



Changing Demographics in the Rural Midwest



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About me

Professor of Agricultural & Rural Policy. Extension appointment.

From Minnesota. Hockey player. Honorary Colombiano.

Secret Mission: Keep “old Blue” running to 300k

What are the rural demographic challenges in the Midwest?

You can't grow you own!

Too many people leave!

Aging population!

Not enough workers!

Rapid diversification!

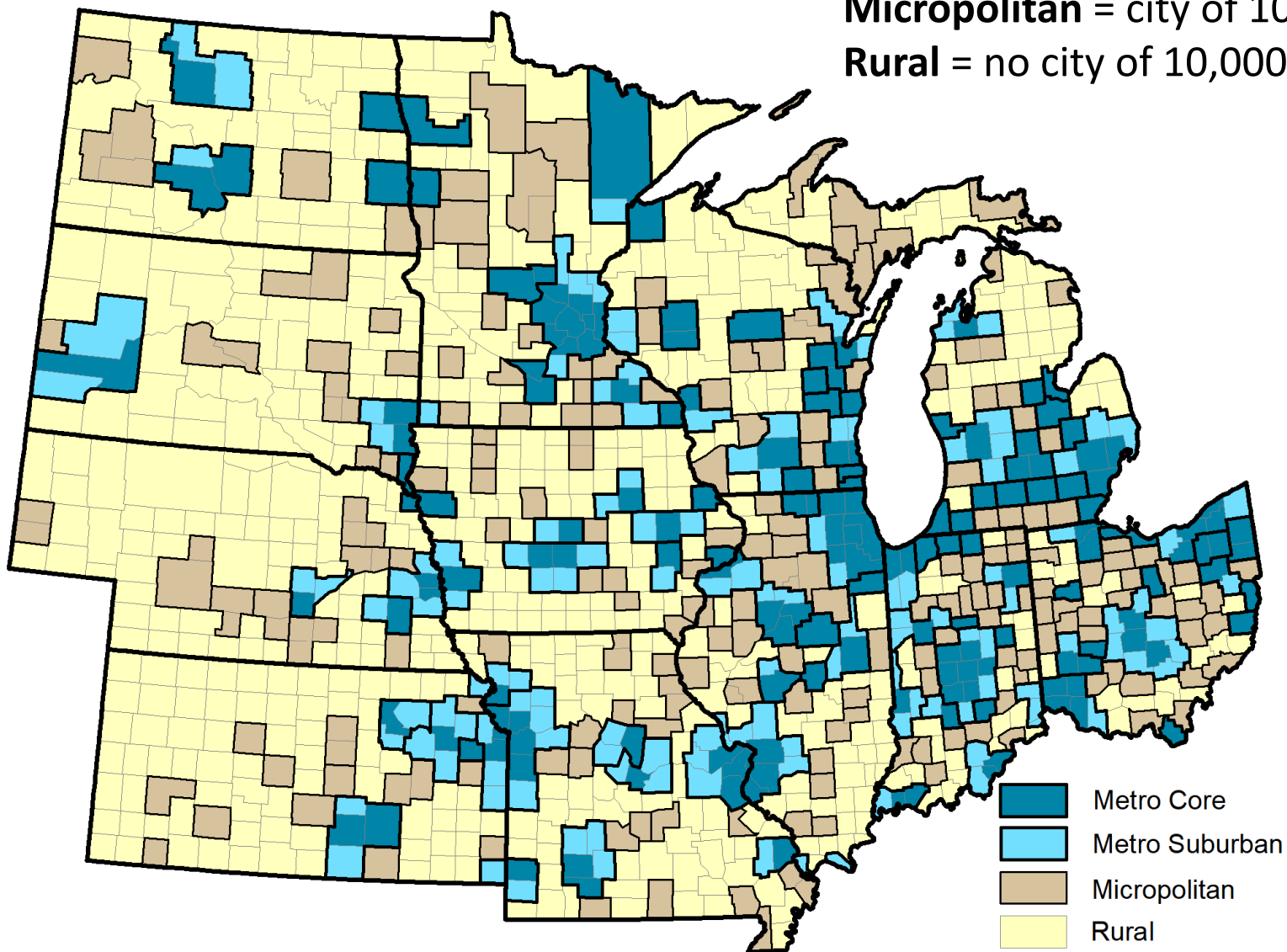
Applies to most, but not all, states in the Midwest



Metro = city over 50,000, plus suburbs

Micropolitan = city of 10,000-49,999

Rural = no city of 10,000 or more



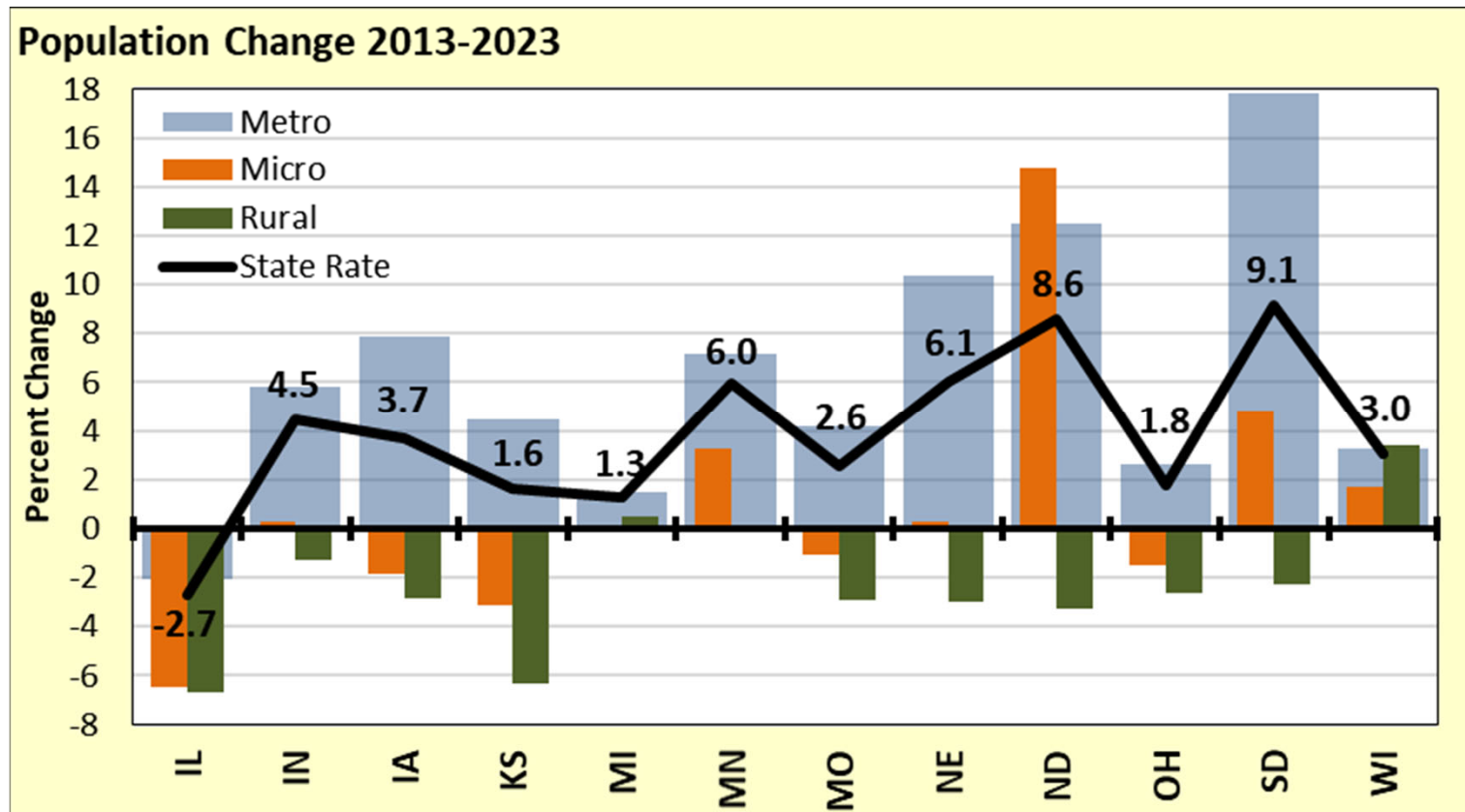


WHERE are the people?



