

POPULATION DISTRIBUTION
INSIDE AND OUTSIDE INCORPORATED PLACES: 2000

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Population Distribution Inside and Outside Incorporated Places: 2000

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Abstract:

More than 60 percent of all United States residents live inside incorporated places. As each state has its own laws governing the establishment and functioning of incorporated places, the number and nature of incorporated places (and the distribution of population living inside and outside of them) varies by state and region. Research by Census Bureau staff has shown that the proportion of population living inside incorporated places in 1990 and 2000 was higher in the Midwest and West regions, and lower in the Northeast and South regions (Johnson et al., 2004). This paper expands on that previous research by examining the distribution of population living inside and outside incorporated places, as well as the number of units of local government, for the United States, metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas in aggregate, and individual metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas. The statistical tables included show 2000 population data for incorporated places as of January 1, 2003, and metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas as of June 6, 2003.

Keywords: United States, cities, incorporated places, metropolitan statistical areas, micropolitan statistical areas, urban geography, population geography, local governments

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INTRODUCTION

An incorporated place is a geographic area with legally defined municipal boundaries under the laws of the state in which it is located. The most common legal descriptors for such places are city, town, borough, and village, though other, less common examples do exist. Typically, each incorporated place has a set of elected or appointed officials and legally prescribed powers to levy taxes and raise revenue, and to provide local services such as water, sewer, sanitation, fire and police protection, schools, and recreational facilities. In unincorporated areas, such services are typically provided by either the county or minor civil division government, or sometimes by a nearby incorporated place (U.S. Census Bureau, 1994).

The laws for establishing an incorporated place vary widely by state, as do the laws governing how a place can modify its boundaries through annexation, de-annexation, merging, or other procedures (Palmer and Lindsey, 2001). This variation in the legal landscape, along with varying rates of growth across incorporated and unincorporated places by region, results in a varied distribution of population by incorporation status across states and regions (Johnson et al., 2004).

While the distribution of population inside and outside incorporated places has been examined at the national, regional, and state levels (Johnson et al., 2004), little research has focused on this distribution inside and outside metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas. Knowledge of how residents are distributed across incorporated and unincorporated jurisdictions within metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas, together with data on the number of local government entities in each area, can provide an opportunity to identify areas where high levels of local geopolitical fragmentation exist. These are areas where a relatively high number of local government jurisdictions (typically incorporated suburbs of large cities) exist in close proximity to one another, often with adjacent territorial boundaries. Such areas may present challenges not only to the local jurisdictions directly responsible for service provision, but also to state and federal policies directed towards the provision of local services.

This paper seeks to provide a foundation for future research by presenting Census 2000 population data for the area inside and outside incorporated places at the national level, as well as for individual metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas. The number of local governmental entities (county, governmentally active minor civil division, and incorporated place) in 2003 is also presented for each metro and micro area.

METHODOLOGY

April 1, 2000 population data tabulated for all incorporated places as of January 1, 2003 were obtained via the Census Bureau's Population Estimates Program. These data provided a record for each place-county part, thereby identifying the county or counties in which each place was located. The county information for each place was then matched against the list of metropolitan and micropolitan statistical area component counties as of the June 6, 2003 Office of Management and Budget definitions of those statistical areas. Finally, population data for incorporated places (as well as the unincorporated balance of each county, where applicable) were aggregated for all metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas, and for United States as a whole. Data used were from the 2003 vintage of the April 1, 2000 estimates base – a re-tabulation of Census 2000 population data in 2003 geography, including corrections to the census processed through the Count Question Resolution Program, as well as postcensal administrative updates, and geographic updates. The places included reflect the universe of places for which the Census Bureau publishes postcensal population estimates, including all actively functioning incorporated places, plus the census designated places of Honolulu, HI, and Arlington, VA (under special agreements between the Census Bureau and the states of Hawaii and Virginia). The number of counties, functioning minor civil divisions (MCDs), and incorporated places in 2003 was also aggregated for each metro and micro area to provide a total number of local governmental entities for each area.

FINDINGS

Most people lived in incorporated places.

There were 19,450 incorporated places in the United States as of January 1, 2003. These places included more than 175 million people – just over 60 percent of the total population of the United States in Census 2000 (Table 1). The majority of the incorporated place population (over 153 million, or about 88 percent) lived inside metropolitan statistical areas (Table 2). Nearly 14 million persons (about 8 percent of the incorporated place population) lived inside incorporated places located within micropolitan statistical areas. Almost 8 million persons lived inside incorporated places that were not located in any metropolitan or micropolitan statistical area (outside core-based statistical areas (CBSAs)). These persons accounted for less than 5 percent of the total incorporated place population (Table 2).

