

POVERTY IN THE RURAL POPULATION OF THE UNITED STATES\*

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Concentration of Poverty in Rural Areas

Table 1 shows the total population and the poverty population of the United States in 1960 according to color and urban-rural residence. It is clearly apparent that poverty is found disproportionately among the rural population. While the nonwhite population is somewhat more urbanized than white population, the color differential for the poverty population is even more pronounced. In any case the prevalence of poverty among whites in urban areas is only three-fourths that of all whites and the prevalence among the urban nonwhite population is just over four-fifths that of the total nonwhite population.

The differential prevalence of poverty among urban and rural populations is a source of considerable concern among administrators who, in weighing program allocation and program impact, find more effective anti-poverty program alternatives in urban areas. However, it may lessen the burdens of such administrators to consider that students of demography have for some time been interested in alternative descriptions of rural and urban population which may be more sensitive to issues which are likely to plague policy makers, whether dealing with poverty or with a number of other matters.

TABLE 1. TOTAL POPULATION AND POPULATION IN POVERTY BY COLOR, URBAN AND RURAL, UNITED STATES, 1960  
(CIVILIAN NONINSTITUTIONAL POPULATION...)  
(In Thousands)

Poverty status and color	Total	Urban	Rural		
			Total	Nonfarm	Farm
<u>All Classes</u>					
Total	175,035	122,287	52,748	39,206	13,542
White	155,206	107,860	47,346	35,408	11,938
Nonwhite	19,829	14,427	5,402	3,798	1,604
<u>Poverty Class</u>					
Total	38,684	21,294	17,390	12,471	4,919
White	27,719	14,583	13,136	9,519	3,617
Nonwhite	10,965	6,711	4,254	2,952	1,302
Percent Distribution					
<u>All Classes</u>					
Total	100.0	69.9	30.1	22.4	7.7
White	100.0	69.5	30.5	22.8	7.7
Nonwhite	100.0	72.8	27.2	19.1	8.1
<u>Poverty Class</u>					
Total	100.0	55.0	45.0	32.2	12.8
White	100.0	52.6	47.4	34.4	13.0
Nonwhite	100.0	61.2	38.8	26.9	11.9

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## Deriving Population Geography for Issues Relevant to Program Application

In the administration of anti-poverty programs, the fundamental distinctions between urban and rural program concepts are related to issues such as accessibility to prospective program recipients of employment opportunity and employment alternatives, and such as the local availability of highly skilled technicians and administrators, among other features often favorably associated with large populations in densely settled areas (urban and metropolitan). Here, the concern is with activity pattern and with involvement or potential involvement of populations in essentially urban metropolitan activity, at one extreme, as opposed to farming and other rural-oriented village or open-country lifestyles on the other.

### An Alternative to Urban-Rural Residence

This paper reports on an attempt made to describe the total population and the population in poverty according to a scheme which would be more sensitive to the accessibility and activity concerns expressed above. One element introduced in the preliminary search for an alternative reflects an additional concern that some basically rural areas are sustaining conditions of a stable or growing economy which many others are not.

### Background

Some remarks by Vincent Whitney in his study of changes in the rural-nonfarm populations of the United States, 1930-1950 are worth noting. Whitney found that 22,000,000 persons, more than one-half of the rural nonfarm population in 1950, were located in counties containing centers of from 10,000 to over 1,000,000 people. He concluded: "Despite the fact that the rural nonfarm population differs noticeably from the urban population in some respects, the majority of the rural-nonfarm people are clearly persons with urban orientations and associations." [4, p. 363]

More recently, Warren Robinson, in a study of rural population by metropolitan status, showed that nonmetropolitan rural population remained nearly constant, at just over 40,000,000 persons, over the period 1900-1960. [2]

By contrast, the rural portion of metropolitan areas, using "retrojection" as the technique for reconstructing metropolitan areas prior to 1950, grew "...by 20 percent or more in every decade since 1900 and has consistently exceeded the national average growth rate." [2, pp. 176-177]

Under the assumption that the new patterns of population growth--particularly in rural areas--and the post-1920 local communication and transportation technologies are associated with radically altered community settlement patterns

and patterns of area-to-area accessibility, a modified approach to urban-rural classifications is described below. The classification is intended to serve those concerned with locally-based anti-poverty programs in the context of a changing society.