Rural shrinking, metros growing

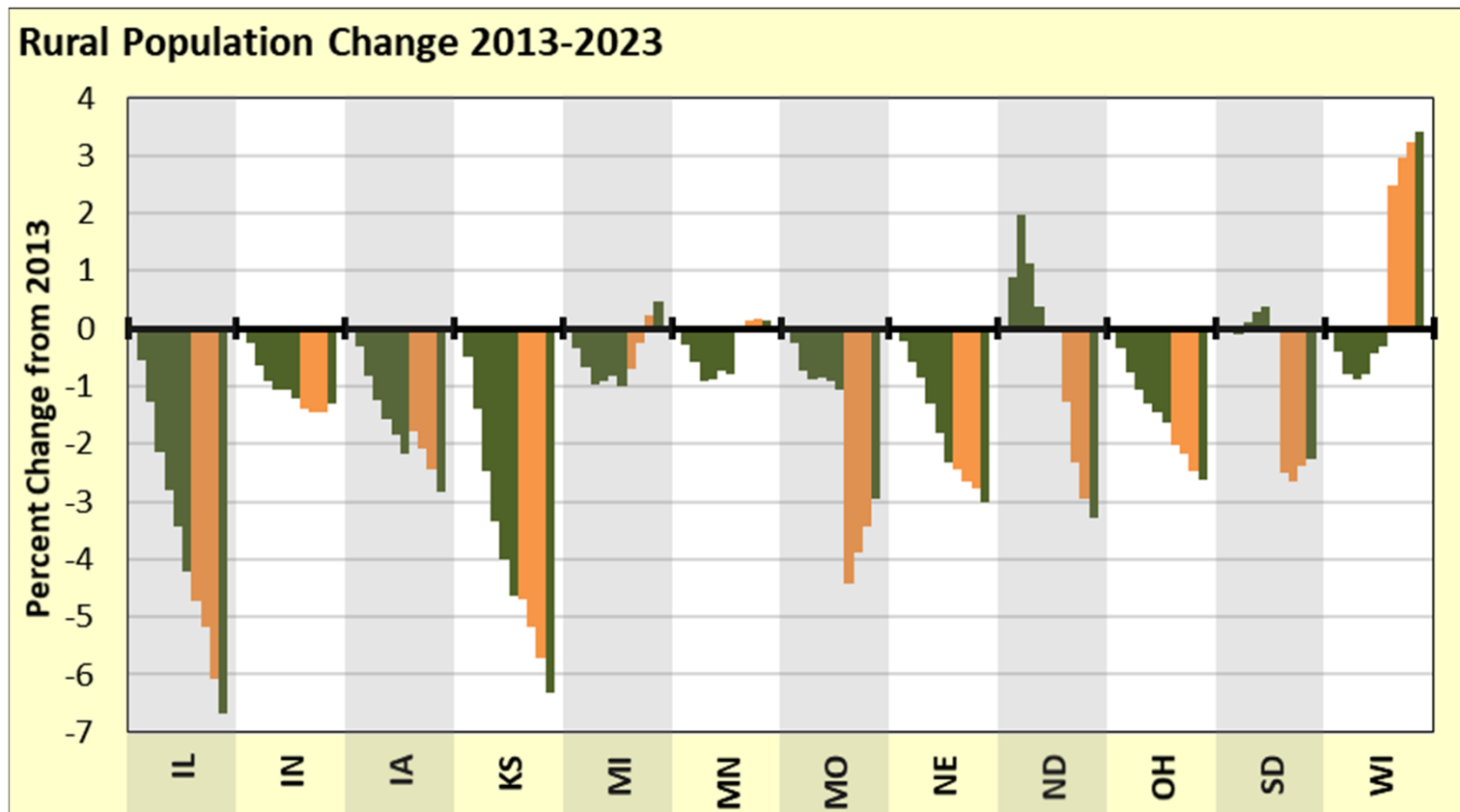
- Problem since early 1900s. Loss on businesses and services.
- Shift in political power to urban/suburban interests
 - *Exceptions: IL is shrinking. MI, MN, WI have stable/growing rural pops.*





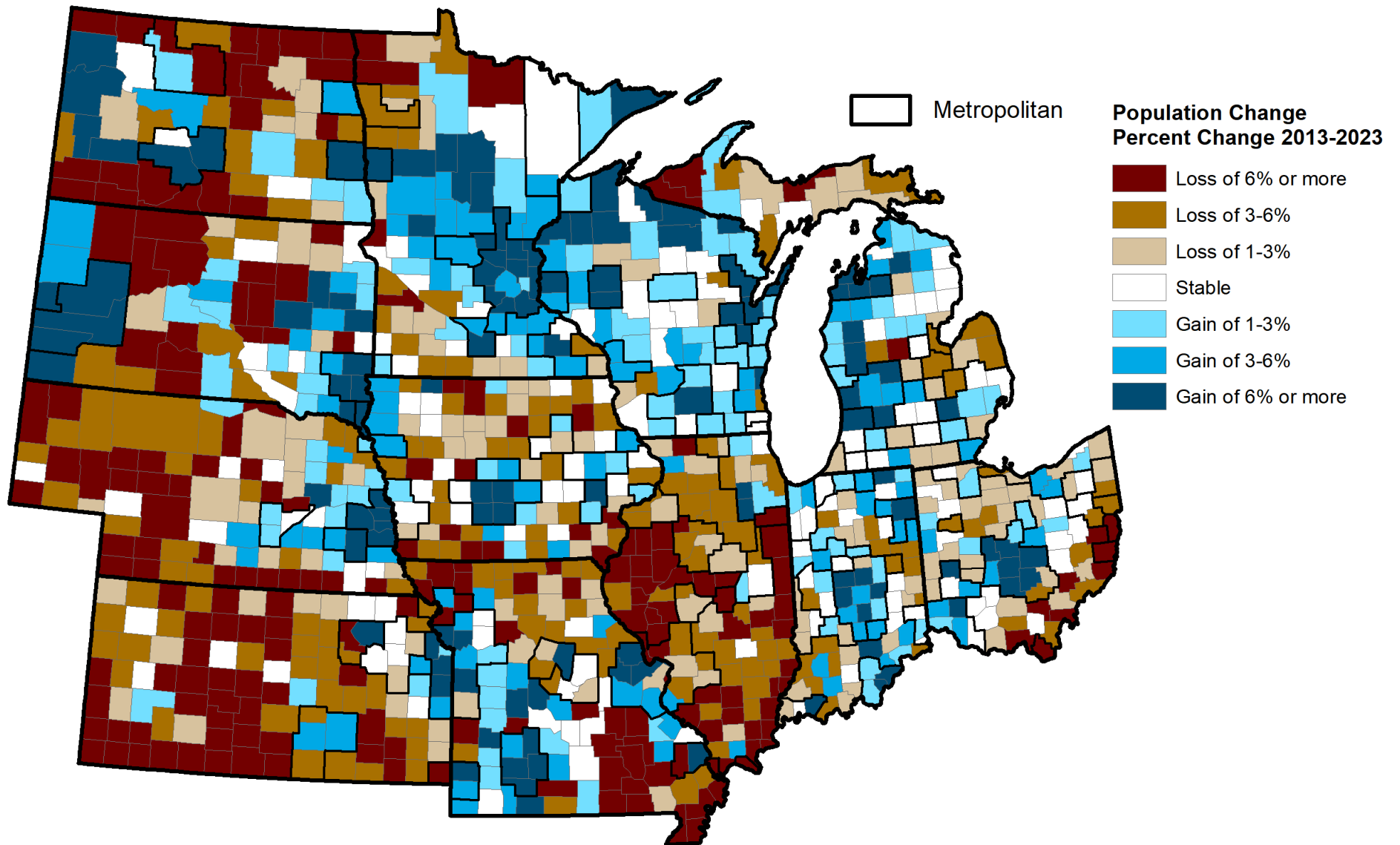
Persistent rural shrinkage, but not everywhere

- *Persistent decline:* IL, IA, KS, NE, OH
- *Slowing decline:* IN, MO
- *Rural rebound:* MI, MN, WI
- *Gains to decline:* ND, SD





Uneven growth and loss



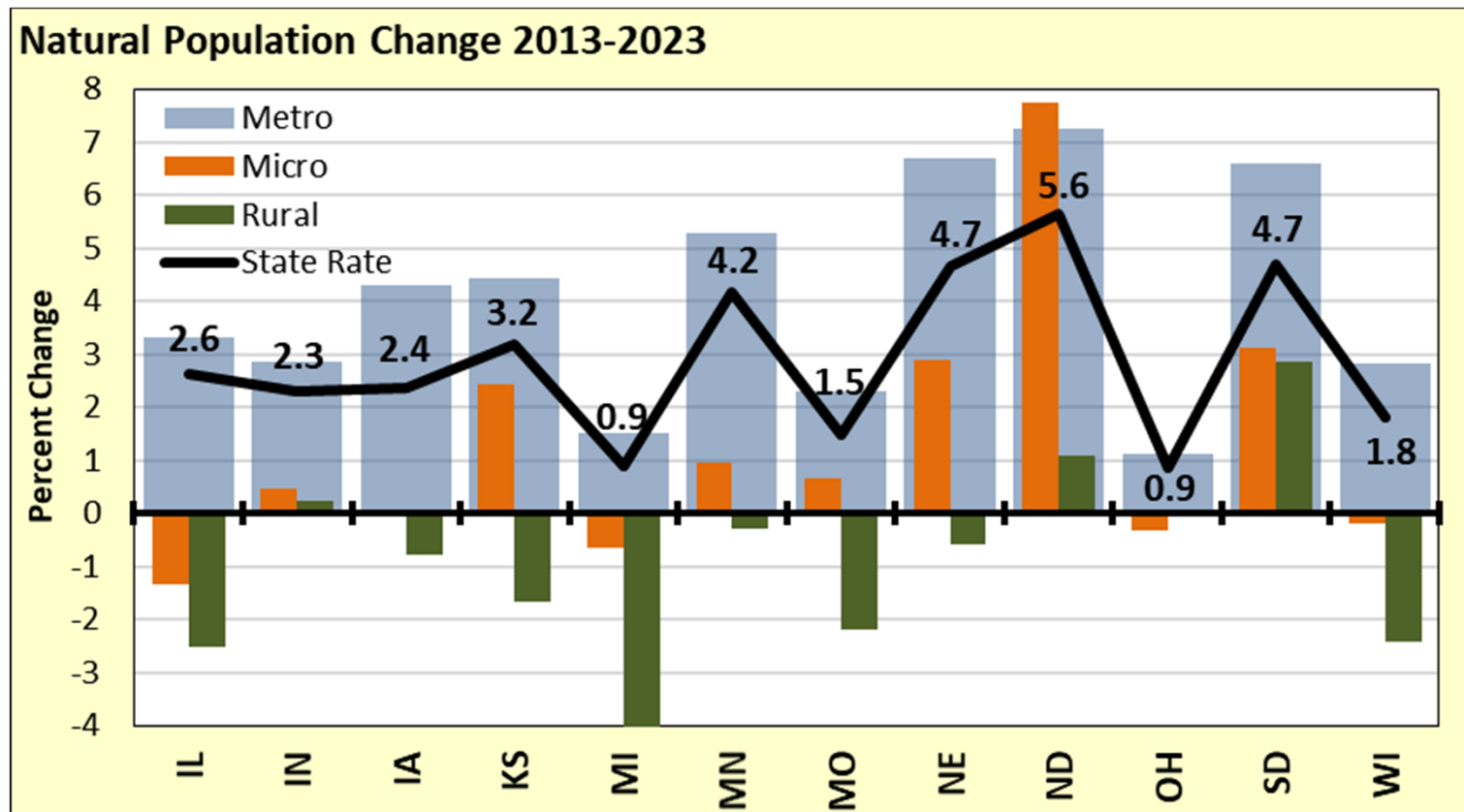


You can't grow your own!



