

profiles of rural residents of Oklahoma and Arkansas

Population and Age

Rural areas are home to more than one-fifth (22.4%) of the population in Oklahoma and more than one-third (35.1%) of the population in Arkansas. Almost three hundred thousand (281,448) children reside in rural Oklahoma and Arkansas. A disproportionately high percentage of the population in the rural counties in both states is older. One young person commented, *"... you've got the kids who are graduating and moving out to college, but nobody's coming back. And all you're left with is the older crowd that's been there all their lives."*

Workers generate income and pay taxes which support a community's infrastructure. Successful economies require a balance between people who work and their dependents. One measure of this balance is the "dependency ratio," a count of how many non-working people (counted as those under age fifteen, and those sixty-five years and over) there are for every 100 working-age people (fifteen to sixty-five years of age). Evaluated in this fashion, there are fewer workers to support the dependents in Oklahoma and Arkansas rural communities than are in other areas of those states.

During the last decade (1990 to 2000) the population in Oklahoma (up 9.7%) grew

more slowly than the nation as a whole (up 13.2%), while the population in Arkansas (up 13.7%) increased at about the same rate. Rural areas in both states saw significantly less growth than their non-rural counterparts. *"Rural America is changing. It is getting tougher. Everything is drying up."* More than one-third (35.6%) of the rural counties in Oklahoma and Arkansas lost population during the last decade (1990 to 2000). Four times fewer (7.8%) non-rural counties experienced a decline in population during the same period. The worst impacted rural counties in Oklahoma were Roger Mills (down 17.1%), Dewey (down 14.6%), Harmon (down 13.4%), Harper (down 12.3%) and Tillman (down 10.6%). Rural counties losing the most population in Arkansas were Lafayette (down 11.2%) and Chicot (down 10.2%). Since *Census 2000*, rural Oklahoma and Arkansas counties have continued to lose population.

Some stay only because they can't afford to leave. One impoverished mother explained, *"The only reason why I am still here is ... [you] have to have money to move."* Many young people in rural Oklahoma and Arkansas plan their lives around leaving. *"I'm planning on getting out, and getting a fairly decent job, like probably, I don't know, in the city or something."* Whole communities are being abandoned by both people and businesses.



“People are moving away more now and many houses are for sale.” “Downtown storefronts are empty.” Policy-makers worry about the long term implications. “What we are doing now is not working. Rural counties in Oklahoma are losing population. Oklahoma has lost seats — congressional seats.” “... rural communities are worth saving. They are the backbone of the nation — a lifestyle ... that we [can’t] afford to lose.”

Rural communities are relatively stable, with residents moving into different homes in the same town about half as often as do non-rural residents.

People relocating into rural Oklahoma and Arkansas communities are less likely than their non-rural counterparts to move from another country or state and more likely to move from somewhere else within the same state. Moves from town to town within rural counties occur more frequently than do moves from town to town within non-rural counties.



	Population, 1990-2000 # change	Child Population (0-18)	Senior Population (65+)	Dependency Ratio (# of dependents per 100 workers)
Oklahoma	3,450,654 100.0% up 9.7%	890,264 100.0%	455,700 100.0%	52.6
Rural counties	774,378 22.4% up 6.2%	197,078 22.1%	125,429 27.5%	58.5
Non-rural counties	2,676,276 77.6% up 10.8%	693,186 77.9%	330,271 72.5%	50.9
Arkansas	2,673,400 100.0% up 13.7%	680,058 100.0%	374,729 100.0%	53.9
Rural counties	937,707 35.1% up 7.9%	233,153 34.3%	156,019 41.6%	58.7
Non-rural counties	1,735,693 64.9% up 17.1%	446,906 65.7%	218,710 58.4%	51.1



WITHIN FIVE YEAR PERIOD (1995-2000)	Did not move at all	Moved within same town/city in the same county	Moved from a different town/city in the same county	Moved into county from another county in the same state	Moved into county from another state	Moved into county from another country
Oklahoma	51.3%	15.2%	10.4%	11.4%	10.0%	1.7%
Rural counties	56.3%	8.7%	12.8%	12.6%	8.7%	0.9%
Non-rural counties	49.9%	17.1%	9.7%	11.0%	10.4%	1.9%

Arkansas	53.3%	11.8%	13.0%	10.4%	10.1%	1.4%
Rural counties	57.9%	8.5%	13.9%	10.0%	8.6%	1.0%
Non-rural counties	50.7%	13.6%	12.6%	10.7%	10.9%	1.5%

Race and Nationality

Whites comprise the majority of residents in both Oklahoma and Arkansas. Making up more than fifteen percent (15.6%) of Arkansas's population, African Americans are that state's largest minority racial population. In Oklahoma, American Indians (7.7%) only slightly edge out African Americans (7.5%) as the largest minority racial population.

