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Rural Population and Rural SBC Trends, 1950-1990

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Introduction

The changes occurring in rural America have had significant impact on the life of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Slightly over half of our Southern Baptist churches are classified as rural. With this high a percentage of churches serving rural America, any changes in the rural context will have a great impact on the SBC as a whole. By carefully examining rural population and rural SBC trends, a fuller understanding of the contribution of rural America to the life of the SBC may emerge.

This report is the result of a request by Dr. Gary Farley for a presentation at the Town and Country Leadership Conference held at the Home Mission Board in Alpharetta, Georgia, in January, 1996. An overview of the findings contained in this report was presented at that meeting. This report constitutes the final form of the rural demographic and rural SBC data and its analysis that is currently available.

I would like to thank Dr. Farley for his helpful comments and encouragement throughout this research project. Steve Whitten provided very useful assistance in the analysis of the data and helped me to focus the project. Marilyn Kelly proofed and edited the report for publication. Carolyn Hillmon provided graphic and mapping assistance. Pam Mitchell compiled the final report. The teamwork of the Research Division of the Home Mission Board makes projects like this possible. It is our prayer that this report will provide insights for all levels of leadership in the SBC to the ministry opportunities in rural America.

Summary of Data

What is rural? This question may evoke old memories of life on the farm, or of wooded hillsides embracing the radiant colors of fall. For others, this question may prompt folks to recall a simpler way of life when neighbors knew each other by name, and no one locked their doors. While rural may be a way of life, it may also be a way of livelihood. Living a rural lifestyle may mean working in some form of agriculture or at least harvesting natural resources from the land, instead of working in a factory or an office building. With the rapid urbanization that characterizes life in the United States, rural places have often been transformed. What was once a pasture may now be a subdivision. While it may be hard to describe exactly what rural is, most of us realize when we are no longer in a rural area. So, what is rural?

For this study the Census Bureau's definition of rural will be used. A rural area is an incorporated place or Census Designated Place with a population of less than 2,500, or an unincorporated area with lower population density. Therefore, any town with a population of at least 2,500 or more is urban. While the definition of rural for this report is quite limiting, it provides the opportunity to compare rural demographics with rural Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) churches. Churches classify themselves by geographic categories listed on their Annual Church Profiles. These geographies parallel the Bureau of the Census geographies. Therefore, both sets of data may be compared for analysis.

Rural population is scattered throughout the United States. In fact, most of the 3,141 counties in the U.S. have some rural population. By using the above definition, rural population can be found in Metropolitan Statistical Areas. In 1990, about 40 percent (39.1%) of all counties in the United States were at least three-quarters rural. There are currently 799 counties that are completely rural. These counties have no towns with populations greater than 2,500. One out of every 10 rural persons live in these completely rural counties. Most of these completely rural counties are found in Appalachia, the Great Plains, and the West (see figure 2). In 1993, 254 (about one-third) of these completely rural counties had no Southern Baptist work.

The rural population of the United States was 62 million in 1990. Rural population now comprises about one-fourth of the United States population. This figure is down from 1950 levels when two-fifths of the population was rural. However, since 1950 the rural population has grown by nearly 8 million. The rural population grew at a rate of 13.5 percent from 1950 to 1990; yet, the urban population grew at a rate five times faster than the rural rate for the same period. The shift from rural to urban is not due to population loss in rural America, rather it is due to the disproportionate growth rates favoring urban over rural.

When examining rural population by decades, a pattern emerges. From 1950 to 1970 the rural population was almost static with a population loss over these 20 years of about half a million persons. The real growth in rural population occurred in the 1970s. In this decade the rural population grew by 10 percent. This phenomena may be due to two factors. First, there was a strong "back to the land" movement in the decade of the 1970s. Second, farm commodity prices were at their highest levels early in this decade. The 1980s saw the growth rate slow. This slowing effect may be attributable to the farm recession and high interest rates that marked the

late 1970s and the early 1980s. Yet, the rural population still grew by 3 million during this decade.

The rural growth rates of the past two decades might have been even greater had it not been for several limiting factors. Overall, rural population growth was fueled by in-migration to rural areas from urban areas and natural increase (more births than deaths). However, in areas where farming dominated the economy, the population has been aging and moving beyond child-bearing years. Also, in farming areas there has been less dependence on manual labor. Farming became more mechanized and farm laborers were no longer needed. The greatest growth in rural areas occurred in places with close proximity to large metropolitan areas, resort communities, and rural retirement areas.

How has the growth rate for rural Southern Baptist churches compared to the rural population trends? The absolute number of SBC churches that classify themselves as rural has dropped slightly over the past 45 years. Part of this drop may be the result of rural churches in the South being reclassified as the church's community changed from rural to urban. With a high density of SBC churches near expanding urban areas in Texas, Florida, and Georgia, reclassification is certainly an issue. Another possibility is that the drop in rural churches has been through the actual loss of these churches. In many cases declining and aging rural populations result in churches losing members and affecting their continued viability.

The number of rural churches declined by about 3 percent (2.6%) and rural Sunday School enrollment declined by about 5 percent (5.2 %) from 1950 to 1990. However, the total membership of rural SBC churches grew by 31 percent, or about 1.2 million members from 1950 to 1990. While this kind of growth seems remarkable, care must be taken with these data. It is possible that churches in open-country rural areas are less likely to have up-to-date membership rolls. In the churches examined to test this hypothesis, it was found that the average Sunday School attendance was about one-tenth what was reported as total membership. Another scenario would be that open-country churches are currently much larger than they were in 1950, and this is not likely.

The 1950s were good years for rural SBC churches. During this decade the rate of addition of new rural SBC churches exceeded the growth rate for rural population. Therefore, the 1950s was the only decade since WW II in which rural churches actually gained relative to the rural population. Two factors contributed to this gain. First, rural population declined by almost 1 percent (0.8%). At the same time the number of rural churches grew by 2.5 percent (see figure 6).

The net gain in rural SBC churches continued through the 1950s and the early 1960s. In 1958 the number of rural SBC churches reached its peak with slightly over 23,750. A gradual decline in the number of rural churches continued for the next 30 years. Since 1987, the numerical decline in rural churches has been reversed and is again approaching 23,000 churches.

Since 1950, the SBC has aggressively expanded beyond the South. However, in the South there have been significant changes that have impacted the rural church. With the rapid urbanization of

the sunbelt South, beginning in the 1960s and continuing until the present, there have been many previously rural churches that have found themselves no longer in a rural environment. This reclassification of churches by community typology may partly explain the loss of rural churches in the South. Overall, the SBC has recorded a net loss of 598 rural churches since 1950 (see figure 12). At the same time the state conventions of Ohio, Indiana, and the Northwest have had a combined net increase of 339 rural churches (see figure 11). Therefore, the gains in the number of rural churches outside of the South have not completely offset the net loss in rural churches Convention-wide.

The number of rural churches declined in most southern state conventions. The decline in the number of rural churches in Texas alone was almost 21 percent since 1950. Tennessee, Kentucky, and Georgia also declined in the number of rural churches—between 15 and 12 percent, respectively (see figure 14). One reason for this decline may be that rural churches are dying. Or, it may be that formerly rural churches are being reclassified as urban. For the SBC as a whole, the number of rural churches has declined slightly at 2.6 percent (see figure 14). Therefore, the SBC has about the same number of rural churches as it did in 1950. This pattern of decline in the number of rural churches does not hold true for new convention states. In the Northern Plains (now Dakotas, and Montana Baptist Conventions, and Wyoming Baptist Fellowship) the number of rural churches increased by almost 400 percent (388%). Other new convention states such as New York, Michigan, Arizona, and Kansas-Nebraska showed rural churches gaining by at least 200 percent since 1950 (see figure 13). Many of the new convention states have started a large number of churches, including rural churches. With the decline in rural churches in southern state conventions and the increase of rural churches in new work conventions, the pattern of distribution for rural churches across the U.S. has changed.

The rural SBC churches had a strong showing in the 1950s. The later decades did not follow the same pattern. Together with the slight decrease in the number of rural SBC churches there were also declines in Sunday School enrollment. The declines in rural churches were matched by declines in rural population in the 1960s and early 1970s. Even though the rural population began to grow during the late 1970s, the rural churches continued to decline. There seems to be about a 15 to 20 year lag between the rural-population trend and the rural-church trend. Since 1980, both rural population and rural churches are showing signs of growth.

The rural population per rural church ratio improved during the 1950s. This improvement was due to an increase in the number of rural churches, and by the decrease in rural population. With rural population showing a rebound in the late 1970s through the early 1990s, this ratio has worsened.

From 1950 to 1990 the rural population per rural Sunday School member worsened by 19 percent. The ratio for rural churches worsened by 14 percent in the 1970s alone. The next decade showed a slowing of that trend as rural churches were started at a rate closer to the rate of rural population growth (see figure 19). It is a fact that the growth in the number of rural churches has not kept pace with the growth in rural population as the rural population rebounds. However, the ratio in 1990 of rural population per rural church of 1:2,734 is much better than

the overall ratio of total population per SBC church of 1:6,567. In other words, the SBC is better churched in rural areas than it is in the nation as a whole.

Completely rural counties (counties with no urban population) are located primarily in three areas: the Great Plains, the West (particularly Northwest), and Appalachia (see figure 2). Although rural population in the United States has grown since the mid 1970s, the nation's breadbasket has not seen any growth. The rural counties of the Great Plains have experienced population losses from 1980 to 1990 (see figures 4 and 5), and are projected to continue to lose population to the year 2000 (see figures 20 and 21).

What are the prospects for rural SBC churches? Rural population growth rates lag behind the rate of urban population growth. However, more than half of the rural population growth (3.9 million) since 1950 has occurred in the South. Since the South is where the SBC's greatest strength in rural churches is concentrated, these churches may well be able to reach more of these new rural residents. Additionally, many of the new convention states are starting rural churches at a faster rate than any other type of church. The Northwest, Dakotas, Montana, Colorado, Minnesota-Wisconsin, and Iowa conventions have made significant progress in reaching their rural communities with a significant number of rural church starts among a relatively stable population (see figures 15 and 20).

Rural church work is changing. While rural populations in areas dominated by agriculture are declining, other rural areas are gaining population. The new rural setting may be a resort community in Colorado or the Ozark highlands. The retirement communities of the Southwest and Florida may also offer opportunities for new rural churches. Opportunities for new rural churches may be found among the new immigrants who are fleeing to rural areas from the hustle and bustle of urban life, yet are still commuting to the city for employment. Rural people today exhibit a growing diversity that will definitely need a variety of approaches if Southern Baptists are to reach them for Christ.

