

TRENDS IN UNINCORPORATED PLACES, 1950-60*

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RESUMEN

Examinanse en este estudio las tendencias observadas durante el decenio de 1950 a 1960 en las localidades no incorporadas, de más de 1,000 habitantes según el censo. En el transcurso de esos años, el número de tales localidades bajó de 1472 a 1468 únicamente, pero se agregaron alrededor de 600 nuevas. Señálanse las razones de la desaparición de tales localidades, así como los cambios en su número por región y localización metropolitana.

Los cambios regionales han seguido el crecimiento de la población general, con una ganancia en cuanto a su número de 20 por ciento en el Oeste. En las Zonas Metropolitanas Estadísticas Standard (Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas), muchas localidades fueron anexadas por las ciudades y otras desaparecieron al extenderse los límites de la Zona Urbanizada (Urbanized Area), pero aparecieron nuevas localidades en la periferia. En las zonas no metropolitanas, el número de localidades cuya población bajó a menos de 1,000 habitantes, no se vió compensado por nuevas localidades no incorporadas. Los cambios observados en las localidades no incorporadas parecen concordar con la tendencia de la distribución de su población que está experimentando la nación.

As part of a continuing effort to move from a strictly legal to a more demographic concept of the city, the Bureau of the Census in 1950 began reporting unincorporated centers in addition to those cities and towns having a legal designation. Census work on unincorporated places actually began prior to 1940, and a special report appeared as part of the 1940 Census, which listed unincorporated places having a population of over 500 at that time.¹ Beginning with 1950, however, such places with 1,000 or more inhabitants have been listed as an intrinsic part of the volume entitled *Number of Inhabitants*, and such places having 2,500 or more people are included in the population defined as urban.

The availability of reasonably comparable data for two time periods makes possible an examination of trends in the number and distribution of unincorporated places and an assessment of their place in the changing settlement structure of the nation. This is the objective of the present paper.

First, however, a review of census prac-

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tice with regard to unincorporated places is in order.² Prior to both the 1950 and 1960 censuses, boundaries were delineated

¹ Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940, Population: Unincorporated Communities, United States, by States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1943). Concern with unincorporated places, and particularly the problem of estimating their populations, resulted in a number of articles at about this time: Paul H. Landis, "The Number of Unincorporated Places in the United States and Their Estimated Populations," *Research Studies of the State College of Washington*, VI (December, 1938), pp. 160-88; Glenn T. Trewartha, "The Unincorporated Hamlet: Analysis of Data Sources," *Rural Sociology*, VI (March, 1941), pp. 35-42; Glenn T. Trewartha, "The Unincorporated Hamlet: One Element of the American Settlement Fabric," *Annals of the Association of Geographers*, XXXIII (1943), pp. 32-81; T. Lynn Smith, "The Role of the Village in American Rural Society," *Rural Sociology*, VII (March, 1942), pp. 10-21; Vincent Heath Whitney, "Notes on Reliability of Atlases for Estimating the Populations of Unincorporated Places," *Rural Sociology*, X (December, 1945), pp. 387-93; Vincent Heath Whitney, "The Estimation of Populations for Unincorporated Places," *American Sociological Review*, XI (February, 1946), pp. 98-103; and Douglas G. Marshall, "Hamlets and Villages in the United States: Their Place in the American Way of Life," *American Sociological Review*, XI (April, 1946), pp. 159-65.

