

Decline was not limited to the central cities; the region’s older suburbs also struggled with population losses as growth moved to the next ring of communities. The slow population trends on display in the city cores increasingly also extend to the next ring out. Inner-ring municipalities like Raytown and Grandview also suffered population declines as the region’s sphere of growth skipped to the next ring. In fact, many older suburbs would have lost more sizable blocks of their population had it not been for the strong growth of nonwhite residents—particularly Hispanics and blacks—in their communities. Independence, MO, for example, lost 4,693 white residents but gained 1,962 Hispanic residents, 1,275 blacks, and 783 Asian/Pacific Islanders. Along a near-ring of 15 selected inner suburbs, for that matter, the white population in places like Gladstone and North Kansas City, MO as well as Merriam and Fairway, KS, declined by 20,000. However, the loss was nearly offset by the arrival of 8,400 blacks, 4,200 Hispanics, and nearly 1,000 Asians.

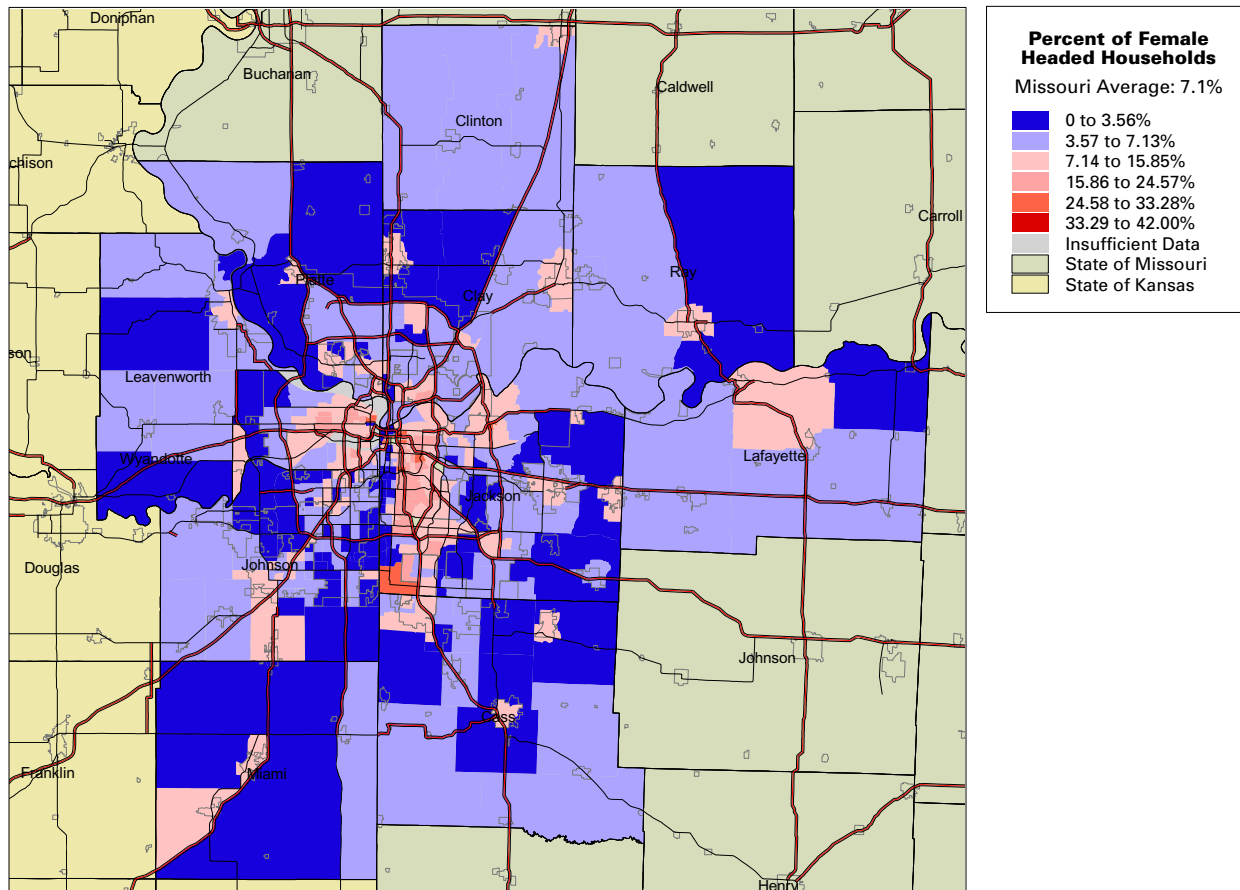
In general, as the Kansas City region decentralized, most of the area’s nonwhite residents became even more concentrated in the core as whites moved out. Overall, 87 percent of the region’s African Americans lived in the two “urban” counties: Jackson and Wyandotte. Both Jackson and Wyandotte counties also saw more whites leave in the 1990s than in the 1980s.⁴¹ Overall, Jackson lost 9,600 whites in the 1980s and 27,000 whites in the 1990s as its 2000 nonwhite percentage edged up from 25.8 to 32.2 percent. Wyandotte, meanwhile, lost 16,613 whites in the 1980s and 22,000 in the 1990s as its percent nonwhite population increased from 35.9 to 49.3 percent. And mostly the exodus affected the central cities. In Kansas City, MO, the city south of the Missouri River and within the I-435 loop lost one-quarter of its white population as the Jackson County exodus tripled over the 1980s. By 2000, the city was 31 percent black. In Kansas City, KS, the flight occurred in all 58 census tracts between the state line and North 90th Street, except one. Half of those tracts lost more than 30 percent of their whites. The city was 29.8 percent African American in 2000.