Figure 1
Rural and Total U. S. Population, 1950 to 1990

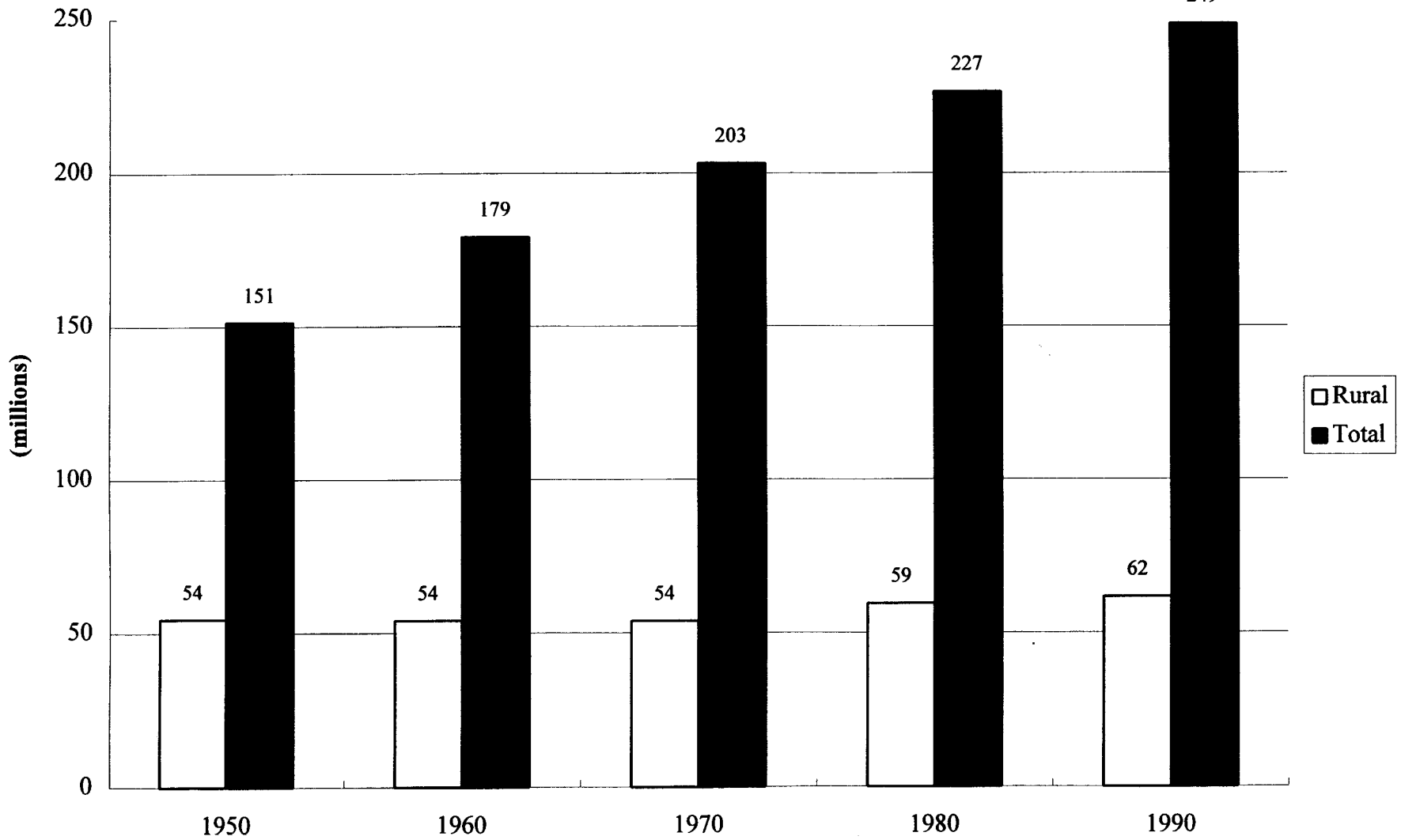
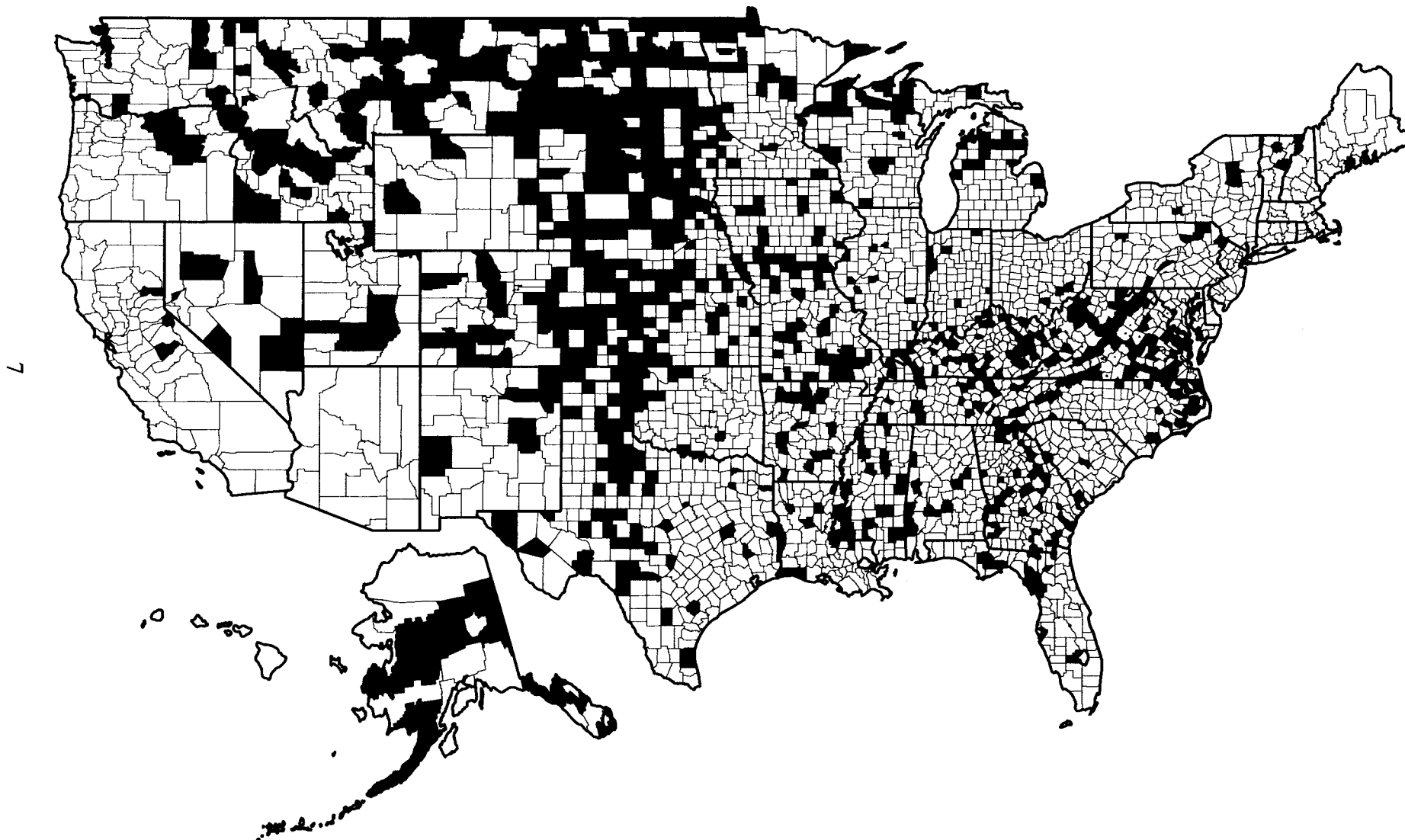
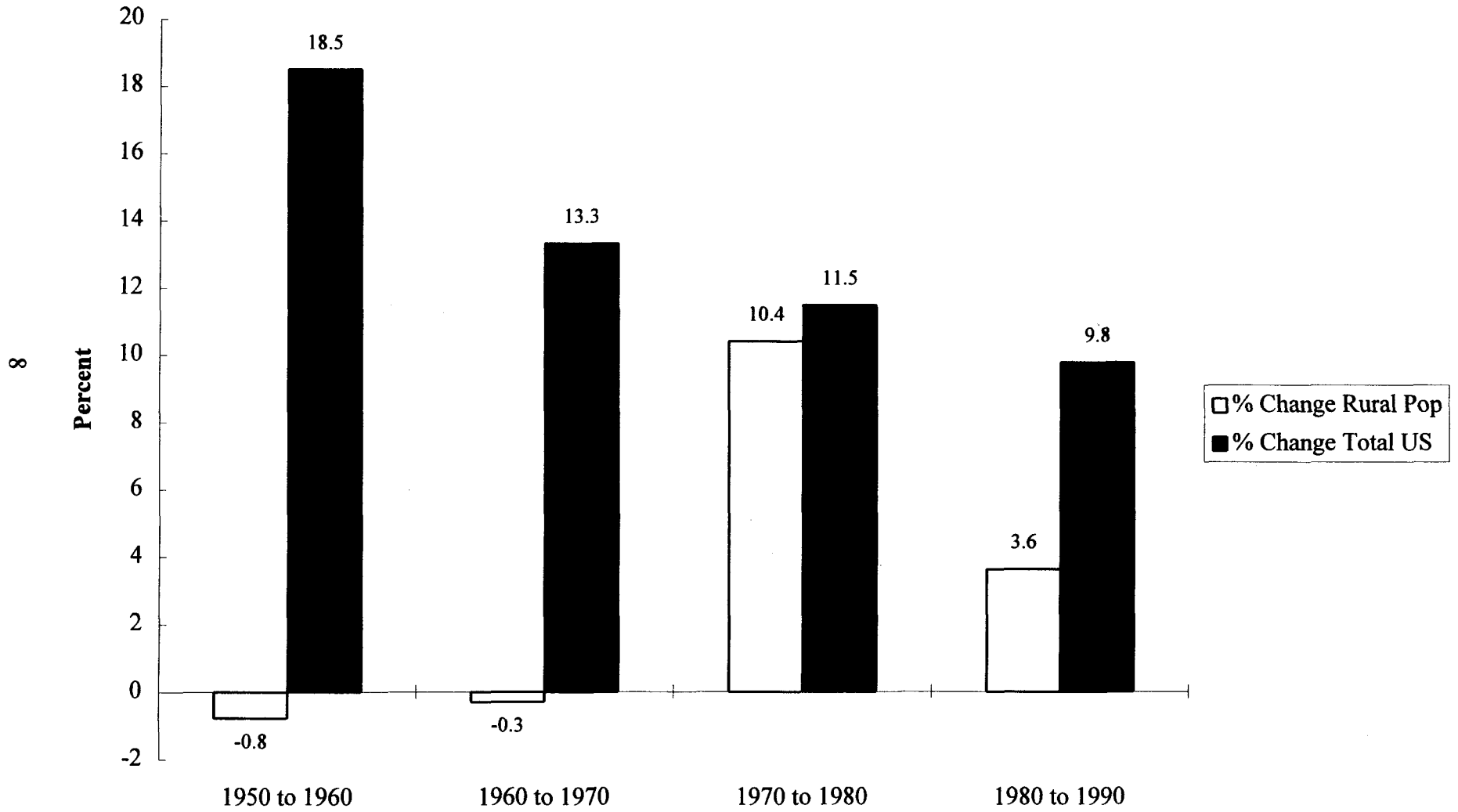


Figure 2
Completely Rural Counties, 1990



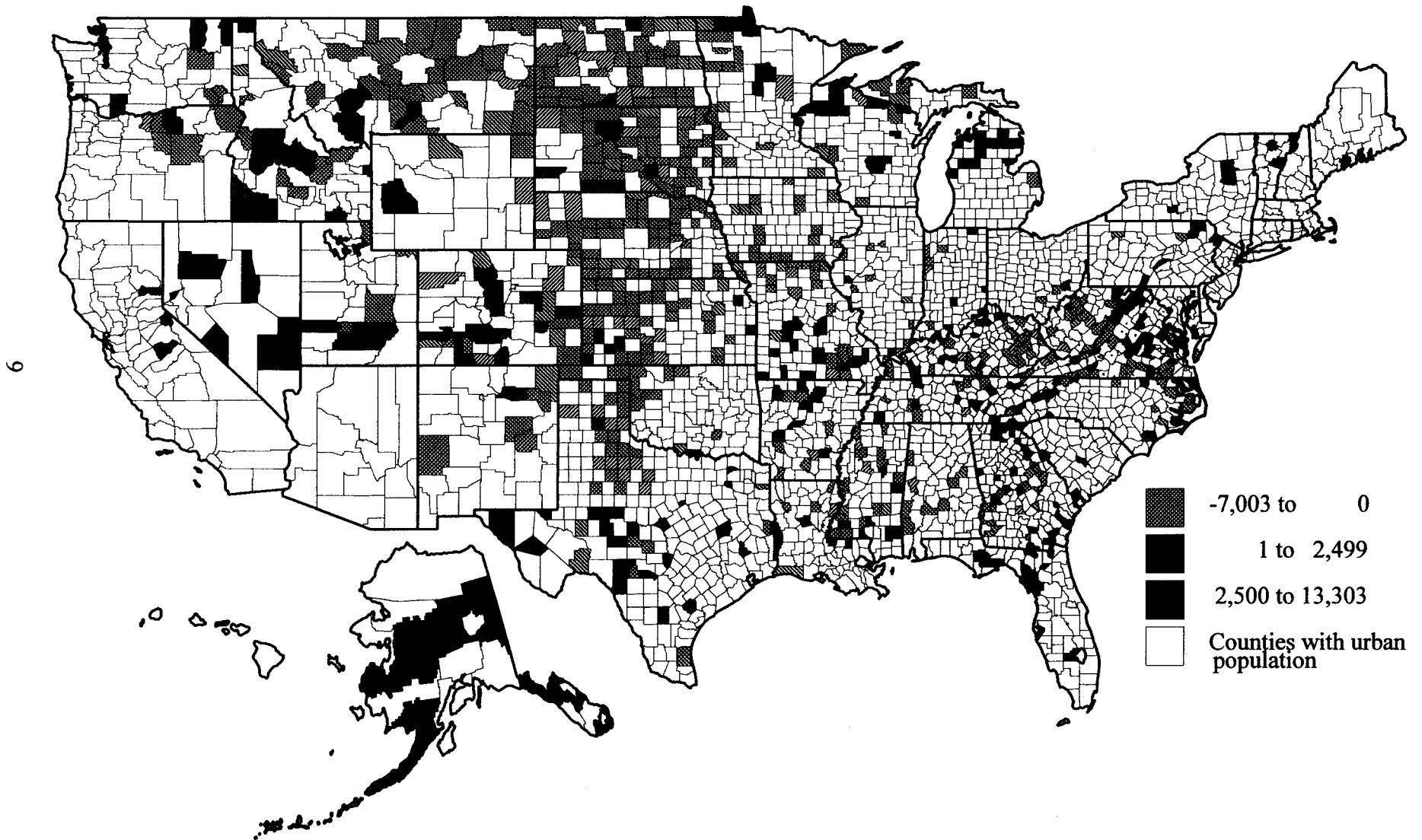
Counties with no urban population as defined by U.S. Census Bureau
Source: Bureau of the Census, Washington, DC; compiled by the Research Division, Home Mission Board, Alpharetta, GA

Figure 3
Percent Change in Rural and Total U. S. Population, 1950 to 1990



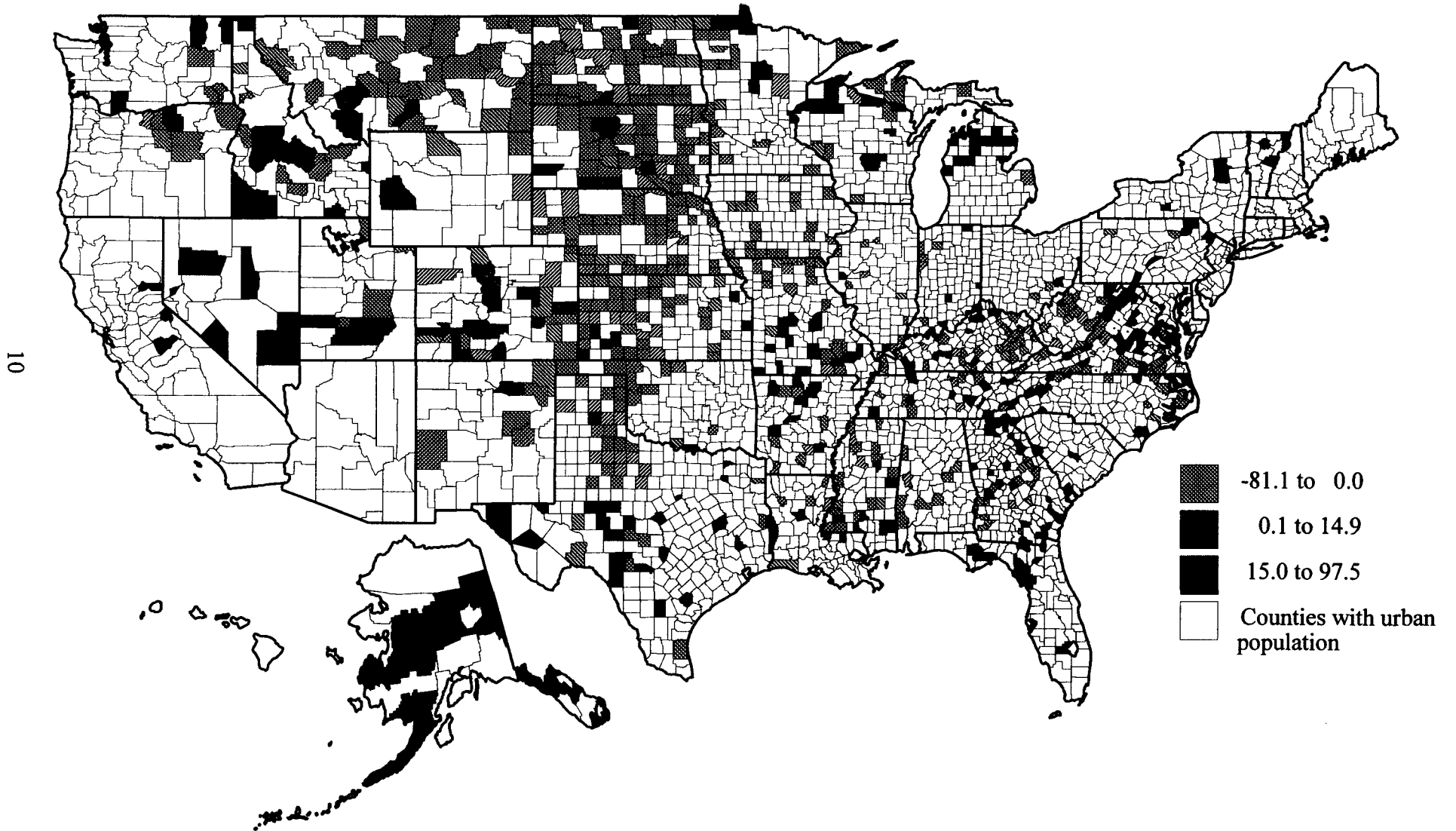
Source: *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1994*; compiled by the Research Division, Home Mission Board, Alpharetta, GA