There is little difference in the racial make-up of rural and non-rural portions of Arkansas. However, in Oklahoma a substantially different minority racial population is found in rural areas. While Whites make up about the same proportion of the population everywhere in Oklahoma, relatively few African Americans live in the state's rural areas. A disproportionately large rate of Oklahoma's American Indian population lives in the state's rural communities. The small

Asian/Hawaiian population in both Oklahoma and Arkansas resides primarily in non-rural communities.

Hispanics are counted as a nationality, rather than a race. A person classified as Hispanic may be White, African American, American Indian or any race. Experts and community members alike suggest that Hispanics are substantially undercounted. Data from schools supports the notion that a greater proportion of rural communities may be Hispanic than are counted so by the recent federal Census. Figures available at this time indicate that the Hispanic population resides all over both Oklahoma and Arkansas, with a slightly higher proportion living in non-rural communities.



	White	African American	American Indian	Asian and Hawaiian	Other single race	Two or more races	HISPANIC ORIGIN
Oklahoma	2,624,679 76.1%	258,532 7.5%	266,801 7.7%	47,386 1.4%	84,830 2.5%	168,426 4.9%	177,768 5.2%
Rural counties	587,023 75.8%	21,369 2.8%	106,032 13.7%	2,466 0.3%	17,585 2.3%	39,903 5.2%	34,925 4.5%
Non-rural counties	2,037,656 76.1%	237,163 8.9%	160,769 6.0%	44,920 1.7%	67,245 2.5%	128,523 4.8%	142,843 5.3%

Arkansas	2,137,166 79.9%	417,881 15.6%	18,492 0.7%	20,615 0.8%	41,164 1.5%	38,082 1.4%	85,576 3.2%
Rural counties	759,168 81.0%	146,821 15.7%	4,834 0.5%	2,729 0.3%	12,871 1.4%	11,284 1.2%	26,310 2.8%
Non-rural counties	1,377,998 79.4%	271,060 15.6%	13,658 0.8%	17,886 1.1%	28,293 1.6%	26,798 1.5%	59,266 3.4%

Disability in Rural Counties

Almost sixty-five thousand (64,915 in 2000) Oklahoma and Arkansas children ages five through fifteen are known to have a disability; some are multiple or severe. Almost eighteen thousand (17,800 in 2000) live in rural areas where accommodations and supports are at a premium. The rate of people with disabilities is about the same for rural and non-rural areas for younger people. For adults and seniors, the prevalence of disabilities increases in rural counties.

Having a disability has a profound impact on a person, their family and their community. The common reality is that a person with a disability may not be able to participate in school or work regularly, may require additional health care services and special transportation, and may be isolated from the rest of their community.

POPULATION WITH DISABILITY	Age 5-15	Age 16-20	Age 21-64	Age 65+
Oklahoma	35,033 6.4%	35,120 13.4%	405,333 21.5%	200,612 46.7%
Rural counties	7,438 6.1%	7,481 12.8%	98,060 24.3%	58,373 49.7%
Non-rural counties	27,595 6.5%	27,638 13.6%	307,273 20.7%	142,239 45.6%

Arkansas	29,882 7.1%	27,851 14.4%	345,338 23.4%	173,400 48.9%
Rural counties	10,362 7.1%	9,491 14.5%	130,746 26.1%	75,367 51.1%
Non-rural counties	19,520 7.1%	18,360 14.4%	214,592 22.1%	98,033 47.4%



Rural Families

There are about eighty-five hundred (8,367 in 2002) out-of-wedlock births in rural Oklahoma and Arkansas each year, representing a slightly higher percentage than occur in non-rural areas. Both Oklahoma and Arkansas experienced the well documented and much discussed decline in the proportion of their families in which children live with two parents. That trend, however, was not significantly better or worse in either state's rural areas. Almost half a million families (475,995) live in Oklahoma or Arkansas rural areas. While more than sixty-five thousand (65,662) rural Oklahoma or Arkansas families are headed by a single man or a single woman, rural families remain less likely to be headed by a single parent than are families in non-rural areas.

