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NEBRASKA 1986 POPULATION ESTIMATES
by Jerome A. Deichert
and Tim K. Himberger

As of July 1, 1986, Nebraska's population was 1,598,000, according to a U.S. Census Bureau provisional estimate. Between 1980 and 1986, the state's population grew by about 28,000 persons. This represents an increase of 1.8 percent since the 1980 census and an increase of 7.6 percent since the 1970 census.

Population change consists of natural increase and net migration. Natural increase is the difference between births and deaths. During the 1980-86 period, births exceeded deaths in Nebraska by 74,000. Net migration (which explains why natural increase and actual increase are not the same) is the difference between people moving into and out of an area. Net migration for the state showed a loss of 46,000 persons between 1980 and 1986 (2.9 percent).

The July 1986 population estimates for Nebraska and its counties were reviewed with special emphasis on changing net migration rates. The data used in this report were obtained from a computer tape file, "1986 Population Estimates by County and Components of Change," prepared by the U. S. Bureau of the Census. It contains provisional population estimates for July 1, 1986, and the corrected 1980 census population figure for each state and county in the United States. In addition, figures are shown for births, deaths, and residual migration during the 1980-86 period.

Table 1 shows the components of Nebraska's population change since 1950. A steady increase in population from 1950 to 1980 masked sizable changes in the underlying components. Both net outmigration and natural increase declined steadily between 1950 and 1980. However, since 1980, net outmigration increased considerably and may match 1960's levels. Also, because births will not make up the difference in population, Nebraska may finish the decade with one of the lowest rates of growth in more than 40 years.

During the 1970s, outmigration rates declined considerably. Many counties recorded gains in population through net immigration—a turnaround from decades of population loss due to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total population (thousands)</th>
<th>Change in population (thousands)</th>
<th>Change in population (percent)</th>
<th>Natural increase (thousands)</th>
<th>Net migration (thousands)</th>
<th>Net migration rate (percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>1,411</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>-117</td>
<td>-8.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>1,485</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>-73</td>
<td>-4.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>1,570</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>-13</td>
<td>-0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>1,598</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>-46</td>
<td>-2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>1,617</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>-75</td>
<td>-4.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 1986 Population Estimates by County and Components of Change and Lynn Nejezchleb, Migration Trends and Patterns in Nebraska, Bureau of Business Research, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, June 1981. Calculations by CAUR.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS
Jerry Deichert is a senior research associate at CAUR and a member of the governor's Economic Forecasting Advisory Board. His interest in economic and demographic issues in Nebraska has resulted in numerous published articles.
Tim K. Himberger is CAUR's database coordinator. Tim's special interests include economic development and economic projections and forecasting.
outmigration. Since 1980, however, the loss of Nebraskans due to outmigration has increased, and, with continued stress on the state’s economy, it is expected to continue.

County Population

Although Nebraska's total population grew steadily from 1960 to 1986, table 2 shows that only 20 counties increased in population between 1980 and 1986. Of the population in 21 counties declining 1 percent or less during the 6-year period, 23 of the remaining counties showed a decline in population that was more than 5 percent. Table 2 and figure 1 show that most of the state's population growth took place in the eastern and southeastern counties. However, some northwestern counties showed an increase. Banner County led the state with a 13.5 percent expansion. The counties with increasing population were generally among the state's largest. Only 6 counties, in the state's population groups.
metropolitan areas or contained a city with a population of 10,000 or more, while 2 contained communities with 2,500 or more residents.

While table 2 shows that Banner County on the western border of the state had the highest rate of growth, Sarpy County continued to be one of fastest growing counties. Other counties that showed substantial growth were Cass, 7.8 percent; Lancaster, 6.8 percent; Box Butte, 6.6 percent; and Buffalo, 5.7 percent. Douglas County had the largest increase in population in 1980-86. Its loss of 2,100 persons accounted for the largest decline in population during the period, with a 17.6 percent decline. While Lincoln County, the state’s smallest, and most were located in the Sandhills Region. Lincoln County had the most dramatic reversal in migration rates. It had the highest immigration rate during the 1970s, as a result of power plant construction and growth in the transportation industry. For an historical perspective of current conditions, tables 1 and 2 also present projected net migration rates for the decade 1980-90, based on an extrapolation of 1980-86 rates. If this 6-year outmigration rate continues throughout the decade, the total outmigration rate for the state will be 4.8 percent during the 1980s.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the conditions of the early 1980s will continue indefinitely, just as it was a mistake to assume that the growth conditions of the 1970s would continue. Regardless, it is clear that there has been a reversal in population and migration trends, the duration and extent of which is problematic.

Compared with previous decades, the 1970s marked the period of lowest outmigration (table 1). The increase in net outmigration during the 1980s brings the population rate back to the levels of the 1960s. As table 1 shows, although net migration rates are similar, the rate of population growth in the 1980s will be less than in the 1960s.

Although the main reason for the difference in population is fewer births, the two decades are different in other ways. The age composition of the population has changed, with more older persons and fewer young persons in the 1980s. As a result, the composition of the outmigrants may have changed, because counties are now losing families and young, single adults. Moreover, after decades of outmigration, some communities cannot support continued outmigration without losing their economic viability.

Table 2 presents a more detailed look at the transition from 1960 to 1986. The 1980 net migration rates are compared with 1970 and 1960. A "+" indicates improvement (improvement is defined as an increase in net immigration, a reversal from outmigration to immigration, or a decrease in net outmigration). By comparing the projected net migration rates during the 1980s to the actual rates of the 1970s, we see that 22 counties showed improvement. During the 1960s, 59 counties (more than 60 percent) improved. Figure 3 shows the counties where improvement occurred. The counties that improved between 1970 and 1980 also improved between 1960 and 1970, except for Douglas and Grant Counties.
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