Figure 4
Net Population Change for Completely Rural Counties, 1980 to 1990



Source: Bureau of the Census, Washington, DC; compiled by the Research Division, Home Mission Board, Alpharetta, GA

Figure 5
Percent Population Change for Rural Counties, 1980 to 1990



Source: Bureau of the Census, Washington, DC; compiled by the Research Division, Home Mission Board, Alpharetta, GA

Table 1**Rural SBC Churches by Year, 1948 to 1992**

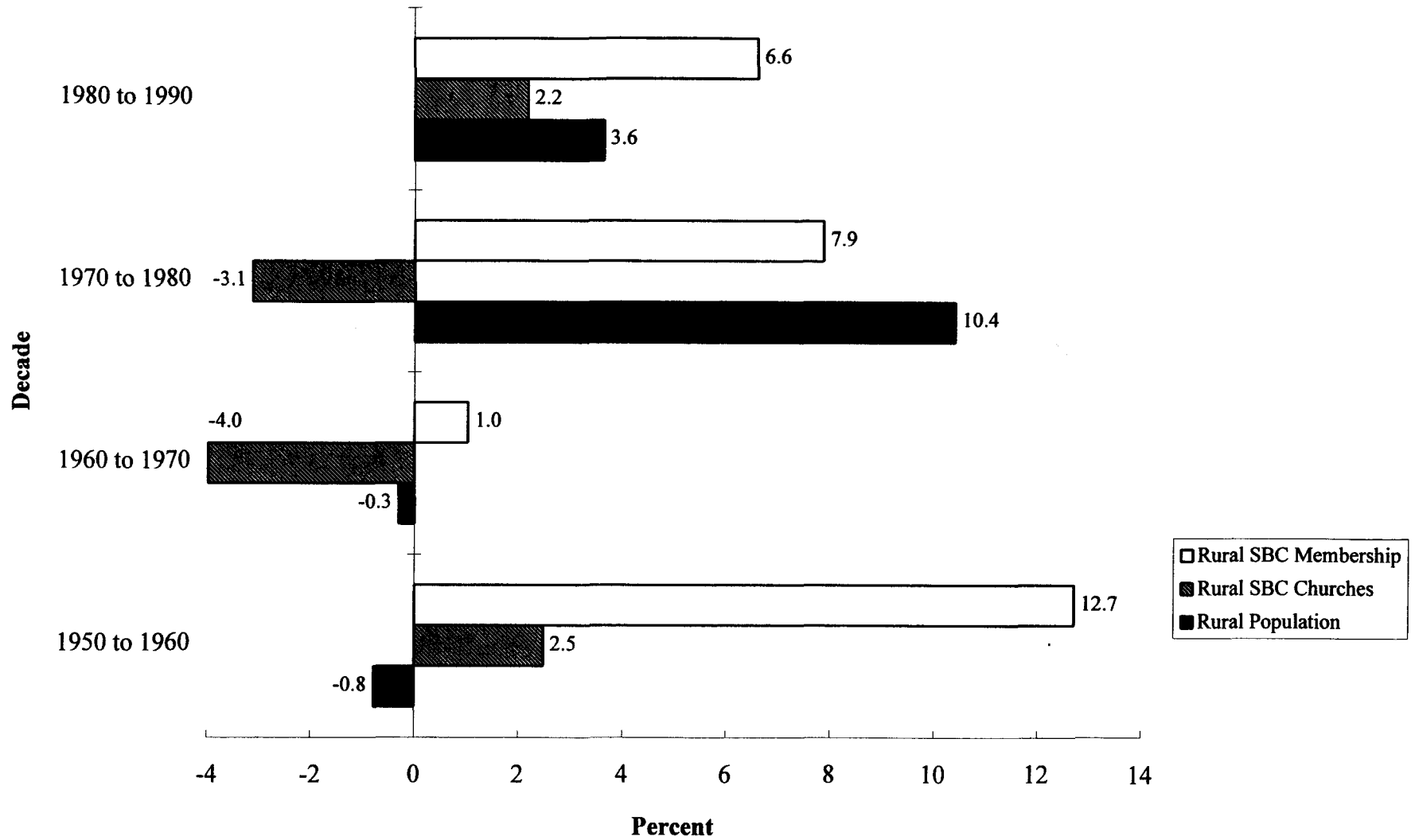
| Year | Open Country | Village | Town | Total Rural | Total SBC | Percent Rural |
|------|-----------------|---------|-------|----------------|--------------|------------------|
| 1948 | 14,454 | 4,810 | 3,476 | 22,740 | 26,822 | 84.8% |
| 1949 | 14,494 | 4,908 | 3,475 | 22,877 | 27,285 | 83.8 |
| 1950 | 14,778 | 4,842 | 3,526 | 23,146 | 27,788 | 83.3 |
| 1951 | 14,531 | 4,905 | 3,654 | 23,090 | 28,289 | 81.6 |
| 1952 | 14,502 | 4,934 | 3,806 | 23,242 | 28,865 | 80.5 |
| 1953 | 14,688 | 4,906 | 3,959 | 23,553 | 29,496 | 79.9 |
| 1954 | 14,660 | 4,891 | 4,064 | 23,615 | 29,899 | 79.0 |
| 1955 | 14,779 | 4,863 | 3,925 | 23,567 | 30,377 | 77.6 |
| 1956 | 14,930 | 4,826 | 3,793 | 23,549 | 30,834 | 76.4 |
| 1957 | 15,064 | 4,777 | 3,838 | 23,679 | 31,297 | 75.7 |
| 1958 | 15,471 | 4,546 | 3,733 | 23,750 | 31,498 | 75.4 |
| 1959 | 15,502 | 4,447 | 3,777 | 23,726 | 31,906 | 74.4 |
| 1960 | 15,548 | 4,409 | 3,767 | 23,724 | 32,251 | 73.6 |
| 1961 | 15,624 | 4,348 | 3,700 | 23,672 | 32,598 | 72.6 |
| 1962 | 15,651 | 4,340 | 3,706 | 23,697 | 32,892 | 72.0 |
| 1963 | 15,243 | 4,387 | 3,651 | 23,281 | 33,126 | 70.3 |
| 1964 | 15,073 | 4,464 | 3,643 | 23,180 | 33,388 | 69.4 |
| 1965 | 14,802 | 4,775 | 3,702 | 23,279 | 33,797 | 68.9 |
| 1966 | 14,643 | 4,783 | 3,757 | 23,183 | 33,949 | 68.3 |
| 1967 | 14,588 | 4,720 | 3,781 | 23,089 | 34,147 | 67.6 |
| 1968 | 14,575 | 4,667 | 3,726 | 22,968 | 34,295 | 67.0 |
| 1969 | 14,536 | 4,584 | 3,713 | 22,833 | 34,335 | 66.5 |
| 1970 | 14,516 | 4,550 | 3,712 | 22,778 | 34,360 | 66.3 |
| 1971 | 14,463 | 4,377 | 3,741 | 22,581 | 34,441 | 65.6 |
| 1972 | 14,331 | 4,382 | 3,762 | 22,475 | 34,534 | 65.1 |

Table 1 (continued)

| Year | Open Country | Village | Town | Total Rural | Total SBC | Percent Rural |
|------|-----------------|---------|-------|----------------|--------------|------------------|
| 1973 | 14,343 | 4,342 | 3,846 | 22,531 | 34,665 | 65.0% |
| 1974 | 14,333 | 4,195 | 3,907 | 22,435 | 34,734 | 64.6 |
| 1975 | 14,135 | 4,132 | 3,914 | 22,181 | 34,902 | 63.6 |
| 1976 | 14,130 | 4,057 | 4,005 | 22,192 | 35,073 | 63.3 |
| 1977 | 14,110 | 4,024 | 4,010 | 22,144 | 35,255 | 62.8 |
| 1978 | 14,111 | 3,979 | 4,037 | 22,127 | 35,404 | 62.5 |
| 1979 | 14,102 | 3,937 | 4,047 | 22,086 | 35,605 | 62.0 |
| 1980 | 14,075 | 3,951 | 4,040 | 22,066 | 35,831 | 61.6 |
| 1981 | 14,119 | 3,942 | 4,067 | 22,128 | 36,079 | 61.3 |
| 1982 | 14,233 | 3,873 | 4,040 | 22,146 | 36,302 | 61.0 |
| 1983 | 14,250 | 3,852 | 4,052 | 22,154 | 36,531 | 60.6 |
| 1984 | 14,125 | 3,778 | 4,109 | 22,012 | 36,740 | 59.9 |
| 1985 | 14,198 | 3,721 | 4,161 | 22,080 | 36,979 | 59.7 |
| 1986 | 14,165 | 3,676 | 4,222 | 22,063 | 37,116 | 59.4 |
| 1987 | 14,133 | 3,643 | 4,284 | 22,060 | 37,286 | 59.2 |
| 1988 | 14,347 | 3,456 | 4,339 | 22,142 | 37,567 | 58.9 |
| 1989 | 14,666 | 3,369 | 4,433 | 22,468 | 37,785 | 59.5 |
| 1990 | 14,794 | 3,271 | 4,483 | 22,548 | 37,974 | 59.4 |
| 1991 | 14,861 | 3,192 | 4,512 | 22,565 | 38,221 | 59.0 |
| 1992 | 14,881 | 3,113 | 4,622 | 22,616 | 38,458 | 58.8 |

Source: *The Southern Baptist Handbook*; compiled by the Research Division, Home Mission Board, Alpharetta, GA

Figure 6
Percent Change Rural Population and Rural SBC by Decade, 1950 to 1990



Source: *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1994*; and Uniform Church Letter; compiled by the Research Division, Home Mission Board, Alpharetta, GA

Table 2

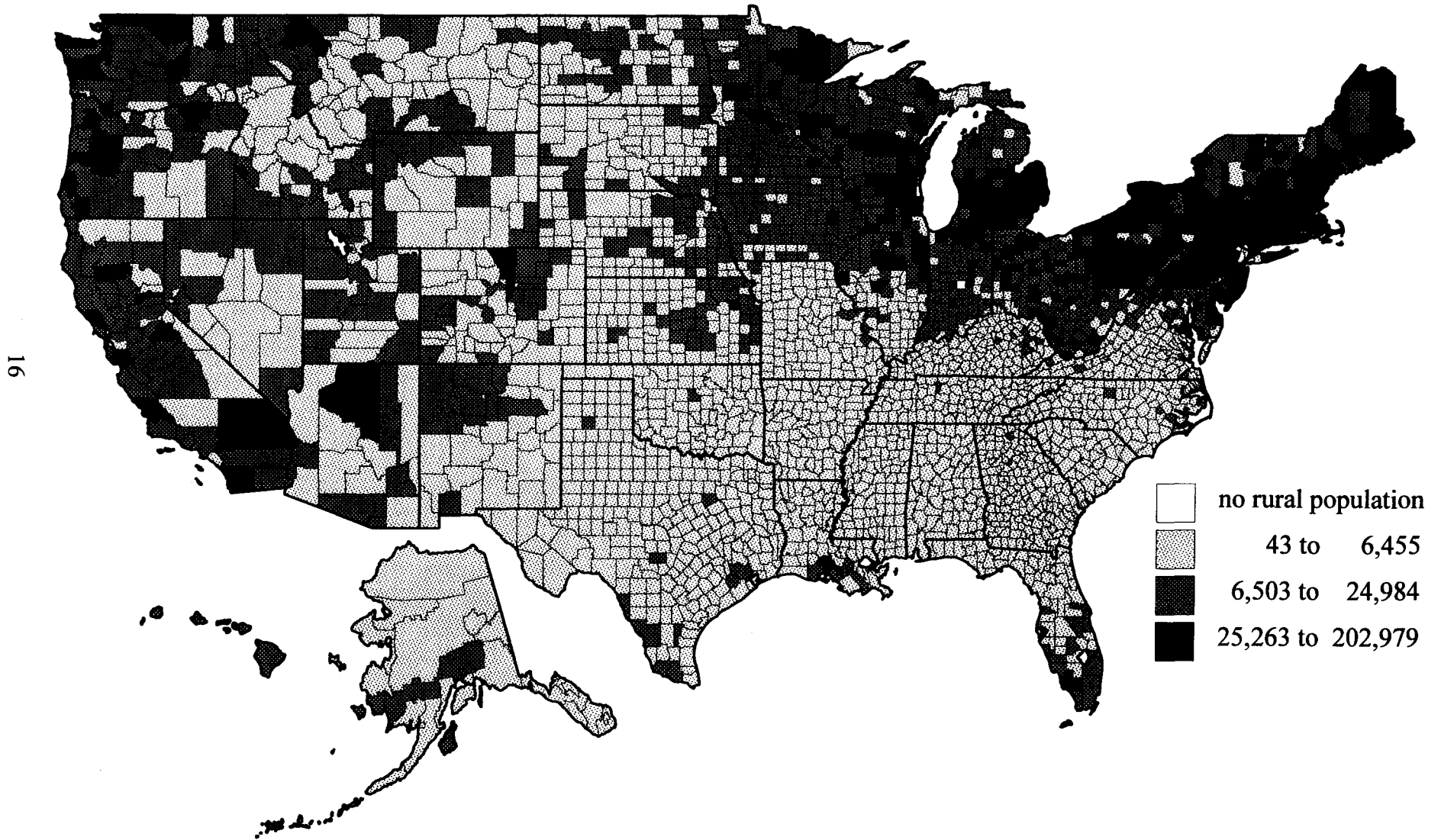
Rural Population and Rural SBC Components of Change by Decade, 1950 to 1990

