

APPENDIX A: AN OVERVIEW OF RURAL APPALACHIA AND NON-APPALACHIAN RURAL AREAS

Comparing Rural Appalachia with Rural Areas Outside Appalachia

Of the 423 counties in the Appalachian Region, 108 are classified as rural counties that are neither part of nor adjacent to a metropolitan area. As shown in Figure A.1, rural counties are found in 11 of the 13 states in the Appalachian Region – only Appalachian Maryland and South Carolina are exceptions. However, there are notable concentrations of rural counties in the Appalachian parts of multiple states including Mississippi, Kentucky, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania. There are 803 rural counties located outside the Appalachian Region, and these are scattered across the United States with higher concentrations in midwestern and western states (see Figure A.1). Given the socioeconomic disadvantages often found in rural counties throughout the country, it is instructive to compare the characteristics of rural counties within Appalachia to those of rural counties located outside the Appalachian Region.

Demographic and Housing Characteristics

Rural counties in Appalachia experienced a much higher rate of population decline between 2010 and 2024 than rural counties outside the Appalachian Region – 3.3 percent versus 0.8 percent (see Table A.1). The population in rural Appalachia is also older with a median age of 42 years versus 41.5 years in other rural areas and has a smaller share of residents under age 18 – 20.5 percent versus 21.8 percent.

Rural Appalachia is also much less racially and ethnically varied, with only 13.8 percent of the population being people of color, compared with 26.7 percent in the rest of rural America. Looking at differences among racial/ethnic groups, there is a slightly higher share of non-Hispanic Black people in rural Appalachia than other rural areas (8 percent and 6.1 percent, respectively) and a smaller share of Hispanic people (3 percent versus 12.2 percent). There is also a much smaller share of people who are non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native in rural Appalachia than in rural counties outside Appalachia. However, racial and ethnic variety is increasing in rural Appalachia – albeit more slowly than in the rest of the nation's rural counties – as the share of people of color in the population rose 2.6 percentage points between 2010 and 2024. This compares with an increase of 3.9 percentage points in the rest of rural America.

Education levels are lower in rural Appalachia than in rural areas in the rest of the country. Among adults ages 25 to 64, 86.7 percent of rural Appalachian residents have completed high school or more, compared with 89.7 percent of rural residents outside the Appalachian Region. About 20.6 percent of working-age adults in rural Appalachia have completed a bachelor's degree or more, compared with 24.4 percent of adults residing in rural counties in the rest of the country. However, the share within Appalachia whose highest education level is an associate's degree is much closer to the share outside the region – 10.5 percent versus 11.4 percent.

Among adults ages 25 and over with a bachelor's degree, slightly more than one-fourth (26.7 percent) of rural Appalachian residents reported their first major was in a science and engineering field compared with nearly one-third (32.2 percent) of rural adults outside Appalachia. These differences in education levels are reflected in differences in employment and income between rural Appalachia and the rest of rural America.

The share of housing units that are single-dwelling units is nearly five percentage points lower in rural Appalachia – 70.7 versus 75.3 percent – but the share of housing units that are mobile homes is much higher – 18.5 percent compared with 11.1 percent in rural counties outside the Appalachian Region. While housing vacancy rates are about the same for both rural Appalachia and the rest of rural America (20.1 percent and 20.6 percent, respectively), rural Appalachia has a noticeably smaller share of these vacant units that are designated for seasonal or recreational use (41.6 percent versus 53 percent).

Rural households within Appalachia are more likely to experience a digital divide than those outside Appalachia. Within rural counties in the Appalachian Region, the share of households with a computer device (90.1 percent) and the share with a broadband (high-speed) Internet connection (83.7 percent) are at least two percentage points lower than for households in rural counties outside the region. Further, 13.2 percent of rural Appalachian households had no access to the Internet in 2020-2024, compared with 10.7 percent of other rural households. However, this gap is closing, as access to digital resources is increasing more rapidly in the Appalachian Region than in the rest of the nation's rural counties – with rises in device ownership and broadband internet access that are nearly two percentage points higher compared with non-Appalachian rural counties.

Labor Force and Commuting

The share of rural Appalachian adults ages 25 to 64 in the civilian labor force is 7.4 percentage points lower than in rural counties outside the Appalachian Region, and the unemployment rate is slightly higher – 4.4 versus four percent. Commuting patterns among rural Appalachian residents who do not work at home also differ from those elsewhere in rural America. Although a higher share of rural Appalachian households had no vehicle available, workers ages 16 and over in rural Appalachia were more likely to drive alone to work (79.1 percent) than workers in rural counties outside the region (75.8 percent).

