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County Recoveries Coincide With Political Shifts.

The nation's economic recovery accelerated in 2016, with more than 1 in 4 counties reporting a full recovery to pre-recession levels on four key economic indicators. That portion is a huge jump from last year when 1 in 10 reported fully recovering counties, according to the National Association of Counties (NACo).

The four indicators are: job totals, unemployment rates, economic output (GDP) and median home prices. Two-thirds of the nation's more than 3,000 counties have recovered on at least three of the economic indicators.

Most of the counties that have fully recovered are in Kentucky, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, South Dakota, Texas and Wisconsin. In addition, the mid-Atlantic, the Northeast and the West Coast have many nearly-to-fully recovered counties. Large counties (more than 500,000 residents) had the highest rate of full recovery at 41 percent. In contrast, more than three-quarters of small counties (fewer than 50,000 residents) still had not reached their pre-recession peaks in any of the indicators by the close of 2016.

The Takeaway: Both the acceleration of the economic recovery and the fact that it's mostly happening in very populated areas is widening the gap between the municipal haves and have nots. It also partly explains shifting political allegiances in some mid-sized counties in 2016.

Many of the approximately 200 mostly Midwestern mid-sized counties that voted for President Obama in 2008 and 2012, voted for President Trump in 2016. According to NACo's analysis, these swing counties have experienced weaker job recoveries compared to the national average with more than half of them still below their pre-recession job peaks.

"While there's a national storyline on the economy, it often plays out differently at the local level," says lead report author Emilia Istrate, managing director of NACo Counties Futures Lab. "The wide variation in local conditions underlines the need for a strong federal-state-local partnership on providing economic opportunity for residents of communities of all stripes."

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