

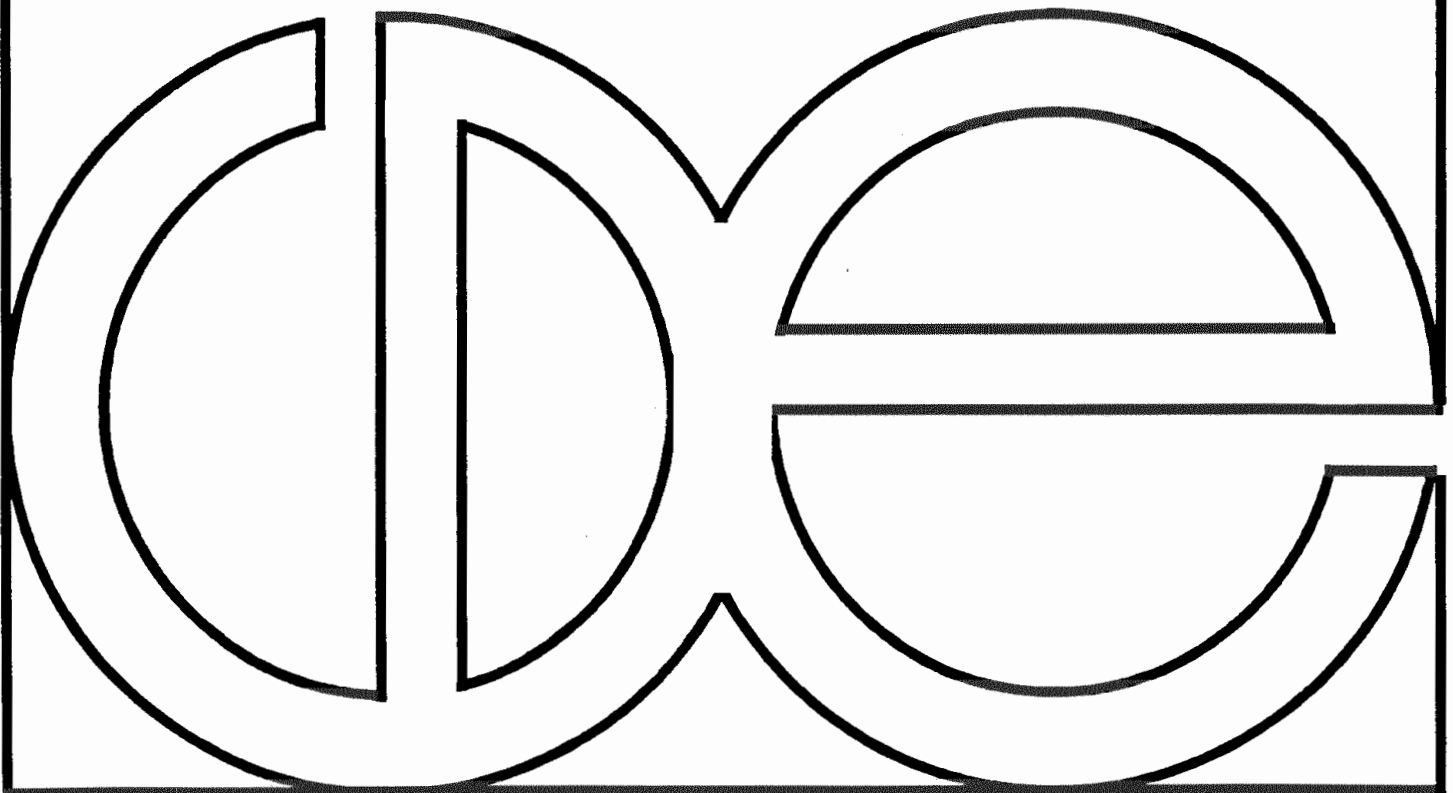
Center for Demography and Ecology

University of Wisconsin-Madison

**DID THE NONMETROPOLITAN POPULATION  
RECONCENTRATE IN THE 1980s?**

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DID THE NONMETROPOLITAN POPULATION RECONCENTRATE IN THE 1980s?

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## ABSTRACT

The 1970s brought the reversal of settlement processes which until then could generally be described as concentration into metropolitan areas and deconcentration within these areas. Not only did nonmetro areas grow faster than metro areas in that period, but there was deconcentration within nonmetro areas, including relatively rapid growth in the open country. Since the reversal in metro-nonmetro growth did not continue, this paper contrasts patterns of local concentration and deconcentration in nonmetropolitan America in the 1980s, with an eye toward determining whether differential growth among place-size groups has reverted to pre-1970 patterns. The growth of places by initial size of place is considered along with the growth of population not living in any place. Patterns of growth for places are compared by location with respect to metropolitan areas and region of country, and by type of county economic activity. Results indicate there is a new pattern of overall slow growth and decline. The non-place population is still the most rapidly growing group, but there is once more a positive association between size of place and rate of growth. In the most recent census decade, small villages have been the slowest growing population entity in nonmetro America with the open country growing fastest at about seven percent. Possible implications for small population centers are discussed.

## DID THE NONMETROPOLITAN POPULATION RECONCENTRATE IN THE 1980S?

The twin processes of population concentration and deconcentration, working at the regional, metropolitan-nonmetropolitan and local levels, have defined the redistribution of the American people in the 20th century. Over most of this period there was a massive concentration of population into cities, with a multiplication of places as urbanization spread and larger centers captured ever greater numbers. Although growth generally was at the periphery of such places, with the coming of the automobile there was in addition a spread of population into formerly rural nearby areas. The recognition of this led to the adaption of the metropolitan area concept in 1950, and on this basis one may generalize that at least until 1970 the settlement process of the nation could be described as concentration into metropolitan areas and deconcentration within these areas.

In nonmetropolitan areas, larger places tended to grow most rapidly, and many of these "grew up" so that their counties were reclassified as metropolitan. Both metropolitan growth, and nonmetropolitan urban growth, was fueled by rural to urban migration, with the reorganization of agriculture and decline in labor needs in other extractive industries. Consequently prior to 1970 many rural parts of the nation experienced declining populations. Within the nonmetropolitan urban hierarchy, moreover, modernization brought a

centralization of trade, service and other activities into larger places, leaving many small places behind.

As by now is very well known, the 1970s brought a shift in this process, with more rapid growth in nonmetro than metro areas, and at the same time increasing deconcentration at the regional level away from the industrial heartland into the South and West. On the nonmetropolitan side, of greater significance than the metro-nonmetro reversal in growth differentials was the widespread shift from slow growth or decline to a more rapid growth in population through migration. Concern for the 'dying small town' was replaced by concern for the harmony of 'newcomers' and 'oldtimers.'

This period turned out to be brief, however, and in the 1980s nonmetro America again suffered a downturn in growth, and once more metro areas were growing more rapidly, as revealed since shortly after 1980 by county population estimates and current population surveys. Now that the 1990 census data products are becoming available, however, it is important to reappraise the last several decades.

One of the most interesting features of the 1970-80 turnaround era was the acceleration of deconcentration within nonmetropolitan areas. Not only were nonmetro areas growing more rapidly than metro areas, but villages and small towns were outpacing larger cities, and in general rural areas were growing faster than urban places even in many more remote parts of the country (Fuguitt, Lichter and Beale 1981; Lichter and Fuguitt 1982;

Long 1981; Long and DeAre 1982). We considered early post-1980 trends using place and county estimates for 1984, and found overall a continued deconcentration, but a definite slowdown from the rates of the 1970s (Fuguitt and Lichter 1989).

The purpose of this study is to contrast the patterns of local concentration and deconcentration in nonmetropolitan America between 1950 and 1990. Given the strong slowdown in growth in the 1980s, has the differential growth among place size groups reverted to the concentrating pattern of an earlier time? If indeed the 1980s is a return to the 1950s or 1960s one might expect this to be a case. But on the other hand many aspects of rural and nonmetro America have been irreversibly transformed since that time.

