

PROCESS

In the fall of 2018, the Institute for Emerging Issues (IEI) participated in a series of six NC Rural Center policy roundtables, hearing the voices of over 100 people from across the state. IEI asked participants to write down stereotypes that they believe exist about rural areas and urban areas of North Carolina. While not a representative sample of the state, we've compiled the results. A narrative analysis (below) details these assumptions and stereotypes.

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Urban

Some assumptions voiced about **urban people** are that they are smarter, have better education, and have a superiority complex: that urban people are pretentious, condescending, and lack respect. Urban people are also assumed to be self-centered and fast-paced — always in a rush, too busy to care or engage with the people around them. Moreover, urban people were said to be liberal politically, less religious and more “diverse” racially and ethnically. While many are perceived as not caring about rural areas or place-based traditions, many urban residents come from rural areas or out of state.

Assumptions voiced about **urban places** include the belief that they have better infrastructure and transit, but also congestion and crowding. Urban places are also seen as the dominant recipient of government spending and resources, related to legislative and political power. There also exists a perception of high crime in urban places.

Assumptions voiced about **urban economies** are that they are the focus of businesses and corporations, resulting in greater job opportunity and wealth.

Rural

Some assumptions surfaced about **rural people** are that they are un- or undereducated, leading to stereotypes of being ignorant or “simple.”

Assumptions about **rural culture** include political conservatism — conservative values and family oriented — and a stereotype that rural people are universally “conservative.” Rural culture is also assumed to lack of diversity, to be locally, not globally focused, with an aging population, and deeper religious ties. Rural culture is reported to be “slower paced,” closed-minded and stubborn, and living in the past.

Assumptions about the **rural economy** is that it is predominantly agrarian and people work as farmers. It’s assumed there are fewer job opportunities, a lack of funding and resources, and that rural people and jobs leave for urban areas. Other themes around the rural economy include the perception of an inferiority complex, that “rural needs help.”

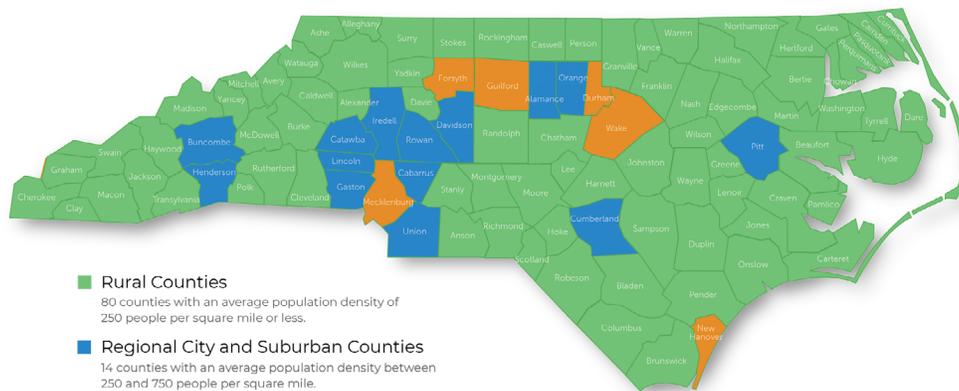
DEFINING RURAL AND URBAN

The Institute for Emerging Issues follows the county classification set by the NC Rural Center:

- **Rural Counties:** average population density of 250 people per square mile or less
- **Suburban Counties:** average population density between 250 and 750 people per square mile
- **Urban Counties:** average population density that exceeds 750 people per square mile

By these definitions, there are 6 urban counties, 14 suburban counties, and 80 rural counties in North Carolina.

NORTH CAROLINA COUNTIES



- **Rural Counties**
80 counties with an average population density of 250 people per square mile or less.
- **Regional City and Suburban Counties**
14 counties with an average population density between 250 and 750 people per square mile.
- **Urban Counties**
6 counties with an average population density that exceeds 750 people per square mile.

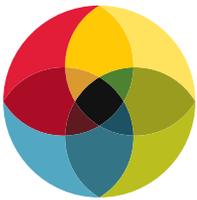
Densities calculated by the Rural Center based on 2014 U.S. Census population estimates.



ASSUMPTION BREAKERS

OUTDATED ASSUMPTION	CURRENT REALITY
Rural people are not well educated.	<p>Although urban counties in the state tend to have populations with greater educational attainment, several rural counties match — and sometimes beat — urban areas when it comes to % of people with a high school degree or higher.</p> <p>(Source: American Community Survey 2017)</p>
Rural people “talk funny”	<p>North Carolina is, arguably, the most linguistically diverse state in the country. NC has five regional dialects, the product of rich diversity among different cultural and ethnic influences. Check out IEI’s podcast with NC State linguistics professor Walt Wolfram to learn more.</p>
Rural areas are more religious.	<p>Data on religious adherence tells a different story. Of the 80 rural counties in NC, more than half (45) fall below the state’s average on religious adherence. Of the 6 urban counties in NC, 4 of them are above the state average; and of the 14 suburban counties, 8 are above the state average. Source: ARDA data set (2010)</p> <p>“Religious Adherence” = All denominations/ groups—Rates of adherence per 1,000 population</p>
<p>Rural population is declining.</p> <p>People are leaving rural areas for urban ones.</p>	<p>In 2010, North Carolina had the second largest rural population after Texas. Source: Carolina Population Center</p> <p>50 of the 80 rural counties have a positive projected percent population change from 2010–2020. As for the highest projected growth in population — four rural counties take the lead: Brunswick, Chatham, Johnston, and Pender, beating out all urban and suburban counties.</p> <p>Source: NC Budget and Management, 2010–2020 county population projections</p>
Urban areas have greater job opportunity.	<p>Urban areas have their own challenges with job opportunity. According to the FutureWork Disruption Index, urban and suburban counties are among the most vulnerable in the state when it comes to projected job loss to automation. Only 1 urban and 1 suburban county fare better than the state’s average projected job loss to automation (though generally, higher levels of education will also help them to recover from this job loss).</p>

<p>Urban areas are the only places in the state where innovation is happening.</p>	<p>3535 patents came from rural counties in NC from 2000–2015. That makes up about 10% of all patents from the state from 2000–2015. Source: USPTO</p> <p>Of the NC IDEA Foundation 2018 SEED grant recipients, 2 of the 7 startups came from rural counties.</p> <p>30 of North Carolina’s counties are in the top quarter of the nation for share of “creative class” — the % of people working in a creative job capacity. North Carolina’s 6 urban counties, 11 of 14 suburban counties, and 13 rural counties make up those in the top 25% nationwide. Source: USDA</p>
<p>Urban people are self-centered.</p>	<p>All 6 urban counties rank above the state average in terms of cash contributions to charities (household average). Suburban and urban counties are among the most charitable of the three county types. Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics 2015</p>
<p>Urban areas are more racially and ethnically diverse.</p>	<p>Many rural counties are among the most racially diverse in the state, when looking at population percent Asian, Black, Hispanic, and American Indian. Nine of the top ten counties with the greatest racial diversity are rural counties. Source: 2010 Census</p>



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