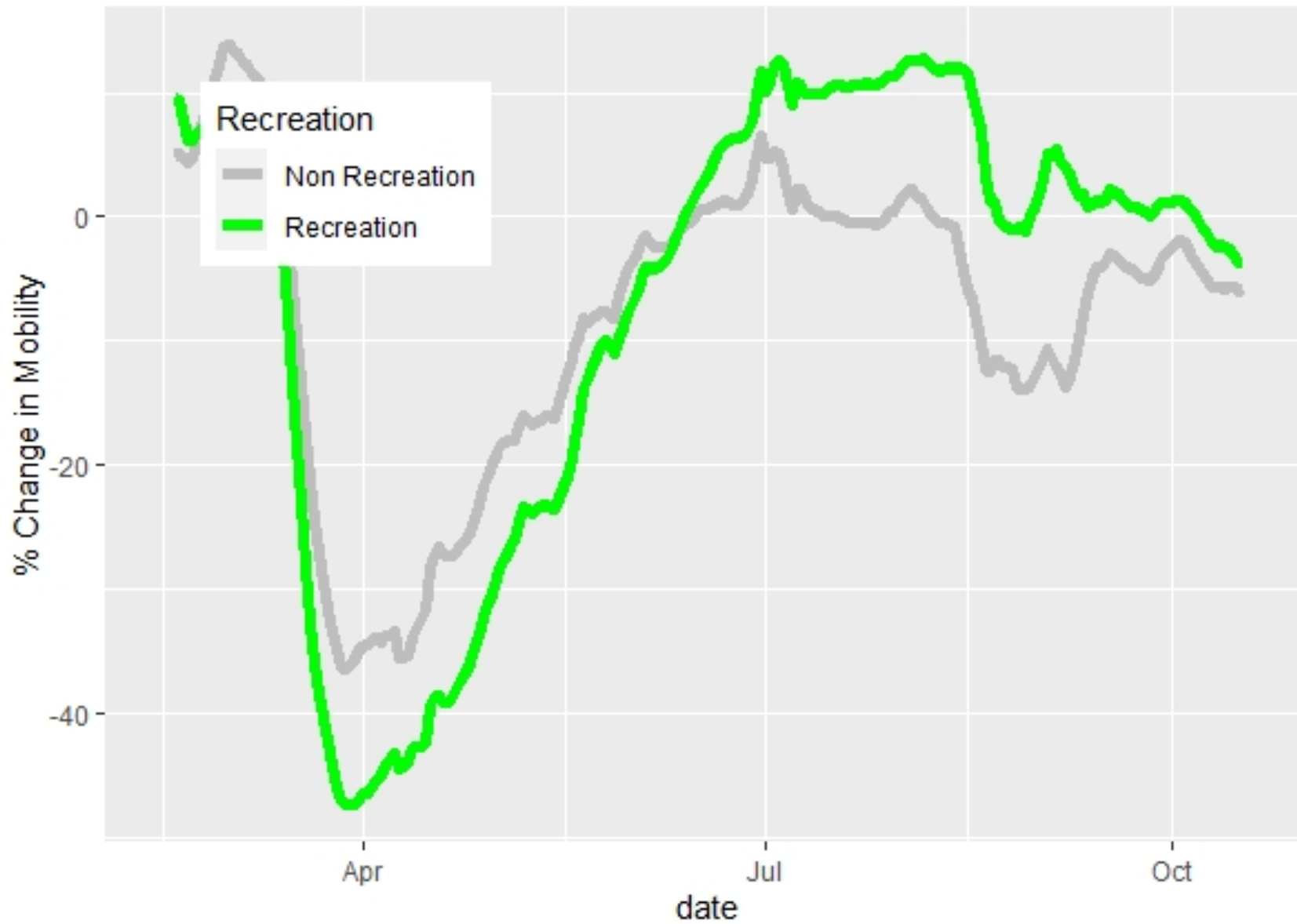
# Change in Workplace Mobility in Recreation Counties