I will consider the growth of places by initial size of place along with the population not living in any place. Patterns of growth are compared by county location with respect to metropolitan areas, region of the country and type of county in terms of major economic activity. Then I will consider concentration and deconcentration for the nonmetropolitan portions of individual states as measured by the growth of incorporated places having more than 2,500 population compared with the population living outside such places.

Although nonmetro growth rates are lower in general than at any time since 1950, the results show a new and pervasive pattern of nonmetropolitan growth by size of place.

## FINDINGS

In the 1980s, we moved into a new pattern of growth by size of place. Figure 1 shows the percent change of population in five place-size groups along with the population outside of any places for each of the past four decades.<sup>(1)</sup> The 1950s were a time of population expansion with high birth rates and high levels of urbanization. The pattern in that decade is thus the expected one with a positive relationship between size of place and growth, and the most slowly growing population was that of persons living outside of any place. By 1960-70, this pattern had greatly attenuated, though population outside places was still growing the slowest, the other size groups, from villages up to places over 25,000, was relatively constant at about 10 percent. The turnaround period, as is now well known, was one of a marked pattern of deconcentration at all geographic levels. For place-size groups, consequently, the pattern is almost the reverse of the 1950s, with an inverse association between size of place and growth and with the population outside any places growing considerably more rapidly than the other size groups.

The 1980-90 period is different from all of the preceding ones. Growth rates generally were, of course, considerably lower in that decade than in any of the three decades preceding, but the pattern seemed to be a combination of the 1950s and the 1970s: That is, the most rapidly growing group continued to be the population outside of any place, though the rate at about 7 percent was about one-third of the comparable rate in the 1970s. Places, however, shifted to a positive association with growth so that the most rapidly growing place

group was those having an initial size of 25,000 and over, and villages under 2,500 declined absolutely.

Nearness to metro areas: Before discussing these trends, it is important to make sure they are not simply an artifact of aggregation. They could, after all, be a combination of rather different patterns near or away from large cities, or in nonmetropolitan areas in different regions of the country or involved in different economic activities. Recognizing this diversity in nonmetro America, we consider, first of all, the extent to which a deconcentrating growth pattern, was due primarily to the spreading influence of adjacent metropolitan areas. Although Figure 2 shows that the deconcentrating pattern came earlier, in the 1950s and 1960s, to adjacent counties as opposed to nonadjacent, it also indicates that the patterns for the 1970s and the 1980s are essentially the same whether or not the county is adjacent to a metropolitan county. In this and subsequent figures I use an abridged size-of-place classification).

Local urbanization: Next, we consider the extent to which the deconcentration of the 1970s and the rather unique pattern of the 1980s is associated with level of local urbanization in more remote nonmetropolitan counties. Deconcentration, for example, might simply be around places greater than 10,000, thus reflecting a spread of local deconcentration around large cities down the urban hierarchy. In the 1950s and 1960s at least, an absolutely declining nonplace population was found in counties not having cities over 10,000 in nonmetro counties not adjacent to a metro area (Figure 3). Some deconcentration, reflected by at least growth, if not equivalent growth, for nonplace population, was already seen in



remote counties having such larger places, however, before 1970.

The deconcentrating pattern of 1970-80, however, was found throughout this county classification. That is, even in completely rural counties, that were not adjacent to a metropolitan area, the nonplace population grew considerably more rapidly than nearby villages and small cities, so that an inverse relation between size of place and growth prevailed throughout the classification. Similarly for these county groups in the 1980s, the nonplace population grew, and in this case the village and small town population declined in more rural counties, and also the nonplace population was the most rapidly growing in counties having a city of 10,000 or more.

Region: How general are these patterns by region of the country? Figure 4 shows the pattern by size of place for adjacent and nonadjacent counties in the Northeast and North Central states combined. In the North, the inverse association between size and growth was characteristic in adjacent counties since the 1950s, though in the 1950s and 1960s there was a positive association between size of place and growth in nonadjacent counties. Both adjacent and nonadjacent counties in the North, however, showed the characteristic inverse pattern of size of place and growth in the turnaround decade, and the nonplace population grew almost 20 percent in that period in adjacent counties. For the 1980s, the general pattern seen in Figure 1 was also found in both adjacent and nonadjacent counties in the North, though all these rates are extremely small. Villages and small cities under 10,000 posted declines, particularly in nonadjacent northern counties.

In the South, again, the deconcentration pattern is quite consistent in the 1970s for both adjacent and nonadjacent counties, and the higher nonplace growth followed by positive association between size of place and growth is found in the 1980s, though again, rates of growth are extremely small in that decade (Figure 5). For the West, Figure 6 shows the same general conclusions can be reached, although growth levels are a little bit larger than in the South, particularly over 1980-90. Looking at the 1980s, I constructed Figure 7 to contrast the regions, and it is clear here that the West continues to grow considerably more rapidly in its nonmetropolitan segments than either the North or the South.

States: Deconcentration also is also rather widespread across states. Table 1 compares the growth of the place population over 2,500 with the total population by states according to whether these places or the balance of the population is growing faster. In the 1950s, almost 90 percent of the states were concentrating and about 80 percent did in 1960-70. In the 1970s, however, only 20 percent were concentrating with the widespread pattern of population deconcentration of the turnaround. In the 1980s, there was a turn-back, but not to the levels of the 1960s, with a little less than half of the states classed as deconcentrating, and one-third showing a clear concentrating pattern. Because the rural population includes villages and these are almost universally the slowest growing category for 1980-90, I re-did this analysis comparing the population in all places with the nonplace population, and for 1980-90 found that virtually every state in the U.S. showed a deconcentrating pattern.

Primary county activity: Much research has illustrated how heterogeneous nonmetropolitan America is in terms of many social and economic characteristics. Rural or nonmetropolitan clearly is not synonymous with farming, though there continue to be a number of areas having a high degree of dependence on agriculture, and these have experienced slow population growth or decline. Rural manufacturing has a long history and it was an important component in the rural renaissance in providing new jobs. This activity declined sharply in the 1980s, however, as part of the national trend. Counties near metro centers have shown important growth effects through commuting and the deconcentration of urban employment. Recently also the number of nonmetropolitan counties have shown growth through recreational activity and an influx of new residents at or near retirement age. These varied specializations have been examined in seeking to explain the nonmetro turnaround and its subsequent reversal. Consequently, it is important to determine how population trends by size of place differed for counties concentrating in one or another of the above activities. The pattern of growth by size using the USDA County Classification for agricultural, manufacturing and retirement counties, along with a designation of commuting counties based upon 1980 commuting data, is given in Figure 8.(2) As would be expected, commuting counties show patterns very similar to those for adjacent counties in Figure 2. They had the most rapid growth overall in the 1950s and 1960s, with an almost uniform association of growth by size in the 1960s. Again, an inverse pattern emerges in the 1970s, but in the 1980s, the pattern found previously for all counties is shown; that is, villages actually lost population slightly and small cities barely gained in that period. Furthermore, this is one of the few instances where the population in places of 10,000 and over exceeded

the growth of the nonplace population. Why villages and small cities should barely grow in commuting counties is difficult to explain and bears further investigation.

The experience of retirement counties is perhaps as would be expected. These counties grew very slowly and in a centralizing way in the 1950s, but already by the 1960s the open country population was growing faster than other groups and this became a strongly inverse pattern in the 1970s. The growth of the nonplace population of more than 40 percent is quite noteworthy here. Growth rates diminished in the 1980s with retirement counties as was true for all other groupings. Since much of the attraction of such areas is to the natural environment, one would expect the nonplace population to continue to grow most rapidly, but it is again surprising that villages actually declined slightly and smaller cities grew only at a little over half the rate of places 10,000 and over in recreational areas.