| | Decade | | | | |
|---|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | 1950 | 1960 | 1970 | 1980 | 1990 |
| United States Rural Population | 54,479,000 | 54,054,000 | 53,565,000 | 59,495,000 | 61,656,000 |
| Decadal Percent Change | | -0.8 | -0.9 | 11.1 | 3.6 |
| SBC | | | | | |
| Rural Churches | 23,146 | 23,724 | 22,778 | 22,066 | 22,548 |
| Decadal Percent Change | | 2.5 | -4.0 | -3.1 | 2.2 |
| Rural Total Membership | 3,921,052 | 4,419,172 | 4,465,357 | 4,817,197 | 5,136,130 |
| Decadal Percent Change | | 12.7 | 1.0 | 7.9 | 6.6 |
| Ratio | | | | | |
| Rural Population per Rural Church | 2,354 | 2,278 | 2,352 | 2,696 | 2,734 |
| Index of Rural Population to Rural Church | | 96.8 | 103.2 | 114.7 | 101.4 |
| Rural Population per Rural Member | 13.9 | 12.2 | 12.0 | 12.4 | 12.0 |
| Index of Rural Population to Rural Membership | | 88.0 | 98.1 | 103.0 | 97.2 |

Source: *The Southern Baptist Handbook*; compiled by the Research Division, Home Mission Board, Alpharetta, GA

Note: the index of change is calculated by dividing the a given decade's rural population per rural church or rural member ratio by the preceding decade's ratio and then multiplying by 100. A score of less than 100 indicates improvement; 100 indicates no change; and a score greater than 100 indicates the index has worsened.

Figure 8
Rural Population per Rural Southern Baptist Church, 1990



Source: Bureau of the Census, Washington, DC and The Uniform Church Letter, Sunday School Board, Nashville, TN;
compiled by the Home Mission Board, Alpharetta, GA

Table 3

Rural Churches by Decade, 1950 to 1990

| Convention | Decade | | | | | Change 1950 to 1990 | |
|------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------------|--------------|
| | 1950 | 1960 | 1970 | 1980 | 1990 | Net | Percent |
| SBC | 23,146 | 23,724 | 22,778 | 22,066 | 22,548 | -598 | -2.6% |
| Alabama | 2,298 | 2,318 | 2,257 | 2,191 | 2,156 | -142 | -6.2 |
| Alaska | 0 | 9 | 13 | 13 | 17 | 17 | 88.9 |
| Arizona | 28 | 63 | 67 | 68 | 86 | 58 | 207.1 |
| Arkansas | 892 | 925 | 901 | 884 | 899 | 7 | 0.8 |
| California | 69 | 168 | 147 | 131 | 146 | 77 | 111.6 |
| Colorado | 0 | 30 | 36 | 53 | 69 | 69 | 130.0 |
| Dakotas Fellowship | | | | | 22 | 22 | ... |
| District of Columbia | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | ... |
| Florida | 671 | 757 | 711 | 677 | 734 | 63 | 9.4 |
| Georgia | 2,251 | 2,294 | 2,135 | 2,035 | 1,986 | -265 | -11.8 |
| Hawaii | 0 | 4 | 6 | 7 | 9 | 9 | 125.0 |
| Illinois | 484 | 547 | 545 | 504 | 476 | -8 | -1.7 |
| Indiana | 0 | 35 | 64 | 87 | 102 | 102 | 191.4 |
| Iowa | | | | | 9 | 9 | ... |
| Kansas | 28 | 56 | 60 | 67 | 84 | 56 | 200.0 |
| Kentucky | 2,004 | 1,894 | 1,782 | 1,712 | 1,740 | -264 | -13.2 |
| Louisiana | 879 | 960 | 921 | 925 | 929 | 50 | 5.7 |
| Maryland | 62 | 79 | 87 | 86 | 90 | 28 | 45.2 |
| Michigan | 0 | 12 | 31 | 27 | 40 | 40 | 233.3 |
| Minnesota-Wisconsin | | | | | 14 | 14 | ... |
| Mississippi | 1,513 | 1,574 | 1,544 | 1,524 | 1,552 | 39 | 2.6 |
| Missouri | 1,467 | 1,417 | 1,375 | 1,341 | 1,322 | -145 | -9.9 |
| Montana Fellowship | | | | | 31 | 31 | ... |
| Nevada | | | | 12 | 22 | 22 | 83.3 |
| New England | | | | | 17 | 17 | ... |
| New Mexico | 129 | 128 | 108 | 103 | 114 | -15 | -11.6 |
| New York | | | 8 | 19 | 27 | 27 | 237.5 |
| North Carolina | 2,602 | 2,735 | 2,722 | 2,523 | 2,521 | -81 | -3.1 |
| Northern Plains ¹ | | | 17 | 45 | 83 | 83 | 388.2 |
| Northwest ² | 2 | 45 | 56 | 61 | 90 | 88 | 100.0 |

Table 3 (continued)

| Convention | Decade | | | | | Change 1950 to 1990 | |
|--------------------------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------------------|---------|
| | 1950 | 1960 | 1970 | 1980 | 1990 | Net | Percent |
| Ohio | 0 | 74 | 93 | 104 | 149 | 149 | 101.4% |
| Oklahoma | 873 | 934 | 916 | 910 | 927 | 54 | 6.2 |
| Pennsylvania-So. Jersey | | | | 16 | 32 | 32 | 100.0 |
| Puerto Rico ³ | | | | 4 | 10 | 10 | 150.0 |
| South Carolina | 1,120 | 1,165 | 1,133 | 1,128 | 1,176 | 56 | 5.0 |
| Tennessee | 2,235 | 2,161 | 1,977 | 1,910 | 1,902 | -333 | -14.9 |
| Texas | 2,488 | 2,304 | 2,073 | 1,920 | 1,978 | -510 | -20.5 |
| Utah-Idaho | | | 17 | 15 | 28 | 28 | 64.7 |
| Virginia | 1,051 | 1,036 | 976 | 929 | 947 | -104 | -9.9 |
| West Virginia | | | | 35 | 65 | 65 | 85.7 |
| Wyoming | | | | | 30 | 30 | ... |

¹Later Dakotas, Montana Fellowships and Wyoming.

²Fomerly Oregon-Washington

³Caribbean Fellowship

Percent change was calculated using the first decade in which rural churches were reported, except for the Northwest Convention where 1960 rural church numbers were used.

Source: *The Southern Baptist Handbook*; compiled by the Research Division, Home Mission Board, Alpharetta, GA

Table 4

Percent Change Rural Churches by Decade, 1950 to 1990

| Convention | Decade | | | | 1950 to 1990 |
|------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | 1950 to 1960 | 1960 to 1970 | 1970 to 1980 | 1980 to 1990 | |
| SBC | 2.5% | -4.0% | -3.1% | 2.2% | -2.6% |
| Alabama | 0.9 | -2.6 | -2.9 | -1.6 | -6.2 |
| Alaska | | 44.4 | 0.0 | 30.8 | 88.9 |
| Arizona | 125.0 | 6.3 | 1.5 | 26.5 | 207.1 |
| Arkansas | 3.7 | -2.6 | -1.9 | 1.7 | 0.8 |
| California | 143.5 | -12.5 | -10.9 | 11.5 | 111.6 |
| Colorado | | 20.0 | 47.2 | 30.2 | 130.0 |
| Dakotas Fellowship | | | | | ... |
| District of Columbia | ... | ... | ... | ... | ... |
| Florida | 12.8 | -6.1 | -4.8 | 8.4 | 9.4 |
| Georgia | 1.9 | -6.9 | -4.7 | -2.4 | -11.8 |
| Hawaii | ... | 50.0 | 16.7 | 28.6 | 125.0 |
| Illinois | 13.0 | -0.4 | -7.5 | -5.6 | -1.7 |
| Indiana | ... | 82.9 | 35.9 | 17.2 | 191.4 |
| Iowa | | | | | ... |
| Kansas | 100.0 | 7.1 | 11.7 | 25.4 | 200.0 |
| Kentucky | -5.5 | -5.9 | -3.9 | 1.6 | -13.2 |
| Louisiana | 9.2 | -4.1 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 5.7 |
| Maryland | 27.4 | 10.1 | -1.1 | 4.7 | 45.2 |
| Michigan | ... | 158.3 | -12.9 | 48.1 | 233.3 |
| Minnesota-Wisconsin | | | | | ... |
| Mississippi | 4.0 | -1.9 | -1.3 | 1.8 | 2.6 |
| Missouri | -3.4 | -3.0 | -2.5 | -1.4 | -9.9 |
| Montana Fellowship | | | | | ... |
| Nevada | | | | 83.3 | 83.3 |
| New England | | | | | ... |
| New Mexico | -0.8 | -15.6 | -4.6 | 10.7 | -11.6 |
| New York | | | 137.5 | 42.1 | 237.5 |
| North Carolina | 5.1 | -0.5 | -7.3 | -0.1 | -3.1 |
| Northern Plains ¹ | | | 164.7 | 84.4 | 388.2 |
| Northwest ² | ... | 24.4 | 8.9 | 47.5 | 100.0 |

Table 4 (continued)

| Convention | Decade | | | | 1950 to 1990 |
|---------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | 1950 to 1960 | 1960 to 1970 | 1970 to 1980 | 1980 to 1990 | |
| Ohio | | 25.7% | 11.8% | 43.3% | 101.4% |
| Oklahoma | 7.0 | -1.9 | -0.7 | 1.9 | 6.2 |
| Pennsylvania-South Jersey | | | | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Puerto Rico ³ | | | | 150.0 | 150.0 |
| South Carolina | 4.0 | -2.7 | -0.4 | 4.3 | 5.0 |
| Tennessee | -3.3 | -8.5 | -3.4 | -0.4 | -14.9 |
| Texas | -7.4 | -10.0 | -7.4 | 3.0 | -20.5 |
| Utah-Idaho | | | -11.8 | 86.7 | 64.7 |
| Virginia | -1.4 | -5.8 | -4.8 | 1.9 | -9.9 |
| West Virginia | | | | 85.7 | 85.7 |
| Wyoming | | | | | ... |

¹Later Dakotas, Montana Fellowships and Wyoming.

²Fomerly Oregon-Washington

³Carribbean Fellowship

Source: *The Southern Baptist Handbook*; compiled by the Research Division, Home Mission Board, Alpharetta, GA