Most people living in metropolitan statistical areas lived in incorporated places.

About 66 percent of the metropolitan population lived inside incorporated places (Table 1). The majority of residents in many large metropolitan statistical areas lived in incorporated places, with a few noteworthy exceptions, including the Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston,¹ Philadelphia, and Washington metropolitan statistical areas,² where most residents lived in unincorporated areas (Table 3). The largest percentages of residents living inside incorporated places tended to be found in metropolitan statistical areas in the Midwest and West regions (Figs. 1 and 2). These included the Carson City, NV Metropolitan Statistical Area, which was completely incorporated, as well as the Minneapolis, Chicago, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Phoenix, and San Francisco metropolitan statistical areas (Table 3).

¹ In the New England states, only cities and boroughs are recognized as incorporated places by the Census Bureau. Towns in New England are recognized as minor civil divisions (largely due to the rural character of many New England towns) and are not treated as incorporated places in Census Bureau data products.

² For readability, titles of metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas may be abbreviated in the text (showing the first-named city only). Full titles are shown in Tables 3-5.

Most people living in micropolitan statistical areas lived in unincorporated areas.

About 48 percent of the population inside micropolitan statistical areas lived in incorporated places, while about 52 percent lived in unincorporated areas (Table 1). Micropolitan statistical areas with the highest percentages of residents living in incorporated places tended to be located, again, in the Midwest and West (Figs. 1 and 2). These included the Butte-Silver Bow, MT and Juneau, AK areas, which were completely incorporated. Areas with the lowest percentages tended to be located in the Northeast and South regions. Noteworthy exceptions were the Hilo, Kahului-Wailuku, and Kapaa, HI;³ Gardnerville Ranchos and Pahrump, NV; and Los Alamos, NM micropolitan statistical areas, which were completely unincorporated (Table 3).

Most people living outside CBSAs lived in unincorporated areas.

About 40 percent of the population outside CBSAs lived in incorporated places, while about 60 percent lived in unincorporated areas (Table 1). The largest incorporated places outside CBSAs included: Carroll, IA (pop. 10,098), and Baker, OR (pop. 9,896).⁴ Of the 3,141 counties in the United States, 77 had no incorporated places. Of these, 35 were outside CBSAs.

Areas with large populations had more governmental units.

Metropolitan statistical areas with the highest numbers of governmental units tended to be located in the Northeast and Midwest, where most states have functioning MCDs (i.e., towns and townships). This is in contrast to areas in the South and West, where governmentally active MCDs are uncommon. Metro areas with large numbers of governmental units also tended to be large in population size (Table 4a). Four of the ten metro areas with the largest numbers of governmental units (New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Detroit) were also among the 10 most populous metro areas (Table 4b). Metro areas with larger populations, but relatively fewer governmental units, tended to be in the South and West. These included areas such as Dallas, Houston, Los Angeles,

³ There are no incorporated places in the state of Hawaii. Places appearing in titles of metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas in Hawaii are Census Designated Places.

⁴ A number of places that were at or near 10,000 population in 2000 and were outside CBSAs as of June 2003 have subsequently been added to new micropolitan areas in updates to the OMB definitions.

Miami, and Washington (Table 4b). Smaller metro areas with relatively large numbers of governmental units, tended to be located in the Northeast and Midwest. The Duluth, MN area, for example, had 183 units of local government serving a population of 275,486 (Table 3).

Table 5 shows metro areas that had at least 100 governmental units, and that also had at least 40 percent of their population in unincorporated areas. Research has suggested that these areas may be susceptible to problems associated with urban sprawl, as the number of local governments presents a challenge for comprehensive, regional land use planning efforts. This is compounded by the paucity of local land use regulations in unincorporated areas, which can exacerbate the outward expansion of urban development (Carruthers, 2003). Areas where such conditions exist vary greatly in population size, ranging from about half a million (Harrisburg, PA), to more than 5 million (Philadelphia). With the exceptions of Atlanta and Washington, these areas are mainly located in the Northeast and Midwest, where many states have multilateral annexation policies that inhibit the ability of large cities to expand their boundaries (Rusk, 2006).

CONCLUSION

The aggregate findings are generally consistent with data published in the previous study conducted by Census Bureau staff on annexation between 1990 and 2000 (Johnson et al., 2004). Metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas with the largest percentages of their populations living inside incorporated places tended to be located in the Midwest and West regions, while areas with lower percentages tended to be located in the Northeast and South. The proportion of population living inside incorporated places in aggregate was higher in metropolitan statistical areas, lower in micropolitan statistical areas, and lowest in areas outside CBSAs. Areas typically associated with urban sprawl (e.g., Atlanta) were often found to have higher percentages of their populations living in unincorporated areas, as well as higher numbers of governmental units.