Almost 32 percent of rural Appalachian workers commuted outside their county of residence compared with about one in five rural workers in the rest of the country. More than three in 10 workers in rural Appalachian counties had a travel time to work of at least 30 minutes, but the average travel time for rural Appalachian workers was 24.5 minutes. By comparison, 23.6 percent of workers in rural counties outside Appalachia took at least a half-hour to get to their jobs, with an average travel time of 20.4 minutes. These commuting patterns include the coronavirus pandemic beginning in March 2020 and reflect the experience of rural workers throughout the pandemic period.

Income and Poverty

Adults in rural Appalachia have lower levels of income and higher rates of poverty and receipt of SNAP benefits than in rural counties outside the Appalachian Region. At \$52,913, median household income in rural Appalachian counties is nearly \$11,000 lower than that of households in rural counties in the rest of the country (\$63,631). Almost one in every five rural Appalachian residents live in poverty, compared with 15 percent of persons in rural counties outside of the Appalachian Region. This gap is even wider among children (4.7 percentage points) and young adults ages 18 to 24 (4.8 percentage points). Although the gap is smaller, even rural Appalachian adults ages 65 and over have a poverty rate that is 2.5 percentage points higher than for older adults in other rural counties.

A higher share of rural Appalachian residents also have incomes below 50 percent of the poverty level and more than four in 10 are classified as low-income because their income is below 200 percent of the poverty level. While only one-sixth (16.9 percent) of all rural Appalachian households received Food Stamps/SNAP in 2020-2024, this share was nearly half (46.9 percent) among households in poverty. In rural counties outside Appalachia, both the share of all households and the share of households in poverty who received Food Stamps/SNAP in 2020-2024 was much lower (by 3.8 and 4.9 percentage points, respectively). In the Appalachian Region, more than one in four (26.4 percent) rural households with children received Food Stamps/SNAP compared with 21 percent of households with children in rural areas outside Appalachia.

Health Insurance and Disability

One of the bright spots in rural Appalachia is the higher level of health insurance coverage compared with the rest of rural America. A smaller share (8.8 percent) of residents in rural Appalachian counties lack health insurance coverage compared with other rural counties (9.5 percent), and this gap is present among all age groups from ages 19 to 64. The share of rural Appalachian residents without health insurance declined slightly less (0.5 percentage points) between 2015-2019 and 2020-2024 than the share in rural areas in the rest of the country (0.7 percentage points).

Adults between the ages of 26 and 34 were the highest share without health insurance coverage in Appalachia, with nearly 17 percent lacking health insurance in 2020-2024. And although the share of young adults ages 19 to 25 in rural Appalachia who lack health insurance coverage is more than two percentage points lower than for young adults in rural areas outside the region, it is important to note that 14.4 percent of young adults in rural Appalachian counties are still without health insurance. Lack of access to health care among young adults can contribute to the development of chronic conditions and negatively affect health at older ages. It may also have put them at greater risk of not receiving needed medical treatment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In contrast to health insurance coverage, levels of disability are much higher among residents of rural Appalachia than among residents in other rural areas. One of every five rural Appalachian residents have a disability compared with 16.9 percent of rural residents in counties outside the Appalachian Region. However, this gap widens to more than five percentage points among adults ages 35 to 64 and just over four percentage points among those ages 65 and older. In rural Appalachia, more than one in five (22.1 percent) working-age adults ages 35 to 64 and four in 10 (40.5 percent) adults ages 65 and older have a disability. By comparison, the respective shares are only 16.7 percent and 36.2 percent for these two age groups in rural counties outside of Appalachia. These higher levels of disability in rural Appalachia – especially among working-age adults – may correspond to lower levels of employment compared with rural areas outside the Appalachian Region.