Across the 1950-60 and 1960-70 decades, agricultural counties showed drastic declines in the population not living in cities or villages as would be expected with the restructuring of agriculture during that time, which was accompanied by high rates of outmigration to urban areas. This is the only grouping observed with a positive association between place size and growth in the 1970s, and that also continued in the 1980s. Perhaps this positive association is not surprising but the relatively strong showing of places over 10,000 is, extending through 1990. Such places grew more rapidly than the U.S. as a whole in every decade since 1960. Despite the fact that the U.S. grew less than 10 percent in the 1980s, places over 10,000 showed a growth of 15 percent in agricultural counties, slightly

outgaining those in commuting and retirement counties in this period.

Manufacturing counties are notable in this figure in showing relatively slow growth throughout the 40-year period. The importance of manufacturing for the turnaround is often cited, yet the growth effect must have been found more in diversified counties. By the 1980s, these counties showed virtually no growth in all size groupings, though again, in both the 1970s and the 1980s, the nonplace population grew at least slightly more rapidly than the other categories.

## DISCUSSION

The preceding analysis has shown the robustness of the deconcentrating pattern in the 1970s (confirming some previous research), and the unique pattern of the 1980s, which included higher nonplace growth, but for places a positive association between size and growth. These are not specific to adjacent or to nonadjacent counties having larger cities, or to different regions of the country. But they are also found in counties specializing in commuting and in retirement and recreation, although in agricultural counties a general positive association between place size and growth continues to prevail.

Almost a decade ago, Lichter, Fuguitt and Heaton (1983) predicted that given

improvements in transportation and communication and related social transformations, the deconcentration pattern of the early 1970s was not likely to revert to concentration. Judging from these findings, they were about half right! An important aspect of the turnaround, that has continued through the turnaround reversal, is a diffuse growth that favors territory outside incorporated places. This is found, though at a considerably diminished level, across a wide range of settings, across all regions, and even in rural counties outside the traditional sphere of metropolitan influence. The only notable exception in my analysis was for counties highly dependent on agriculture according to the USDA classification. These included 6 million of the 57 million nonmetro residents in 1990.

As with the turnaround decade, the widespread nature of the settlement trends of the 1980s make it difficult to point to specific causes, though it is clear that living outside cities, and in many instances some distance from such cities, continues to be attractive for many people. Although the level of rural growth was considerably diminished, at least in some areas this must raise implications in terms of efficiencies in service provision, including health care and other services to an aging population, political coordination among local subunits and environmental issues relating to increased rural residential land use. There need to be more field studies in selected rural areas to better understand the nature of this faster nonplace growth. To what extent is it simply peripheral growth around places, even in remote areas? Extant studies indicate that this is generally not the case (Hart, 1984; Voss and Fuguitt, 1979) but more current work in a wider range of settings is needed.

But the 1980s also saw a unique type of concentrating pattern, which was also widespread, among the incorporated places. In related research (Fuguitt, 1991) I have shown that for 1980-90 incorporated places under 2,500 posted their slowest growth of any decade in the 20th century. Smaller centers have undoubtedly suffered from the twin disadvantages of declining overall population growth in the surrounding area, and an acceleration of organization centralization in trade and service provision. Indeed, as institutions may deconcentrate from larger centers, they appear more likely to choose settings in the open county rather than villages or small towns. Recent nationwide residential preference surveys suggest that the nostalgic attractiveness of the village or small town may be overblown (Fuguitt and Brown 1990). In both 1954 and 1988 residents of smaller cities and villages more than 30 miles from a large city were least likely to prefer to live in such a place. We need to give increased attention to the specific problems of smaller places. They aren't disappearing, but they must face many problems today.

Really understanding what has been going on in nonmetropolitan population redistribution over the past 40 years appears to be ever more challenging. The trend through 1970 seemed clear, as continuing urbanization, and deconcentration around large cities. Then came to very widespread and consistent inverse pattern of the 1970s. It was deconcentration all right, but seemingly everywhere. Now we have overall slow growth and decline, but with an equally widespread and consistent pattern of continuing deconcentration and concentration. Important work remains for rural demographers.

## FOOTNOTES

(1) In this analysis nonmetropolitan includes counties that were not designated as metropolitan in 1950 for considering the 1950-60 decade, those not metropolitan in 1963 for the 1960-70 decade, those as of 1974 for the 1970-80 decade and those not metropolitan in 1983 for the 1980-90 decade. Thus a "floating" metropolitan/nonmetropolitan designation is used. I argue that this is most appropriate for making comparisons over several decades, since nonmetro areas designated at later times include only the more remote of the nonmetro sector for earlier times. In 1950, for example none of the 1983 nonmetro counties would become metropolitan for at least 30 years, but by 1990 a number of 1983 nonmetro counties had already become metropolitan.

The size-of-place population comparisons are made by classifying places by size at the beginning of a given period and following these places through the decade, regardless of their size at the end.

(2) Commuting counties are those with 15 percent or more of their population commuting to a central county of a metropolitan area in 1980. Others are classed according to a USDA county classification. Retirement counties are those with a high level of net immigration of persons 65 and over, and agriculture and manufacturing dependent counties



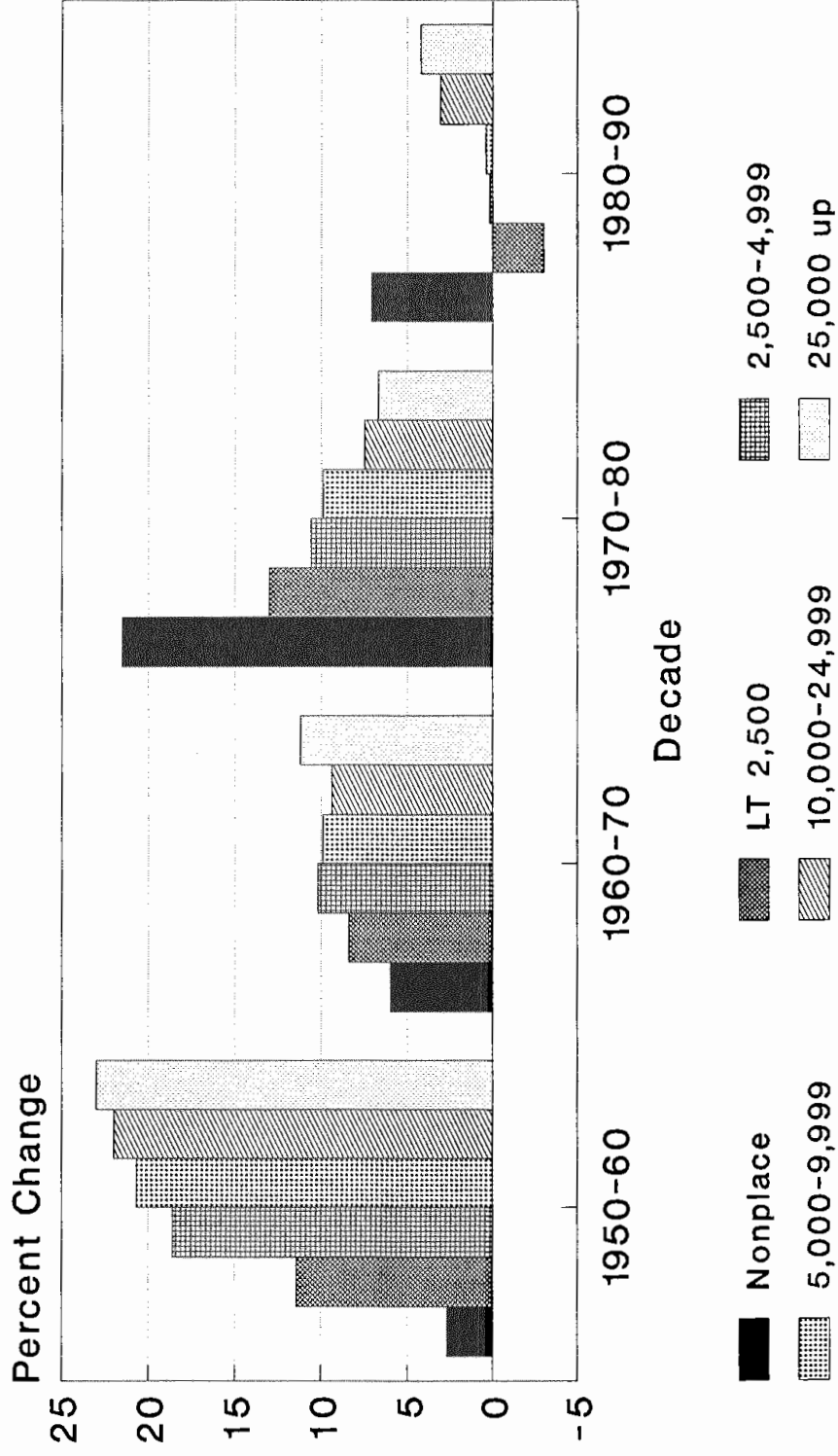
are classed by per capita income data (Bender and associates 1985). To avoid overlaps, noncommuting counties were classed a retirement if they had that classification, otherwise they were classed as agricultural if they had that classification, and otherwise as manufacturing if they had that classification. Of the 57 million nonmetropolitan residents in 1990, about 7 million were in commuting counties, 12 million in retirement counties, 6 million in agricultural counties, 15 million in manufacturing counties, and 17 million in counties not included in Figure 8.