### Method

The 1962 city-county data file as prepared by the Bureau of the Census, corresponding to the 1962 County and City Data Book [3], was used to classify all counties in the U.S. according to the following arrangement:

1. Metro-urban: Metropolitan counties or those with population 50 percent or more urban in 1960.
  - a. Metro: Metropolitan counties.
  - b. Nonmetro: Nonmetropolitan counties with 50 percent or more urban.
2. Stable, nonmetro-urban: Nonmetropolitan counties with population (1) less than 50 percent urban in 1960, and (2) without absolute loss, 1950-1960.
  - a. No migration loss: Without net loss due to migration, 1950-1960.
  - b. With migration loss: With loss due to migration.
3. Declining, nonmetro-urban: Nonmetropolitan counties with population (1) less than 50 percent urban in 1960, and (2) displaying absolute decline, 1950-1960.
  - a. Level-of-living index 100 or more: Farm operator level-of-living index in 1959 less than 100, regardless of size of farm population in county.
  - b. Level of living index less than 100: Index below 100.

Once having identified the counties according to this scheme, we prepared tabulations of a file of unpublished 1960 Census data which provides county summaries of population by poverty status.

In the modified classifications, the basic dichotomy is that of population within metropolitan areas or within counties with 50 percent or more of their respective population's classified as urban, on the one hand, and population located in nonmetropolitan predominantly rural areas on the other. The first class, that which I have termed metro-urban, refers to areas in which populations are clearly within the immediate influence of the urban society such that accessibility would not appear to be a critical problem

<sup>1</sup>Poverty status is defined according to the Social Security Index as described in [1].

to urban or city-oriented institutions (poverty programs). This assumption ignores variations in population size and density by minor civil division which may provide severe problems of another sort.

Functional interrelationships of population in such areas are assumed to be of a common urban kind. Assuming the salience of occupational roles in defining such relations, the ties--either directly or through opportunity--to urban employments are evident and are distinguishing with respect to the objective of the classification.

Outside the metro-urban areas, both absolute population change as well as change due to migration are considered. The predominantly rural "stable" areas were defined as those with no absolute population loss over the decade 1950-1960. The stable class, then, includes both counties with and without losses in population due to migration.

In stable or growing rural areas, while access to urban institutions may be less than in the metro-urban areas, the presumptive needs, in speculative consideration of anti-poverty treatments, for schemes for economic development or, alternatively, for encouraging out-migration are thought to be less severe (opportunities are thought to be more prevalent) than is the case among the less than economically healthy areas--the predominantly rural "declining" areas.

Finally, in nonmetro-urban "declining" areas the farm operator level-of-living index was used, regardless of the size of the farm component, separating counties at levels of 100 or greater as opposed to those of less than 100. This was done on the assumption that a further scaling of declining areas as to their economic health might be accomplished. I must admit to more uncertainty in the utility of this step

than of the others. At any rate, I should like to turn to the results of the tabulations.

### Results

Tabulations of the county populations according to the rubric described above, which I shall term the urbanism-stability area index, yields the distribution of the total population and the rural population, by poverty status, as shown in table 2. Thus, while the prevalence of poverty is greater among rural persons than urban, the rural poverty population is more heavily concentrated in areas outside the metro-urban class than rural population as a whole.

The excess of rural poverty population in nonmetro-urban areas is wholly accounted for by the difference in degree of concentration in declining areas. Moreover, while similar proportions of the total population are located in nonmetro-urban stable areas and declining areas, and the rural populations are evenly balanced between such areas, a larger proportion of the poverty population and an even greater proportion of the rural poverty population is located in declining areas than in the stable areas.

Table 3 indicates that while percent rural tends to be least in the metro-urban areas and most in the nonmetro-urban areas, at a minimum, one-fifth of the total in even the least urban areas, is comprised of urban population. Moreover, the proportion of metro-urban population that is rural is not insignificant. Also notable is that for every urbanism-stability area index class, the urban proportion in the poverty population falls below the urban proportion in the total population.