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Not surprisingly, these changes paralleled an increasing concentration of poor people and low-income workers at the heart of the region. By 2000, Jackson and Wyandotte, the urban counties, registered 11.9 and 16.5 percent poverty rates, respectively, as Kansas City, KS and Kansas City, MO logged rates of 17.1 and 14.3 percent. By contrast, poverty in the prospering suburbs of Johnson, Platte, and Clay counties ranged from 3.4 to 4.8 to 5.5 percent, respectively. Farther-out counties such as Miami, Leavenworth, and Lafayette also exhibited low poverty rates, ranging from 5.5 to 6.7 to 8.8 percent. Female-headed households, frequently earning low-wages, were similarly concentrated. Almost half (24,181) of the metro area's 51,000 female heads-of-household with own children lived in the two

center cities in 2000. Finally, the region's working poor are similarly found in the urban core. The highest percentage of low-wage taxpayers who claimed the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) lived in eastern Wyandotte County and central Kansas City, MO, where one-third to almost half of all tax filers qualified for the tax credit in 2000.⁴² By contrast, the proportion of residents receiving the credit in the outer suburban areas of Johnson and Platte counties ranged from negligible to just 8 percent. Overall, nearly 40 percent of the metropolitan area's EITC recipients were located in the Kansas City, MO where nearly 20 percent of taxpayers filed for the EITC.

Female-headed households were strongly concentrated in the region's core in 2000



Source: U.S. Census Bureau tract data, 2000

WHAT THIS MEANS:

While the Kansas City region grew solidly in the last decade, that growth predominantly took place near the edges of the economy while older communities in the core struggled to keep up or remain stable. Clearly, growth revitalized many districts of the region in the 1990s. Farther and farther out, an unprecedented economic boom brought wave after wave of middle-class population growth. During the decade, vast new subdivisions and job creation continued a trend of suburban expansion that has seen the region's urbanized area grow 6-fold between 1940 and 1990 to accommodate a mere doubling of population.⁴³ Now, growth is pushing farther out in every direction—into the northland of Clay and Platte counties, east into Blue Valley, southeast beyond Lee's Summit and Cass County, southwest into Kansas and beyond Overland Park and Olathe into Miami County, west into Leavenworth. Meanwhile, the core continues to sag. Job growth ebbed there as employment moved to the suburbs. Poor persons and communities of color remained stuck as the metropolis grew to the south, and east, and north. Schools struggled and social distress accumulated as urban neighborhoods suffered from too little growth. In short, metro Kansas City continues to grow in spatially divided ways, with wealth and opportunity accumulating in its many rings of suburbs while slow growth, minority residents, and lower-income households accumulate in the center.

Such decentralization puts enormous pressure on the infrastructure, natural resources, and finances of the region. In the suburban growth ring, communities that were essentially rural in 1970 now find they must make rapid investments. In the growing suburbs, governments must raise taxes to expand sewer and water lines, offset lost open space with new parks, and provide a wider range of services, even as fringe school districts rush to build new schools and

individuals complain of new traffic. Communities like Lee's Summit and Blue Springs prospered in the 1990s but also struggled to build new schools, install infrastructure, and provide adequate services for growth that sometimes felt like too much growth. Closer in, the vast growth on the periphery weakens the urban core and older suburbs as middle-class families, jobs, and opportunity decamp for places farther out. Finally, across the region as a whole, the metropolis' radical degree of decentralization continues to lengthen commutes, reduce the region's focus, and spawn new local governments that add to fragmentation. Ultimately, population dispersal is scattering the region's traditional sense of community and compromising the region's natural integrity.