Rural baby bust, metro baby boom

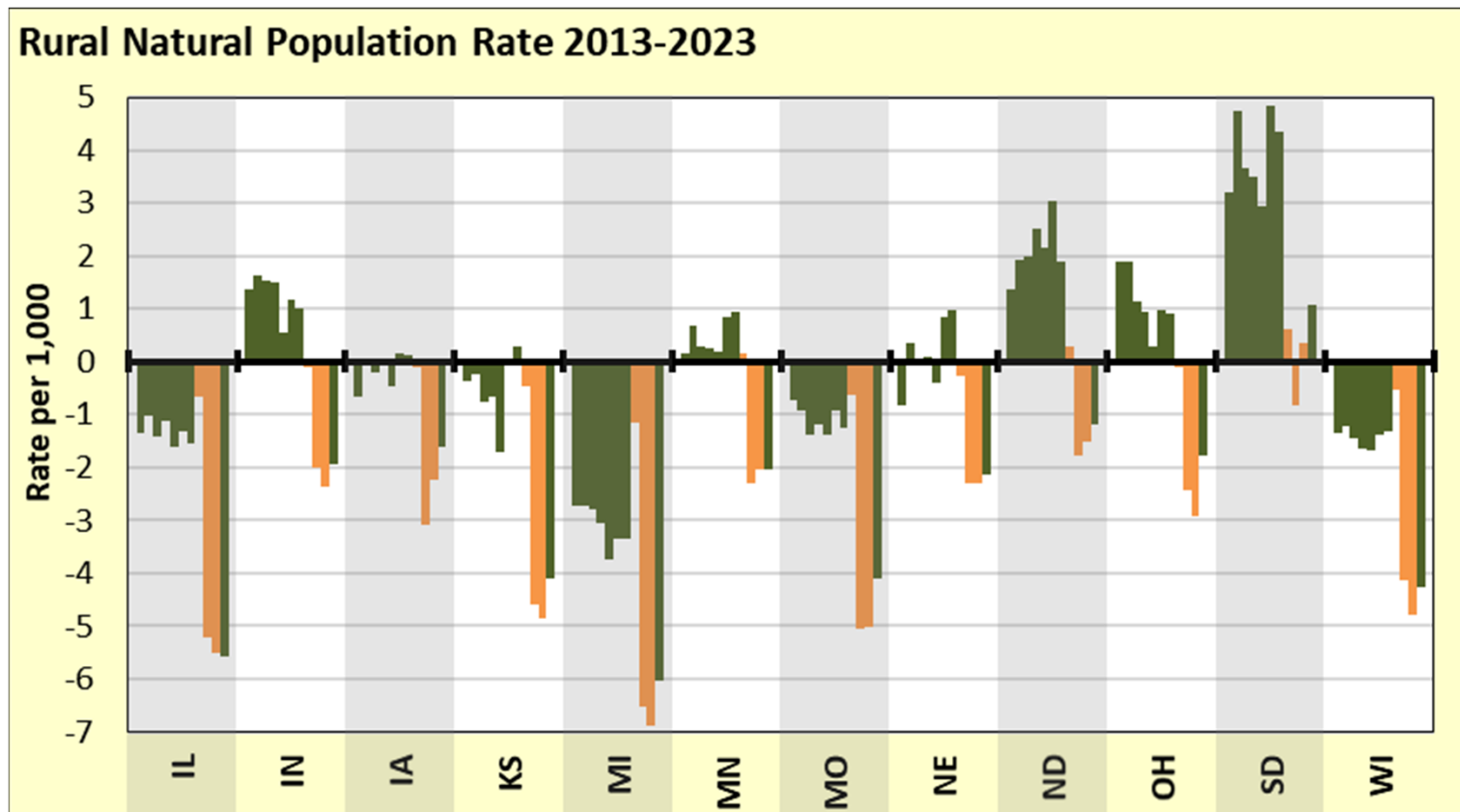
- Rural far below replacement rates (*more deaths than births*)
- Fewer babies = fewer students, fewer young workers
 - *Exceptions: IN, OH at replacement. ND, SD having more babies.*





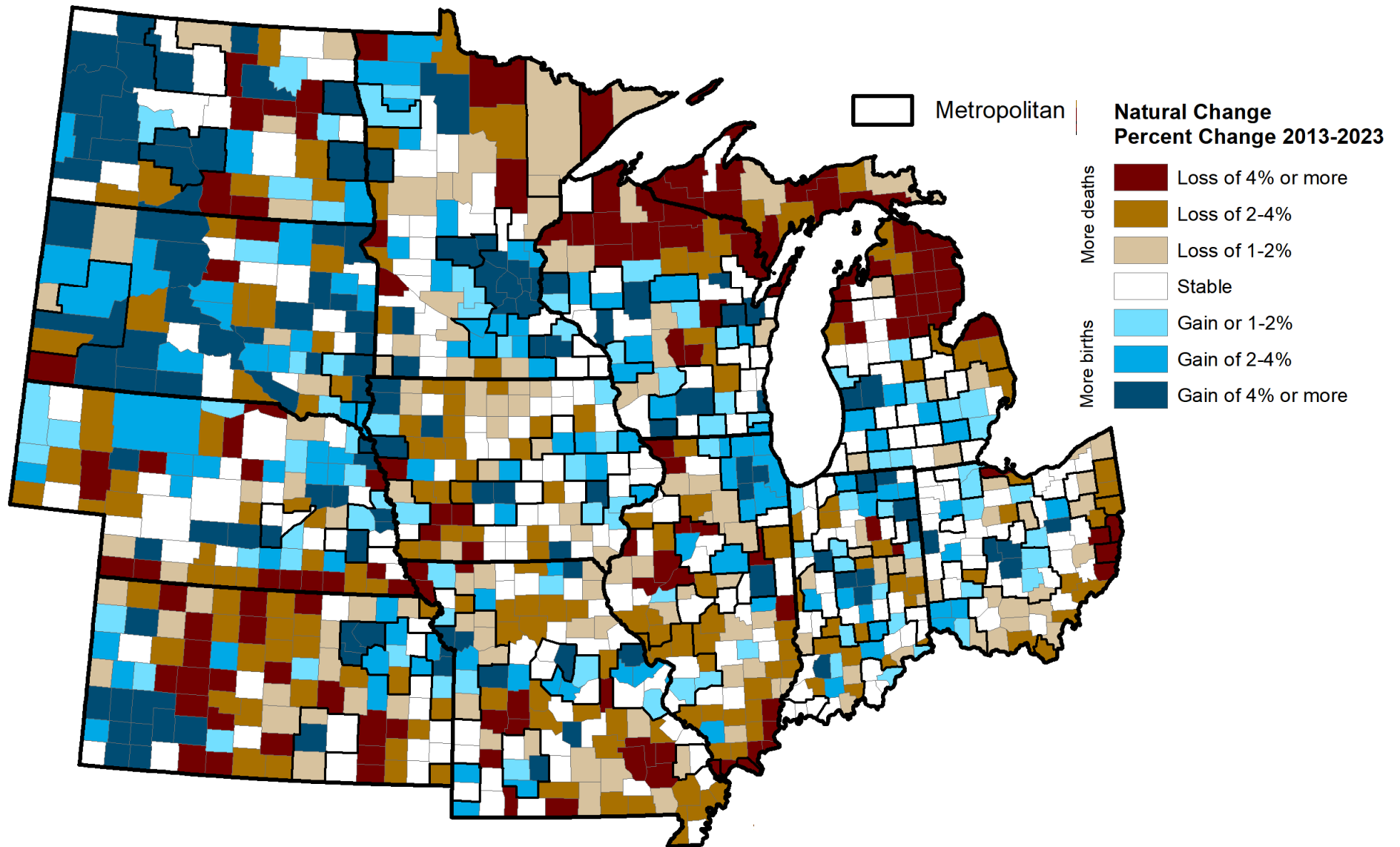
COVID will limit rural natural growth for a decade

- *Baby drought*: IL, MI, MO, WI (older populations)
- *Baby bust*: IA, KS, MN, NE
- *Baby boom to bust*: IN, ND, OH } (COVID deaths and delayed childbirth)
- SD only state with more rural births than deaths.