Veteran Status

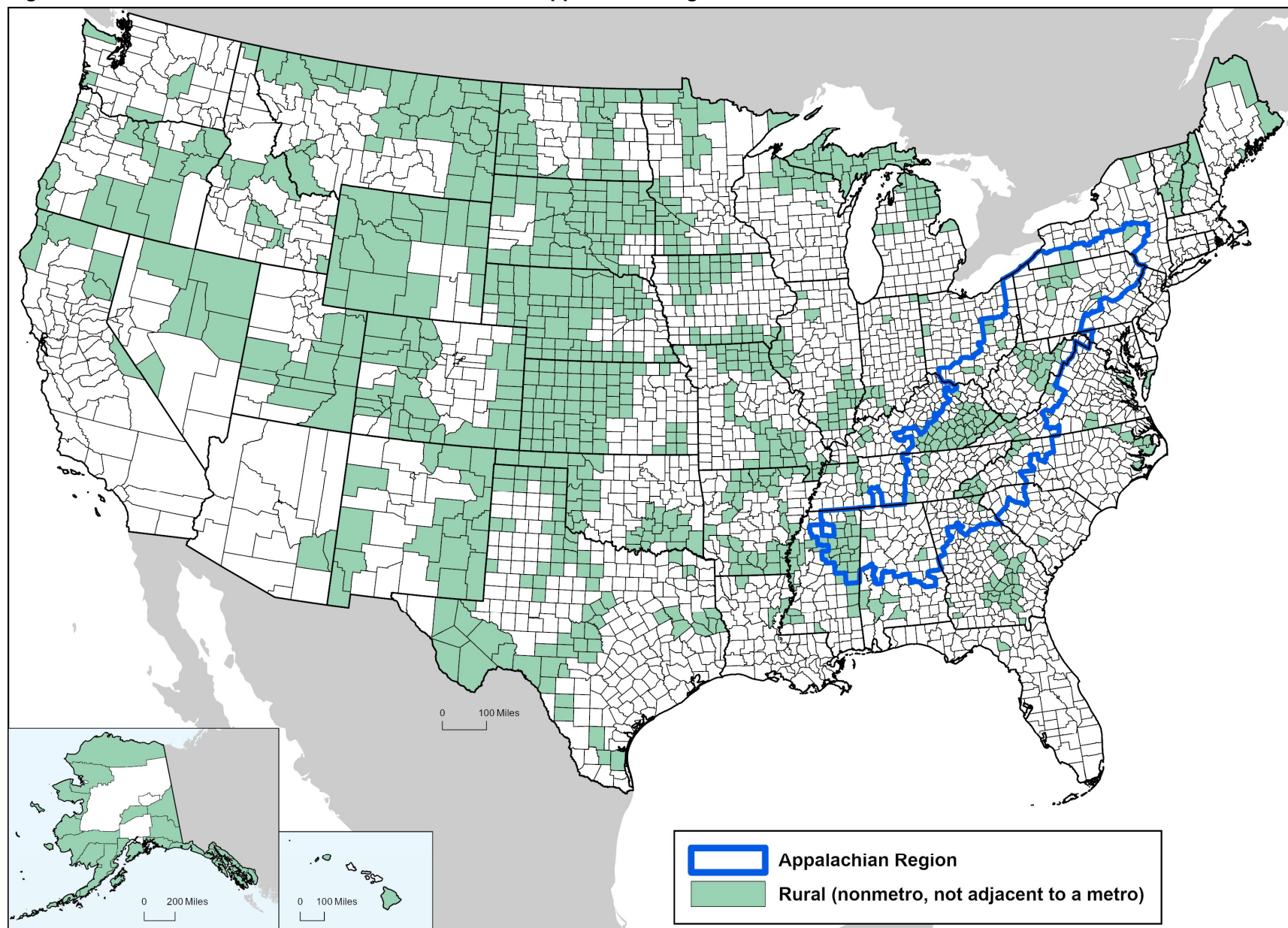
A slightly smaller share of the civilian population ages 65 and over in rural Appalachia are veterans (14.1 percent) than the share in rural counties in the rest of the country (15.6 percent). This gap is nearly the same between rural areas within and outside Appalachia among civilian males ages 18 and older. Only 12.3 percent of rural Appalachian adult male civilians are veterans compared with 13.6 percent of male civilians in rural areas outside Appalachia.

Summary

A comparison of rural counties within the Appalachian Region with those located outside Appalachia reveals some important contrasts in characteristics and overall levels of well-being between these areas. The population in rural Appalachian counties is older, less racially and ethnically varied, and has been declining in number faster since 2010 than the population in rural counties in the rest of the country.

With the exception of health insurance coverage, rural Appalachian counties continue to lag behind rural counties in the rest of the country on many key educational, health, and economic factors. Rural Appalachian residents have lower levels of education, employment, income, and access to the Internet, as well as higher levels of poverty, SNAP benefit receipt, and disability than rural residents in other areas of the United States.

Figure A.1: Rural Counties in the United States and the Appalachian Region



Map Title: Rural Counties in the United States and the Appalachian Region

Data Source: USDA, Economic Research Service, 2024 Urban Influence Codes condensed by ARC.

