Metro and Nonmetro Counties in Colorado

Based on the most recent listing of core based statistical areas by the Office of Management and Budget (December 2005), 17 counties\(^1\) in Colorado are part of metropolitan areas, and 8 counties are part of micropolitan areas. The micropolitan category defines counties that include an urban area with a population of 10,000 to 49,999 plus surrounding counties that are linked through commuting ties. These areas often represent important economic and trade centers in rural areas. The remaining 39 counties in Colorado are considered noncore counties. Using these classifications and the population estimates for 2005, 86.0 percent of Colorado residents live in metropolitan areas, 5.6 percent live in micropolitan areas, and 8.4 percent live in noncore areas.

\(^1\) Broomfield County was created from parts of Adams, Boulder, Jefferson, and Weld Counties effective in November of 2001. Broomfield County is part of the Denver-Aurora Metropolitan Area.
Population

Colorado’s population in July of 2005 was 4,665,177, up 8.4 percent from the 2000 Census. During the 1990s, the population in Colorado increased 30.6 percent. Nationally, population increased 13.1 percent during the 1990s, and 5.3 percent from April 2000 to July 2005. The population growth in Colorado’s micropolitan areas outpaced the metropolitan and noncore areas during the 1990s, and the metro areas had the fastest growth during the 2000 to 2005 period.

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<tr>
<th>Percent Change in Population</th>
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<td>U.S.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
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<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nonmetropolitan</td>
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<td>Micropolitan</td>
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<td>Noncore</td>
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Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Six counties in Colorado lost population during the 1990s, all of them nonmetro. The fastest growth in the 1990s was in Douglas County in the Denver-Aurora Metropolitan Area, with a population growth of 191 percent. Population more than doubled in three counties in the Denver-Aurora Metropolitan Area during the 1990s (Douglas, Park, and Elbert).

From 2000 to 2005, 21 counties in Colorado lost population, all but one of them nonmetro. The fastest growth during this time was again in Douglas County, with a population increase of 41.9 percent.
The Economic Research Service, USDA, classifies counties as population loss counties if the population declined from 1980 to 1990 and from 1990 to 2000. In Colorado, four counties, all nonmetro, are classified as population loss counties.

**ERS County Typology:**
**Population Loss Counties**

Race / Ethnicity

The population in Colorado is 90.3 percent white and 4.1 percent African American. Nationally, the population is 80.2 percent white and 12.8 percent African American (2005 Census Bureau estimates).
Within Colorado, the metropolitan population is 89.4 percent white and 4.6 percent African American. The micropolitan population is 94.8 percent white and 1.6 percent African American, and the noncore population is 95.7 percent white and 0.9 percent African American.

People of Hispanic origin make up 19.5 percent of Colorado’s population, and 14.4 percent of the total U.S. population. In 17 Colorado counties, the Hispanic population accounts for over 25 percent of total population, shown in the map to the right. In Conejos and Costilla Counties, the Hispanic population accounts for over 50 percent of total population.

Many areas have experienced significant growth in Hispanic populations over the past decade and a half. The map to the right shows the counties in which the Hispanic population more than doubled between 1990 and 2005.
Age

The age distribution of the metro and nonmetro populations in Colorado is shown in the chart to the right. The percent of the population in the older age categories is higher in the nonmetro portions of Colorado.

Many rural areas experience an aging of their populations over time, in some cases due to inmigration of retirees and in other cases due to outmigration of younger populations and an aging-in-place of residents. Four Colorado counties have a significant portion of total population over the age of 65. These counties, all nonmetro, are shown in the map to the right.

The Economic Research Service classifies counties as retirement destination counties based on population change due to immigration. In Colorado, 17 counties are classified as retirement destination counties (6 metro and 11 nonmetro counties).
Educational Attainment

The percent of the population age 25 and over that has earned a Bachelor’s Degree or higher is 24.4 percent in the U.S. and 32.7 percent in Colorado. In metro areas of Colorado, this statistic is 34 percent, compared to 25 percent in nonmetro areas.

The chart to the right compares the educational attainment of Colorado’s metro and nonmetro populations. The percent of the population with high educational attainment is greater in the metro areas, while the percent of the population with low educational attainment is greater in the nonmetro areas.

The Economic Research Service classifies counties as low education counties if “25 percent or more of residents 25-64 years old had neither a high school diploma nor GED in 2000.” In Colorado, three counties, all nonmetro, are classified as low education counties.
Poverty

The poverty rate in Colorado in 2003 was 10.0 percent, compared to 12.5 percent for the U.S. (Census Bureau estimates). The poverty rate in Colorado counties ranged from 2.2 percent in Douglas County to 25.6 percent in Crowley County.

