

Agricultural Outlook Forum, Arlington, Virginia, February 21, 2008

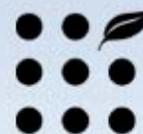
Return Migration to Rural and Small Town America

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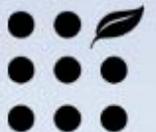


Collaborative Research between ERS and the University of Montana

NRI competitive grant No. 2007-35401-17742: “Return Migration to Geographically Disadvantaged Communities of the Rural United States”

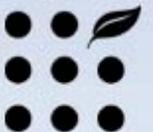
Questions:

1. What factors influence the decision to return?
2. What social and economic adjustments do return migrants commonly face?
3. What can be done at the community level to increase the likelihood for return migration?



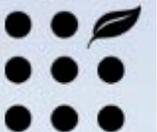
Mixed-methods Research

- quantitative analysis:
 - cohort-specific, county-to-county migration flows using 1990 and 2000 U.S. Census data
- qualitative methods:
 - interviews to evaluate return migration decisions and their impact on geographically-disadvantaged rural communities.



In this presentation:

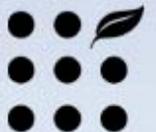
- Geographic disadvantage and its relevance to the study of return migration
- Analysis of counterstream migration flows: methods and initial results
- Next steps



Geographic disadvantage

Nonmetro population and job growth consistently higher in:

- Counties adjacent to large or fast-growing metro areas
- Counties with important regional centers (micropolitan areas)
- Counties with interstate highways
- Scenic areas



Geographic disadvantage

3 county-level measures combined into an Index of Geographic Disadvantage:

1. Access to urban areas (gravity model)
2. Distance to transportation infrastructure (interstates and regional airports)
3. ERS Natural Amenities Index (mild climate, mountains, lakes)

