



## Micropolitan Areas & the Measurement of Urbanization\*

by

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### *What is the Issue?*

New York State, like the rest of America, is predominantly metropolitan. Many people think of “metropolitan” as cities, and “non-metropolitan” as rural areas. While some non-metropolitan areas are certainly what we have traditionally thought of as rural, many are not. The ability to differentiate among non-metropolitan areas is important for a whole range of issues, not the least of which is a basic understanding of the process of metropolitanization, and of the diversity of social and economic roles that continue to be played by people and places that remain beyond the metropolitan periphery. The U.S. government has recently revised its classification system of metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas, introducing the *micropolitan* concept. The purpose of this new measurement concept is to effectively differentiate the social and economic realities of places caught in between metropolitan areas and more traditionally conceptualized non-metropolitan areas.

### *What is “Micropolitan”?*

With the new classification system, both metropolitan and non-metropolitan territory can be integrated with a population center. To this end, a *core-based statistical system* was instituted that established the micropolitan category as a means of distinguishing between non-metropolitan areas that contain a population core, and non-metropolitan areas that do not. Micropolitan areas are built around core settlement clusters of 10,000-49,999 persons, and included both core counties and outlying counties with high commuting

to the core. Counties were retained as the basic geographic building block of metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas in the new system. Of New York State’s 62 counties, 36 are metropolitan and 26 are non-metropolitan. Of the non-metropolitan counties, 15 are considered micropolitan and 11 are non-core-based.

### **Table 1: NYS Non-Metro Counties:**

#### Micropolitan Counties:

Cattaraugus  
Cayuga  
Chautauqua  
Clinton  
Columbia  
Cortland  
Franklin  
Fulton  
Genesee  
Jefferson  
Montgomery  
Otsego  
Seneca  
St. Lawrence  
Steuben

#### Non-CBA Counties:

Allegany  
Chenango  
Delaware  
Essex  
Greene  
Hamilton  
Lewis  
Schuyler  
Sullivan  
Wyoming  
Yates

Official metropolitan statistical areas were first created in the U.S. in the 1910 Census. The USDA and several other federal agencies have examined various categorization schemes which attempt to identify and group the significant diversity within non-metropolitan areas. However, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) which is the federal government agency responsible for establishing the nation’s *official* geography has not, until 2000, adopted this perspective. *By establishing this new system that delineates micropolitan areas, the diversity that has always existed within non-metropolitan areas has finally been officially recognized.*

## Does this new measurement concept effectively differentiate ?

Our analysis shows substantial differentiation between micropolitan and non-core-based statistical areas (non-CBSAs), and demonstrates the importance of distinguishing between these two types of non-metro areas. As an intermediate category, micropolitan areas provide stability to the decade-to-decade swings in non-metropolitan population change during periods of higher out-migration, but share almost equally with non-CBSA areas in attracting migrants during periods of high non-metropolitan in-migration. In terms of services available and their function as urban centers, micropolitan areas are intermediate between small metropolitan and non-CBSA areas, but more similar to small metropolitan areas. Accordingly, studies of non-metropolitan population growth and migration should focus on the wide swings experienced by non-CBSA areas. Decade-to-decade swings in micropolitan areas, while still marked, were not nearly as dramatic as those experienced by smaller more isolated places with more production-dependent economies.

## Policy Implications

The U.S. government's new core-based statistical areas system officially recognizes diversity within the non-metropolitan sector, and sheds light on how this diversity affects demographic and socioeconomic development in the rapidly changing intermediate areas between metropolitan and non-metropolitan America. This permits researchers and policy makers to target assistance to non-metropolitan areas of highest need and where opportunities for growth and development are greatest. As information about micropolitan areas makes its way into government data and publications alongside that about metropolitan areas, micropolitan areas will draw increased attention from policy makers and the social science research community. Accordingly, we see the new core-based classification system as a step in the right direction that will enhance our understanding of urbanization and spatial development in America during the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