Nonmetro West



# Change in Recreation Mobility in Recreation Counties

Nonmetro West

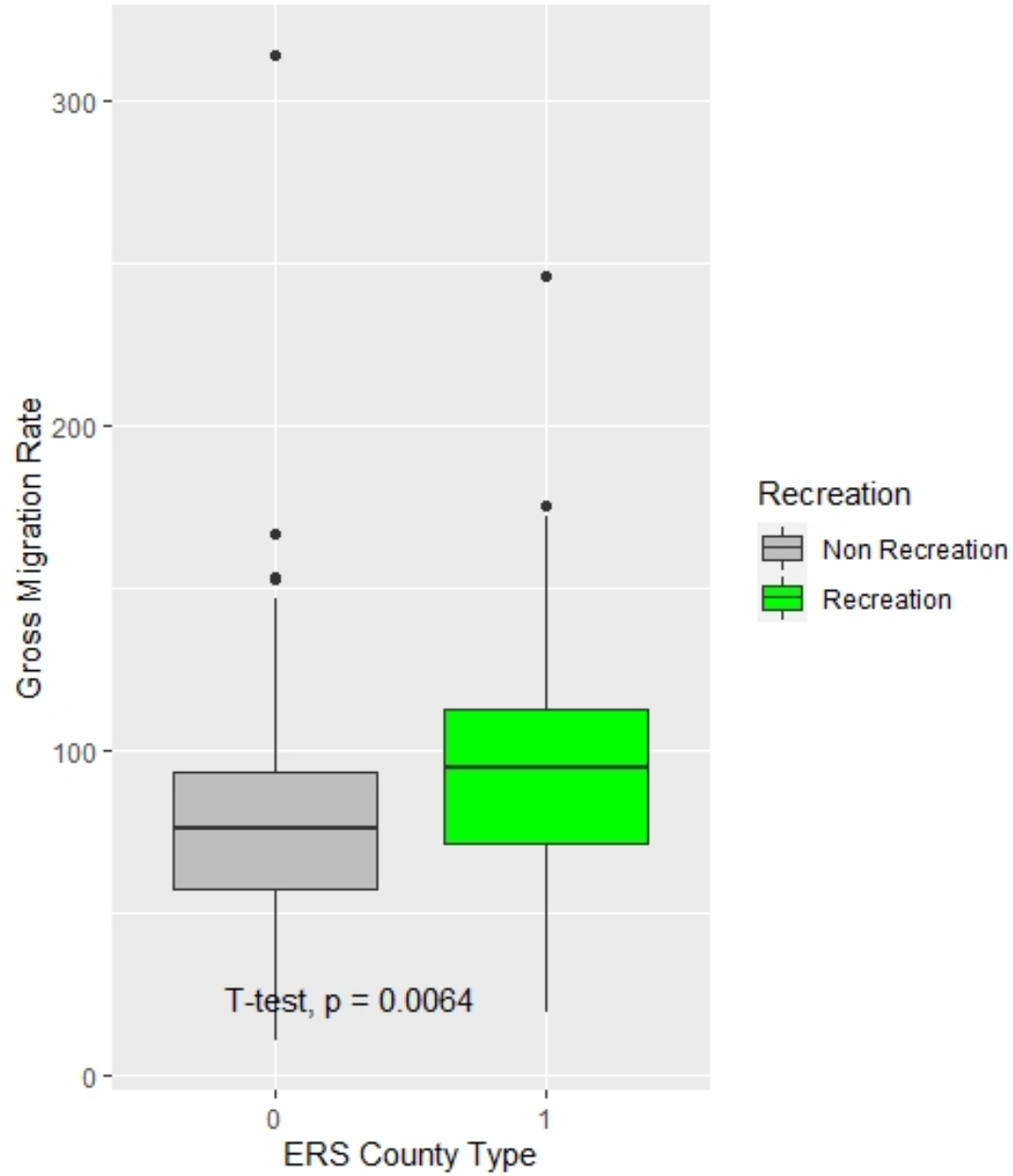


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# Gross Migration Exchange with Metro Counties

Nonmetro West



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# Gross Migration with Metropolitan Areas

