



Missouri Economy Indicators

Newcomers Bring Community Change

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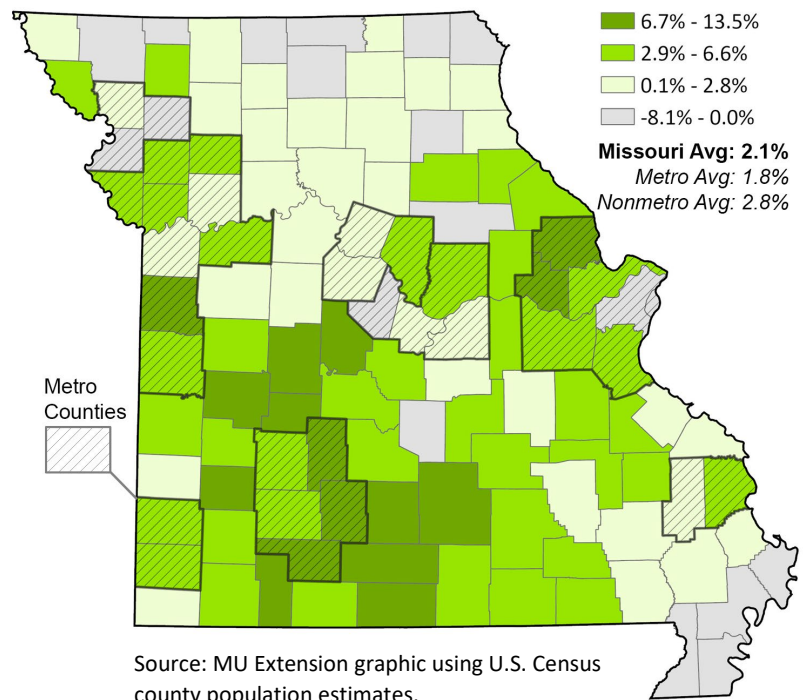
People move to new communities every day—for school, work, retirement, family, or other reasons. When they relocate to a county from a neighboring county, another state, or another country, they are considered “in-migrants.” Between 2020 and 2025, net migration—the difference between people moving into a county (in-migrants) and leaving (out-migrants)—increased the average U.S. county population by 2.5%. In-migrants, whether new or returning residents to a county, may bring different expectations about what they want from a community and how they hope to contribute to it. A recent Northwest Missouri survey highlights differences in the perspectives of longtime residents and newcomers. Understanding these differences can help local leaders and organizations shape more effective community development strategies.

Rural Missouri Counties Gain a Higher Share of Newcomers

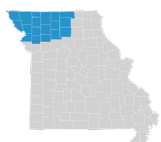
From 2020 to 2025, Missouri’s counties gained an average of 2.1% of their population from net migration. Nonmetro counties experienced a greater share of migration gains (2.8%) compared to metro counties (1.8%). However, some counties saw more residents move out than move in, resulting in net migration losses.

Four Missouri counties gained over 10% of their population from migration, likely drawing residents from nearby counties or urban areas. Lincoln County, in the St. Louis area, was the only metro county in this group. The other three—Hickory, Benton, and Ozark—were nonmetro counties where in-migration was likely driven by retirees.

Percent Population Change from Net Migration, 2020 to 2025



Northwest Missouri Alumni and Resident Survey



In 2020 and 2025, the Community Foundation of Northwest Missouri (NWMO) surveyed current and former residents across its 18-county region to identify factors influencing where people choose to live. Both surveys highlighted the preferences of longtime, first-time, and returning residents. For example, the 2025 NWMO survey again found that area ties and health care access were top location considerations for all respondents. However, first-time and returning residents placed significantly greater importance on broadband access, arts and entertainment, and outdoor recreation than did longtime residents—widening gaps that were more modest in 2020.

Newcomers More Likely to Seek Civic Engagement

Civic engagement strengthens communities by building personal relationships and deepening connections to place. NWMO respondents reported consistently high levels of engagement across activities such as voting, socializing with neighbors, and donating to local organizations.

Relative to people who grew up in the region and never left (stayers), NWMO newcomers (returners and new immigrants) were more likely, by 10 percentage points or more, to engage in activities such as community fundraising and leadership (Chart 1). Newcomers were also more likely to say they would try one of the community engagement activities if asked (70%) compared with stayers (56%).

When asked what efforts they would support in their community, around one-third of all respondents saw value in including a wider range of people and perspectives in local decision-making (Chart 2). Yet stayers were less likely, 11% compared to 19% of newcomers, to want to involve new residents in groups and committees. Consistent in 2020 and 2025, newcomers were more likely to say they champion the efforts of people trying new things.

Newcomers bring fresh ideas and attitudes that can challenge the social norms and identities of established residents. While offering energy, they may inadvertently create conflict. These recent survey insights from NWMO indicate that newcomers could provide resources for community initiatives but may also require intentional efforts and community dialogue to navigate differences.

Understanding the preferences and motivations of new residents is an important step to improving civic engagement. Community surveys are a key tool, as factors can evolve over time; in 2020, NWMO newcomers and stayers reported more similar civic engagement rates and comparable support for community activities.

Additional Notes and Resources

- Learn how the [Maximize NWMO initiative](#) of the Community Foundation of Northwest Missouri has used their survey to inform community development and access the [2025 survey](#) and [2020 survey](#) findings.
- Find your county's [Civic Muscle Index](#) to see engagement measures and access MU Extension resources.

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Chart 1: Civic Engagement Activities in the Past Year

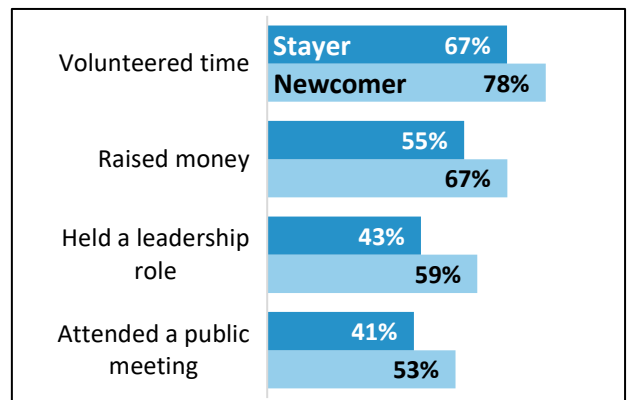
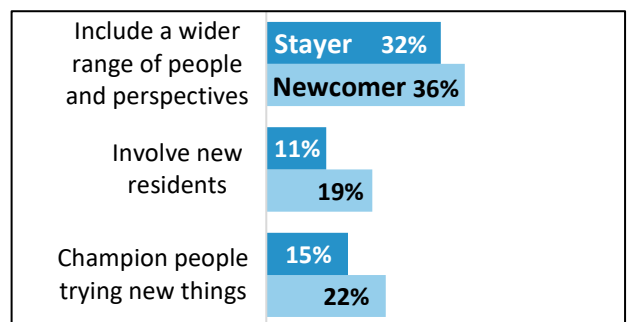


Chart 2: Support for Community Efforts



Sources: 2025 NWMO Survey, Community Foundation of Northwest Missouri and MU Extension graphic.