Younger adults and older retirees



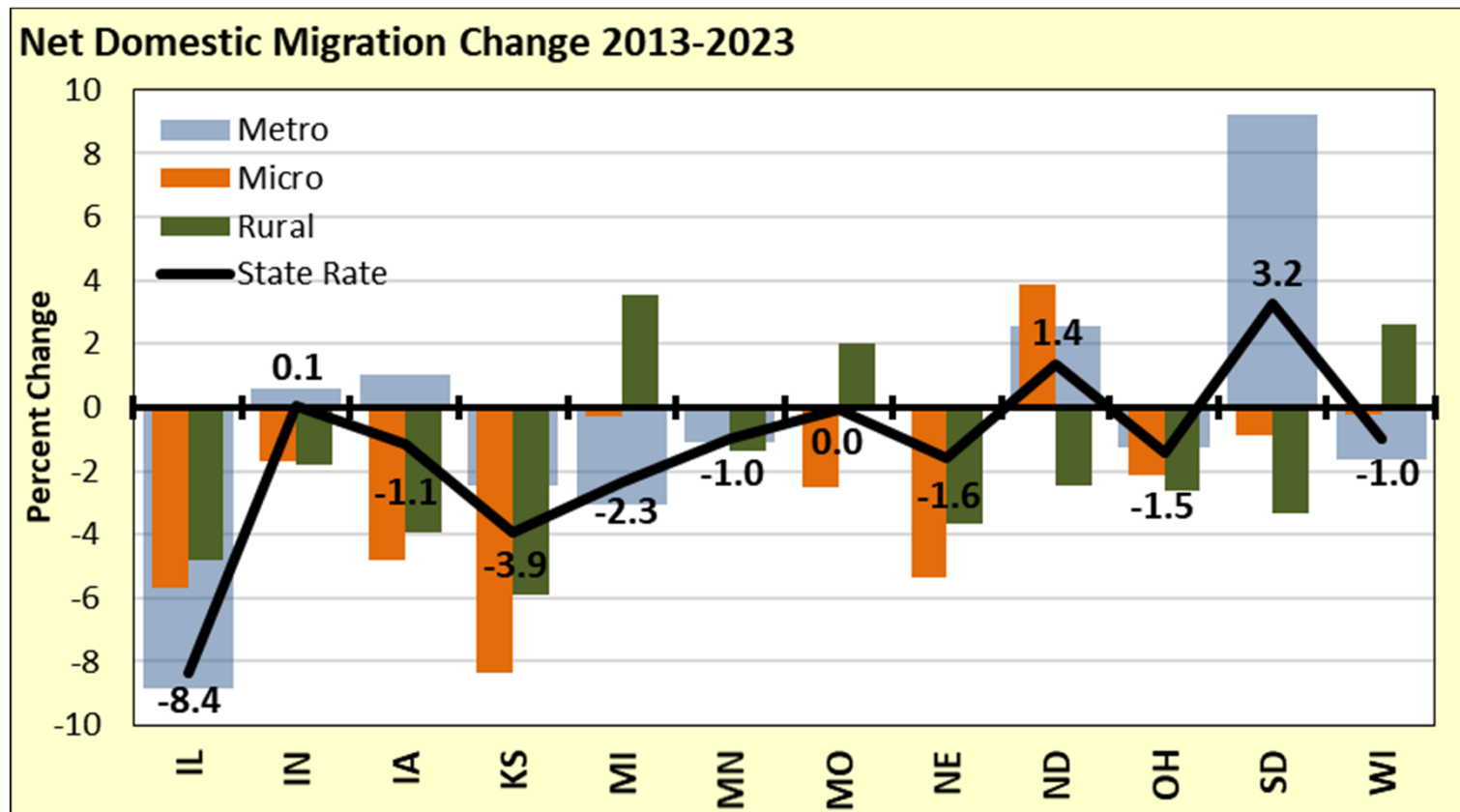


Too many people leave!



Rural Midwest's biggest export is our people

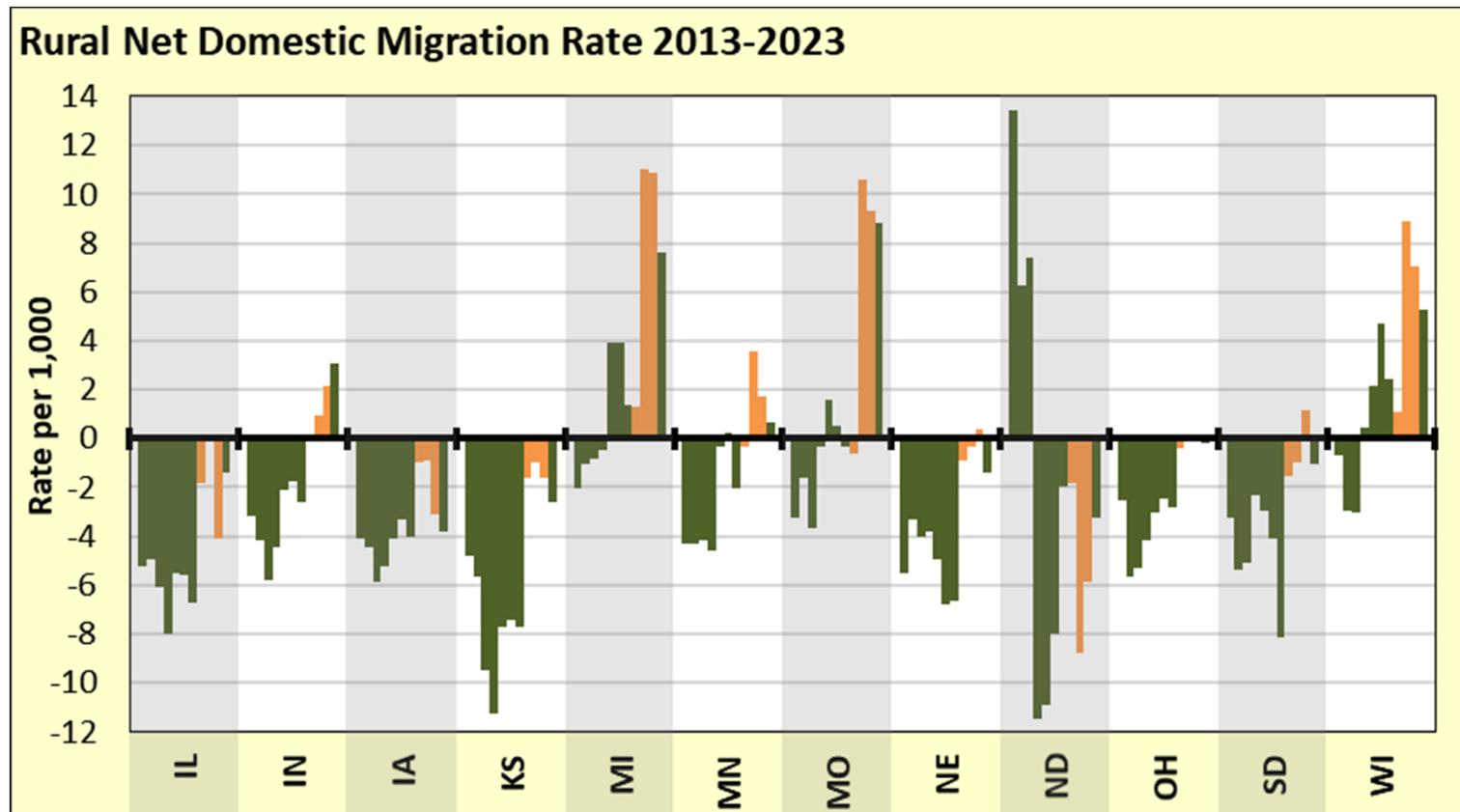
- Push-Pull factors: jobs and amenities
- Rural towns loss is metro cities gain
- Rural cannot recoup its investment in their kids!
 - *Exceptions: In-migration in MI, MO, WI. (retirees)*





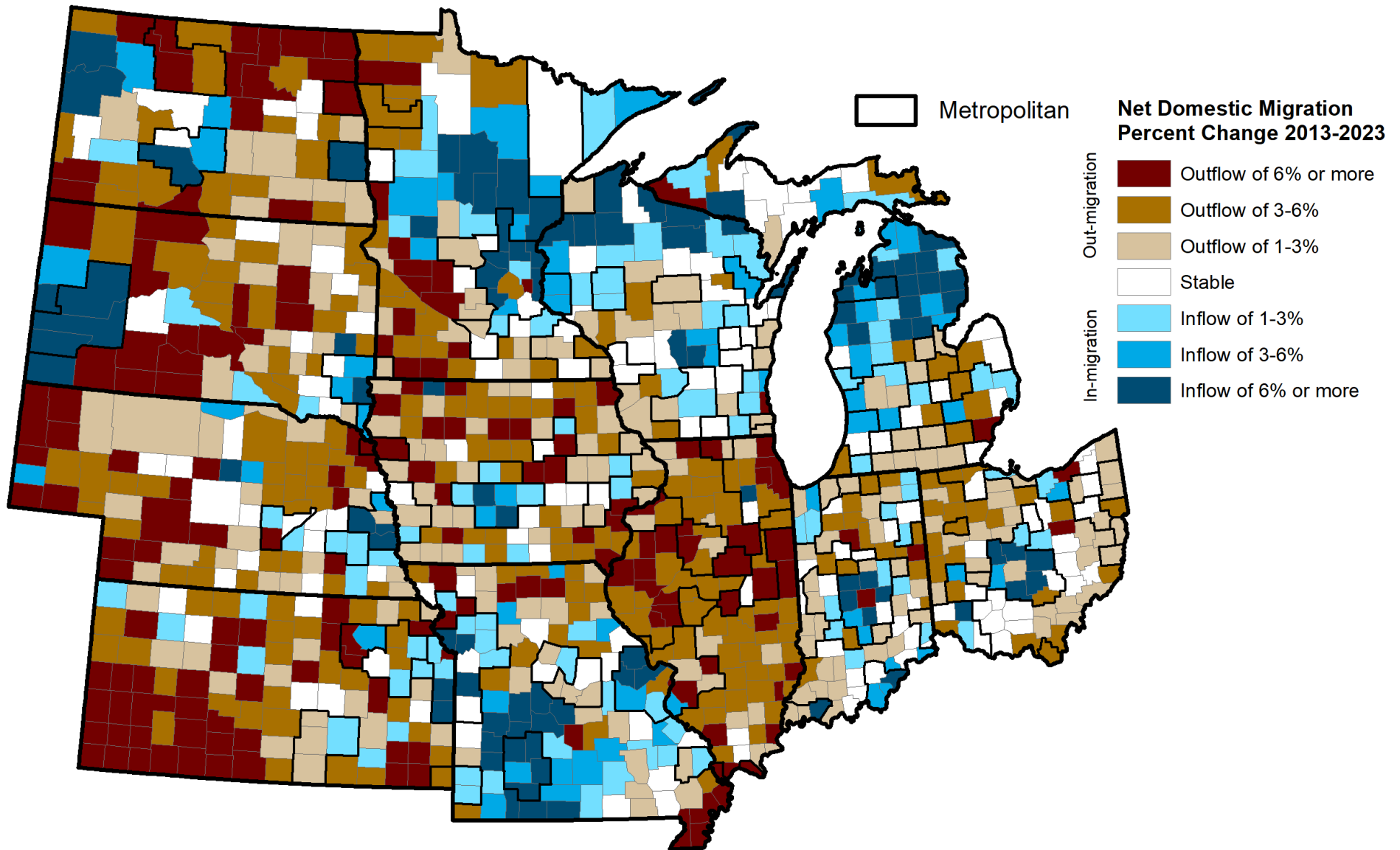
COVID temporarily slowed out-migration, no rural rebound

