

Test Bank

Demographic Trends in Rural America (Johnson)

Instructor version: correct options are bold and followed by a rationale and a difficulty tag. Delete the “Answer” lines to produce a student-facing version. Items map to the chapter’s learning objectives (see the Instructor Teaching Guide).

Part I — Multiple Choice (10 items)

1. The chapter’s central argument is that:

- a) Rural America is demographically uniform
- b) There is “not one rural America” — places and trajectories vary enormously**
- c) Rural areas are all growing
- d) Rural and urban trends are unrelated

Answer: b) Johnson stresses the diversity of rural places and demographic trajectories throughout. **[Concept]**

2. “Natural change” in a population refers to:

- a) Migration in and out
- b) The balance of births and deaths**
- c) Changes in county boundaries
- d) Seasonal population shifts

Answer: b) Natural change is births minus deaths; net migration is the separate in-minus-out balance. **[Recall]**

3. For the first time in recorded history, the nonmetro population:

- a) Doubled
- b) Declined in absolute terms between 2010 and 2020**
- c) Grew faster than metro areas
- d) Stopped migrating

Answer: b) Nonmetro America lost about 290,000 people (–0.6%) from 2010 to 2020 — the first decade-long decline. **[Recall]**

4. Between 2010 and 2020, the nonmetro population loss occurred because:

- a) Natural increase turned strongly negative alone
- b) Net outmigration (–1.1%) exceeded a minimal natural increase (+0.5%)**
- c) Immigration surged
- d) Counties were reclassified

Answer: b) The migration loss outweighed the small natural gain, producing an overall decline. **[Analysis]**

5. The rural continuum in the chapter is based on:

- a) Income and race

- b) Metro adjacency and whether a county has a town of 10,000–50,000 (micropolitan)**
- c) Latitude and climate
- d) Party voting patterns

Answer: b) Counties are grouped by adjacency to metro areas and micropolitan status. **[Concept]**

6. Which county type was traditionally a demographic “bright spot” but lost population in the 2010s?

- a) Recreation
- b) Retirement
- c) Manufacturing**
- d) Amenity

Answer: c) Manufacturing counties, once growing, lost population as migration losses met collapsing natural increase. **[Understand]**

7. From 2020 to 2024, what share of nonmetro counties had more deaths than births?

- a) 12 percent
- b) 54 percent
- c) 82 percent**
- d) 25 percent

Answer: c) 82% experienced natural decrease — up from 54% in 2019 and the highest share ever recorded. **[Recall]**

8. Despite record natural decrease, the nonmetro population grew after 2020 because:

- a) Birth rates rebounded
- b) Nearly a million net in-migrants offset the excess of deaths over births**
- c) Deaths were undercounted
- d) Counties merged

Answer: b) An influx of in-migrants produced a net gain of about 407,000 despite deaths far exceeding births. **[Analysis]**

9. Most of the post-2020 nonmetro population gain accrued to:

- a) Farm counties
- b) Manufacturing counties
- c) Recreation and retirement (amenity) counties**
- d) Counties losing residents

Answer: c) Recreation and retirement counties gained about 376,000; the rest of rural America gained just 39,000. **[Recall]**

10. The “downward demographic spiral” of depopulation involves:

- a) Rising births and falling deaths
- b) Young-adult out-migration, aging, and rising mortality reinforcing one another**
- c) Rapid in-migration

d) Boundary changes

Answer: b) These self-reinforcing dynamics drain demographic resilience and deter development; ~35% of nonmetro counties have depopulated. **[Concept]**

Part II — Short Answer (5 items)

Suggested length: 3–6 sentences each. Model answers follow in green.

1. Explain the difference between natural change and net migration, and why the chapter calls them the two “engines” of population change.

Model answer: Natural change is the balance of births and deaths — natural increase when births exceed deaths, natural decrease when deaths exceed births. Net migration is the balance of people moving in versus out, including both domestic moves and immigration. They are the two engines because every population change decomposes into these two forces, and they can move in the same or opposite directions. The chapter’s central story is how each engine behaved through the Great Recession and the pandemic, and how they combined differently across rural places.

2. Why did nonmetro America lose population between 2010 and 2020, and why was this historically significant?

Model answer: Over the decade, nonmetro net outmigration (–1.1%) exceeded a minimal natural increase (+0.5%), producing an overall decline of about 290,000 (–0.6%); two-thirds of nonmetro counties lost population. It was significant because it was the first absolute decade-long decline in the nonmetro population in recorded history, following gains of 8.3% and 3.4% in the two prior decades. It also marked the point where, for the first time, deaths began to exceed births across nonmetro America as fertility fell and deaths rose.

3. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect rural natural change, and why were rural areas hit especially hard?

Model answer: The pandemic drove a sharp rise in deaths — nonmetro deaths rose 22% to about 620,000 a year — while births fell 4% to 487,000, the fewest in over 50 years. Deaths exceeded births by more than half a million over four years (versus 18,000 before the pandemic), and 82% of nonmetro counties experienced natural decrease, the highest share ever. Rural areas were hit especially hard because their populations were older, had more pre-existing conditions, lower vaccination rates, and often limited access to health care.

4. Explain the post-2020 “migration surprise” and where the resulting growth was concentrated.

Model answer: Despite record natural decrease, the nonmetro population grew by about 407,000 from 2020 to 2024 because nearly a million net in-migrants arrived — the share of counties gaining from migration rose from 28% (2010–15) to 41% (2015–20) to 65% (2020–24), and the nonmetro migration rate even matched the metro rate. The growth was highly concentrated: recreation and retirement counties captured about 376,000 of the net gain (drawing remote workers, early retirees, and second-home owners, and losing fewer residents), while the rest of rural America gained just 39,000.

5. What is a “downward demographic spiral,” and why does the chapter treat depopulation as a serious concern?

Model answer: A downward demographic spiral is the self-reinforcing dynamic of depopulation: chronic young-adult out-migration removes the population most likely to have children, which accelerates aging, which raises mortality and lowers births, which deepens natural decrease and further discourages people from staying or moving in. About 35% of nonmetro counties have already experienced depopulation. It is a concern because the spiral is hard to escape, drains a community's demographic resilience, and inhibits future economic development.

Part III — Essay (3 items)

Suggested length: 500–900 words. Each prompt lists the elements of a strong response — usable as a quick rubric.

1. “There is not one rural America.” Using the continuum and the four county types, build an evidence-based argument that rural demographic change is highly uneven.

A strong response:

- States the diversity thesis clearly.
- Uses the continuum (adjacency, micropolitan status) with specifics.
- Contrasts county types (farm/manufacturing vs recreation/retirement).
- Cites concrete figures (e.g., 376,000 vs 39,000 post-2020).
- Reaches a defensible conclusion about unevenness.

2. Analyze how the Great Recession and COVID-19 each reshaped rural population change, and how their effects differed.

A strong response:

- Explains recession effects (migration to record low; births fell).
- Explains pandemic effects (death surge; natural decrease; migration surprise).
- Uses the two engines to organize the comparison.
- Notes what recovered (migration) and what didn’t (births).
- Draws a reasoned conclusion about the two shocks.

3. Rural America’s demographic future ‘hinges on migration.’ Evaluate that claim and its policy implications for growing and shrinking counties.

A strong response:

- Explains why natural increase is likely spent.
- Assesses the migration surge and its uncertainty.
- Addresses the depopulation spiral and its risks.
- Distinguishes policy needs for growing vs declining counties.
- Reaches a defensible position on the claim.