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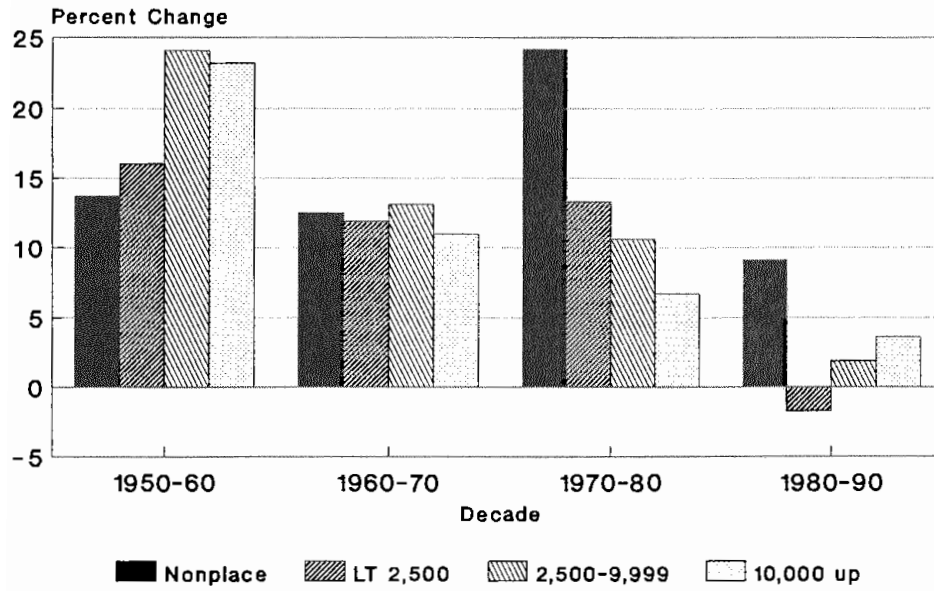
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Figure 1  
**NONMETRO POPULATION PERCENT CHANGE  
 BY SIZE OF PLACE 1950-1990**



Nonmetropolitan as of the beginning of each decade.

Figure 2  
**POPULATION CHANGE BY SIZE OF PLACE**  
**COUNTIES ADJACENT TO METRO AREAS**



**COUNTIES NOT ADJACENT TO METRO AREAS**

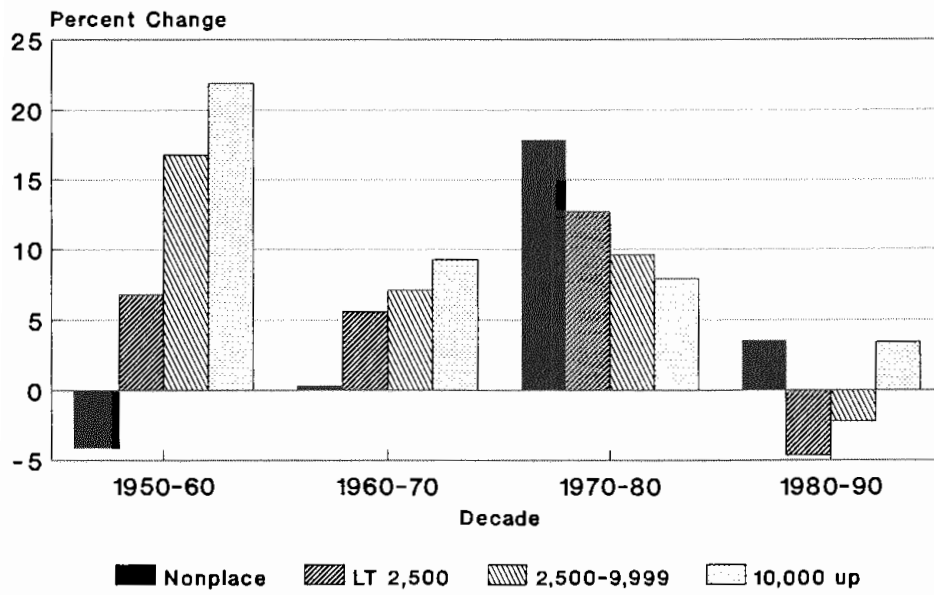
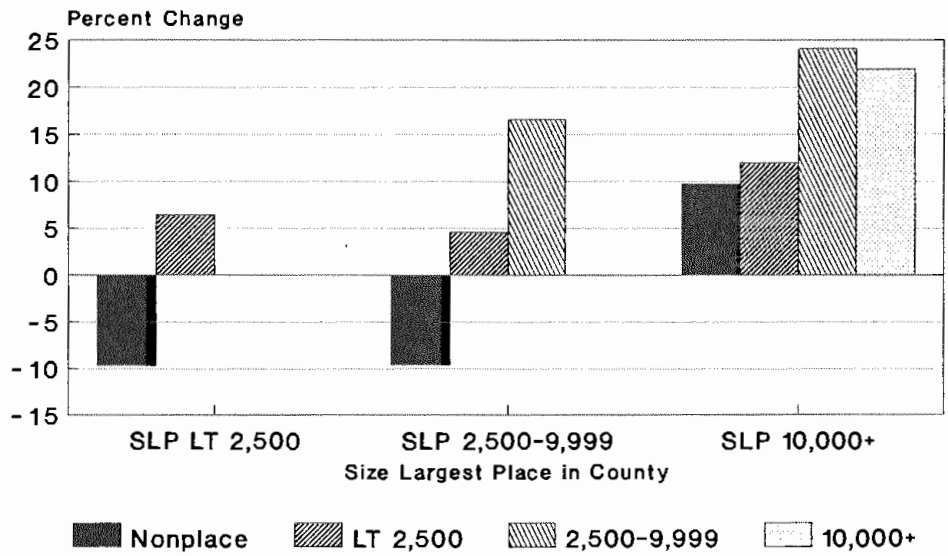
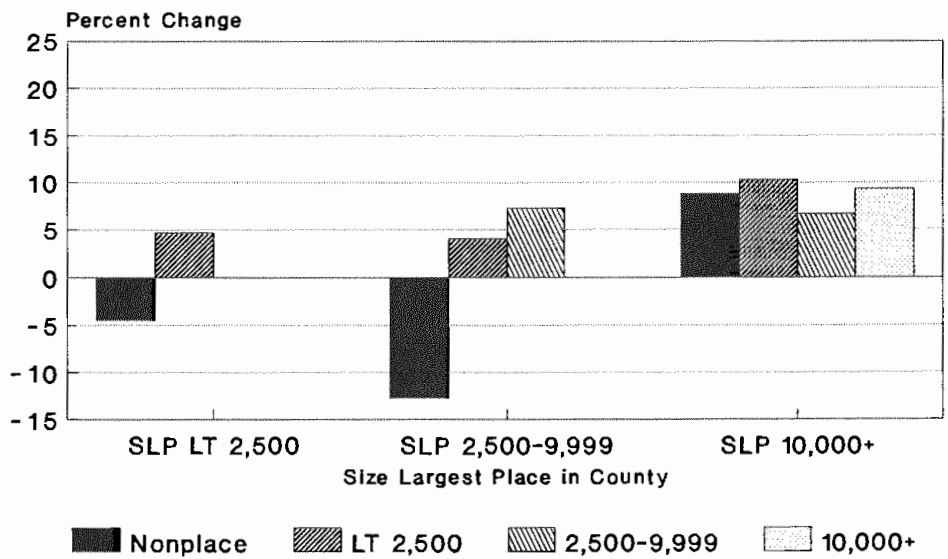


Figure 3  
**SIZE OF LARGEST PLACE IN COUNTY**  
 1950-1960



NONADJACENT nonmetropolitan as of the beginning of each decade.