- Rural out-migration back to pre-pandemic levels
- *COVID rural turnaround: IN, MN, MO (what everyone hoped)*
- *Persistent in-migration: MI, WI (likely retirees)*





Farm belt declines, amenity belt gains





Why do people leave?

Better job opportunities

Family situations

Quality of K-12 schools

Limited healthcare services

Lack of adequate housing

Not enough entertainment options

Dislike of local leadership

Disliked small town living

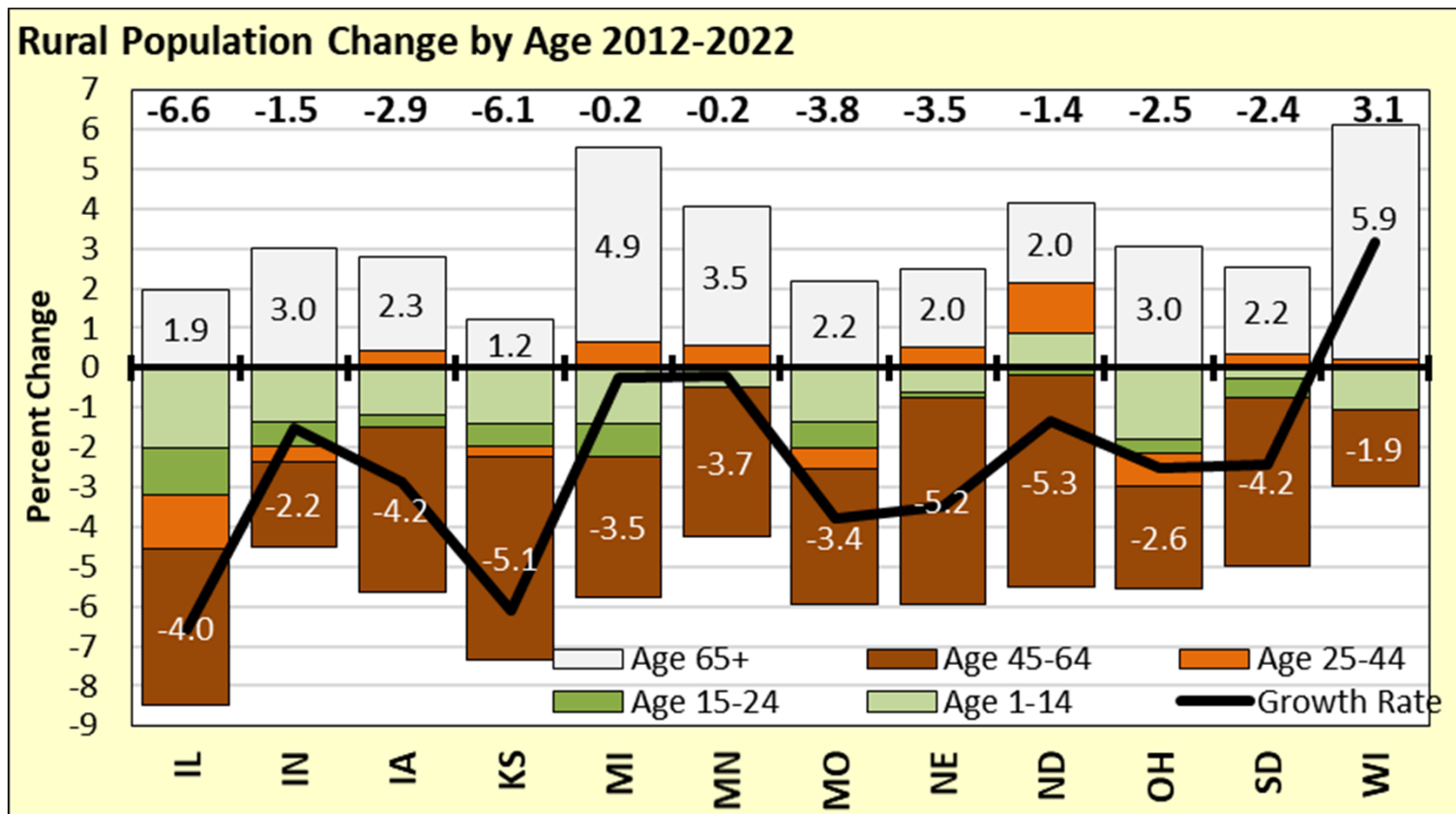


Aging population!



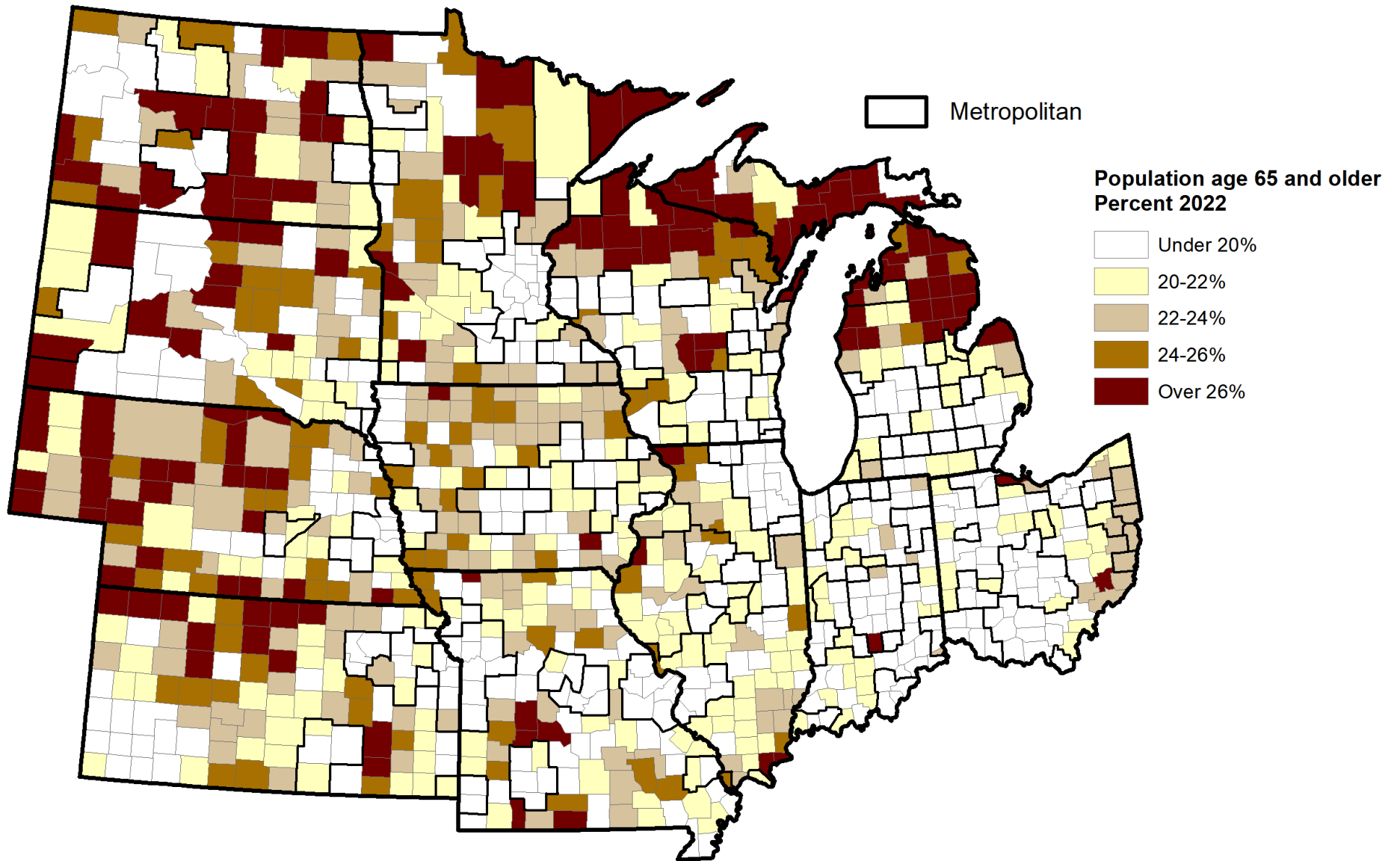
Rural both shrinking and aging, loss of workforce