Figure 9
Rural Population per Rural SBC Member, 1950 to 1990

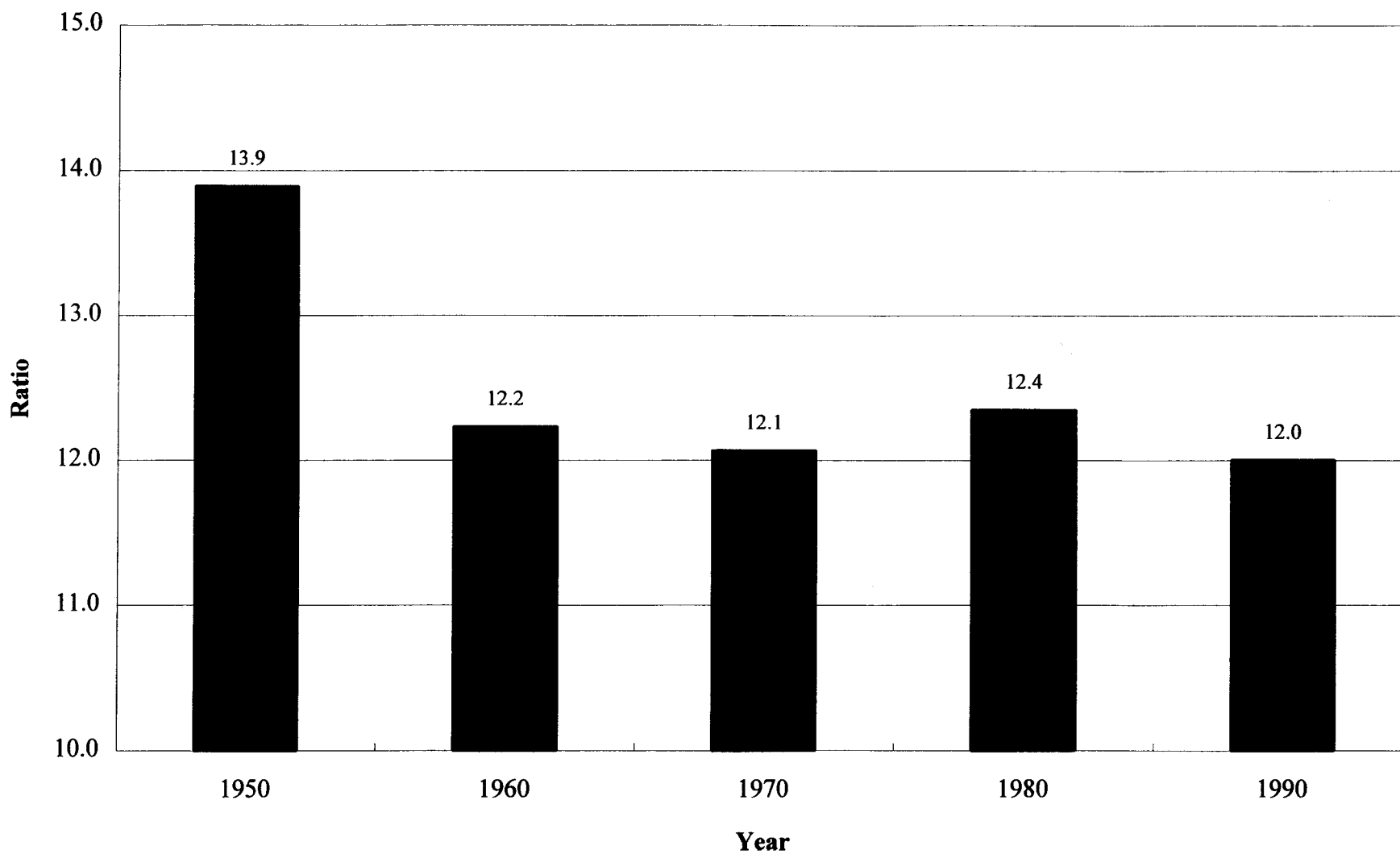
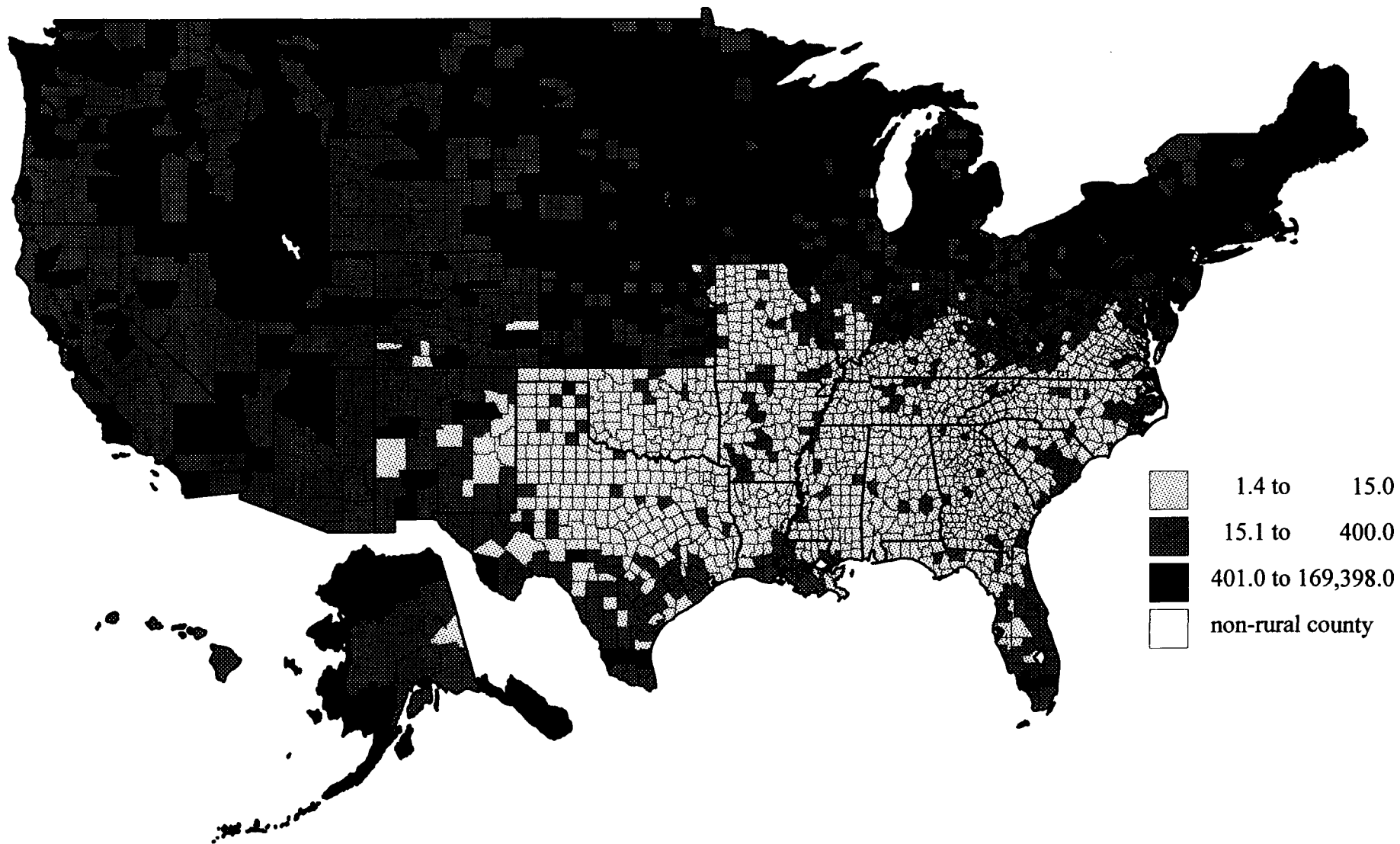


Figure 10
Rural Population per Southern Baptist Member, 1990



Source: Bureau of the Census and The Uniform Church Letter, Sunday School Board, Nashville, TN; compiled by the Research Division, Home Mission Board, Alpharetta, GA

Table 5

Rural SBC Membership by Year, 1948 to 1992

| Year | Open Country | Village | Town | Total Rural | Total SBC | Percent Rural |
|------|-----------------|---------|-----------|----------------|--------------|------------------|
| 1948 | 2,011,359 | 726,587 | 973,496 | 3,711,442 | 6,489,221 | 57.2% |
| 1949 | 2,061,587 | 738,919 | 980,284 | 3,780,790 | 6,761,265 | 55.9 |
| 1950 | 2,145,589 | 753,486 | 1,021,977 | 3,921,052 | 7,079,889 | 55.4 |
| 1951 | 2,134,182 | 762,933 | 1,026,571 | 3,923,686 | 7,373,498 | 53.2 |
| 1952 | 2,143,691 | 780,065 | 1,046,442 | 3,970,198 | 7,634,493 | 52.0 |
| 1953 | 2,182,702 | 771,298 | 1,101,184 | 4,055,184 | 7,886,016 | 51.4 |
| 1954 | 2,210,616 | 787,337 | 1,144,751 | 4,142,704 | 8,155,922 | 50.8 |
| 1955 | 2,262,296 | 776,208 | 1,150,051 | 4,188,555 | 8,453,741 | 49.5 |
| 1956 | 2,312,907 | 742,197 | 1,138,875 | 4,193,979 | 8,697,830 | 48.2 |
| 1957 | 2,363,233 | 750,761 | 1,155,877 | 4,269,871 | 8,955,262 | 47.7 |
| 1958 | 2,443,347 | 741,574 | 1,159,060 | 4,343,981 | 9,206,758 | 47.2 |
| 1959 | 2,488,243 | 731,464 | 1,174,165 | 4,393,872 | 9,485,276 | 46.3 |
| 1960 | 2,505,360 | 743,825 | 1,169,987 | 4,419,172 | 9,731,591 | 45.4 |
| 1961 | 2,546,897 | 740,795 | 1,170,062 | 4,457,754 | 9,978,488 | 44.7 |
| 1962 | 2,569,551 | 750,359 | 1,184,591 | 4,504,501 | 10,193,052 | 44.2 |
| 1963 | 2,508,228 | 754,032 | 1,175,002 | 4,437,262 | 10,395,940 | 42.7 |
| 1964 | 2,489,517 | 769,648 | 1,177,165 | 4,436,330 | 10,601,515 | 41.8 |
| 1965 | 2,413,199 | 828,476 | 1,187,252 | 4,428,927 | 10,772,712 | 41.1 |
| 1966 | 2,394,152 | 825,919 | 1,201,107 | 4,421,178 | 10,949,493 | 40.4 |
| 1967 | 2,407,407 | 808,881 | 1,211,752 | 4,428,040 | 11,142,726 | 39.7 |
| 1968 | 2,421,349 | 814,516 | 1,197,760 | 4,433,625 | 11,332,229 | 39.1 |
| 1969 | 2,437,196 | 800,986 | 1,200,220 | 4,438,402 | 11,489,613 | 38.6 |
| 1970 | 3,255,717 | | 1,209,640 | 4,465,357 | 11,629,880 | 38.4 |
| 1971 | 3,253,306 | | 1,225,552 | 4,478,858 | 11,826,463 | 37.9 |
| 1972 | 3,278,544 | | 1,232,136 | 4,510,680 | 12,067,284 | 37.4 |

Table 5 (continued)

| Year | Open Country | Village | Town | Total Rural | Total SBC | Percent Rural |
|------|-----------------|---------|-----------|----------------|--------------|------------------|
| 1973 | 3,322,073 | | 1,270,733 | 4,592,806 | 12,297,346 | 37.3% |
| 1974 | 3,351,801 | | 1,294,873 | 4,646,674 | 12,515,842 | 37.1 |
| 1975 | 3,327,796 | | 1,304,514 | 4,632,310 | 12,735,663 | 36.4 |
| 1976 | 3,355,281 | | 1,322,355 | 4,677,636 | 12,922,605 | 36.2 |
| 1977 | 3,361,901 | | 1,338,728 | 4,700,629 | 13,083,199 | 35.9 |
| 1978 | 3,379,545 | | 1,360,059 | 4,739,604 | 13,196,979 | 35.9 |
| 1979 | 3,400,631 | | 1,372,457 | 4,773,088 | 13,379,073 | 35.7 |
| 1980 | 3,440,649 | | 1,376,548 | 4,817,197 | 13,606,808 | 35.4 |
| 1981 | 3,484,817 | | 1,403,589 | 4,888,406 | 13,789,580 | 35.4 |
| 1982 | 3,538,394 | | 1,369,286 | 4,907,680 | 13,998,252 | 35.1 |
| 1983 | 3,568,406 | | 1,364,969 | 4,933,375 | 14,185,454 | 34.8 |
| 1984 | 3,529,343 | | 1,377,531 | 4,906,874 | 14,349,657 | 34.2 |
| 1985 | 3,540,899 | | 1,385,679 | 4,926,578 | 14,486,403 | 34.0 |
| 1986 | 3,537,477 | | 1,412,252 | 4,949,729 | 14,618,567 | 33.9 |
| 1987 | 3,538,952 | | 1,417,220 | 4,956,172 | 14,727,770 | 33.7 |
| 1988 | 3,543,933 | | 1,437,764 | 4,981,697 | 14,821,496 | 33.6 |
| 1989 | 3,631,653 | | 1,461,083 | 5,092,736 | 14,913,538 | 34.1 |
| 1990 | 3,660,981 | | 1,475,149 | 5,136,130 | 15,044,413 | 34.1 |
| 1991 | 3,691,263 | | 1,483,039 | 5,174,302 | 15,238,283 | 34.0 |
| 1992 | 3,703,300 | | 1,522,141 | 5,225,441 | 15,365,486 | 34.0 |

Source: *The Southern Baptist Handbook*; compiled by the Research Division, Home Mission Board, Alpharetta, GA

Table 6

Rural Membership by State Convention, 1950 to 1990

| Convention | Decade | | | | |
|----------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | 1950 | 1960 | 1970 | 1980 | 1990 |
| SBC | 3,921,052 | 4,419,172 | 4,465,357 | 4,817,197 | 5,136,130 |
| Alabama | 339,503 | 374,435 | 394,632 | 420,181 | 423,736 |
| Alaska | 0 | 890 | 1,845 | 2,059 | 3,061 |
| Arizona | 1,726 | 6,094 | 7,998 | 9,653 | 12,397 |
| Arkansas | 124,444 | 146,546 | 152,761 | 173,644 | 193,136 |
| California | 6,441 | 19,487 | 18,685 | 16,473 | 21,027 |
| Colorado | 0 | 2,042 | 3,389 | 6,436 | 8,664 |
| Dakotas Fellowship | | | | | 1,090 |
| District of Columbia | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Florida | 104,867 | 145,268 | 140,564 | 162,741 | 184,091 |
| Georgia | 406,672 | 449,725 | 441,572 | 463,381 | 482,588 |
| Hawaii | 0 | 277 | 445 | 675 | 915 |
| Illinois | 56,680 | 69,676 | 74,618 | 79,022 | 76,673 |
| Indiana | 0 | 4,104 | 7,561 | 13,931 | 17,082 |
| Iowa | | | | | 660 |
| Kansas | 2,234 | 5,388 | 7,289 | 9,379 | 12,333 |
| Kentucky | 353,855 | 369,211 | 356,835 | 382,115 | 400,726 |
| Louisiana | 164,252 | 184,174 | 185,768 | 213,058 | 232,949 |
| Maryland | 8,729 | 14,340 | 16,955 | 22,769 | 22,466 |
| Michigan | | 1,233 | 3,326 | 3,688 | 3,864 |
| Minnesota-Wisconsin | | | | | 824 |
| Mississippi | 289,681 | 296,362 | 293,903 | 320,801 | 341,171 |
| Missouri | 197,219 | 221,622 | 225,674 | 256,330 | 262,291 |
| Montana | | | | | 1,967 |
| Nevada | | | | 904 | 2,199 |
| New England | | | | | 1,811 |

Table 6 (continued)

| Convention | Decade | | | | |
|------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | 1950 | 1960 | 1970 | 1980 | 1990 |
| New Mexico | 14,357 | 17,454 | 15,776 | 18,158 | 22,191 |
| New York | | | 1,010 | 1,523 | 2,389 |
| North Carolina | 311,129 | 572,484 | 603,683 | 599,181 | 626,289 |
| Northern Plains ¹ | | | 1,136 | 2,363 | 4,985 |
| Ohio | 0 | 8,143 | 14,002 | 19,713 | 27,373 |
| Oklahoma | 134,019 | 163,969 | 173,750 | 213,352 | 234,945 |
| Northwest ² | 70 | 3,700 | 6,376 | 7,538 | 11,644 |
| Pennsylvania-So. Jersey | | | | 2,256 | 4,560 |
| Puerto Rico ³ | | | | 309 | 688 |
| South Carolina | 255,484 | 278,003 | 276,561 | 293,214 | 311,853 |
| Tennessee | 369,681 | 407,614 | 399,379 | 417,426 | 433,878 |
| Texas | 422,891 | 443,657 | 426,179 | 456,114 | 506,221 |
| Utah-Idaho | | | 1,091 | 1,069 | 2,767 |
| Virginia | 193,368 | 213,274 | 212,594 | 223,218 | 232,938 |
| West Virginia | | | | 4,523 | 8,745 |
| Wyoming | | | | | 1,928 |

¹Later Dakotas, Montana Fellowships and Wyoming; aggregated for analysis.

