**What’s behind Greater Minnesota’s economic recovery?**

<p>In the world of economics, things aren&rsquo;t always so cut-and-dried, like when data suggests some regions of the state &ndash; particularly those westward &ndash; saw income and job growth at faster rates than the metro area since the recession.</p>

<p>The Twin Cities metro area is Minnesota&rsquo;s economic engine, providing most of the state&rsquo;s tax revenue, while Greater Minnesota has tended to lag behind, an example of the urban and rural divide that played a pronounced political role in the 2016 election.</p>

<p>But a Star Tribune analysis shows personal income &ndash; in this case, the amount of money individuals make per capita &ndash; increased an average of 16 percent in outstate Minnesota since the Great Recession&rsquo;s end in 2009, ahead of the metro&rsquo;s rate of 12 percent.</p>

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<div class="embed"><iframe class="dataframe1" src="http://datadrop-dev.startribune.com/20170712-mnrecovery/builds/production/?chart=gaps" border="0" frameborder="0" scrolling="no" width="100%" height="460"></iframe></div>

<p>When mapping this out county-by-county, we can see places like Swift County showing a 30 percent jump in per capita personal income, while Kittson, Stevens and Red Lake saw growth of 20 percent or more.</p>

<p>In the metro, per capita income in Ramsey County grew more slowly with an 8 percent increase over the time period, while Hennepin rested at about the state average.</p>

<p>&ldquo;The impact of the recession was different in different parts of the state,&rdquo; said Allison Liuzzi, director of Minnesota Compass, adding that tough times have necessitated economic changes in some places.</p>

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<div class="embed"><iframe class="dataframe2" src="http://datadrop-dev.startribune.com/20170712-mnrecovery/builds/production/?chart=personal" border="0" frameborder="0" scrolling="no" width="100%" height="550"></iframe></div>

<p>Checking median household income over time reveals similar trends, with 47 outstate counties showing growth at or above the statewide percent change since 2009 of 3 percent.</p>

<p>Pushing the analysis up from counties to regions shows an even clearer picture, with the Twin Cities resting just below the state average and nearly every outstate region either matching or surpassing it, with the exception of Southern Minnesota.&nbsp;</p>

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<p>Income growth was particularly strong in western Minnesota since 2009, likely connected to what&rsquo;s going on in North Dakota. Fargo in particular has seen population and economic growth in recent years, Liuzzi said, which may have partially affected how some Minnesota counties adjusted to the recession.</p>

<p>And since income is a metric closely tied to other economic indicators, it&rsquo;s not surprising that unemployment rates often dropped significantly from 2009 to 2015 in some outstate counties and available jobs increased.</p>

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<div class="embed"><iframe class="dataframe6" src="http://datadrop-dev.startribune.com/20170712-mnrecovery/builds/production/?chart=jobs" border="0" frameborder="0" scrolling="no" width="100%" height="430"></iframe></div>

<p>These kinds of trends in outstate economic growth haven&rsquo;t gone unnoticed. <a href="http://www.naco.org/sites/default/files/documents/County\_Economic\_Tracker2014-FINAL.pdf" target="new\_">A 2015 report</a> from the National Association of Counties showed that of the eight Minnesota counties that had recovered from the recession, all of them were in the western part of the state.</p>

<p>Since then, the most <a href="http://www.naco.org/resources/county-economies-2016-widespread-recovery-slower-growth" target="new\_">recent iteration</a> of that report shows nearly 25 percent of county economies nationwide closed their unemployment gaps in 2016, mostly in smaller counties with fewer than 50,000 residents. And the only Minnesota counties to grow jobs faster from 2015 to 2016 were in the <a href="http://explorer.naco.org/index.html?dset=County%20Economies&amp;ind=Employment%20Growth%202016%20vs%202015&amp;external=true">western edge of the state</a>.</p>

<p>The NACo report also sheds additional light on some political realities related to the last election as a majority of counties that swung from Democrat in 2012 to voting for Donald Trump in 2016 had weak job recoveries. But in Minnesota, weak job recoveries were only the case for about half the 19 counties Trump swayed into the red column during the presidential election, <a href="http://www.startribune.com/13-takeaways-from-the-presidential-election-in-minn-nationwide/400722341/?refresh=true" target="new\_">according to the report</a>, and many saw income growth above the state average as well.</p>

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<p>Though every region has its own story to tell, possible explanations from experts for Greater Minnesota&rsquo;s recovery include:</p>

<ol>

<li>Wider age ranges among the workforce in rural counties, as people often start working at younger ages and continue well after retirement.<br />

&nbsp;</li>

<li>Some profitable years for the energy, agricultural and manufacturing industries in various regions.<br />

&nbsp;</li>

<li>Demographics could affect per capita metrics like personal income, as younger people make less money and counties in Greater Minnesota are often older on average. Aging populations could also be retiring in the metro.<br />

&nbsp;</li>

<li>Migrations of lower income families into the Twin Cities area might be slowing personal and household income growth rates in those counties.</li>

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A notable economic chasm still exists between the Twin Cities and regions beyond. But when taking a closer look, it seems some regions of Greater Minnesota effectively weathered the storms of recession.</p>