² This review is based primarily on unpublished information kindly made available by the Geography Division of the Bureau of the Census. The cooperation of T. C. Kerlin, Robert C.

around larger population centers not having legally defined limits or corporate powers. These places had to possess a definite nucleus of residences, and the boundaries were drawn so as to include, if possible, all the surrounding closely settled area. Census enumeration districts were made to conform to these boundaries for both years. As part of the 1950 program, State Highway Departments delimited unincorporated places and forwarded maps showing these to the Bureau of the Census. For 1960, essentially the same procedures were followed as in 1950, except that the State Highway Departments were not involved. Prior to 1960, a comprehensive list of places was made, based primarily on a compilation of places reported or considered in 1950, and a current *Rand McNally Atlas*. Additional sources checked included a list of places incorporated or disincorporated since 1950, the *Postal Guide*, the *Railroad Guide*, and other information available in records kept by the Census. Boundaries were delineated for places on this list which had an estimated population of 800 or more. To be eligible, available maps had to show a definite core of residences and sufficient density to give the place generally the same physical characteristics as an incorporated community of comparable size. In certain counties, proposed enumeration district boundaries, including those delimiting unincorporated places, were drawn for the 1960 Census by county officials or other interested local organizations. These boundaries were used when they conformed to Bureau of the Census specifications.

For both censuses, each place was designated by a local name or combination of names. In 1960, if no name was widely recognized in the area, one was used that would indicate the place location, as "Gainesville West, Florida." Following

Klove, and William T. Fay, of the Division, in giving time to explain the unincorporated program, and in furnishing unpublished records, is gratefully acknowledged.

enumeration in both years, places so delimited which were located outside urbanized areas and found to have a population of 1,000 or more, were included in the published reports.

There were two significant modifications of procedure made in 1960. First, places in urbanized areas were included if they had 10,000 or more population and were recognized and delimited by local officials or organizations. Second, a determined effort was made to separate into component parts those contiguous places previously reported together and given two or more hyphenated names. In this way, two adjacent communities which may have been reported as a single unincorporated place in 1950 with a hyphenated name were separated. Both of the resulting places, one, or none might then qualify as unincorporated places on the basis of size in 1960. This change in practice will be taken into account in the analysis to follow.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF UNINCORPORATED PLACES IN 1960

There were 1,577 unincorporated places over 1,000 population reported in the Census of 1960.³ This includes 109 places over 10,000 in urbanized areas, together having more than two and one-half million people. Because of lack of comparability with 1950, when places in urbanized areas were not reported, these 109 places will not be considered further in this report. Of the 1,468 places remaining, only 28 had 10,000 or more people, 480 had

³ The listing of unincorporated places for both 1950 and 1960 was carefully compiled and checked, based on Tables VI and VII for each state in the 1950 volume entitled *Number of Inhabitants* and Tables VII and VIII in the corresponding 1960 volume, along with errata sheets appearing at the first of these volumes. The slight discrepancy in the total number of places included in this study and the totals listed in Table K (p. xxii) of the 1960 *Number of Inhabitants* appears to be due to misclassification by the census in Table K of Gainesville Cotton Mills, Georgia, and Bellglade Camp, Florida, as incorporated places, and Boulder City, Nevada, as an unincorporated place.

between 2,500 and 10,000, and exactly twice this number, 960, had from 1,000 to 2,500 people. Almost four million people lived in these unincorporated places.

The regional distribution of the 1,468 unincorporated places is given in Table 1. Concentration in the Northeast and the South is apparent, with 70 percent altogether in the New England and Middle Atlantic division and in the Southern region. A different picture emerges, however, when the relative importance of unincorporated places is considered. Here the places 1,000-10,000 are singled out, since all but 2 percent of the unincorporated places are under 10,000 in size, and incorporated places outside urbanized areas are compared with unincorporated places in this size group. The last column shows that almost all the places 1,000-10,000 in New England are unincorporated, and this unique situation explains why the Northeast region has been divided into the New England and Middle Atlantic divisions for this analysis. The North Central states have the lowest proportion unincorporated, with only one in twenty so classified. The West, with fewer such places than the South, has twice the proportion of centers unincorporated. State variations with regard to incorporation procedures, and in the extent to which densely settled areas are included in the urban fringe, no doubt account for most of

this regional difference. Taking the United States as a whole, and excluding urbanized areas, about one place out of every five 1,000-10,000 in size is unincorporated.