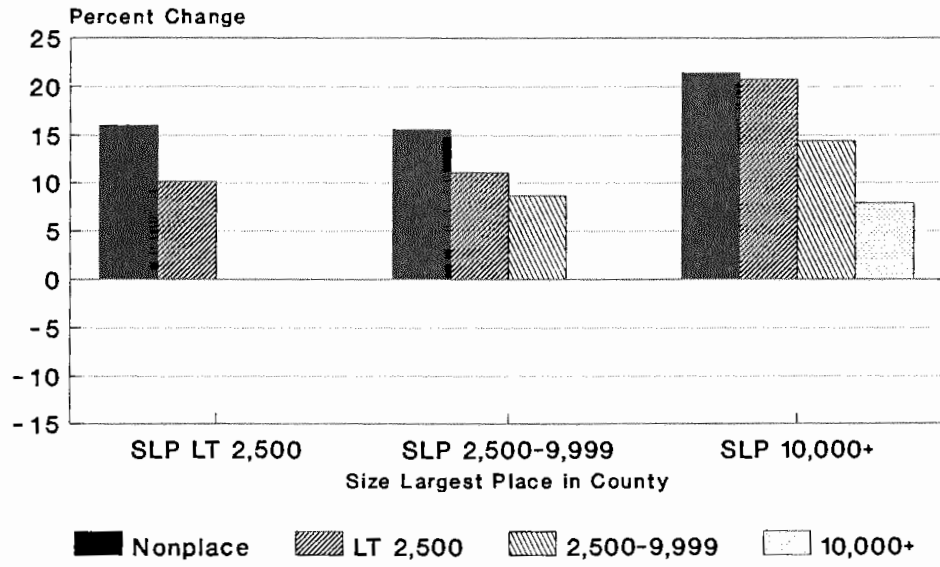
1960-1970



NONADJACENT Nonmetropolitan as of the beginning of each decade.

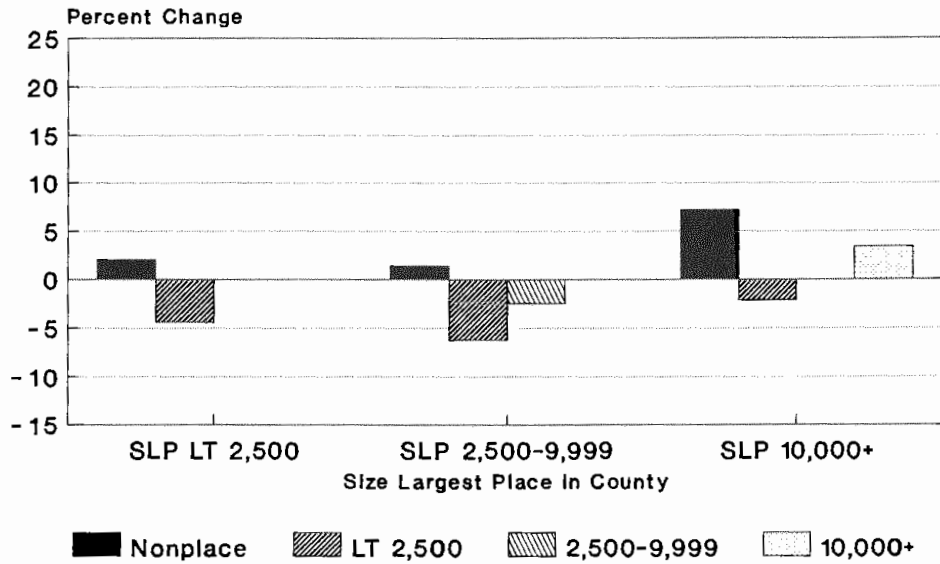
Figure 3, continued

1970-1980



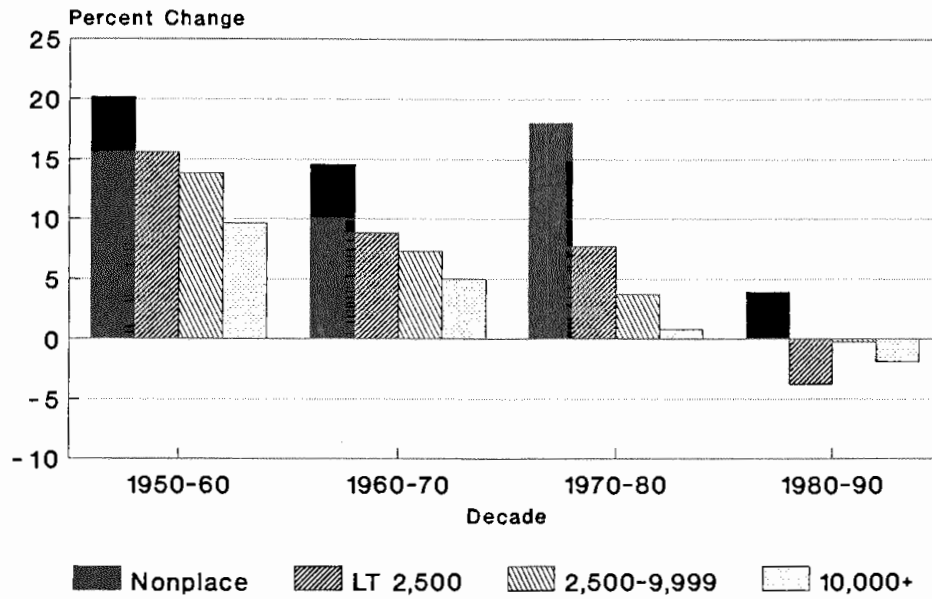
NONADJACENT Nonmetropolitan as of the beginning of each decade.

1980-1990

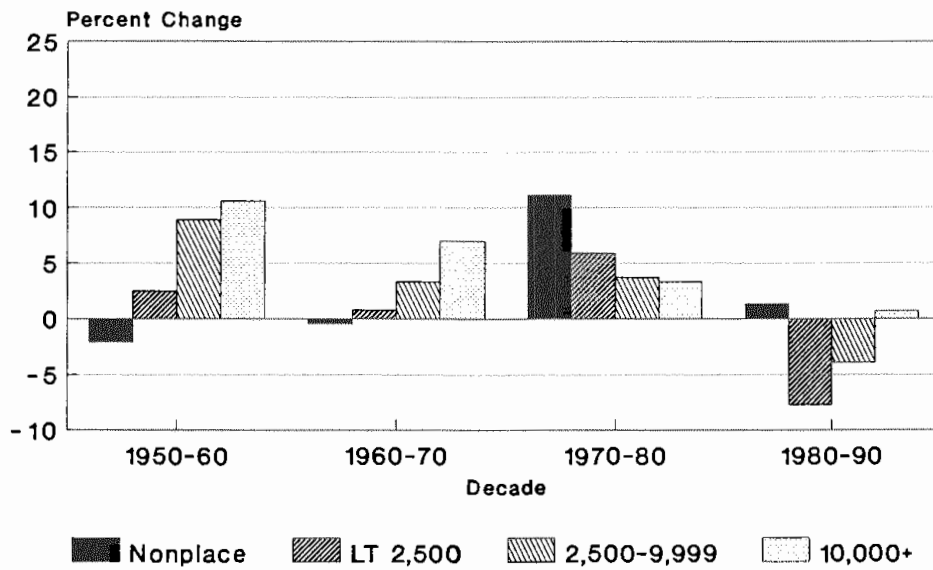


NONADJACENT Nonmetropolitan as of the beginning of each decade.

