



Missouri Economy Indicators

Population Trends 2020-23

VOL. 5, ISSUE 9, 15 JUL 2024

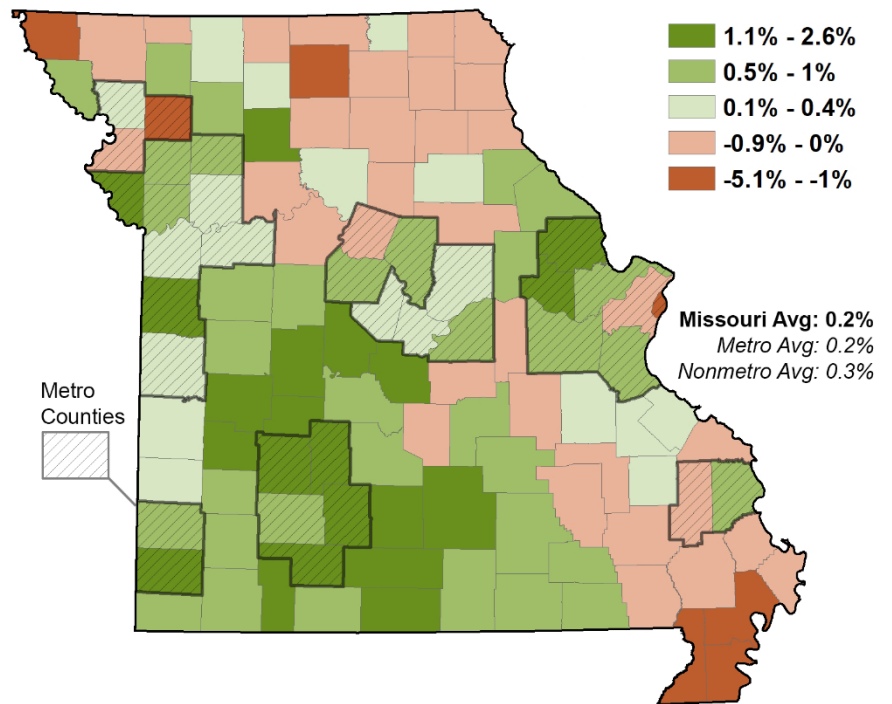
With a 2023 population of nearly 6.2 million, Missouri ranks as the 18th largest state in the nation. From 2020 to 2023, the Show-Me State gained more than 44,600 residents, representing an annual growth rate of 0.2%. Missouri's growth rate is slower than the national average (0.3%), reflecting trends seen in many Midwestern states. Compared to its neighboring states, Missouri's 2020-23 growth rate notably outpaced Illinois (-0.6%) and Kansas (0.0%) but was significantly slower than Tennessee (1.0%) and Oklahoma (0.7%). Within Missouri, population changes were influenced by evolving work trends, along with the geographic and economic characteristics of its counties.

Remote Work Stokes Metro Suburban Growth from 2020-23

With a 0.2% annual growth rate, Missouri's metro counties grew more slowly than nonmetro counties. Metro area growth came largely from suburban counties; Lincoln (2.6%) and Webster (2.1%) counties, on the outskirts of St. Louis and Springfield, respectively, had the highest annual growth rates from 2020 to 2023. The increase in remote work options for many urban workers has influenced this population shift.

Suburban county gains offset static or declining populations in the state's largest counties. Jackson County had virtually no annual growth from 2020 to 2023, while St. Louis City and County populations declined.

Annual Percent Change in County Population, 2020-23



Source: MU Extension graphic using U.S. Census population estimates and compound annual growth rates.

Missouri's metro areas grew at an annual rate of 0.5% during the past decade (2010-20), while nonmetro areas declined annually by 0.4%. However, the past three years have seen a major shift in this trend. Although metro areas still account for the largest number of new residents, mostly due to suburban domestic migration, nonmetro areas have been gaining population at a faster pace since 2020. From 2020 to 2023, metro annual growth rates slowed to 0.2%, while nonmetro areas gained 0.3% annually. Most of the nonmetro growth occurred in Missouri's southwest region, while the Bootheel and northern counties saw population declines over the past three years.