Recreation Counties in Red

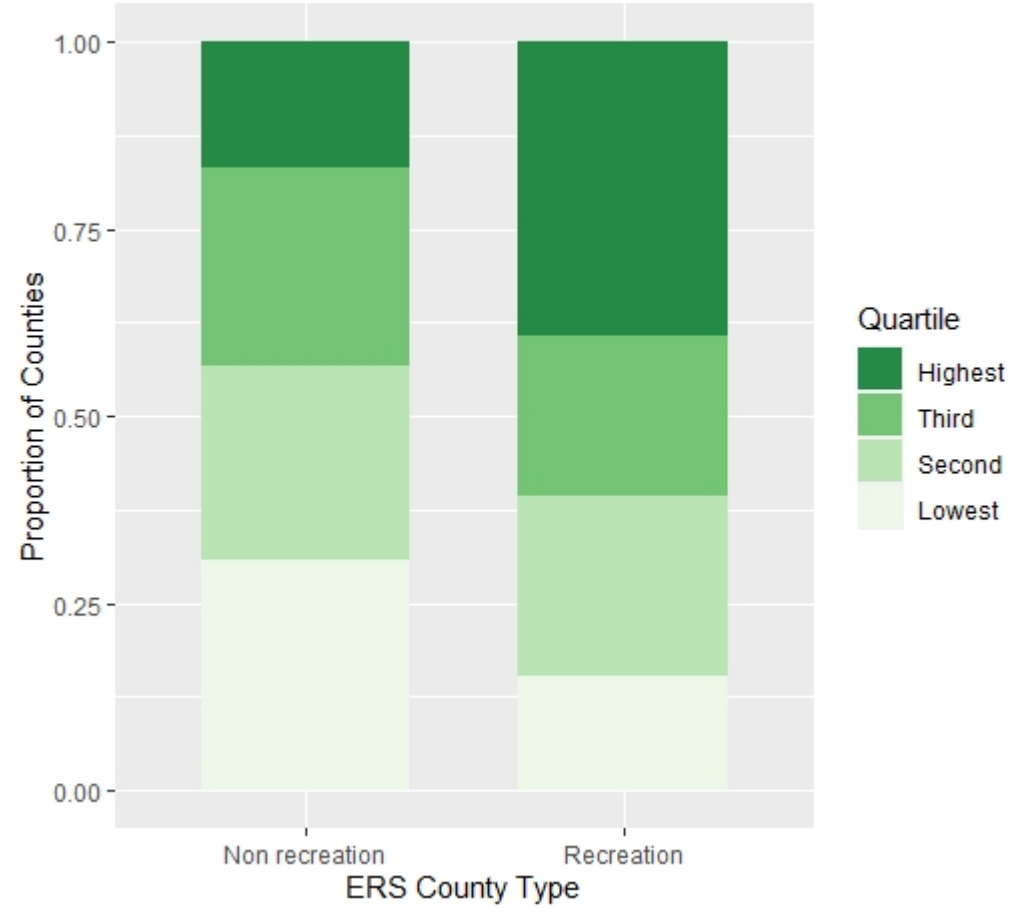


## Gross Migration Level

- lowest
- second
- third
- fourth
- fifth
- sixth
- seventh
- highest

# Metro Gross Migration Quartiles

Nonmetro West



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# DR. MEGAN LAWSON

STATISTICIAN AND ECONOMIST AT HEADWATERS ECONOMICS



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# Recreation brings more than just tourism