Figure 4  
**POPULATION CHANGE BY PLACE SIZE, NORTH  
 COUNTIES ADJACENT TO METRO AREAS**



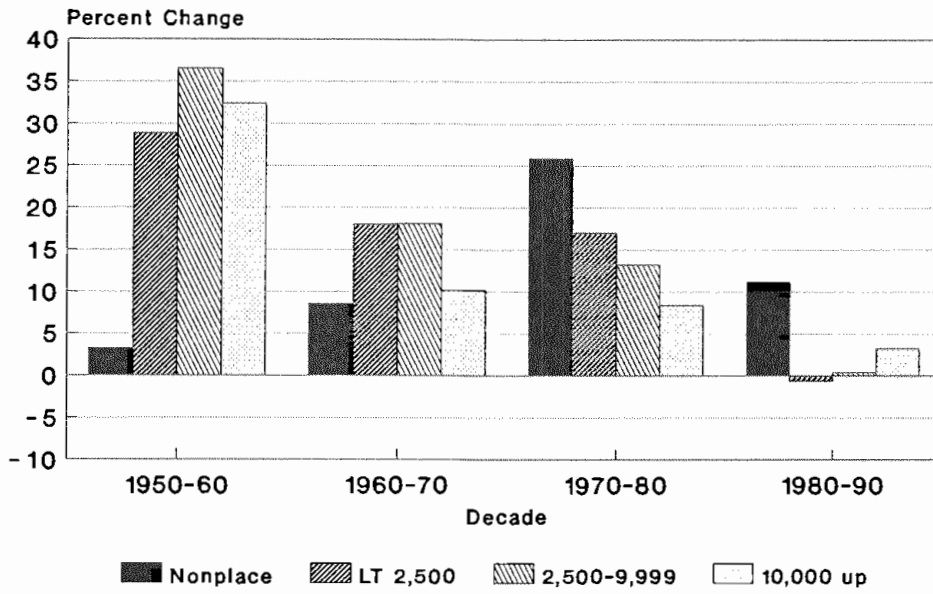
**COUNTIES NOT ADJACENT TO METRO AREAS**



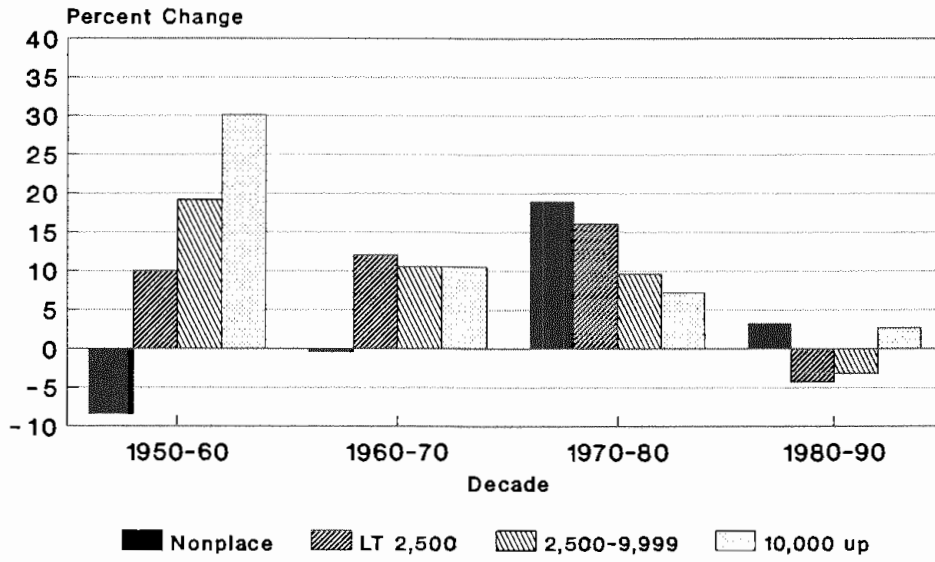
Nonmetropolitan as of the beginning of each decade.



Figure 5  
**POPULATION CHANGE BY PLACE SIZE, SOUTH  
 COUNTIES ADJACENT TO METRO AREAS**

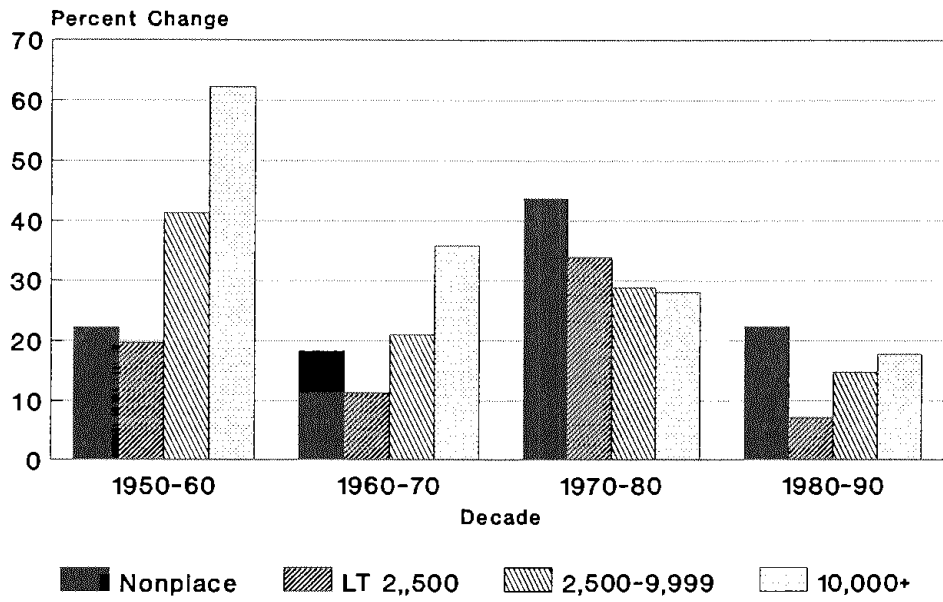


**COUNTIES NOT ADJACENT TO METRO AREAS**

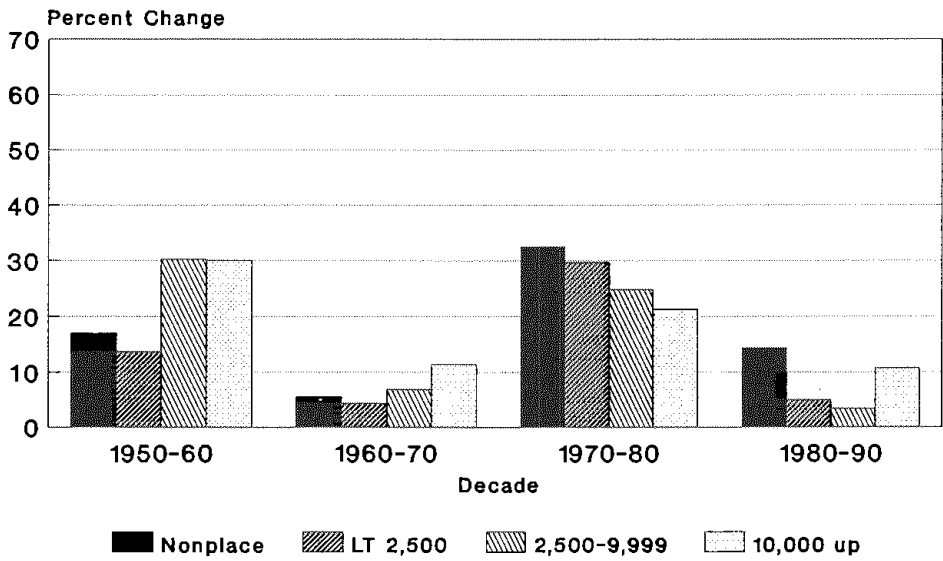


Nonmetropolitan as of the beginning of each decade.