²Fomerly Oregon-Washington

³Carribbean Fellowship

Source: *The Southern Baptist Handbook*; compiled by the Research Division, Home Mission Board, Alpharetta, GA

Table 7
Percent Change Rural Membership by State Convention,
1950 to 1990

| Convention | Decade | | | |
|------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | 1950 to 1960 | 1960 to 1970 | 1970 to 1980 | 1980 to 1990 |
| SBC | 12.7% | 1.0% | 7.9% | 6.6% |
| Alabama | 10.3 | 5.4 | 6.5 | 0.8 |
| Alaska | ... | 107.3 | 11.6 | 48.7 |
| Arizona | 253.1 | 31.2 | 20.7 | 28.4 |
| Arkansas | 17.8 | 4.2 | 13.7 | 11.2 |
| California | 202.5 | -4.1 | -11.8 | 27.6 |
| Colorado | ... | 66.0 | 89.9 | 34.6 |
| Dakota Fellowship | ... | ... | ... | ... |
| District of Columbia | ... | ... | ... | ... |
| Florida | 38.5 | -3.2 | 15.8 | 13.1 |
| Georgia | 10.6 | -1.8 | 4.9 | 4.1 |
| Hawaii | ... | 60.6 | 51.7 | 35.6 |
| Illinois | 22.9 | 7.1 | 5.9 | -3.0 |
| Indiana | ... | 84.2 | 84.2 | 22.6 |
| Iowa | ... | ... | ... | ... |
| Kansas | 141.2 | 35.3 | 28.7 | 31.5 |
| Kentucky | 4.3 | -3.4 | 7.1 | 4.9 |
| Louisiana | 12.1 | 0.9 | 14.7 | 9.3 |
| Maryland | 64.3 | 18.2 | 34.3 | -1.3 |
| Michigan | ... | 169.7 | 10.9 | 4.8 |
| Minnesota-Wisconsin | ... | ... | ... | ... |
| Mississippi | 2.3 | -0.8 | 9.2 | 6.3 |
| Missouri | 12.4 | 1.8 | 13.6 | 2.3 |
| Montana | ... | ... | ... | ... |
| Nevada | ... | ... | ... | 143.3 |
| New England | ... | ... | ... | ... |
| New Mexico | 21.6 | -9.6 | 15.1 | 22.2 |
| New York | ... | ... | 50.8 | 56.9 |
| North Carolina | 84.0 | 5.4 | -0.7 | 4.5 |
| Northern Plains ¹ | ... | ... | 108.0 | 111.0 |
| Northwest ² | 5185.7 | 72.3 | 18.2 | 54.5 |

Table 7 (continued)

| Convention | Decade | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | 1950 to1960 | 1960 to1970 | 1970 to1980 | 1980 to1990 |
| Ohio | ... | 72.0% | 40.8% | 38.9% |
| Oklahoma | 22.3 | 6.0 | 22.8 | 10.1 |
| Pennsylvania-So. Jersey | ... | ... | ... | 102.1 |
| Puerto Rico ³ | ... | ... | ... | 122.7 |
| South Carolina | 8.8 | -0.5 | 6.0 | 6.4 |
| Tennessee | 10.3 | -2.0 | 4.5 | 3.9 |
| Texas | 4.9 | -3.9 | 7.0 | 11.0 |
| Utah-Idaho | ... | ... | -2.0 | 158.8 |
| Virginia | 10.3 | -0.3 | 5.0 | 4.4 |
| West Virginia | ... | ... | ... | 93.3 |
| Wyoming | ... | ... | ... | ... |

¹Currently divided into Montana and Dakotas Fellowships and Wyoming - combined here for comparative purposes.

²Formerly Oregon / Washington

³Carribbean Fellowship

... cell is incalculable

Source: *The Southern Baptist Handbook*; compiled by the Research Division, Home Mission Board, Alpharetta, GA

Table 8

**Conventions with the Greatest Percentage Difference
in Rural Membership, 1950* to 1990**

| | |
|------------------------------|--------|
| Northwest ¹ | 13.7 % |
| New England | 8.7 |
| Pennsylvania-South Jersey | 7.4 |
| Minnesota-Wisconsin | 6.5 |
| Northern Plains ² | 6.3 |
| Iowa ³ | 6.0 |
| West Virginia | 5.2 |
| Colorado | 4.3 |
| Nevada | 3.8 |
| Utah-Idaho | 2.7 |

*Or since inception

¹Convention name change; previously Oregon-Washington

²Currently Dakotas, Montana and Wyoming Fellowships; aggregated here for analytical purposes

³Fellowship

Source: *The Southern Baptist Handbook*; compiled by the Research Division,
Home Mission Board, Alpharetta, GA

Table 9

**Conventions with the Greatest Percentage Decrease
in Rural Membership, 1950* to 1990**

| | |
|----------------|----------------|
| SBC | -21.2 % |
| South Carolina | -23.5 |
| Alabama | -22.9 |
| Illinois | -21.9 |
| Georgia | -21.6 |
| Tennessee | -21.2 |
| Mississippi | -20.1 |
| Florida | -18.3 |
| Virginia | -17.9 |
| North Carolina | -17.8 |
| Kansas | -17.3 |

*Or since inception

Source: The *Southern Baptist Handbook*; compiled by the Research Division,
Home Mission Board, Alpharetta, GA

Figure 11
Conventions with the Greatest Net Increase in Rural Churches, 1950 to 1990

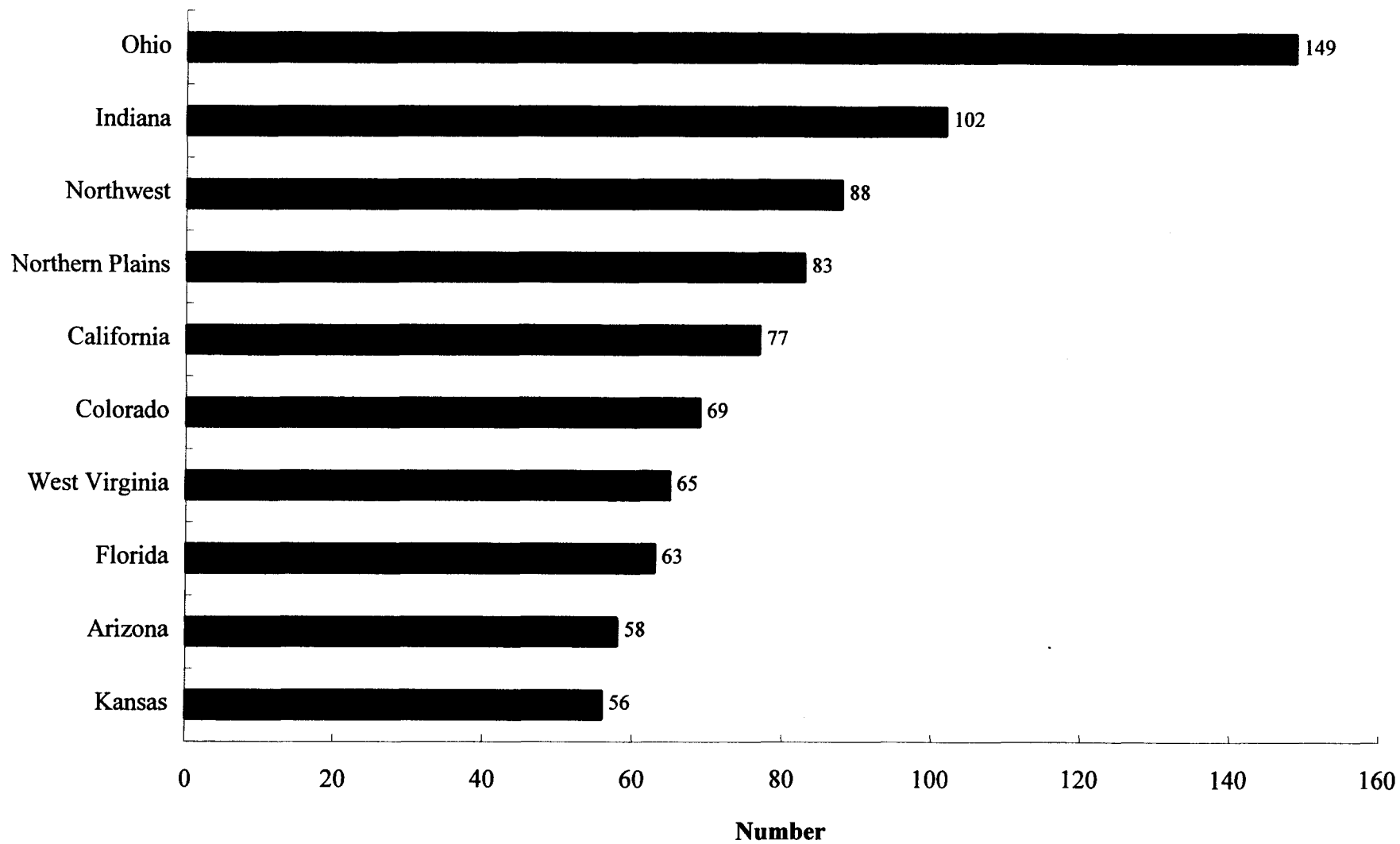


Figure 12
Conventions with the Greatest Net Decrease in Rural Churches, 1950 to 1990

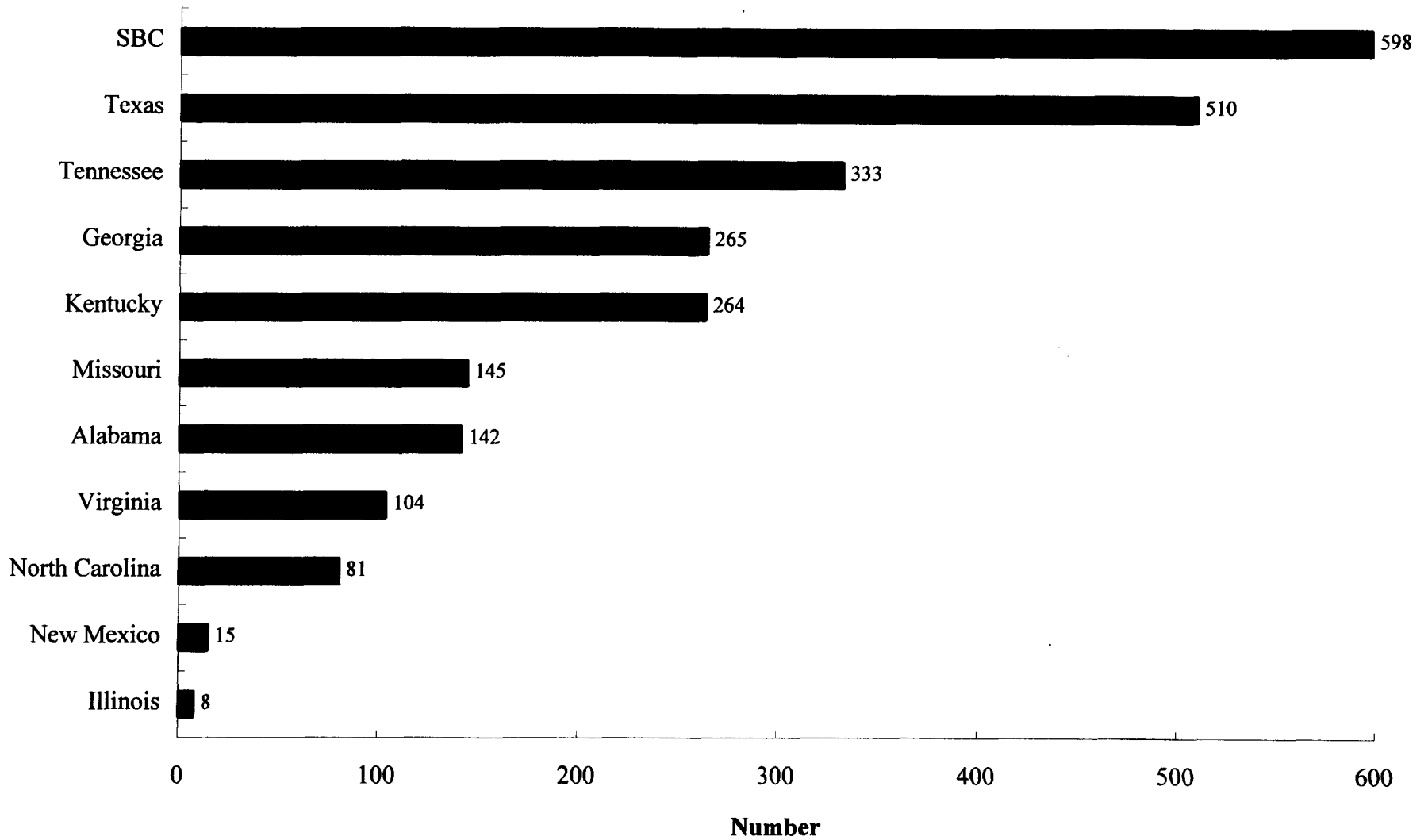


Figure 13

Conventions with the Greatest Percentage Increase in Rural Churches, 1950 to 1990