TABLE 2. PERCENT DISTRIBUTION OF TOTAL AND RURAL POPULATION BY URBANISM-STABILITY AREA INDEX BY POVERTY STATUS, UNITED STATES, 1960

Type of Area	Percent			
	Total Population		Population in Poverty	
	Total	Rural	Total	Rural
Total	100	100	100	100
Metro-Urban	76	40	60	28
Metro	64	26	47	15
Nonmetro	12	15	13	13
Stable, Nonmetro-Urban	13	30	18	30
No Migration Loss	5	11	6	9
With Migration Loss	8	19	12	21
Declining, Nonmetro-Urban	11	29	22	43
Level-of-Living Index $\geq$ 100	4	10	5	11
Level-of-Living Index $<$ 100	7	19	17	32

TABLE 3. PERCENTAGE URBAN AND RURAL OF POPULATION CLASSIFIED BY URBANISM-STABILITY AREA INDEX BY POVERTY STATUS, UNITED STATES 1960

Type of Area	Percent					
	Total Population			Poverty Population		
	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural
Total	100	70	30	100	55	45
Metro-Urban	100	84	16	100	79	21
Metro	100	88	12	100	85	15
Nonmetro	100	63	37	100	57	43
Stable, Nonmetro-Urban	100	31	69	100	25	75
No Migration Loss	100	33	67	100	28	72
With Migration Loss	100	30	70	100	24	76
Declining, Nonmetro-Urban	100	20	80	100	15	85
Level-of-Living Index $\geq$ 100	100	20	80	100	15	85
Level-of-Living Index $<$ 100	100	20	80	100	15	85

#### Prevalence of Poverty

Table 4 shows the percent of population in poverty by urban-rural residence by urbanism-stability status. On the whole, the prevalence of poverty is greater in predominantly rural areas than in the metro-urban areas. However, predominantly rural areas without loss due to migration had urban-like rates of poverty prevalence. Moreover, the urban population residing in predominantly rural areas where there was either (1) loss due to migration, but not absolute loss, or (2) in declining areas where the level-of-living index was above 100, the prevalence of poverty is in the metro-urban range.

The prevalence of poverty shown in table 4, is especially high in predominantly rural declining areas with low level-of-living index values. While only 7 percent of the U.S. population lived in such areas in 1960, some 19 percent of the rural population was so located and about 32 percent of the rural poverty population lived in such areas. On the other hand, only 2 percent of the urban population and 5 percent of the urban poverty population resided in such areas (table 5).

#### Conclusions

Although 45 percent of the U.S. population in 1960 defined as in poverty was comprised of rural

TABLE 4. PERCENT OF POPULATION IN POVERTY, BY URBAN-RURAL RESIDENCE, POVERTY STATUS AND URBANISM-STABILITY AREA INDEX, UNITED STATES, 1960

Type of Area	Percent in Poverty				
	Total	Urban	Rural		
			Total	Nonfarm	Farm
Total	22	17	33	32	36
Metro-Urban	17	16	23	22	26
Metro	16	16	20	19	22
Nonmetro	25	22	28	28	28
Stable, Nonmetro-Urban	29	23	32	32	33
No Migration Loss	23	20	25	26	24
With Migration Loss	33	26	36	36	36
Declining, Nonmetro-Urban	45	34	48	49	46
Level-of-Living Index $\geq$ 100	32	24	34	35	32
Level-of-Living Index $<$ 100	52	39	55	56	54

TABLE 5. PERCENT DISTRIBUTION OF TOTAL AND URBAN POPULATION  
BY URBANISM-STABILITY AREA INDEX, BY POVERTY STATUS,  
UNITED STATES, 1960

Type of Area	Percent			
	Total Population		Poverty Population	
	Total	Urban	Total	Urban
Total	100	100	100	100
Metro-Urban	76	91	60	86
Metro	64	80	47	72
Nonmetro	12	11	13	14
Stable, Nonmetro-Urban	13	6	18	8
No Migration Loss	5	2	6	3
With Migration Loss	8	4	12	5
Declining, Nonmetro-Urban	11	3	22	6
Level-of-Living Index $\geq$ 100	4	1	5	2
Level-of-Living Index $<$ 100	7	2	17	5

population, examination of the population distribution according to a simple typology of areas permits a closer approximation of the extent of poverty outside areas of direct urban influence. Of the rural population in poverty, some 28 percent reside in metro-urban areas and an additional 30 percent are found in nonmetro-urban stable areas.

Thus, anti-poverty programs oriented toward alternatives of encouraging out-migration or economic development are probably more reasonably assessed against some 22 percent of the population in poverty (which includes an urban component) rather than the 45 percent figure with which we began (table 1).

Further analysis of the data not covered in the paper is planned in order to evaluate color differentials and variations by region as to the way in which the conventional view of urban-rural residence intersects with the view suggested by the urbanism-stability area classification described.

#### REFERENCES

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