Another important aspect of the distribution of unincorporated places concerns their location relative to metropolitan centers and other larger cities. Here a trichotomy has been set up. First, places have been classified according to whether or not they are located in Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas, as defined in 1960. Second, those places not in SMSA's have been further subdivided according to whether or not the largest place in their county was larger than 10,000 population in 1960. Of the 1,468 unincorporated places in 1960, 459 (or about one-third) were in SMSA's, and 688 of the remainder were in counties with at least one city of more than 10,000 people. The other 321, constituting 20 percent of the total, were in other nonmetropolitan counties.

A comparison by size indicates that unincorporated places are more highly concentrated in SMSA's than are incorporated places. Thus comparing incorporated and unincorporated places 1,000-10,000 in population located outside urbanized areas, it is found that 16 percent of the incorporated places are in SMSA's, while this is true of 31 percent of the unincorporated places.

Table 1.—DISTRIBUTION OF UNINCORPORATED PLACES BY REGION, 1960*

Region	Unincorporated places		All places 1,000 to 10,000				Percent places unincorporated
			Incorporated outside UA		Unincorporated		
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
New England.....	306	21	50	1	298	21	86
Middle Atlantic.....	259	18	671	12	255	18	28
North Central.....	138	9	2,129	39	137	9	6
South.....	439	30	2,024	36	437	30	18
West.....	326	22	639	12	313	22	33
Total	1,468	100	5,513	100	1,440	100	21

* The 109 places reported in the 1960 Census which are located in urbanized areas have been excluded from this report.

CHANGES IN UNINCORPORATED
PLACES, 1950-60

There was virtually no change in the number of unincorporated places between 1950 and 1960. In 1950 there were 1,472 such places reported, and in 1960 there were 1,468.⁴ This apparent lack of change, however, covers up what is actually a very dynamic situation. For, of the 1,472 places reported in 1950, 692 dropped out and were not reported in 1960, while an additional 688 new places were reported in 1960, bringing the total to 1,468.

Since unincorporated places have no legal status, it is perhaps not surprising that there should be so much turnover in the decade between censuses, especially in view of the population redistribution patterns of recent years. Certainly an unincorporated place is "fair game" for annexation by nearby incorporated centers; it may itself incorporate and thereby change its status, or it may fall into the expanding urbanized areas delimited by the census around metropolitan centers.⁵ Further, population shifts may lead to a re-

⁴ Places in Alaska and Hawaii were included for 1950, though Alaska and Hawaii were not states at that time.

designation of unincorporated centers, so that new places appear which include much the same territory as old ones. Finally, a place may decline in population to below the 1,000 mark and thus be ineligible in the later census year. These possible reasons for 1950 places not being reported in 1960 are so different in their implications that an adequate understanding of trends in unincorporated places requires a tabulation, by reason for disappearance, of those dropped after 1950.

Accordingly, a search was made through the appropriate voided forms filed in the Geography Division of the Bureau of the

⁵ Two recent articles on incorporation are: Amos H. Hawley, "The Incorporation Trend in Metropolitan Areas, 1900-1950," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, XXV (February, 1959), pp. 41-45; and Henry J. Schmandt, *The Municipal Incorporation Trend, 1950-1960* (Madison: Bureau of Government, University Extension Division, University of Wisconsin, 1961). Jerome G. Manis has written an essay on annexation, "Annexation: The Process of Reurbanization," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, XVIII (July, 1959), pp. 353-60. Annexation as a growth factor in metropolitan areas is considered by Leo F. Schnore in "Municipal Annexations and the Growth of Metropolitan Suburbs, 1950-1960," *American Journal of Sociology*, LXVII (January, 1962), pp. 406-17.