Another way to understand Missouri’s recent population growth is through an economic lens. The U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service classifies counties by six [economic dependencies](#) based on job and income concentration (see map). Most counties are nonspecialized (or diversified), meaning no single sector drives their overall economy.

From 2010 to 2020, only diversified or federal/state government-dependent counties (universities, military, etc.) experienced positive annual population growth. Recreation-dependent counties saw stagnation in growth during this period after robust growth in the prior decade. Counties dependent on agriculture, manufacturing or mining industries saw populations decline.

Since 2020, Missouri counties across all economic dependencies, save mining, have seen aggregate population gains. This is especially true for recreation-dependent counties, where annual population growth exceeds 1%, five times faster than the state average. Increased remote work options and Baby Boomer retirements have made these often seasonal destinations attractive for year-round living. Farm and manufacturing-dependent counties on the outskirts of metro areas also saw population gains from 2020 to 2023, as remote and hybrid work options allow people to live farther from urban centers where living expenses, such as housing, can be more affordable.

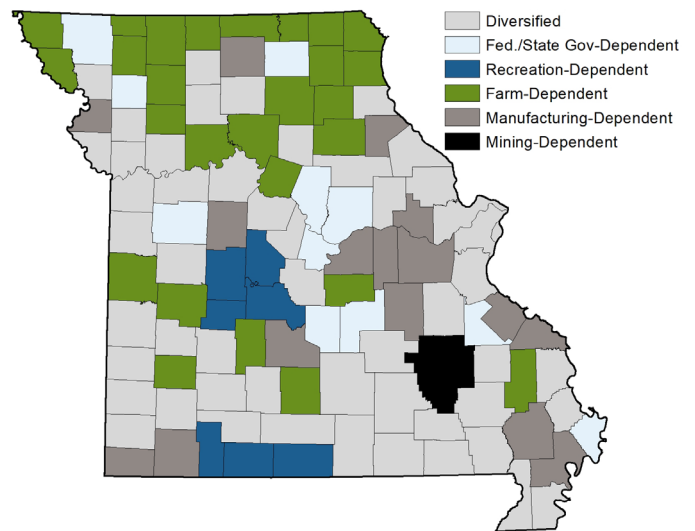
Additional Notes and Resources

- Missouri’s population shifts reflect broader trends in the evolving post-pandemic U.S. economy. A Census article on [exurban community growth](#) provides additional context on this national trend. Analysis of [2022-23 population data](#) by the Brookings Institution shows a rebound in many large city populations, indicating that trends in population migration bear watching as urban and rural communities strive to attract people in the coming years.

All Missouri Economy Indicators briefs in this series are available at <http://muext.us/MissouriEconomyIndicators>

Authors: Alan Spell, Assistant Extension Professor, alan.spell@missouri.edu
 Natalia Filimonova, Visiting Scholar, nfd5c@missouri.edu

Missouri County Economic Types



Annual Percent Change in Population 2010-20 and 2020-23

	2010-20 Annual Area Pop. Chg.	2020-23 Annual Area Pop. Chg.
Missouri	0.3%	0.2%
Metro Counties	0.5%	0.2%
Nonmetro Counties	-0.4%	0.3%
Missouri County Economic Type		
Recreation-Dependent	0.0%	1.1%
Fed./State Gov-Dependent	0.3%	0.3%
Farm-Dependent	-0.5%	0.3%
Manufacturing-Dependent	-0.1%	0.2%
Diversified	0.4%	0.2%
Mining-Dependent	-1.0%	-0.4%

Sources: MU Extension graphic using U.S. Census population estimates and compound annual growth rates. Economic types in the table and map from the USDA Economic Research Service, 2015.