With almost eighty divorces for every one hundred marriages, Oklahoma has one of the highest divorce rates in the

nation. However, divorces are less common in rural Oklahoma than in other parts of the state. Arkansas, with a lower state divorce rate than Oklahoma, has higher divorce rates in its rural areas. The result is a rural divorce rate in Oklahoma and in Arkansas that is virtually equal.

Oklahoma or Arkansas grandparents are raising their own grandchild in almost twenty-five thousand (24,228 in 2000) rural households. Following the national trend, an increasing number of rural grandparents find themselves responsible for supporting and raising their own grandchildren because of teen-pregnancy, out-of-wedlock birth, substance abuse, death, disability, mental illness, imprisonment or poverty among the birth parents. Rural counties in these two states found grandparents as their grandchild's primary caretaker more often than in non-rural counties.

Rural Poverty

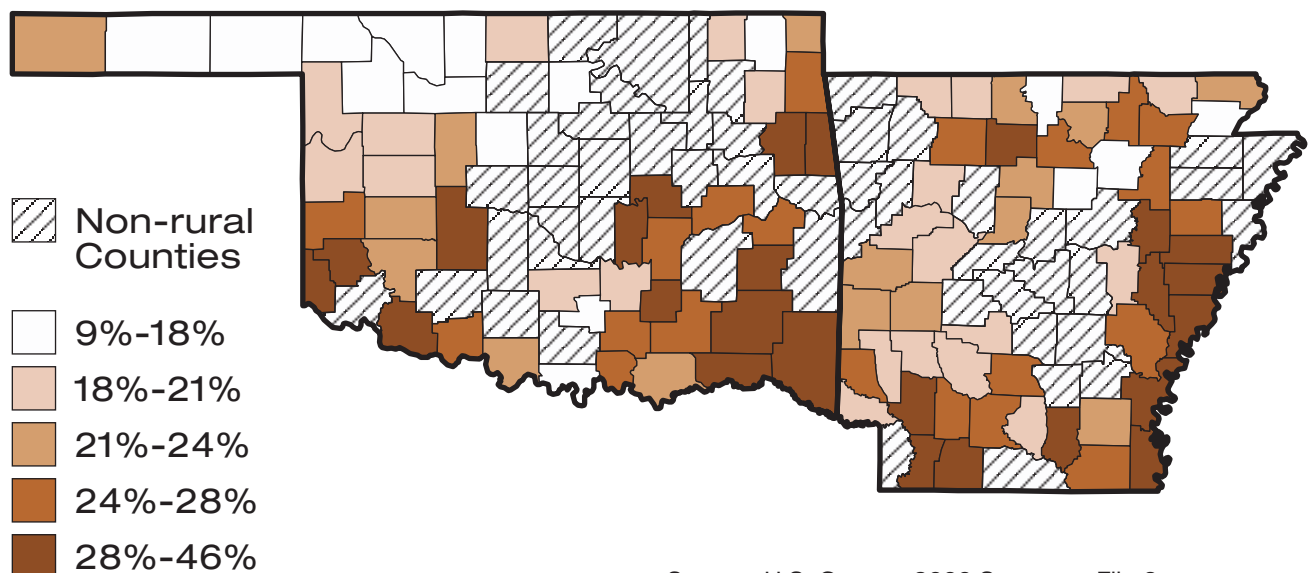
People living in Oklahoma and Arkansas rural communities are disproportionately poor. Over three hundred thousand (303,252) rural Oklahoma and Arkansas residents live on incomes that fall below the poverty line (under about \$15,000 per year for a family of three in 2003). Nearly forty percent (39.5%) of those live in extreme poverty — on incomes not even reaching half of the poverty line (under about \$7,500 per year for a family of three in 2003).

More hover just above the poverty line, struggling to make ends meet without ever having enough to become economically self-sufficient. The worst poverty rates for both states are found in the rural counties. Of the ten poorest counties in Oklahoma, all are rural. In Arkansas, nine of the ten poorest are rural. One in four rural children lives in poverty. Nearly half of all rural single parent families with children are poor. Except for Asian Americans, poverty is worse in rural counties for every race and nationality.