Table 2.—REASONS FOR NOT INCLUDING 1950 UNINCORPORATED PLACES IN 1960

Reason	Number of places dropped
1. Urban growth.....	384
In urbanized area in 1960.....	235
Other	
Annexed by incorporated place.....	88
Incorporated.....	54
In township urban by special rule 1960.....	7
2. Decline of place to less than 1,000 population in 1960..	150
3. Change of census procedure.....	33
4. Change of name, with new 1960 place covering at least part of 1950 place.....	125
Split hyphenated place name into separate areas, with at least one reported in 1960.....	54
Other.....	71
Total.....	692

Census, and the following classification resulted:

1. *Reasons generally associated with urban growth.*—The predominant reason under this category, as seen in Table 2, was that a place reported in 1950 fell in an urbanized area designated by the census for 1960. Such places may also have been annexed or incorporated.⁶ This category also includes those places outside urbanized areas which incorporated, were annexed either in entirety or to such a degree that the area remaining would not make up an eligible unincorporated place, or were in townships made urban by special rule located in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

2. *Decline of the unincorporated place to less than 1,000 population in 1960.*—This may have been determined after the census count, by the size of population reported, or during the delineation process, if a count of dwelling units gave an estimated population under 800.

3. *Change in census procedure.*—All but four of these were places with hyphenated names which were split and then dropped because all individual places were too small. Since it is possible that in these cases the *combined* places would have had more than 1,000 people, they were classified as dropped due to the 1960 policy of discouraging hyphenated place names rather than to decline to less than 1,000 population. In addition, one place dropped after 1950 was a college and the other a military reservation. These two 1960 exclusions may not reflect a change in census procedure but rather could have been included by mistake in 1950. Hilo and Honolulu, Hawaii, were included in 1950 but not in 1960 because they had definite boundaries. There are no incorporated centers in Hawaii.

⁶ Also classified as dropouts under the category were nine places in Urbanized Areas which actually were reported by the Census in 1960, since they were over 10,000 population at that time. As previously noted, places over 10,000 population located in Urbanized Areas in 1960 were excluded from the present analysis for the sake of consistency with 1950 procedure.

4. *Change of name, with new 1960 place covering at least part of 1950 place.*—This category includes places which changed names, since census procedure is to consider these as new places regardless of whether or not the territory included was greatly different. In some cases the boundaries appeared to be the same. In others there was considerable variation between censuses. Also included in this category are places which survived when a hyphenated name place was split and two or more component parts reported in 1960. In order to take this fourth category into account in analyzing change, the new places replacing these 1950 dropouts were identified. Altogether, 156 new places replaced 125 places reported in 1950.

THE 1950-60 BALANCE SHEETS

Table 3 is a detailed balance sheet resulting from the above tabulations. The total column of the table on the right shows that one-fourth of the 1950 places dropped out because of growth reasons and another 10 percent because of decline, and the loss of these places was balanced by the number of new places added. Similarly, those dropped due to change in practice and change in name were matched by those added due to changes in name, so there was no net change in number over the decade.

Size—Changes in the number of places by size over the decade have resulted in fewer unincorporated places under 2,500 and more between 2,500 and 10,000 in the United States. Table 3 shows the number of small places declined 9 percent, while the number 2,500-10,000 grew 23 percent. The expected distribution by size shows that the adding and dropping would have resulted in a somewhat higher proportion of small places in 1960 than in 1950. Therefore, the decline in the number of small unincorporated places is due to the growth of places which were reported in both censuses from smaller to larger size groups. These shifts are indicated in the next to the last line, which shows a net

Table 3.—CHANGES IN THE NUMBER OF UNINCORPORATED PLACES BY SIZE, 1950-60

Type of change	1,000-2,499	2,500-9,999	10,000-up	Total
A. BALANCE SHEET				
Number, 1950.....	1,052	389	31	1,472
Drop:				
Growth.....	-237	-130	-17	-384
Decline.....	-147	- 3		-150
Procedure change....	- 29	- 2	- 2	- 33
Name change.....	- 71	- 52	- 2	-125
Add:				
Name change.....	89	64	3	156
New places.....	399	130	3	532
Expected, 1960.....	1,056	396	16	1,468
Net shift.....	- 96	84	12	
Number, 1960.....	960	480	28	1,468
B. PERCENTAGES				
Percent change in number	- 9	+ 23	-10	0
Percent of 1950 places:				
Drop due to growth...	23	33	59	26
Drop due to decline..	14	1	0	10
New places.....	38	33	10	36