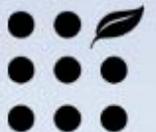
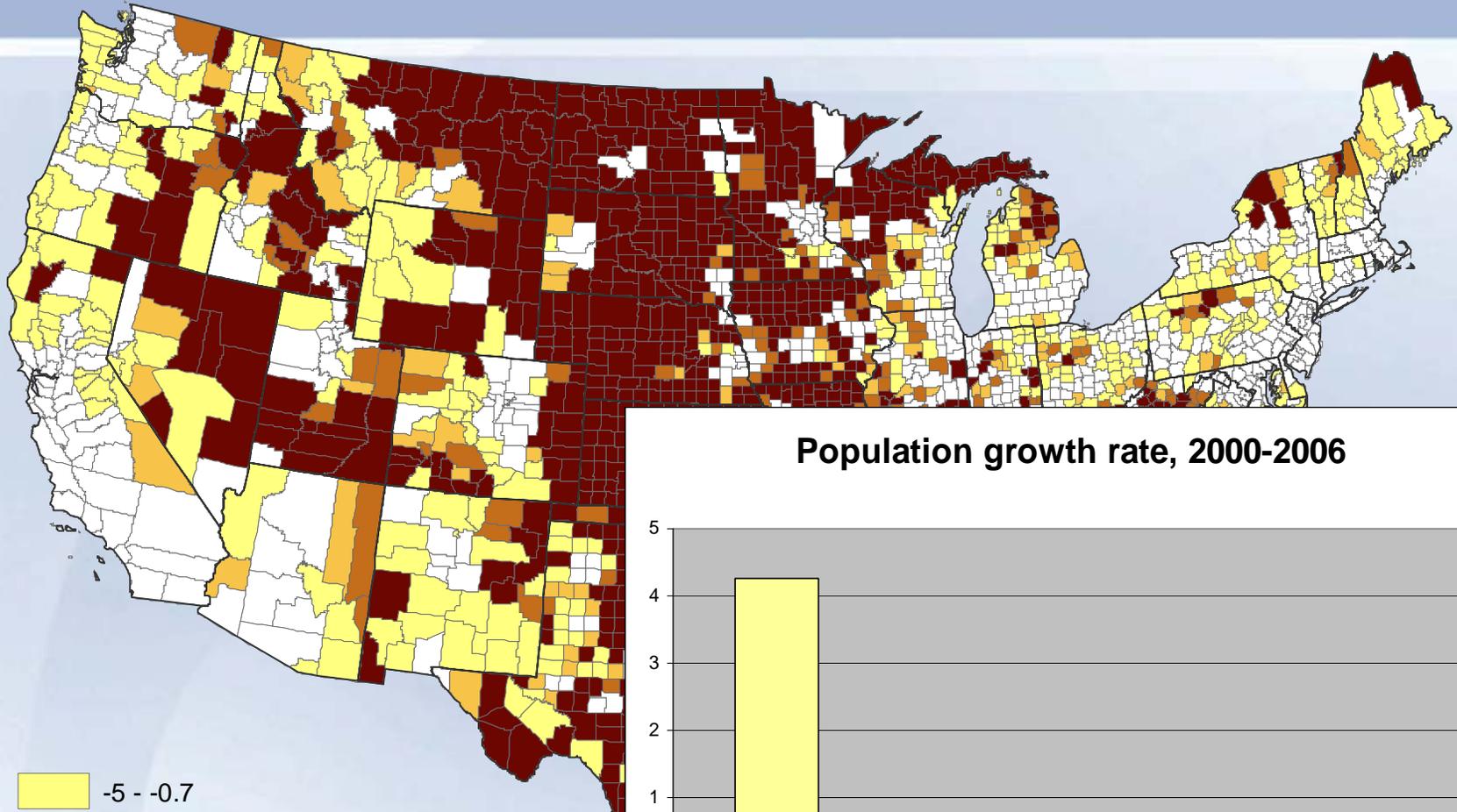
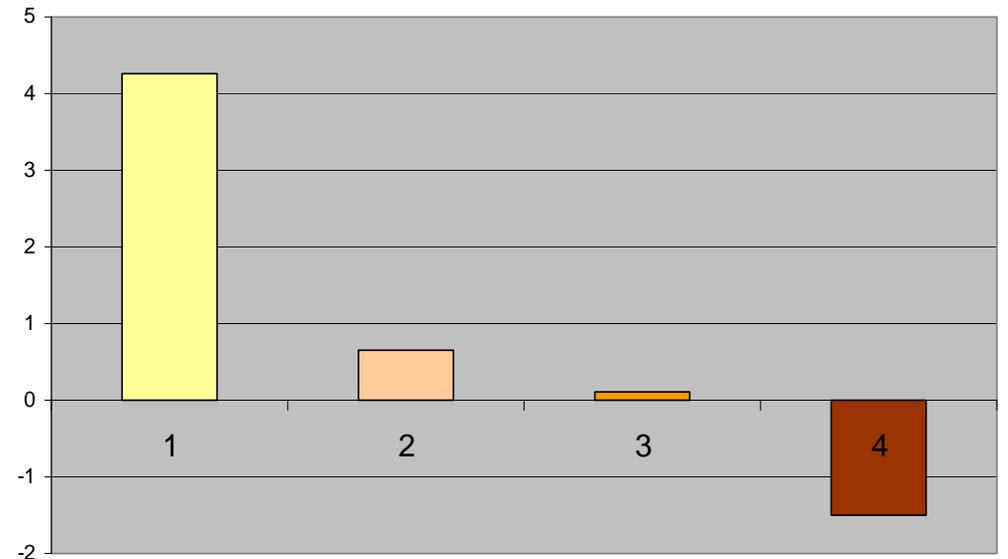