Future research needs include an examination of more recent population trends inside and outside incorporated places using the latest intercensal population estimates, as well as an analysis of the change over time of the distribution of the incorporated place population within metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas. Also, an exploration of data on the distribution of population inside principal cities versus other incorporated places could provide additional insights on the extent of political fragmentation within each metropolitan or micropolitan statistical area. Finally, a statistical exploration (e.g., regression analysis) of the potentially explanatory relationship between the number of governmental units, the percent of population in unincorporated areas, and conditions associated with urban sprawl may prove interesting, provided an acceptable quantitative measure of sprawl can be reached.

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Figure 1

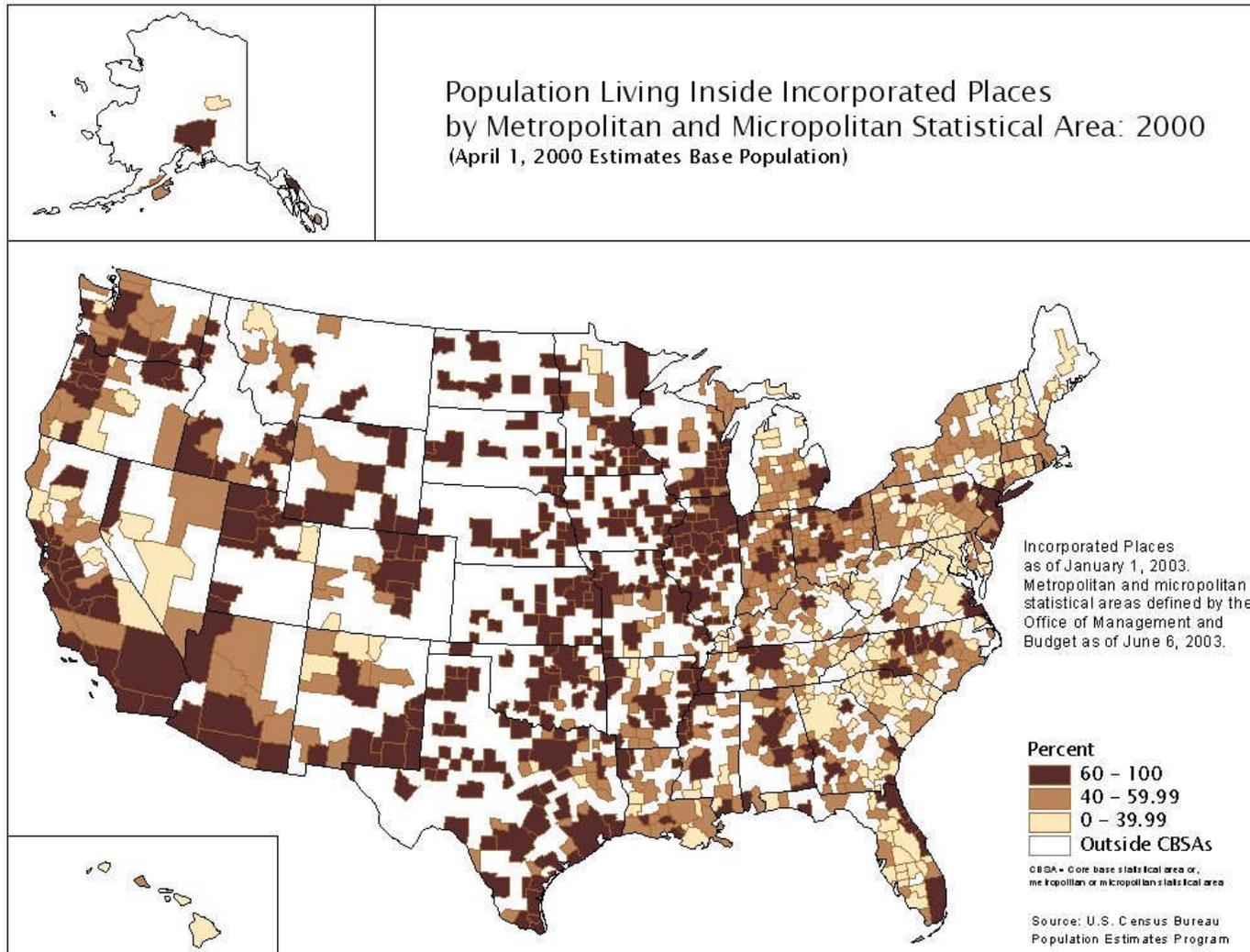


Figure 2