Table 4.—CHANGES IN UNINCORPORATED PLACES BY REGION, 1950-60

Type of change	New England	Middle Atlantic	North Central	South	West	Total
A. BALANCE SHEET						
Number, 1950.....	310	257	149	484	272	1,472
Drop:						
Growth.....	-30	-62	-59	-148	-85	-384
Decline.....	-15	-25	-11	- 73	-26	-150
Procedure change.....	- 5	- 4	- 1	- 20	- 3	- 33
Name change.....	-27	-23	-14	- 38	-23	-125
Add:						
Name change.....	31	28	16	51	30	156
New places.....	42	83	58	183	161	532
Number, 1960.....	306	259	138	439	326	1,468
B. PERCENTAGES						
Percent change in number...	- 1	+ 1	- 7	- 9	+20	0
Percent of 1950 places:				31		
Drop due to growth.....	10	24	40	15	31	26
Drop due to decline.....	5	10	7		10	10
New places.....	14	34	39	38	60	36

movement of 96 places up from the smallest size category.

Region.—There has been a noteworthy redistribution of unincorporated places by region over the 1950-60 decade. Table 4 shows that the West gained over 20 percent in the number of places, while the South and North Central regions declined less than 10 percent. The New England and Middle Atlantic divisions were stationary over the period and had the lowest turnover of places. The New England states were outstanding in this regard, with 75 percent of the places reported in 1950 also listed in 1960. The fact that very few small places are incorporated in New England no doubt explains the greater stability of unincorporated places reported there. Many must be well-established rural service centers similar to those that would be incorporated in other regions.

It is interesting to compare the components of change by region. Both the West and the South had the same proportion of places drop out due to growth, while the North Central states lost relatively more. The South had more losses due to decline of places below the 1,000 mark than any other region and also lost 20 of the 32 places due to procedure change. Loss and gain due to name change are about 9 and 11 percent, respectively, in all regions considered. The big difference between the West, with its growing number of places, and the other regions is in the proportion of new places added, which at 60 percent is more than 20 percentage points higher than any other region.

Metropolitan location.—Shifts in the number of unincorporated places by metropolitan location have resulted in a decline in Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas and in nonmetropolitan counties without cities of 10,000 or more. In contrast, the number of unincorporated places increased 18 percent in non-metropolitan counties with places over 10,000 population. The structure of the changes is quite different for these location categories as seen in Table 5. Since urban growth is

most pronounced in metropolitan areas, it is not surprising that fully 50 percent of the 1950 unincorporated places in SMSA's were dropped for reasons associated with growth. Corresponding percentages for the other two categories are much lower, and the lowest figure, as would be expected, is for nonmetropolitan counties without cities of 10,000. The reverse relationship exists for the relative importance of dropouts due to the decline of the unincorporated place to less than 1,000 population, with the highest percentage found in the least urbanized category. Variations in the relative importance of dropouts or additions due to name changes are slight. The number of new places comes to 40 percent of the 1950 total number in SMSA's and also in nonmetropolitan counties with cities of more than 10,000, while the corresponding figure for other nonmetropolitan counties is lower.

In sum, a higher rate of loss due to urban growth accounts for the decline in numbers in SMSA's, in contrast with the growth in nonmetropolitan counties with medium sized cities. The decline in the least urbanized counties, on the other hand, may be attributed to high losses due to the decline of individual unincorporated places below the 1,000 mark and to fewer new places being designated.⁷

According to one view, the difference in the trend between SMSA's and non-metropolitan counties having cities over 10,000 is largely a statistical artifact. Since most of the places classified here as dropping out due to growth were unincorporated centers falling in 1960 urbanized areas, and urbanized areas have been delineated only around cities of 50,000 or