Figure 6  
**POPULATION CHANGE BY PLACE SIZE, WEST  
 COUNTIES ADJACENT TO METRO AREAS**

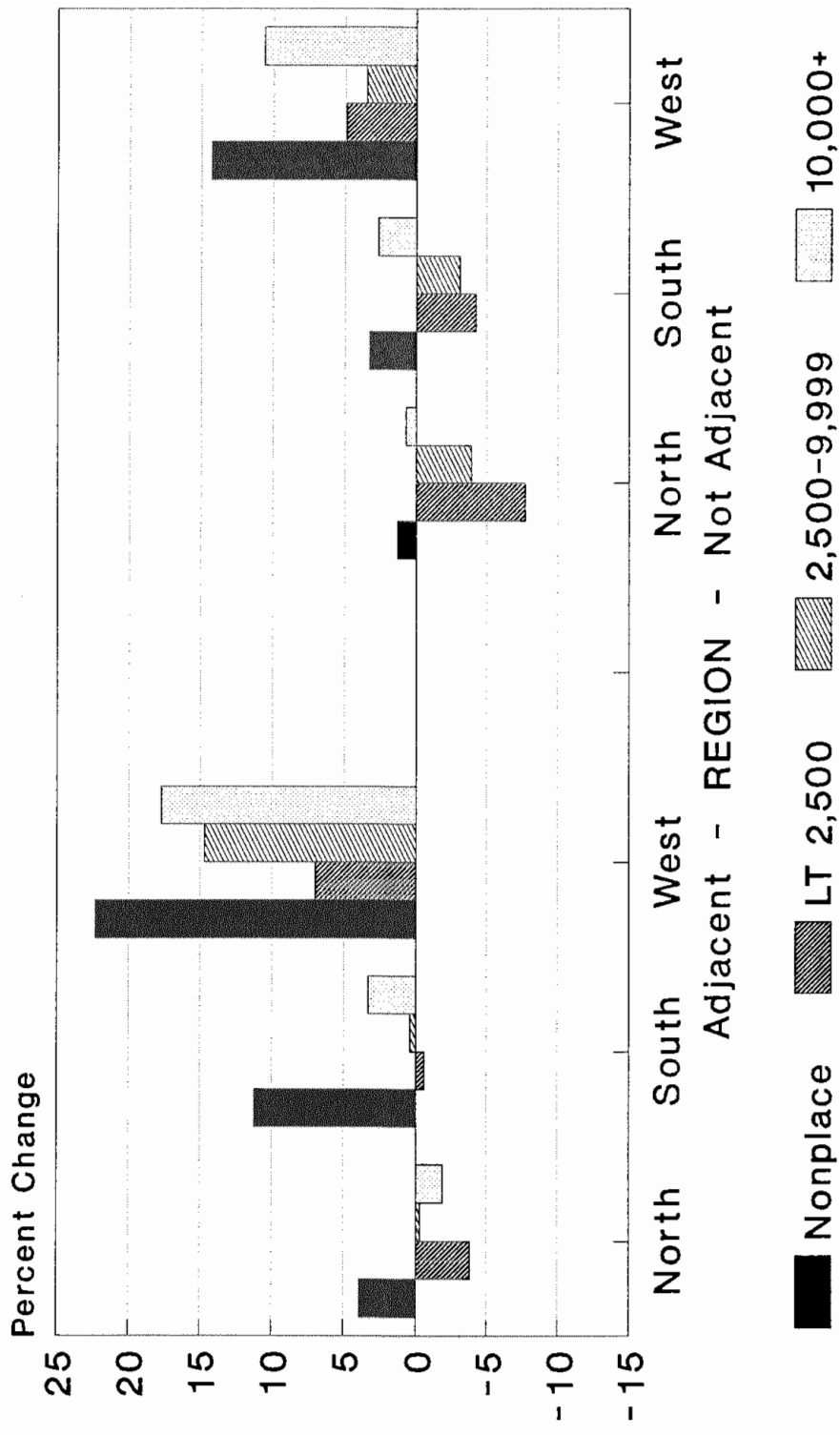


**COUNTIES NOT ADJACENT TO METRO AREAS**



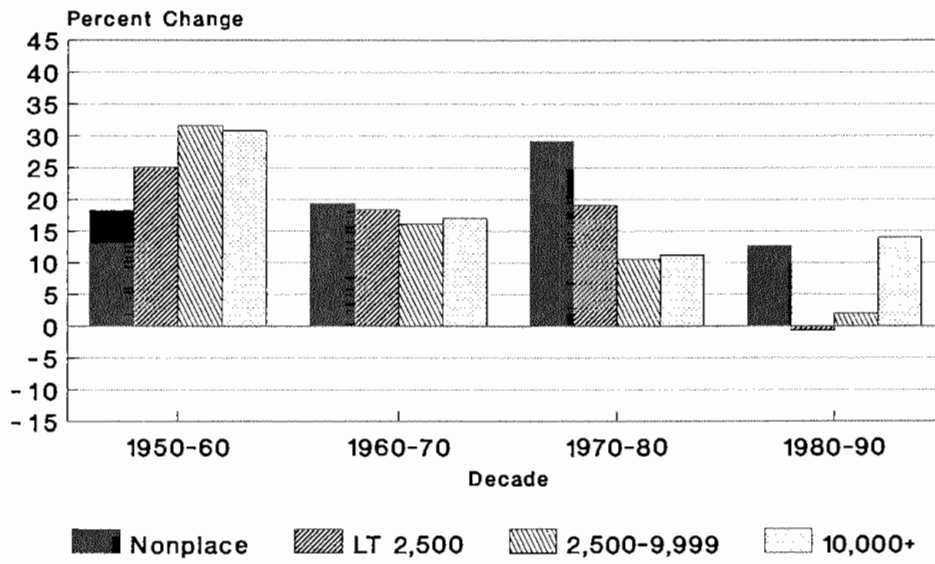
Nonmetropolitan as of the beginning of each decade.

Figure 7  
**POPULATION CHANGE BY PLACE SIZE, REGION**  
 1980-1990



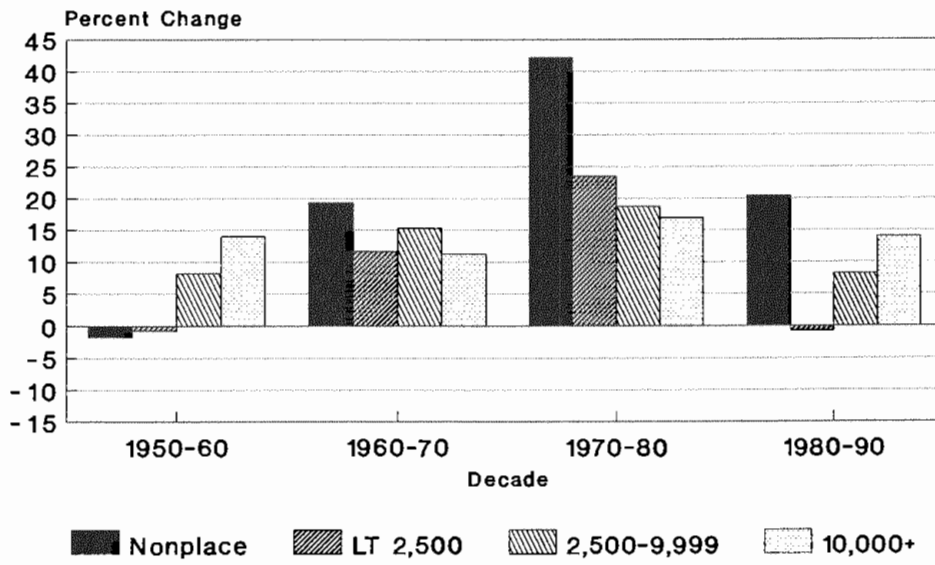
Nonmetropolitan as of the beginning of each decade.