Table A.1: Selected Measures for Rural Appalachia and Rural Areas Outside Appalachia

Demographic, Social, or Economic Characteristic	Appalachian, Rural (nonmetro, not adjacent to a metro)	Non-Appalachian, Rural (nonmetro, not adjacent to a metro)
NUMBER OF COUNTIES	108	803
Demographic and Housing Characteristics		
Population, July 1, 2024	2,521,564	12,247,418
Percent change (2010 to 2024), population	-3.3	-0.8
Median age, July 1, 2024	42.0	41.5
Percent of population under age 18, July 1, 2024	20.5	21.8
Percent of population who are people of color, July 1, 2024	13.8	26.7
Percent of population who are Black alone, not Hispanic, July 1, 2024	8.0	6.1
Percent of population who are Hispanic or Latino, July 1, 2024	3.0	12.2
Percent of population who are American Indian or Alaska Native alone, not Hispanic, July 1, 2024	0.6	3.5
Percentage point change (2010 to 2024), Percent of population who are people of color	2.6	3.9
Percent of persons ages 25-64 with a high school diploma or more, 2020-24	86.7	89.7
Percent of persons ages 25-64 with an associate's degree but without a bachelor's degree, 2020-24	10.5	11.4
Percent of persons ages 25-64 with a bachelor's degree or more, 2020-24	20.6	24.4
Among persons ages 25 and over with a bachelor's degree or more, percent whose bachelor's degree field (first major) was science and engineering, 2020-24	26.7	32.2
Percent of all housing units that are single-unit dwellings, 2020-24	70.7	75.3
Percent of all housing units that are mobile homes, 2020-24	18.5	11.1
Percent of housing units that are vacant, 2020-24	20.1	20.6
Percent of vacant housing units that are for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use, 2020-24	41.6	53.0
Percent of households with one or more computer devices (including smartphone and tablet), 2020-24	90.1	92.8
Percentage point change in the share of households with a computer device, 2015-19 to 2020-2024	9.3	7.4
Percent of households with a broadband (high-speed) Internet subscription, 2020-24	83.7	86.1
Percentage point change in the share of households with a broadband (high-speed) internet subscription, 2015-19 to 2020-2024	12.9	11.0
Percent of households with no access to the Internet, 2020-24	13.2	10.7
Labor Force and Commuting		
Percent of civilian labor force universe ages 25-64 (excludes Armed Forces personnel) in civilian labor force, 2020-24	66.9	74.3
Unemployment rate, persons ages 25-64 (percent of civilian labor force), 2020-24	4.4	4.0
Percent of households with no vehicle available, 2020-24	7.3	6.1
Percent of workers ages 16 and over who drove alone to work, 2020-24	79.1	75.8
Percent of workers ages 16 and over who worked outside their county of residence, 2020-24	31.6	19.5
Percent of workers ages 16 and over (not working at home) whose travel time to work was 30 minutes or more, 2020-24	31.2	23.6
Mean travel time to work in minutes for all workers ages 16 and over who didn't work at home, 2020-24	24.5	20.4
Income and Poverty		
Median household income (in adjusted 2024 Dollars), 2020-24	52,913	63,631
Percent of persons in poverty, 2020-24	18.9	15.0
Percent of persons under age 18 in poverty, 2020-24	23.7	19.0
Percent of persons ages 18-24 in poverty, 2020-24	26.2	21.4
Percent of persons ages 25-64 in poverty, 2020-24	17.6	13.6
Percent of persons ages 65 and over in poverty, 2020-24	14.2	11.7
Percent of persons with income below 50 percent of poverty level, 2020-24	8.5	6.9
Percent of persons with income below 200 percent of poverty level, 2020-24	41.6	34.8
Percent of households receiving Food Stamps/SNAP, 2020-24	16.9	13.1
Percent of poor households receiving Food Stamps/SNAP, 2020-24	46.9	42.0
Percent of households with children receiving Food Stamps/SNAP, 2020-24	26.4	21.0
Health Insurance and Disability		
Percent of persons without health insurance coverage, 2020-24	8.8	9.5
Percentage point change (2015-19 to 2020-24), Percent of persons without health insurance coverage	-0.5	-0.7
Percent of persons ages 19-25 without health insurance coverage, 2020-24	14.4	16.8
Percent of persons ages 26-34 without health insurance coverage, 2020-24	16.7	17.5
Percent of persons ages 35-64 without health insurance coverage, 2020-24	10.9	12.2