⁷ Balance sheets by metropolitan location also were made separately for the North, South, and West. With one exception, changes in the number of places by location are consistent on a regional basis with changes for the United States as a whole. In the rapidly growing West, the number of unincorporated places grew in non-metropolitan counties not having a city of 10,000 or more in contrast to the situation in the South, the North, and the nation as a whole.

more, this reason could have applied only in a few nonmetropolitan counties. What would the results have been, for example, if the urbanized area program had been extended down to places of 10,000 or more population in 1960? A tentative answer was obtained by locating all 688 unincorporated places in nonmetropolitan areas with communities of 10,000 or more in 1960. It was found that 317 of these were directly adjacent to places of 10,000 or more and so presumably would have been in urbanized areas had such areas been delineated. If these unincorporated places had thus been eliminated from the 1960 list, there would have been only 371 places in this location category instead of 688, and the number of places would have declined 36 percent over the 1950-60 period. No doubt a complete check would have

revealed many places adjacent to centers of 10,000 or more in SMSA's and even a few in those nonmetropolitan counties not having centers of 10,000 or more. In any event, each of these three location categories would have sustained losses in the number of unincorporated places had the urbanized area program included places of 10,000 or more.

CONCLUSION

Changes in unincorporated places are an integral part of the pattern of population redistribution which is occurring in the nation. The West, with a total population growth rate twice that of any other region, is the only region with a marked increase in the number of unincorporated places. This was attributed to a higher

Table 5.—CHANGES IN UNINCORPORATED PLACES BY METROPOLITAN LOCATION, 1950-60

Type of Change	In SMSA	Not in SMSA:		Total
		Largest place 10,000 up	Largest place under 10,000	
A. BALANCE SHEET				
Number, 1950.....	533	584	355	1,472
Drop:				
Growth.....	-267	-88	-29	-384
Decline.....	- 26	-47	-77	-150
Procedure change.....	- 4	- 9	-20	- 33
Name change.....	- 35	-61	-29	-125
Add:				
Name change.....	45	77	34	156
New places.....	213	232	87	532
Number, 1960.....	459	688	321	1,468
B. PERCENTAGES				
Percent change in number..	- 14	+18	-10	0
Percent of 1950 places:				
Drop due to growth....	50	15	8	26
Drop due to decline....	5	8	22	10
New places.....	40	40	25	36

rate of establishment of new places there than in other regions.

Despite the fact that unincorporated places are not increasing in number in metropolitan areas, they play an important part in the urbanization process. In 1960 they are more likely than incorporated centers of comparable size to be found in SMSA's. Over one-half of the unincorporated places are either in SMSA's or adjacent to cities of over 10,000 population in nonmetropolitan areas. In expanding metropolitan areas over the 1950-60 period, many places passed out of existence due to annexation, new incorporation, or census designation as part of an urbanized area. In their place, however, came almost as many new unincorporated centers located farther out on the periphery of urban growth.

At the same time, in parts of the country with a lower degree of urban development, a significant number of unincorporated places declined to less than 1,000 population and passed out of existence. Also in these areas the rate of establishment of new places is low. More than one-third of the 150 places dropping out due to decline are located in the nonmetropolitan South, and many are in sections of general population decline. For example, six places dropped out for this reason

in Harlan County, Kentucky, alone, which is located in the depressed coal-mining section of the southern Appalachians.

Unincorporated places certainly do not constitute as homogeneous a set of units as one would desire in population research. Variations in incorporation laws make this problem particularly acute, so that in some areas these places may be predominately stable, well-established, small communities, while in other areas they may be virtually non-existent, or else company towns or segments of the rural-urban fringe experiencing rapid transition to suburban status. In studying the population changes of communities, it would be highly desirable to put incorporated and unincorporated places together and thus deal with a set of centers which are population aggregates without regard for legal incorporation. However, the great instability of unincorporated places, in contrast to incorporated centers, would make most kinds of combined analysis very difficult where change is the focus. Unincorporated places, then, need to be considered separately and their place in our nation's population structure assessed. The present paper is meant to be a step in this direction.