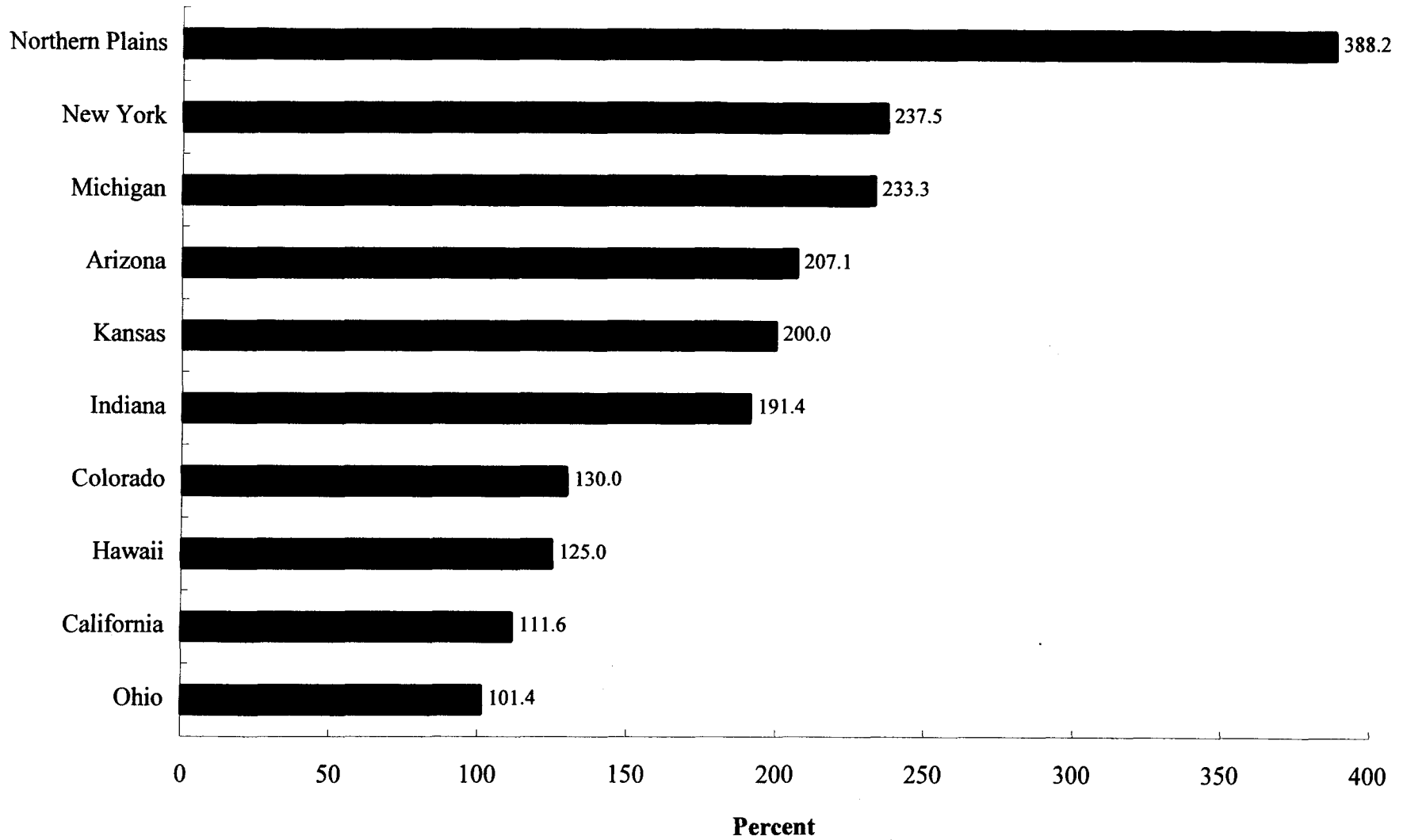


Figure 14

Conventions with the Greatest Percentage Decrease in Rural Churches since 1950

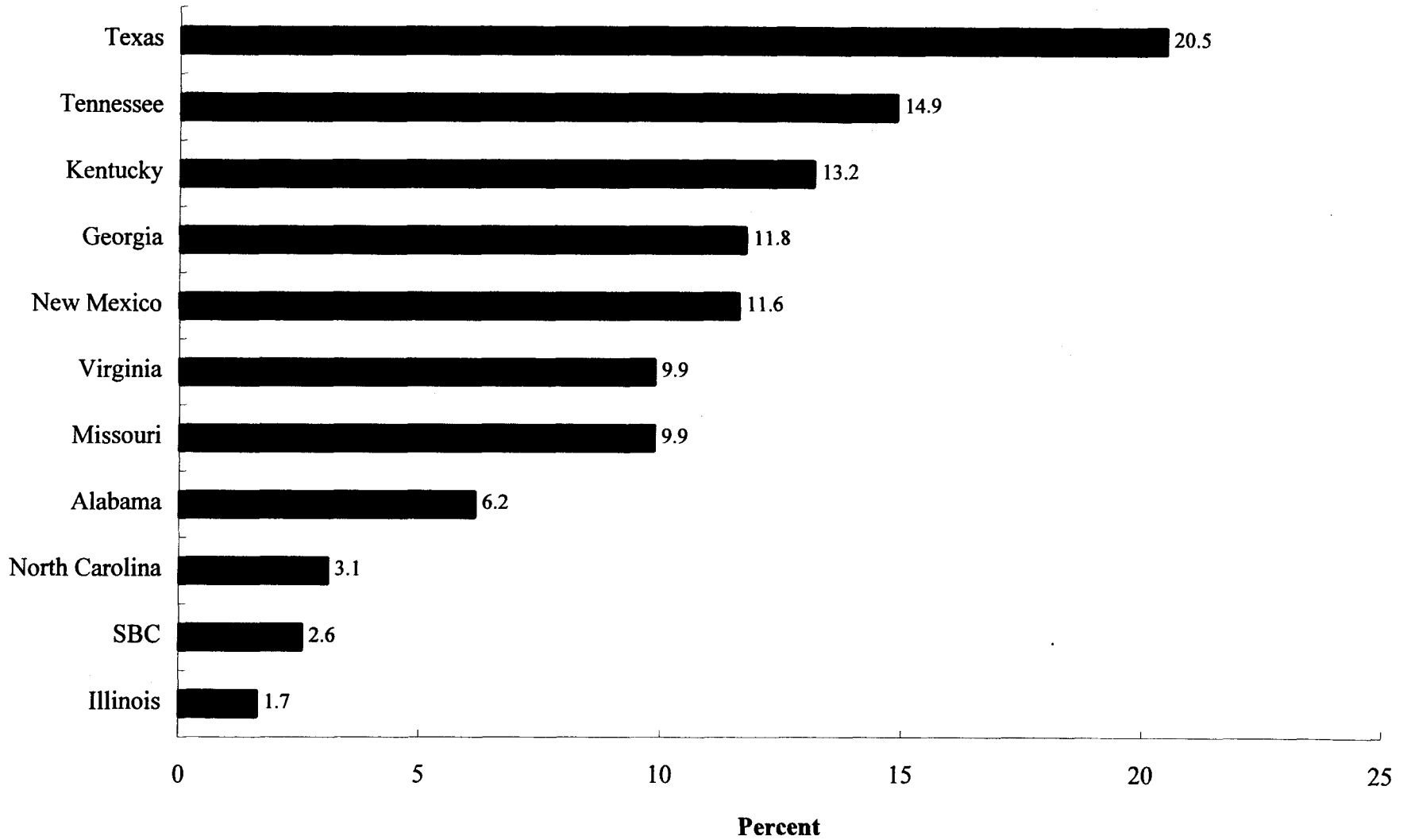


Figure 15
Conventions with the Greatest Percentage Difference in Rural Churches, 1950 to 1990

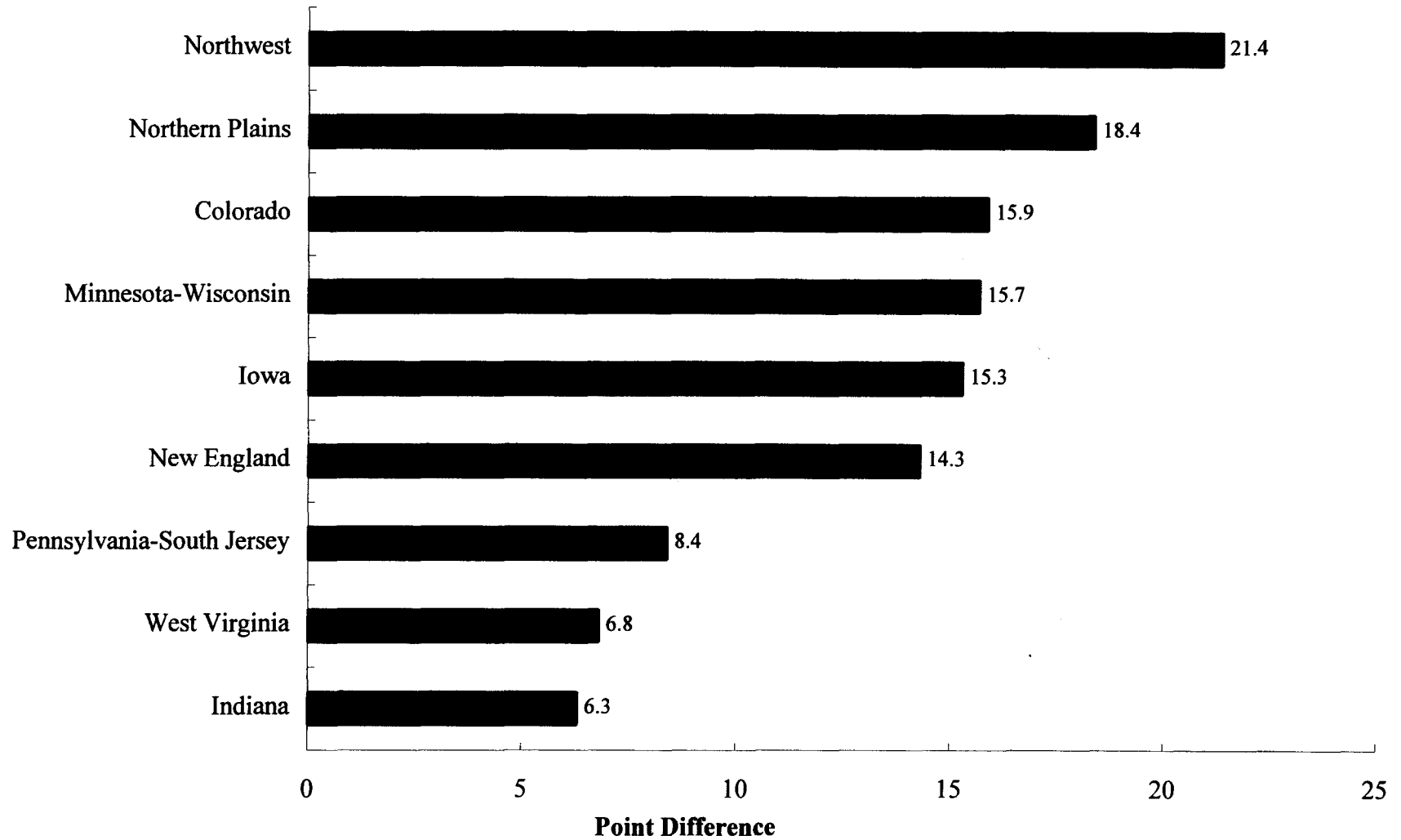


Table 10

**Conventions with the Greatest Percentage Difference
in Rural Churches, 1950* to 1990**

| | |
|------------------------------|--------|
| Northwest ¹ | 21.4 % |
| Northern Plains ² | 18.4 |
| Colorado | 15.9 |
| Minnesota-Wisconsin | 15.7 |
| Iowa ³ | 15.3 |
| | |
| New England | 14.3 |
| Pennsylvania-South Jersey | 8.4 |
| Puerto Rico ³ | 8.2 |
| West Virginia | 6.8 |
| Indiana | 6.3 |

*Or since inception

¹Convention name change; currently Northwest

²Currently Dakotas, Montana and Wyoming Fellowships; aggregated here for analytical purposes

³Fellowship

Source: The *Southern Baptist Handbook*; compiled by the Research Division,
Home Mission Board, Alpharetta, GA

Table 11

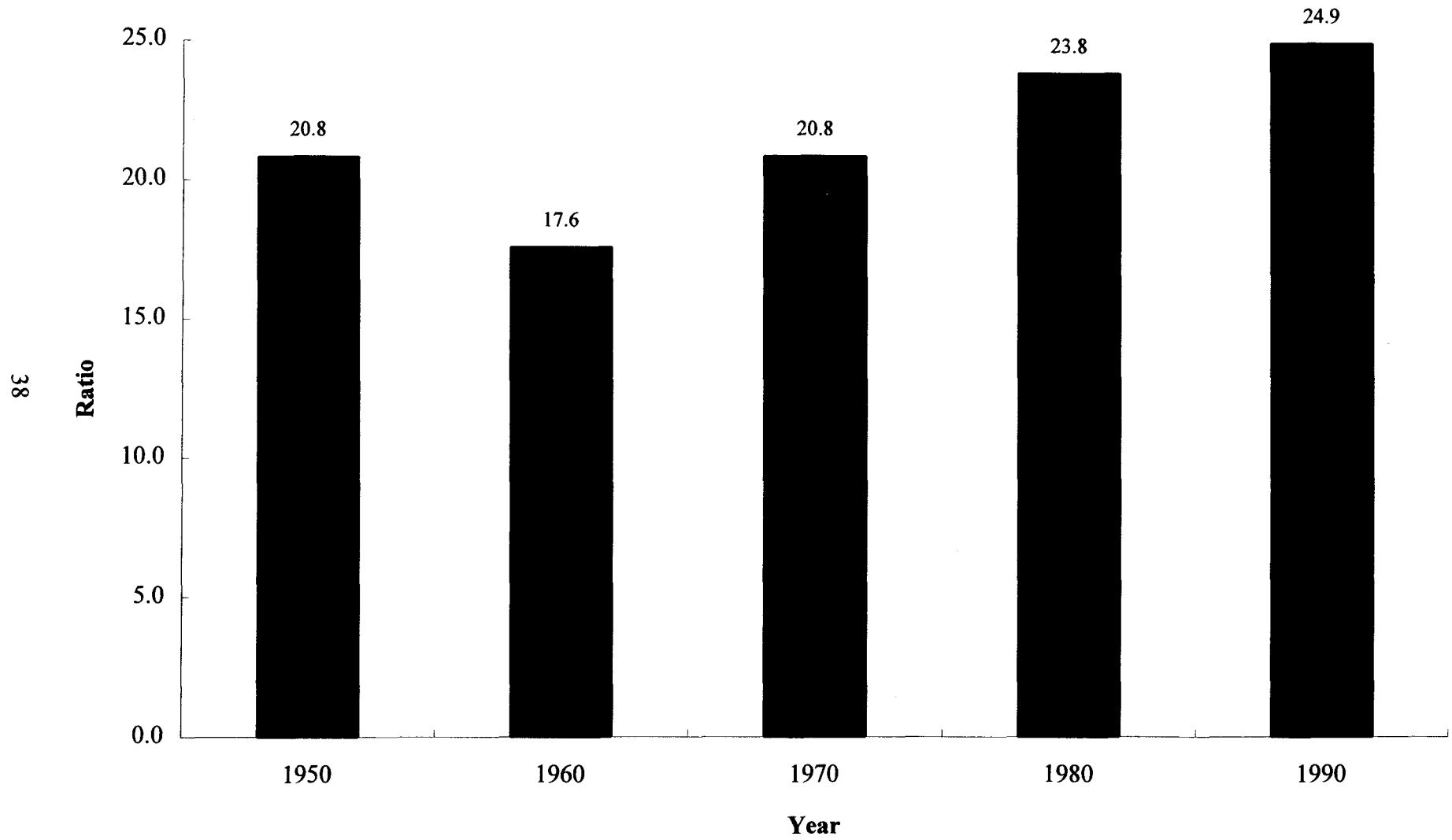
**Conventions with the Greatest Percentage Decrease
in Rural Churches, 1950* to 1990**

| | |
|----------------|----------------|
| SBC | -23.9 % |
| Florida | -30.0 |
| Illinois | -28.5 |
| New Mexico | -27.7 |
| Texas | -24.6 |
| Maryland | -24.4 |
| Virginia | -21.9 |
| Georgia | -21.0 |
| South Carolina | -20.7 |
| Tennessee | -19.7 |
| Alabama | -18.7 |