- Seniors only growing part of rural population
- Sizeable loss of experienced workforce age 45-64. No future pipeline!
 - *Does not mean NO growth. Minority gains offset some losses, but not all.*





Senior citizen clusters



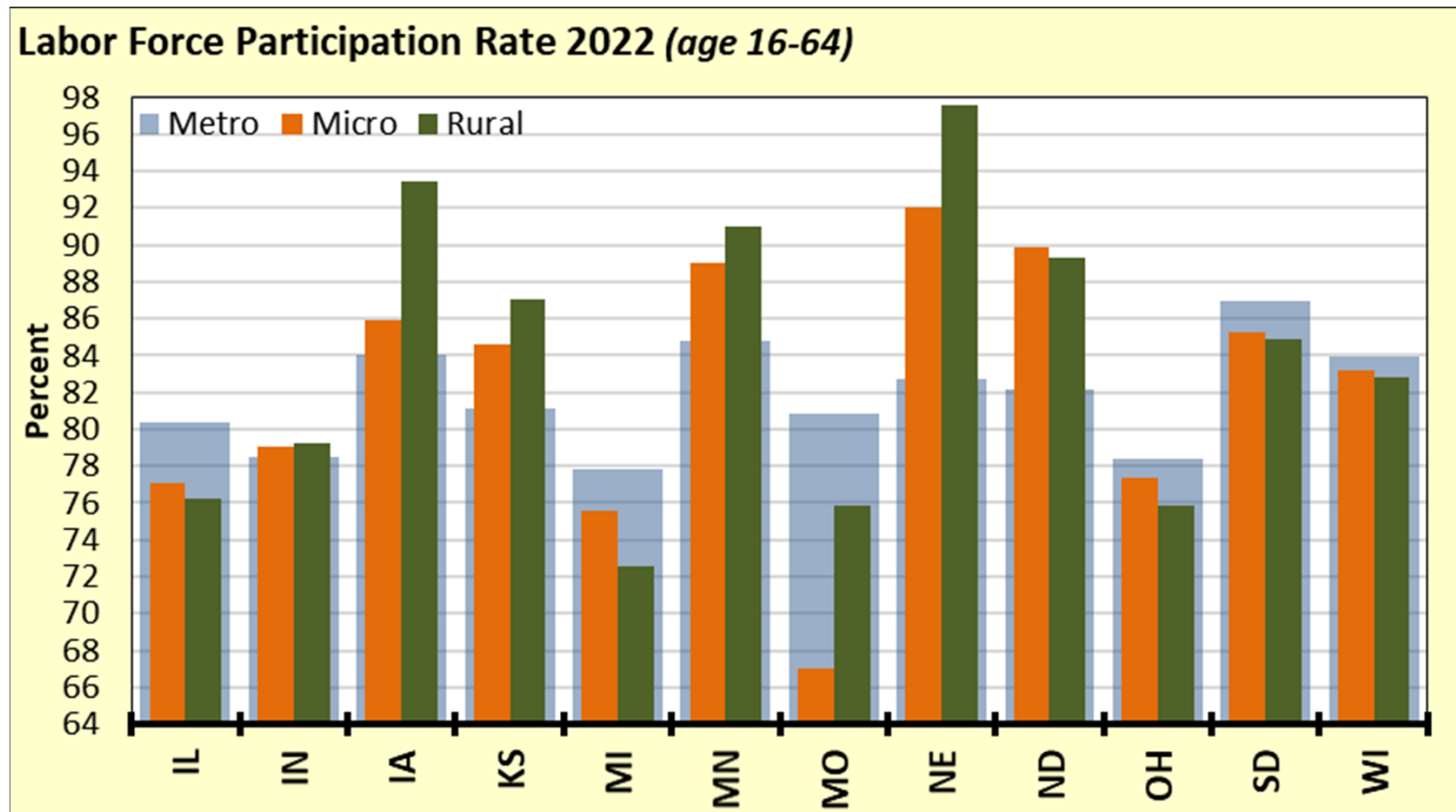


Not enough workers!



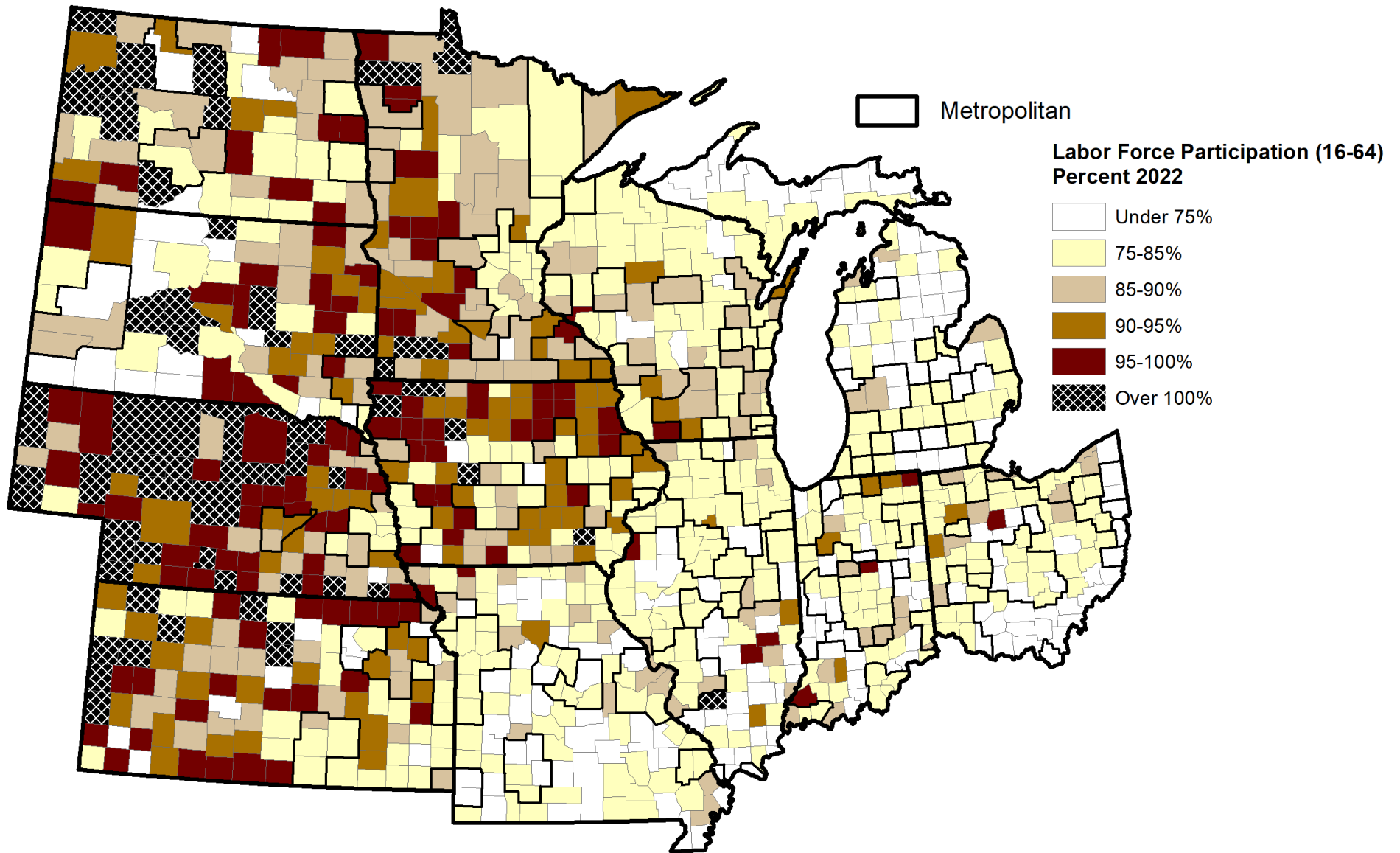
Nearly everyone works in rural areas

- Severe rural worker shortage (~90%) in IA, MN, NE, ND
- Rural shortage is worse than in metros, for some states
- Lower participation in IL, IN, MI, MO, OH
 - *Why? Retired, disability. Also unemployable, discouraged workers.*