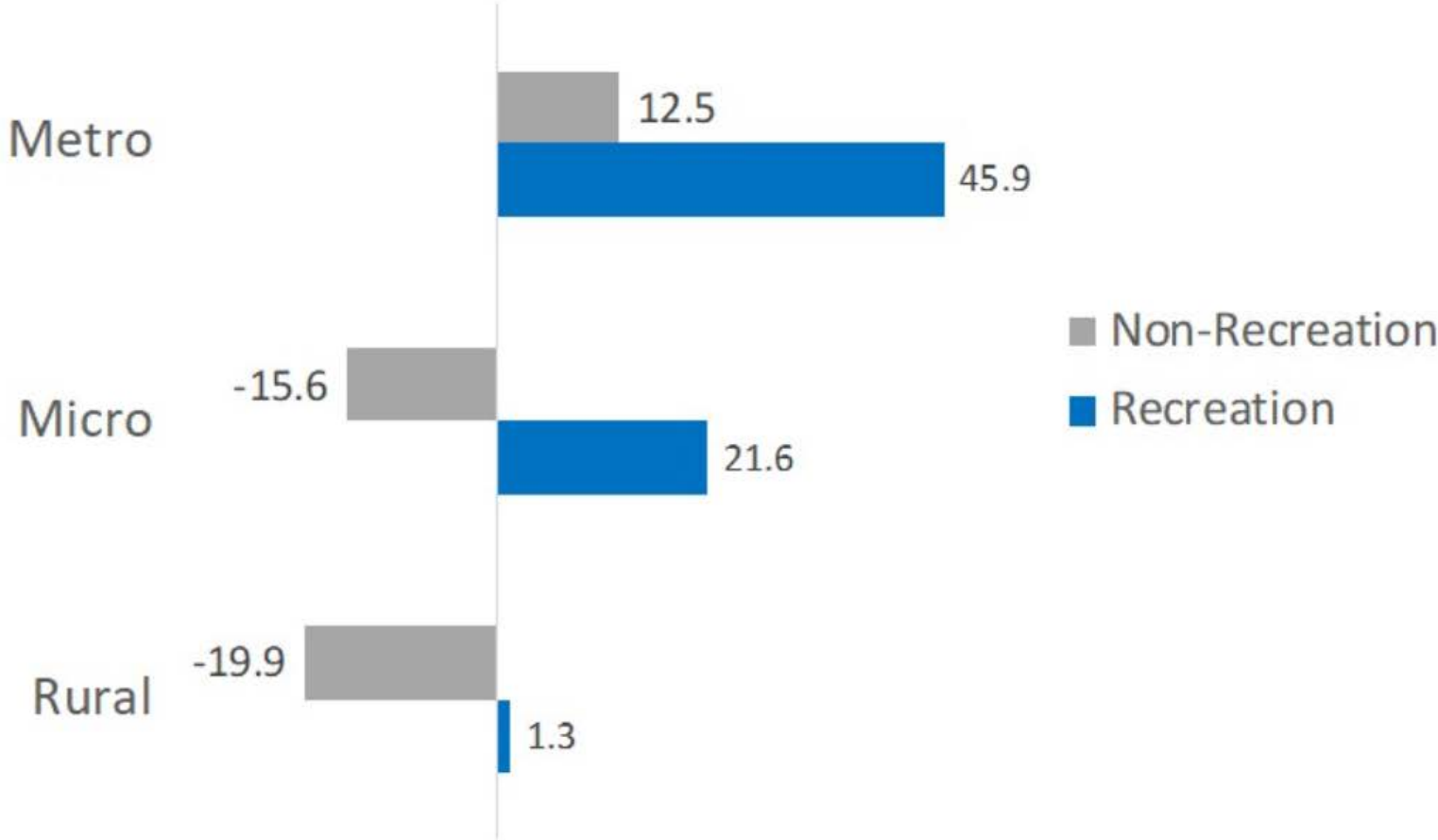


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# Recreation brings more than just tourism

Ave. Net Migration per 1,000 Residents, 2010-2016



<https://headwaterseconomics.org>



# Familiar challenges, exacerbated

*The Washington Post*

National

## New homes on the range: Weary city dwellers escape to Montana, creating a property gold rush

*The New York Times*

### *The Virus Sent Drones to a Small Town. Suddenly, It's Not So Small.*

The population boomed in Winhall, Vt., as people tried to get away from Covid-19 hot spots. Bear complaints are up. Plumbers are booked until Christmas. And the dump is "sheer pandemonium."



## Coronavirus Threatens Strained Rural Health Care System

<https://headwaterseconomics.org>



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**DR. DON ALBRECHT**  
DIRECTOR OF THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER



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NOV. 12:

**ADAPTATIONS:** COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES  
ON AMENITY MIGRATION

NOV. 19:

**TRANSFORMATIONS:** A TALE OF TWO TOWNS:  
THE SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITIES APPROACH IN  
ACTION IN GARDINER AND DEER LODGE, MT

DEC. 3:

**INNOVATIONS:** COMMUNITY PEER EXCHANGE

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