	Out-Of-Wedlock Births (all ages)	Two parent Families with Children; Rate change, 1990-2000	Single Parent Families with Children	Divorces and Annulments	Grandparents Responsible for Raising Own Grandchildren
Oklahoma	18,334 36.4% of all births	322,136 34.7% down 3.8%	137,884 14.9%	20,448 79.8 per 100 marriages	39,279 58.5% of all grandparents living with own grandchild
Rural counties	3,898 38.2% of all births	71,085 33.5% down 3.5%	28,062 13.2%	4,549 69.0 per 100 marriages	11,017 65.1 % of all grandparents living with own grandchild
Non-rural counties	14,436 36.0% of all births	251,051 35.1% down 3.9%	109,822 15.3%	15,899 83.1 per 100 marriages	28,262 56.2% of all grandparents living with own grandchild
Arkansas	13,898 37.1% of all births	244,062 31.3% down 4.0%	110,889 15.1%	17,101 62.1 per 100 marriages	33,618 58.1% of all grandparents living with own grandchild
Rural counties	4,469 38.6% of all births	82,707 31.3% down 4.3%	37,600 14.2%	6,419 69.2 per 100 marriages	13,211 60.8% of all grandparents living with own grandchild
Non-rural counties	9,429 36.5% of all births	161,355 34.2% down 3.9%	73,289 15.5%	10,682 58.5 per 100 marriages	20,407 56.4% of all grandparents living with own grandchild

Child Poverty



Source: U.S. Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF3), Table P87

	General Poverty		Poverty by Age			Poverty by Selected Races and Nationalities				Poverty by Selected Family Type	
	Poor (<100% of poverty line)	Extreme Poverty (<50% of poverty line)	Youth (0-17)	Working Age (18-64)	Seniors (65+)	White	African American	American Indian	Hispanic	Married Couple with Child(ren)	Single Parent with Child(ren)
Oklahoma	491,235 14.7%	204,486 6.1%	171,929 19.6%	271,566 13.4%	47,740 11.1%	301,266 11.8%	70,219 29.4%	57,182 22.0%	45,279 26.3%	29,731 8.7%	49,276 35.7%
Rural counties	136,026 18.3%	52,623 7.1%	46,873 24.2%	72,673 16.8%	16,480 14.0%	89,395 15.8%	6,242 37.9%	26,205 25.4%	9,801 29.0%	9,659 12.7%	11,793 42.0%
Non-rural counties	355,209 13.7%	151,863 5.9%	125,056 18.3%	198,893 12.5%	31,260 10.0%	211,871 10.7%	63,977 28.8%	30,977 19.8%	35,478 25.6%	20,072 7.6%	37,183 34.1%
Arkansas	411,777 15.8%	170,728 6.6%	146,321 21.8%	216,360 13.7%	49,096 13.8%	251,303 12.1%	134,124 33.6%	3,844 21.2%	22,849 27.6%	23,410 9.0%	43,565 39.3%
Rural counties	167,226 18.3%	67,093 7.4%	57,947 25.2%	84,877 15.8%	24,402 16.5%	105,532 14.2%	53,543 38.1%	1,133 23.8%	7,461 30.3%	10,000 11.3%	16,707 44.4%
Non-rural counties	244,551 14.5%	103,635 6.1%	88,374 20.1%	131,483 12.6%	24,694 11.9%	145,771 10.8%	80,581 31.1%	2,731 20.3%	15,388 26.5%	13,410 7.9%	26,858 36.6%

Statistical Sketch of Rural Oklahoma and Arkansas

Quantitative data for rural Oklahoma and Arkansas show that rural communities are experiencing a much slower rate of population growth than non-rural areas, and in some instances a decline. Rural communities have a disproportionate number of older residents and a slightly higher prevalence of disabilities among their adults and seniors. Teen birth rates are high in rural counties in both states, far exceeding the national rates. Rural families,

however, are less likely to be headed by a single parent than are families in non-rural areas. Rural communities in these two states also found grandparents as their grandchild's primary caretaker more often. Poverty was the most consistent and revealing element of rural communities where all age groups and family types experienced higher rates of poverty than in non-rural areas.