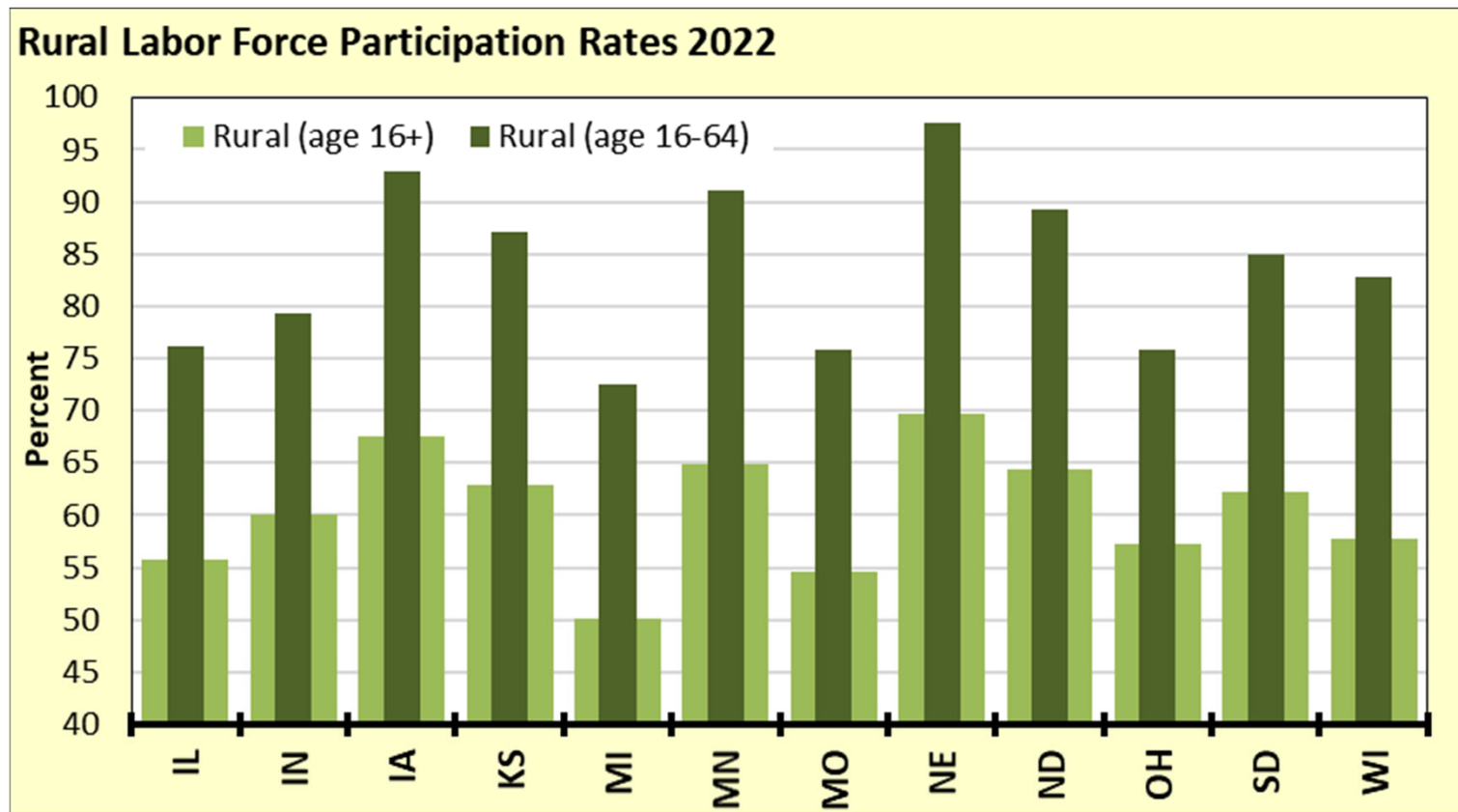
Worker shortage in western Corn Belt and Great Plains





Boomers prop-up rural workforce

- Without Boomers, LFP jumps from 60-65% to 75-90%!
- *Who will replace Boomers? Will Gen Z and Gen Alpha work? Will they stay?*
 - *Only have 5-7 years to come up with solutions!*



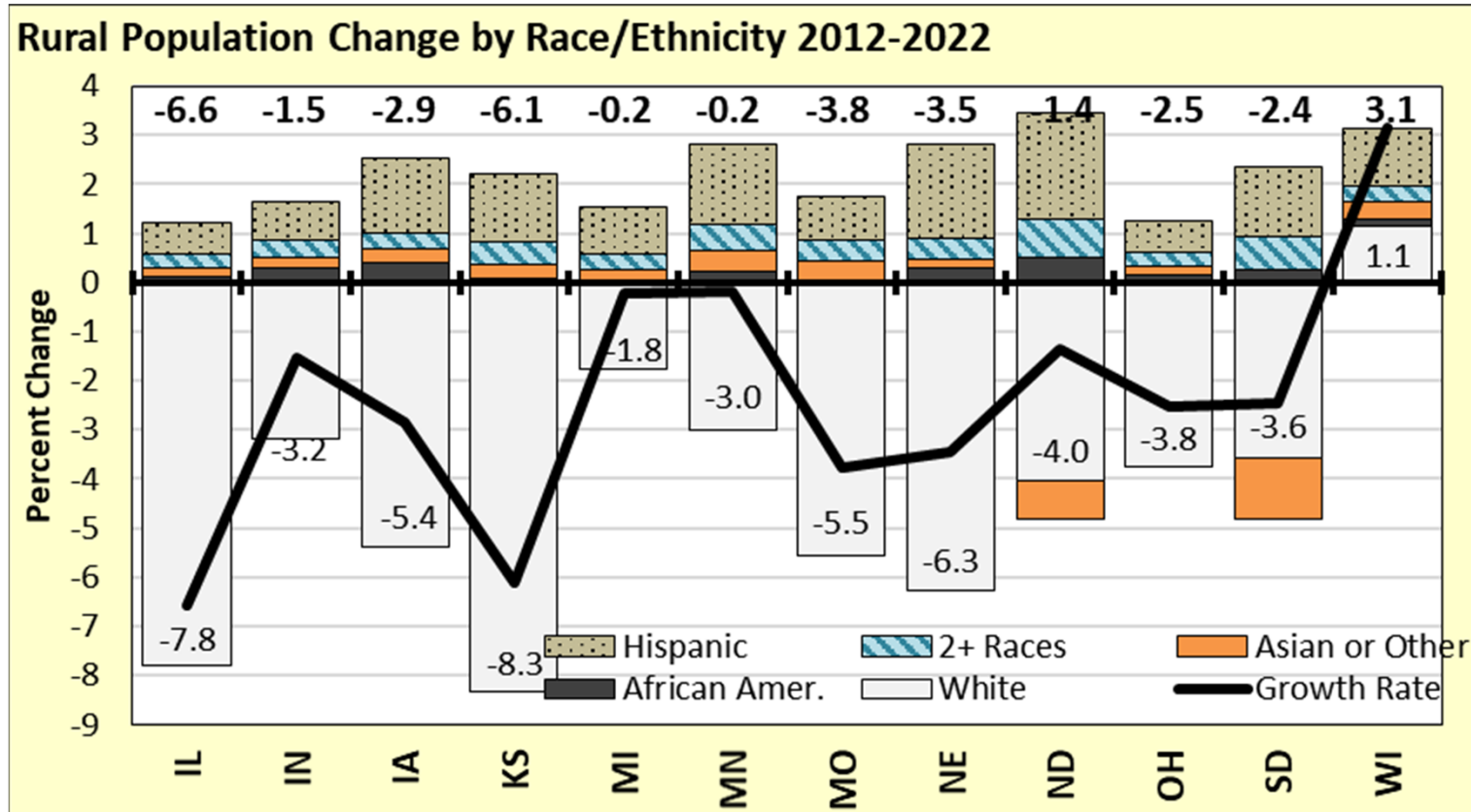


Rapid diversification!



Rural both shrinking and diversifying

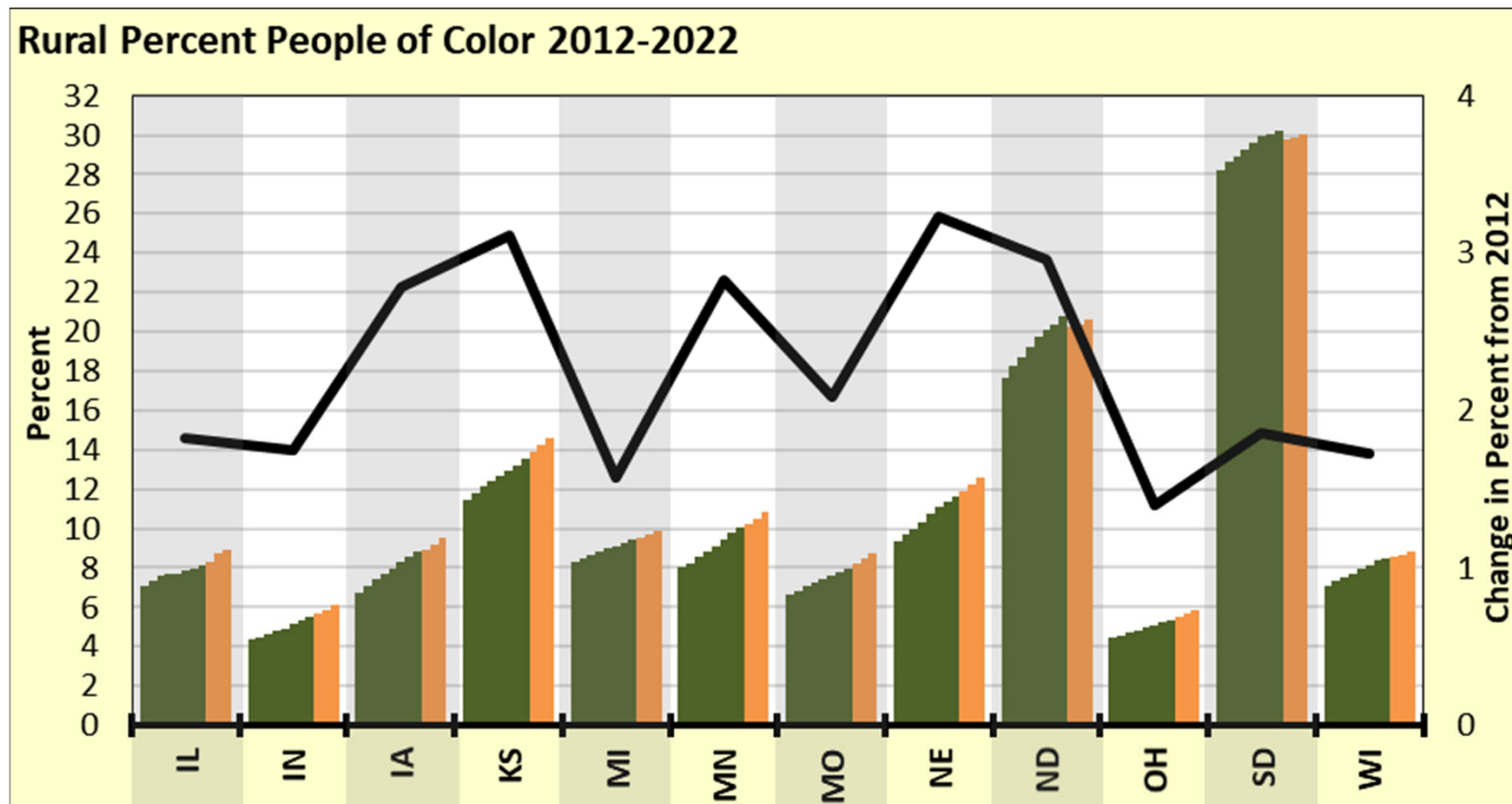
- Minority growth avoided sizable rural population losses
- Future rural students, workers, and customers
 - *Without minorities, some rural states would have shrank by 5% to 8%!*