Figure 1. Index of Geographic Disadvantage



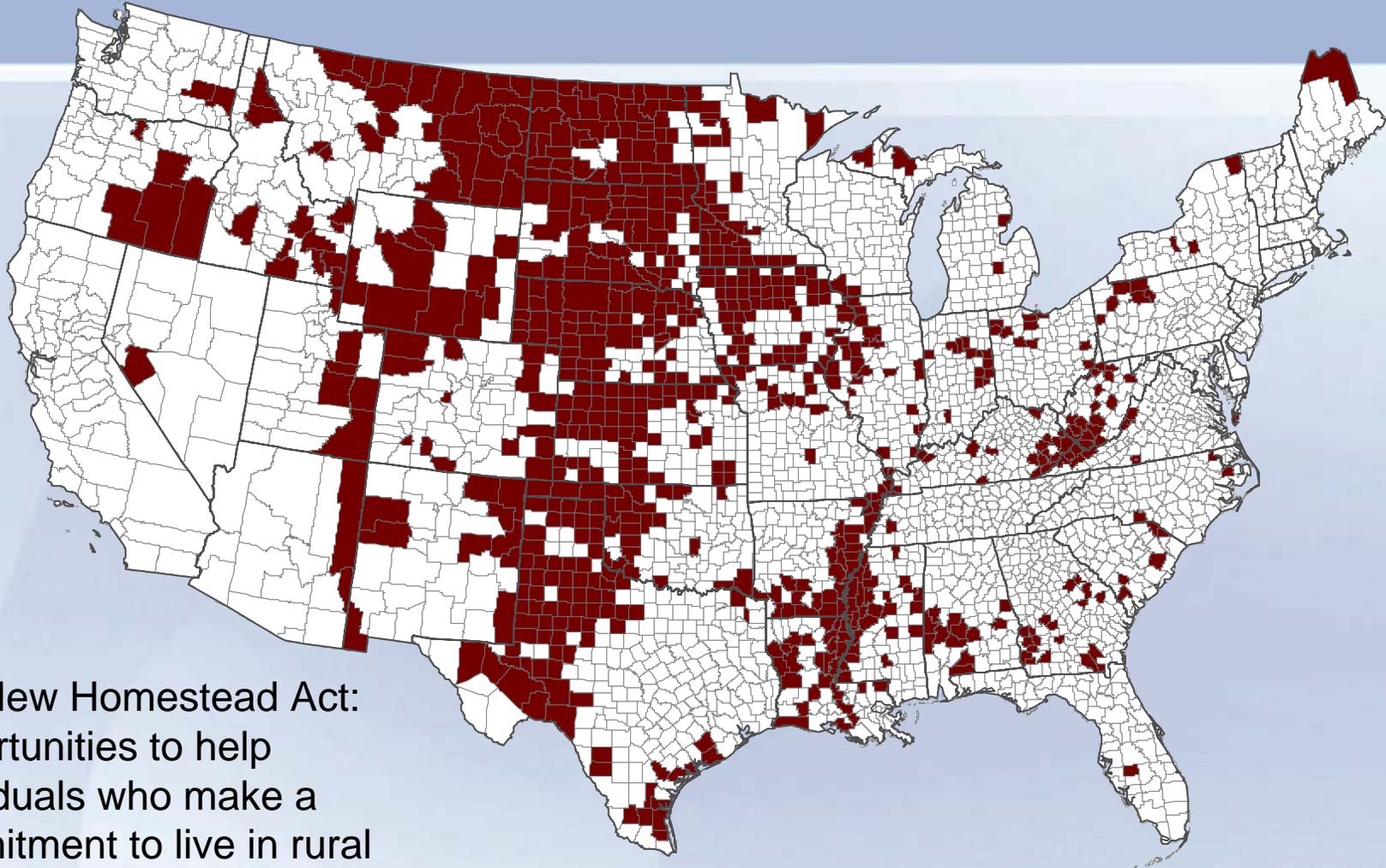
- 1 -5 - -0.7
- 2 -0.7 - -0.3
- 3 -0.3 - 0.2
- 4 0.2 - 9.2
- Metro

Population growth rate, 2000-2006



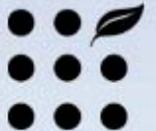
Note: values are the average for counties with decreasing urban population, decreasing infrastructure, and lower scores of the ERS Natural Amenities Index.

Figure 3. Nonmetro counties with net migration rates of -10 percent or lower, 1980-2000.