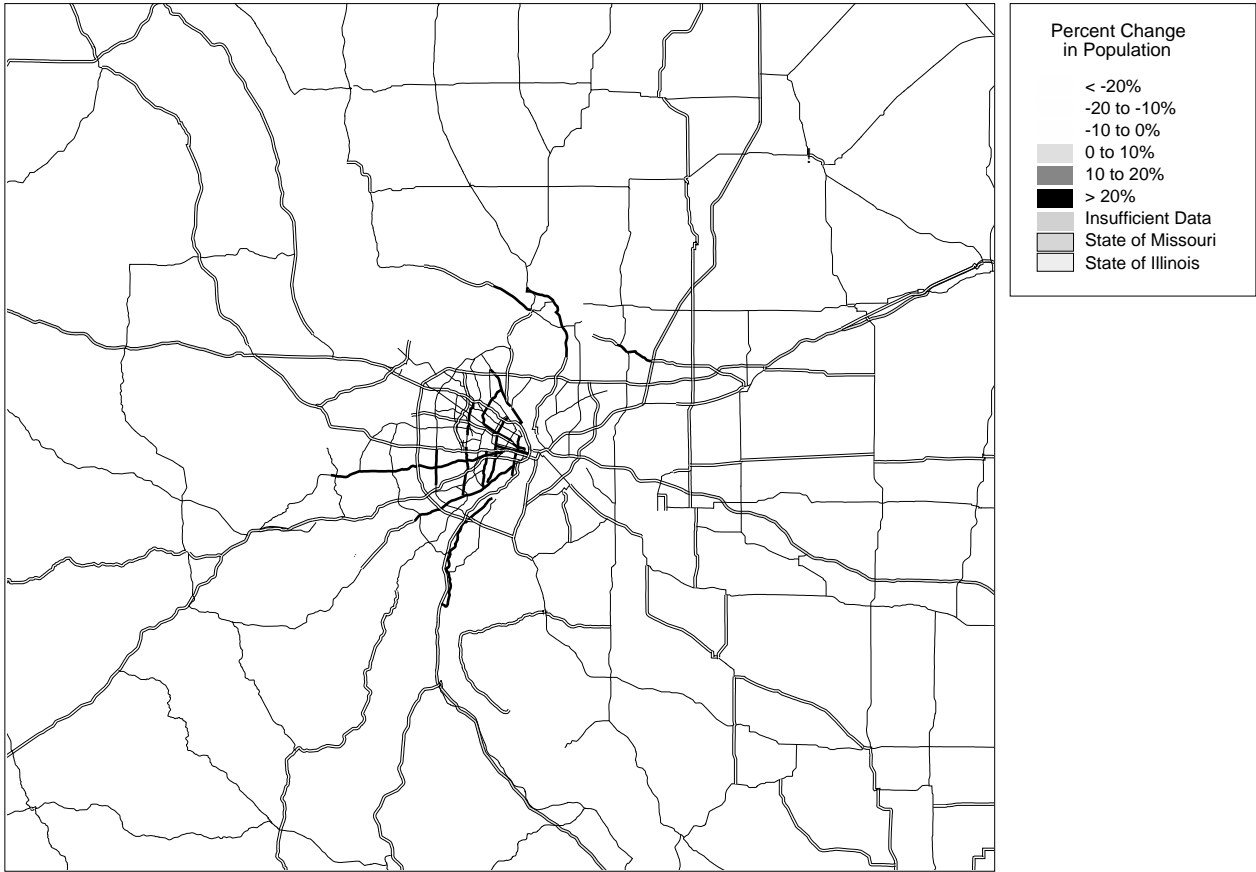
Ultimately, these disparate trends—excessive decentralization far out and decline close in—do not contradict each other but rather connect to and exacerbate each other. The Kansas City region shows, in this respect, how spatially defined social, economic, and racial disparities lie at the root of Missouri's decentralization and exacerbate it. In Kansas City, initial concentrations of poverty, minority residents, and weak schools triggered decentralization decades ago. Over time, the steady exodus of white and middle-class residents intensified the job-loss and distress of the core to the point that decentralization is actually now accelerating. In the 1990s, even more white and middle-class citizens fled the central cities as did in the 1980s, while at the same time, the increasing price of desirable close-in homes drove middle-class residents farther and farther outwards in their search for affordable housing and good schools.⁴⁴ And so metropolitan Kansas City epitomizes how the uneven growth that results from concentrated poverty and clustered minority populations can propel growth outward, creating a reinforcing cycle of growth and disinvestment that is hard to break.

Metropolitan St. Louis grew modestly in the 1990s, but the central city continued to lose ground as the suburbs and fringe gained.

The very slow earlier pace of population growth in the St. Louis area picked up in the 1990s. Overall, the two-state region added 111,000 new residents during the 1990s to grow by a modest 4.5 percent. That growth improved upon the weak 3.2 percent growth rate scored during the 1980s, and allowed the region to reach a total population of 2.6 million in 2000. The region now stands as the 18th largest metro in the U.S. Only the City of St. Louis and St. Clair County, IL, continued to lose population.

Along with modest population growth came solid job growth in the 1990s, though that has tailed off in the last two years. The region added 185,000 new full- and part-time jobs for a job-base expansion of 12.8 percent in the 1990s. This resurgence—which produced jobs substantially faster than the rate of population growth—was all the more impressive given that most of it occurred in the second half of the decade. Unfortunately, the region has subsequently felt the national economic slowdown hit home, as unemployment nearly doubled from 3.4 percent in January 2000 to 6.2 percent in July 2002.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau



Source: Brookings analysis of U.S. Census Bureau tract data, 1990 and 2000