The Economic Research Service classifies counties as persistent poverty counties if they experienced poverty rates of 20 percent or higher in each decennial census from 1970 through 2000. There are 386 persistent poverty counties in the U.S., and four are located in Colorado. These four counties are nonmetro.
Health Services

The designation of areas or populations as medically underserved is based on an index of four variables - the ratio of primary care physicians per 1,000 population, the infant mortality rate, the percent of the population with incomes below the poverty level, and the percent of the population age 65 and over (Health Resources and Services Administration, HHS). Within Colorado, several areas of the state are considered medically underserved, shown in the map below.

Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs) are those areas that “may have shortages of primary medical care, dental or mental health providers and may be urban or rural areas, population groups, or medical or other public facilities” (Health Resources and Services Administration, HHS). Within Colorado, several areas in the state are designated as primary care HPSAs for the total or low income populations.
Per Capita Income

Per capita income trends in Colorado have matched national trends, with Colorado’s income exceeding the national income throughout much of the past several decades. In 2004, per capita income in Colorado was $36,113, compared to $33,050 for the U.S.

Nonmetro per capita income in Colorado has lagged behind metro per capita income over the past several decades. In 2004, metro per capita income in Colorado was $37,340, compared to $28,665 in nonmetro areas.

The per capita income gap is measured with nonmetro per capita income as a percent of metro per capita income. In Colorado, the gap was at its smallest in 1974 and at its largest in 2001. In 2004, nonmetro per capita income was 76.8 percent of metro per capita income.
Within Colorado, 2004 per capita income ranged from $16,737 in Saguache County to $75,454 in Pitkin County. Six counties, all nonmetro had per capita income less than $20,000 in 2004.

Transfer payments include retirement and disability payments, social security benefits, public assistance, and medical benefits. In Colorado, four counties’ incomes rely significantly on transfer payment. In these counties, all nonmetro, transfer payments account for over 30 percent of total personal income in the county.
Employment

In 2004, government and government enterprises accounted for the largest shares of employment in Colorado (13.6%) and the U.S. (13.9%). Retail trade was the second largest employment sector both in Colorado (10.5%) and the U.S. (11.0%).

The ERS Economic Typology classifies counties into one of five industry categories of specialization or as nonspecialized. The map to the right shows the classification of Colorado counties by this typology, illustrating the diversity across the state.
Unemployment

In 2005 the unemployment rate in Colorado was 5.0 percent, compared to 5.1 percent for the nation. Within Colorado, the unemployment rate ranged from 3.0 percent in Hinsdale County to 10.4 percent in Costilla County.

The Economic Research Service classifies counties as low employment counties if “less than 65 percent of residents 21-64 years old were employed in 2000.” In Colorado, three counties, all nonmetro, are classified as low employment counties.
Agriculture

Agriculture is an important industry in Colorado, and 15 counties are classified by the Economic Research Service as farming dependent (see map on page 11). The map below shows the value of agricultural products sold in 2002 for Colorado counties. In 8 counties the value was over $100 million, and in Weld County the value was over $1 billion.

Average farm size in Colorado is 991 acres, and 29 percent of farms are 500 acres or larger. In 15 counties, over half the farms are 500 acres or larger.
Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is an important component to economic development today. Unfortunately, data that allow us to measure entrepreneurial activity and trends is difficult to ascertain, particularly at the county level. The CFED Development Report Card for the States rates each state on its entrepreneurial energy, “evaluating the extent to which new firms are generated and whether they are contributing to employment growth.” While this is a state-level ranking, it provides useful insight as to how a state is performing. Colorado’s ranking is “A”.

As mentioned, county level indicators of entrepreneurship are difficult to ascertain, but a good indicator is the proportion of workers that are self employed. The map below shows self employed workers as a percent of nonfarm private employment in the county.
Nonmetro Recreation Counties

The Economic Research Service’s classification of nonmetro recreation counties captures the recreational opportunities and development in many rural parts of the nation. The classification is based on a number of factors, including employment and income derived from recreation-related activities, seasonal housing units within the county, and receipts from hotels and motels. Nationally, 334 counties are classified as nonmetro recreation counties, and 26 are located in Colorado. Counties that were nonmetro in 1993 or in 2003 are classified.
Data Sources and References

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For Comments and Questions on this Report:

Kathleen K. Miller
RUPRI Program Director
(573) 882-5098
miller@rupri.org

Contact RUPRI

Rural Policy Research Institute
Truman School of Public Affairs
University of Missouri-Columbia
214 Middlebush Hall
Columbia, MO 65211
(573) 882-0316 Voice
[573] 884=5310 FAX

http://www.rupri.org