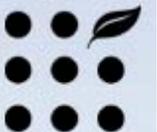
The New Homestead Act:
Opportunities to help
individuals who make a
commitment to live in rural
counties suffering from high
out-migration

<http://dorgan.senate.gov/issues/north-dakota/homestead/case.cfm>



Counterstream migration

- Return migration hard to measure directly with current data
- New method: estimate return migration by studying counterstreams
- Every major migration stream generates a counterstream
- Matching age-specific, county-to-county streams with their counterstreams 10 years later provides an indirect measure of return migration



Counterstream migration

- Match streams with counterstreams
 - For any given county: match out-migration to county x of 15-19 year olds, 1985-1990, with in-migration from county x of 25-29 year olds, 1995-2000.
- 3 types of counterstreams
 1. Balanced: counterstream highly correlated with previous out-migration stream
 2. Out-dominant: smaller than expected counterstream
 3. In-dominant: larger than expected counterstream
- Return migration more likely to be part of types 1 and 2.

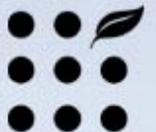


Figure 4. Percent of 25-29 year old in-migrants in return migration counterstreams, 1995-2000

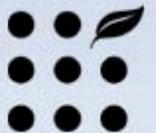
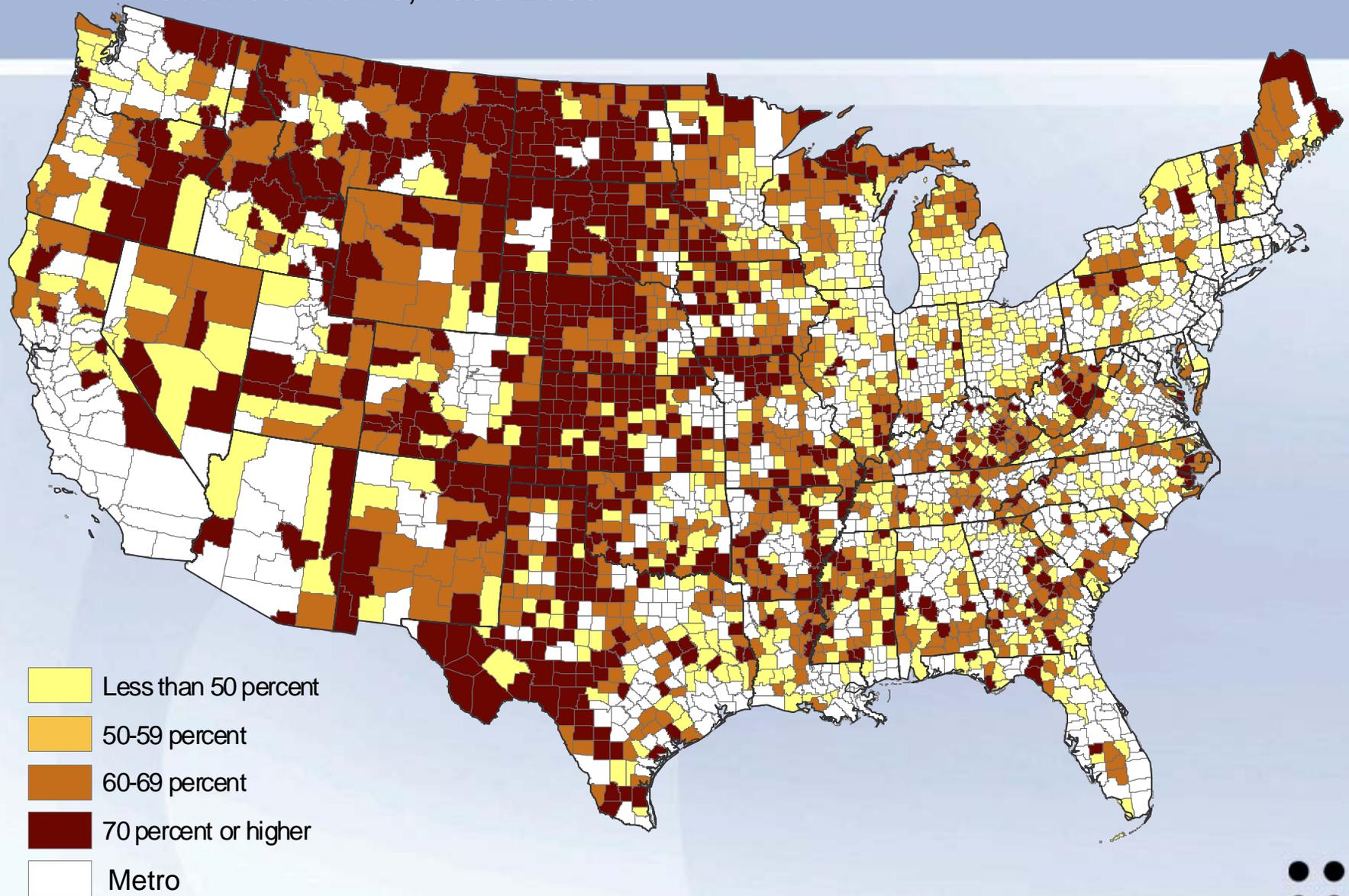
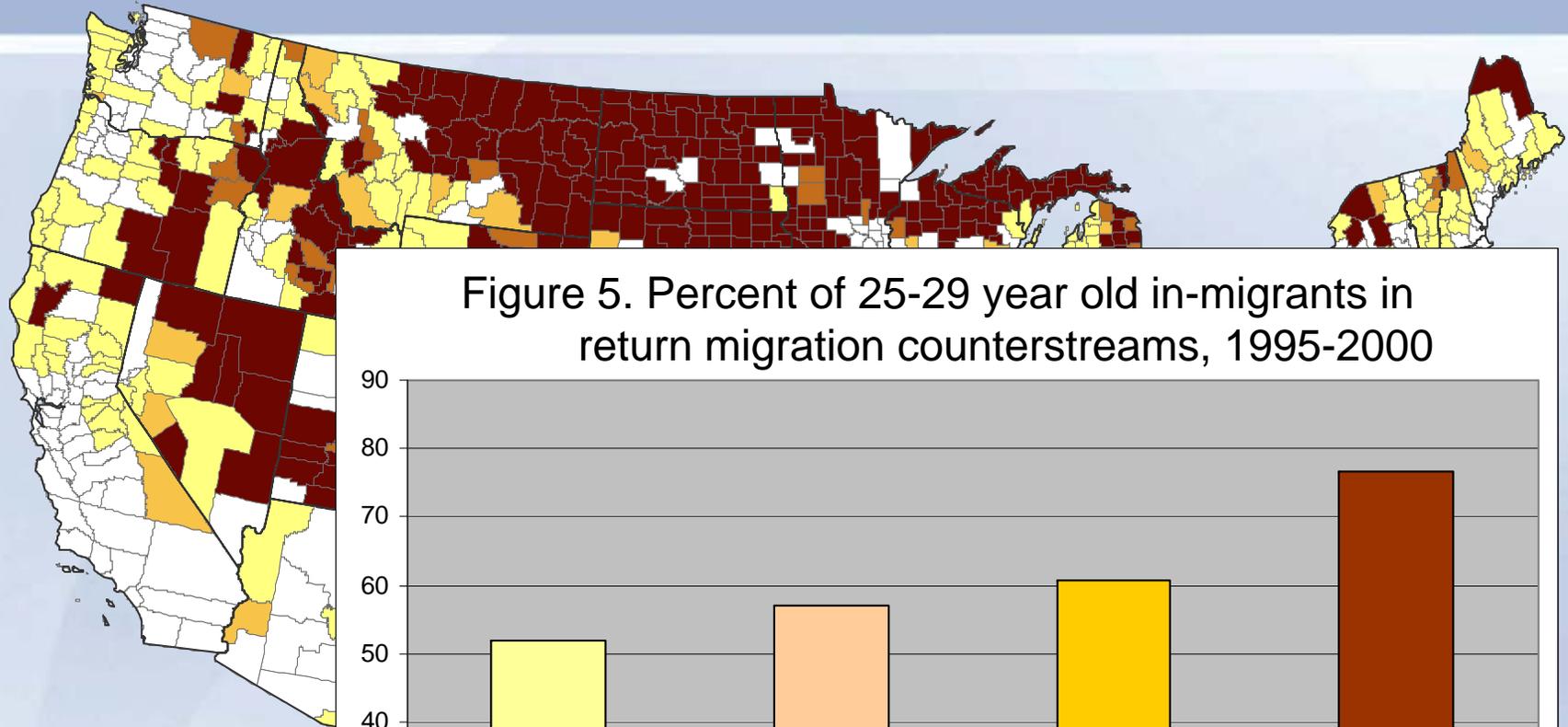