*Or since inception

Source: *The Southern Baptist Handbook*; compiled by the Research Division,
Home Mission Board, Alpharetta, GA

Figure 16
Rural Population per Rural Sunday School Member, 1950 to 1990



Source: *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1994*; and *The Southern Baptist Handbook*; compiled by the Research Division, HMB

Figure 19
Indices of Change by Decade, 1950 to 1990

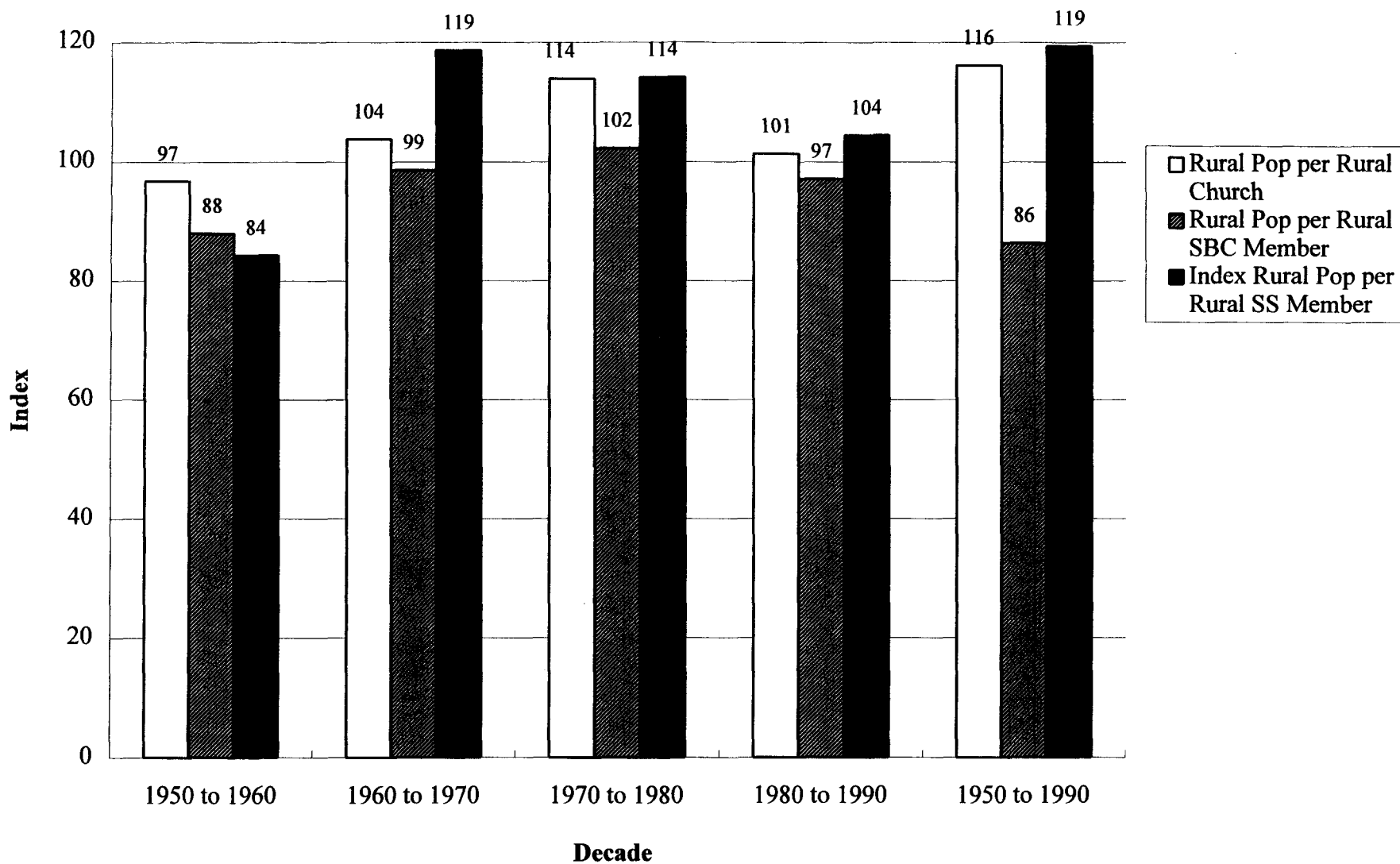
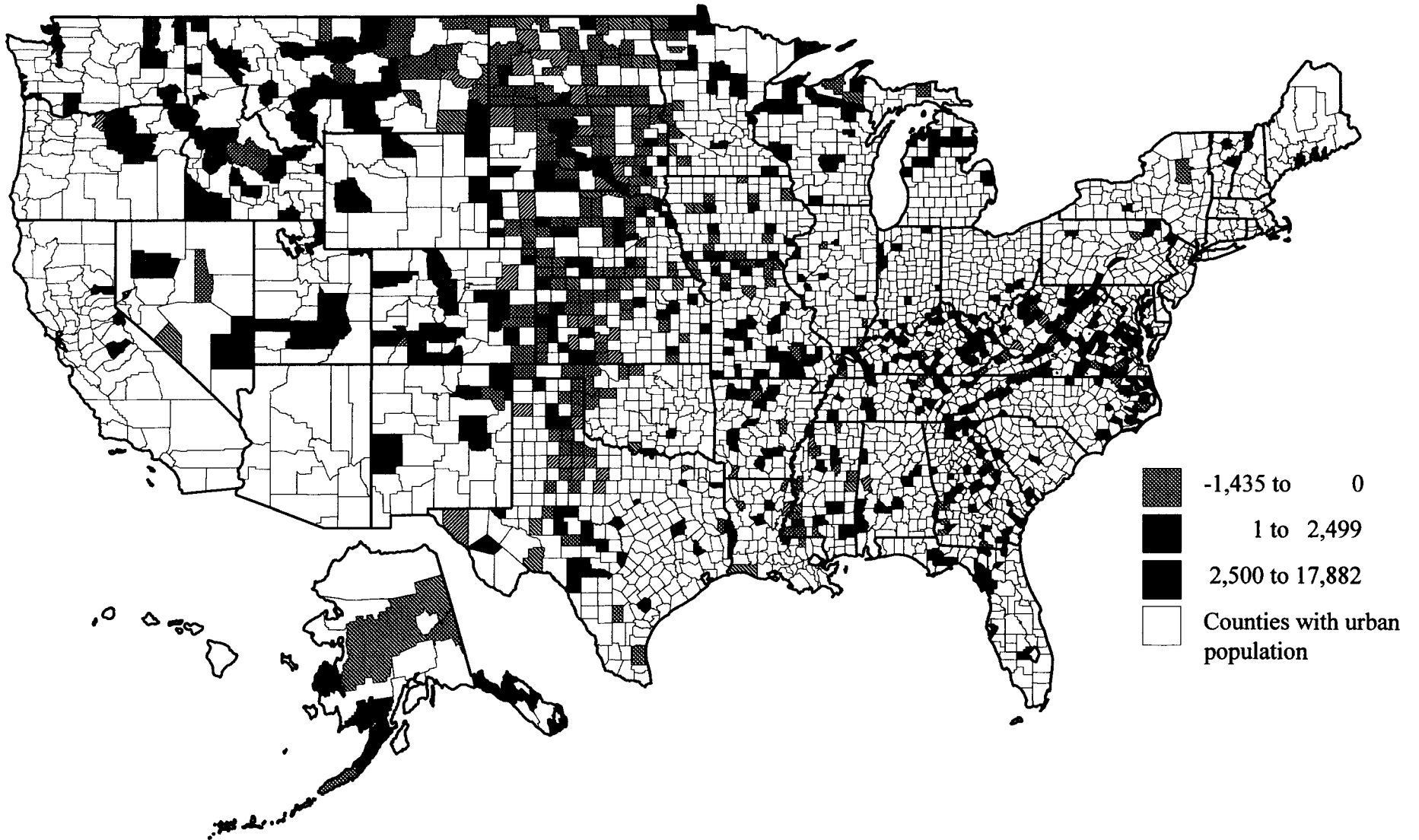
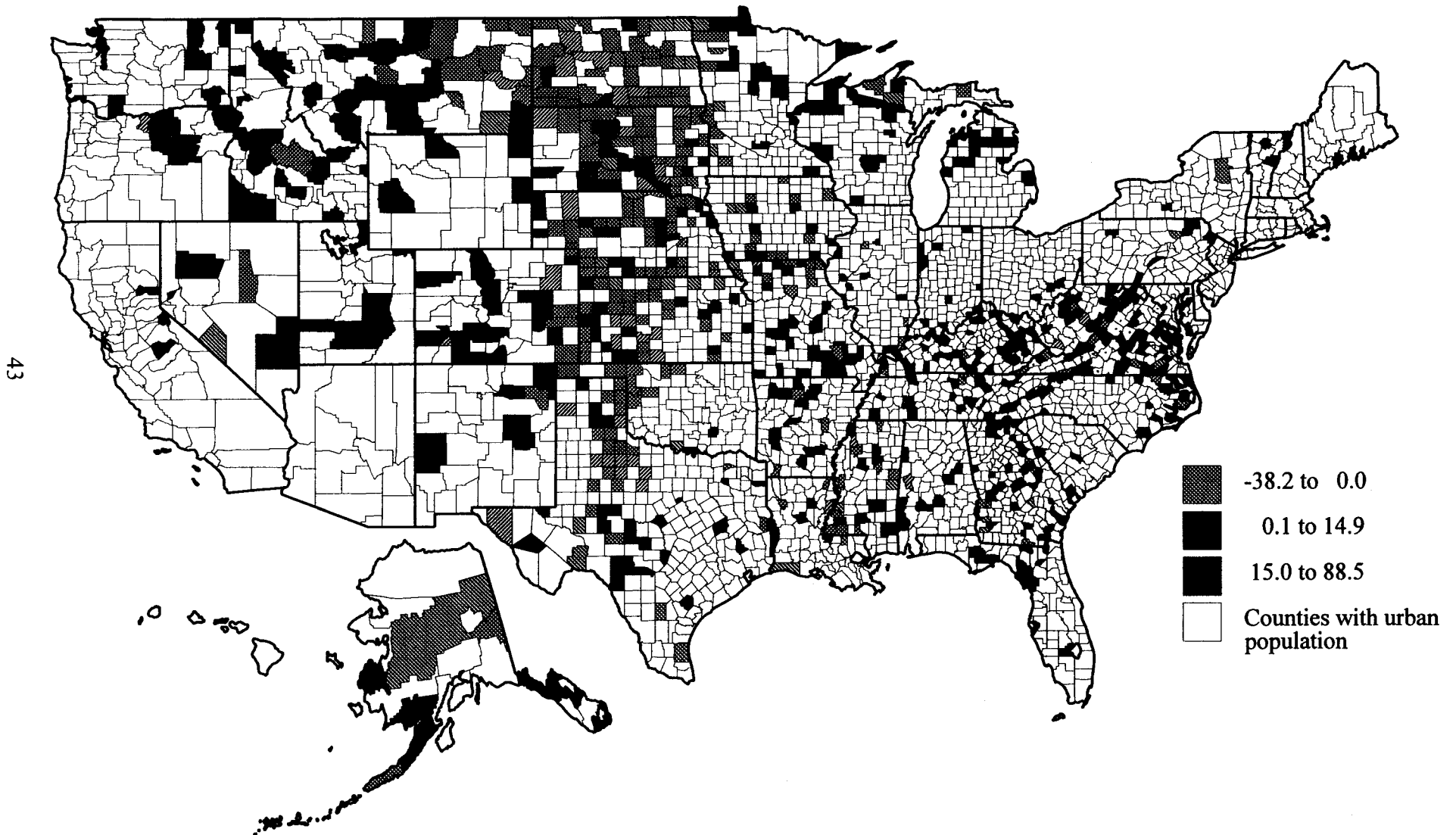


Figure 20
Projected Net Population Change for Completely Rural Counties, 1990 to 2000



Source: Bureau of the Census, Washington, DC; compiled by the Research Division, Home Mission Board, Alpharetta, GA

Figure 21
Projected Percent Population Change for Completely Rural Counties, 1990 to 2000



Source: Bureau of the Census, Washington, DC; compiled by the Research Division, Home Mission Board, Alpharetta, GA