Figure 8  
**CHANGE BY SIZE OF PLACE BY COUNTY TYPE  
 COMMUTING COUNTIES**



Nonmetropolitan as of the beginning of each decade.

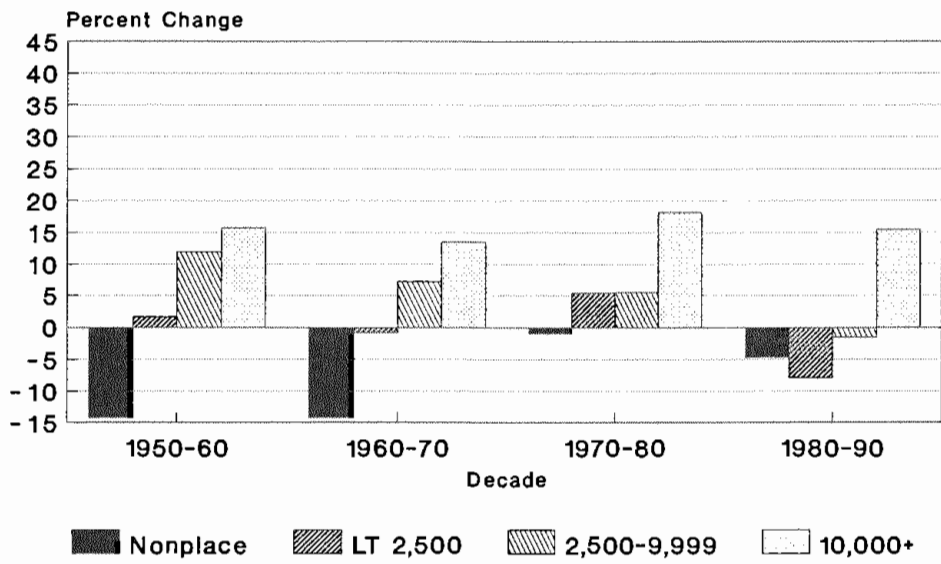
**RETIREMENT COUNTIES**



Nonmetropolitan as of the beginning of each decade.

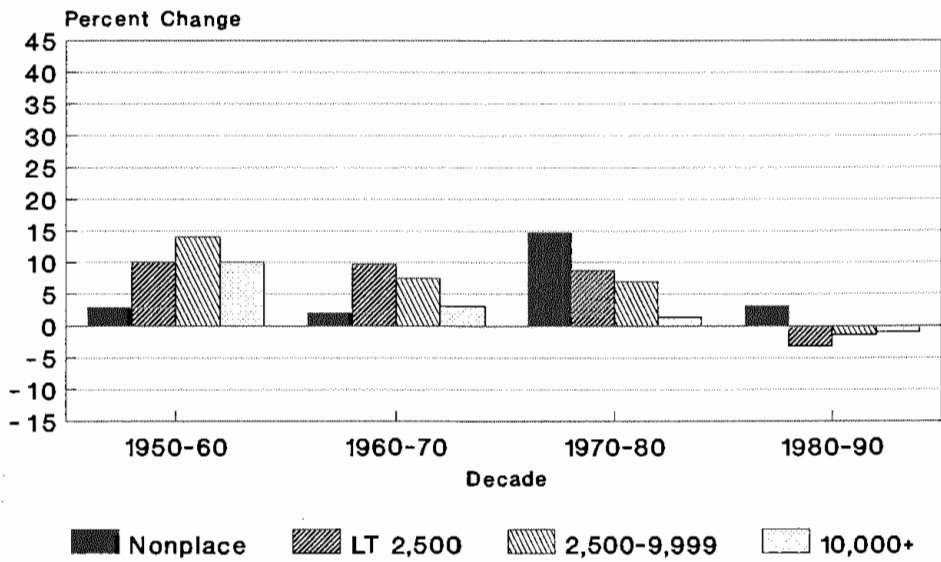
Figure 8, continued

### AGRICULTURAL COUNTIES



Nonmetropolitan as of the beginning of each decade.

### MANUFACTURING COUNTIES



Nonmetropolitan as of the beginning of each decade.

TABLE 1

## NONMETROPOLITAN CONCENTRATION/DECONCENTRATION, UNITED STATES, 1950-90(a)

Division & State	1950-60	1960-70	1970-80	1980-90
NEW ENGLAND				
CONNECTICUT	--	--	--	--
MAINE	C1	D2	D2	--
NEW HAMPSHIRE	--	--	D1	--
RHODE ISLAND	--	--	--	--
VERMONT	--	--	--	--
MIDDLE ATLANTIC				
NEW JERSEY	D1	D1	D1	--
NEW YORK	D1	D1	D2	D2
PENNSYLVANIA	D2	D2	D2	D2
EAST NORTH CENTRAL				
ILLINOIS	C1	C1	D1	C3
INDIANA	C1	C1	D1	0
MICHIGAN	D1	D1	D2	D2
OHIO	D1	C1	D1	D2
WISCONSIN	C1	C1	D1	C1
WEST NORTH CENTRAL				
IOWA	C2	C2	C1	C3
KANSAS	C2	C3	C1	C3
MINNESOTA	C1	C1	0	C2
MISSOURI	C2	C1	D1	C1
NEBRASKA	C2	C2	C2	C3
NORTH DAKOTA	--	--	C2	--
SOUTH DAKOTA	C2	C2	C2	C3
SOUTH ATLANTIC				
DELAWARE	--	--	--	--
FLORIDA	C1	C1	C1	D1
GEORGIA	C2	C1	D2	D1
MARYLAND	C1	D1	--	--
NORTH CAROLINA	C1	C1	D1	D1
SOUTH CAROLINA	C1	C2	D1	D1
VIRGINIA	C1	C1	D1	0
WEST VIRGINIA	C3	C3	D1	D3

EAST SOUTH CENTRAL					
ALABAMA	C1	C1	D1	0	
KENTUCKY	C2	C1	D1	C2	
MISSISSIPPI	C2	C2	D1	D3	
TENNESSEE	C2	C1	D1	D1	
WEST SOUTH CENTRAL					
ARKANSAS	C2	C1	D1	C2	
LOUISIANA	C1	C1	D1	D3	
OKLAHOMA	C2	C1	D1	D3	
TEXAS	C1	C2	D1	D2	
MOUNTAIN					
ARIZONA	C1	D1	D1	D1	
COLORADO	C2	C1	D1	D1	
IDAHO	C1	C1	D1	0	
MONTANA	C1	C3	D1	0	
NEVADA	--	--	--	--	
NEW MEXICO	C1	D3	0	D1	
UTAH	C1	--	--	C1	
WYOMING	C1	C1	C1	0	
PACIFIC					
ALASKA	--	--	--	--	
CALIFORNIA	C1	C1	D1	C1	
OREGON	C1	C1	C1	C1	
WASHINGTON	C1	C1	D1	D1	

- (a) Cities are nonmetropolitan incorporated places of 2,500 population or more at the beginning of each decade. The nonmetropolitan county designation is as of the beginning of each decade. See text.

KEY

- C1: Place population grew faster than county population.  
C2: Place population grew, county population declined.  
C3: Place population declined less than county population.
- D1: Place population grew more slowly than county population.  
D2: Place population declined, county population grew.  
D3: Place population declined more than county population.
- 0: Change less than 0.5
- (--): Indicates the state has fewer than 35 nonmetropolitan cities.

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