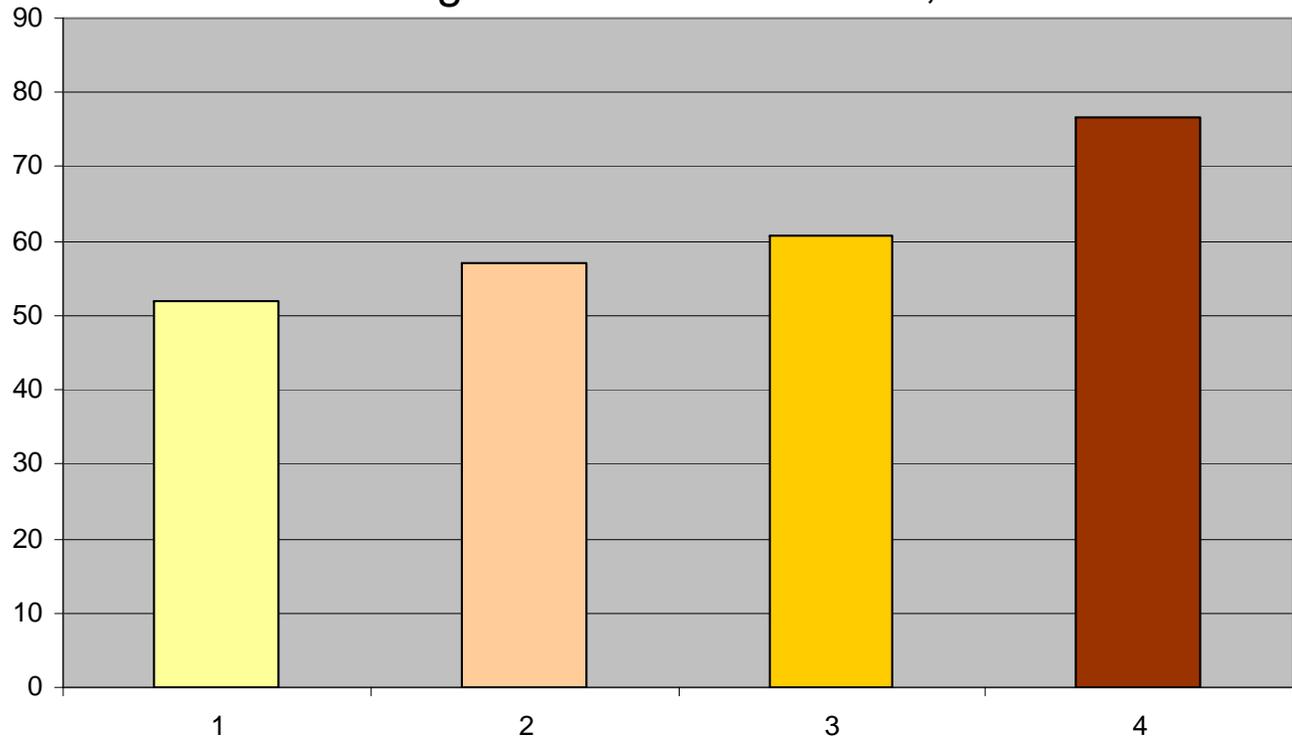


Figure 1. Index of Geographic Disadvantage



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Figure 5. Percent of 25-29 year old in-migrants in return migration counterstreams, 1995-2000



infrastructure, and lower scores of the ERG Natural Amenities Index.

Next Steps

- Same analysis for 30-34 and 35-39 age groups
- Analyze connections between return migration and economic growth in geographically-disadvantaged counties
- Select representative counties for qualitative analysis
- Interviews at high school reunions, the only venue that brings together non-migrants, out-migrants, and return migrants

