

APPLYING THE CURRENT CORE BASED STATISTICAL AREA STANDARDS TO HISTORICAL DECENNIAL CENSUS DATA

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Extended Abstract:

Beginning with the introduction of “Standard Metropolitan Areas” in 1950, the basic concept of a metropolitan area has remained the same: a densely settled population nucleus and the counties closely linked to that core. Alterations to metropolitan area definitions have occurred not only because of changes in population distribution and commuting, but also as a result of changes in the standards used to define these areas. While researchers generally regard metropolitan area definitions from decade to decade as comparable, changes in the standards for defining these areas have actually had a substantial impact on the way these areas are defined. The specific criteria used to define metropolitan statistical areas have changed with each decade, and the most recent standards review, in particular, yielded standards that broke sharply with the past in some respects: two new types of statistical areas (micropolitan statistical areas and combined statistical areas) were created; the basic geographic units for New England areas changed from cities and towns to counties; and the criteria for defining principal cities (what had been called “central cities”) changed markedly. This paper describes how core based statistical areas would have looked in 1960, 1970, 1980 and 1990 if the current standards, those published in the December 27, 2000, *Federal Register Notice*, were applied to data from those decennial censuses.

Applying a consistent set of standards to data across time provides a more accurate picture of population trends for metropolitan areas in the second half of the twentieth century. This paper will devote particular attention to the “rural rebound” of the 1970s to examine whether this population trend was in part a reflection of changes in metropolitan area standards. Also, seeing the distribution of micropolitan statistical areas in past census years will show whether the areas that grew fastest would have been classified as micropolitan had that category existed at that time.

This effort raises a number of methodological issues. The first step in the current standards is to identify all population cores, comprised of urbanized areas (populations of 50,000 or more) and urban clusters (populations of 10,000 or more but less than 50,000). Because urban clusters were first defined in Census 2000, we must use places or clusters of places to approximate the historical population cores of micropolitan statistical areas. Also, a number of special tabulations--most notably the ratio of jobs to employed residents for all places within core based statistical areas--will need to be created to determine which places will be classified as principal cities.

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This report is released to inform interested parties of ongoing research and to encourage discussion of work in progress.

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