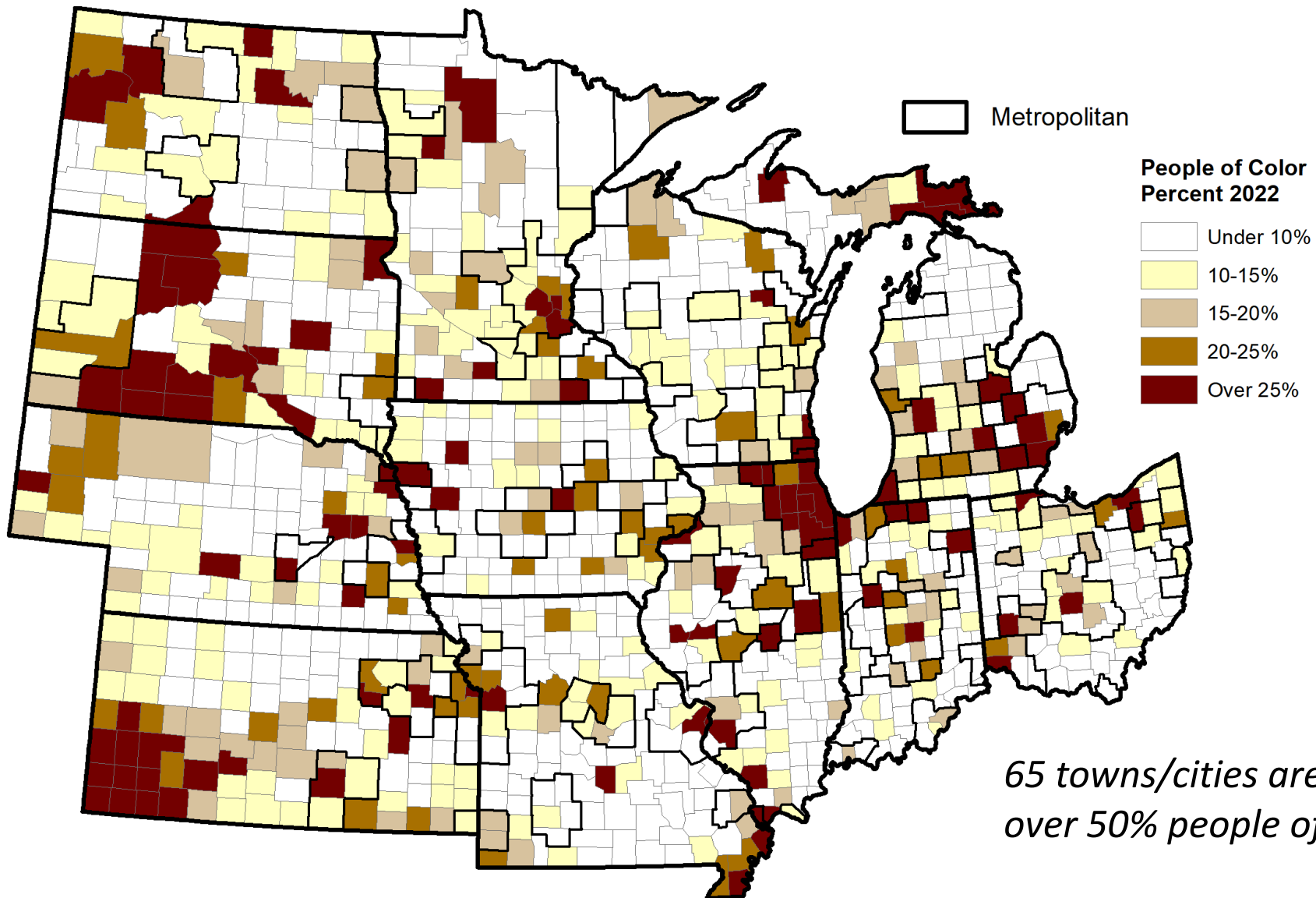
Who moves to rural and micro areas? Immigrants!

- Immigrants moved during COVID. U.S. residents stayed put.
- Immigrants fill labor gaps, especially in agriculture.
- Current rise partly driven by border surges and border policies.



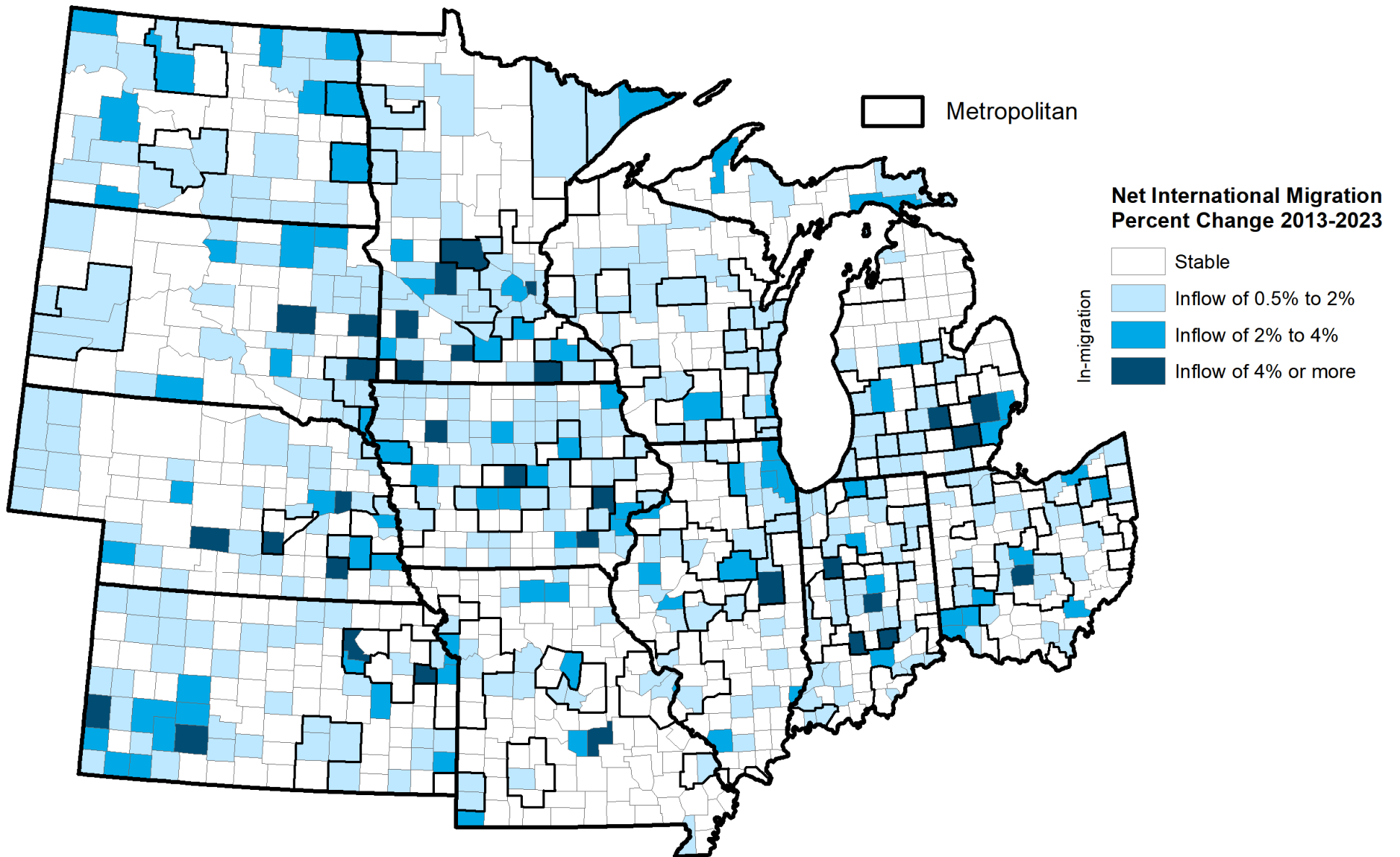


When the “minority” becomes the majority





Immigration highly localized





Implications and Strategies



What can be done?

No one is coming to save most small towns.

Build local leadership capacity!

- *Mentor young or new leaders.*
- *Leaders who are champions and conveners.*

Promote and build rural quality of life!

- *Keep who you have. Attract those who left.*
- *Can compete with metros. You are in control to change it.*
- *Housing. Daycare. Schools. Socializing. Telecoms.*

Workforce readiness for rural stayers!

- *High school apprenticeship programs. 2+2 programs with local colleges.*
- *Teaching life/basic skills to discouraged workers.*

Diversify smart!

- *Integrating minorities to secure your future.*
- *Language skills. Cultural competencies. ... but it works both ways!*

Rural Challenges

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Rapid diversification!



**Questions?
Comments?**

Thanks for your time!

Feel free to contact me

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