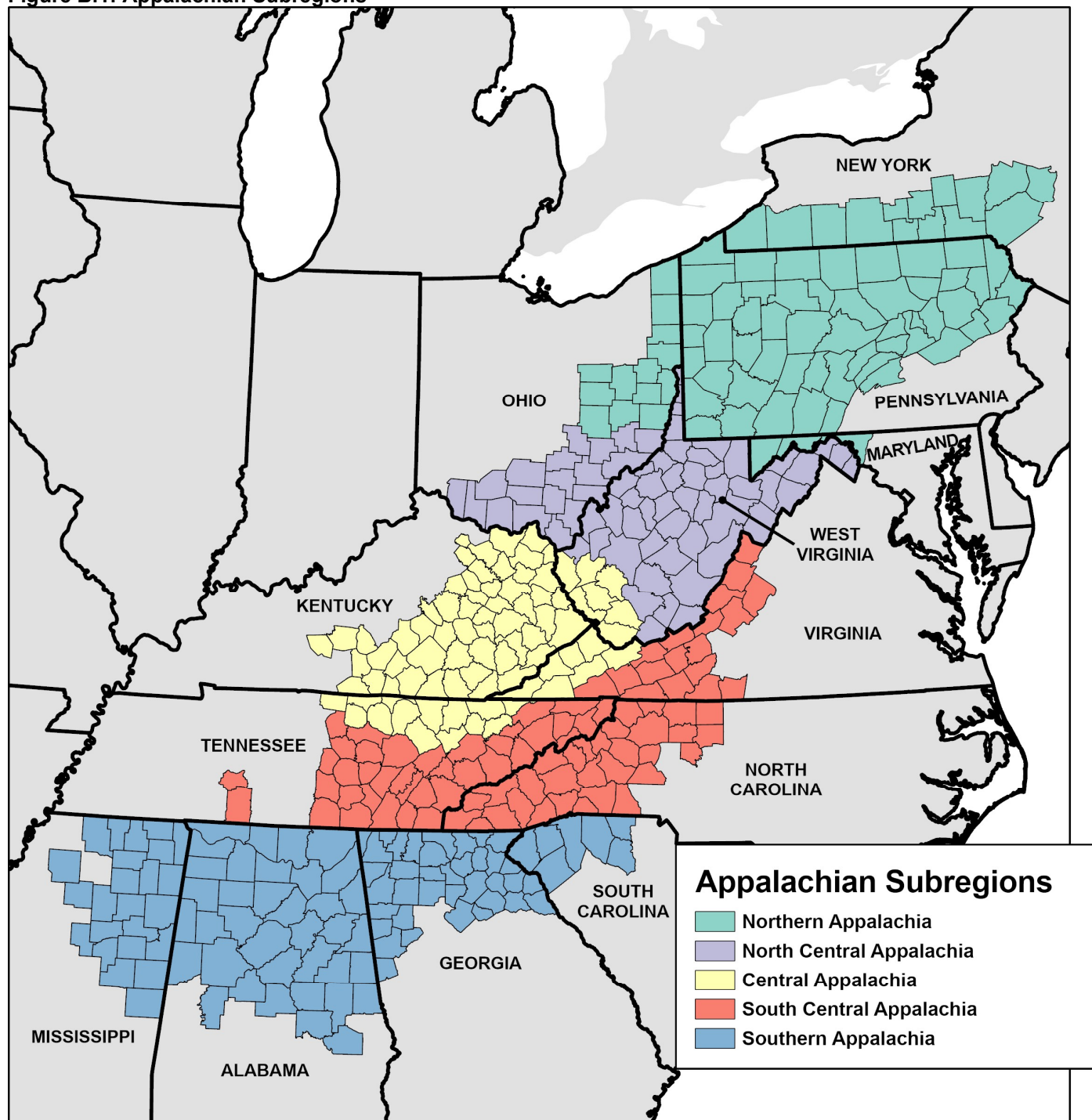
Table A.1: Selected Measures for Rural Appalachia and Rural Areas Outside Appalachia (continued)

Demographic, Social, or Economic Characteristic	Appalachian, Rural (nonmetro, not adjacent to a metro)	Non-Appalachian, Rural (nonmetro, not adjacent to a metro)
<i>Health Insurance and Disability (continued)</i>		
Percent of persons with a disability, 2020-24	20.0	16.9
Percent of persons ages 35-64 with a disability, 2020-24	22.1	16.7
Percent of persons ages 65 and over with a disability, 2020-24	40.5	36.2
<i>Veteran Status</i>		
Percent of civilian population ages 65 and over who are veterans, 2020-24	14.1	15.6
Percent of male civilian population ages 18 and over who are veterans, 2020-24	12.3	13.6

Data Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Vintage 2020 and Vintage 2024 Population Estimates; and 2015-2019 and 2020-2024 American Community Surveys.

APPENDIX B: REFERENCE MAPS

Figure B.1: Appalachian Subregions

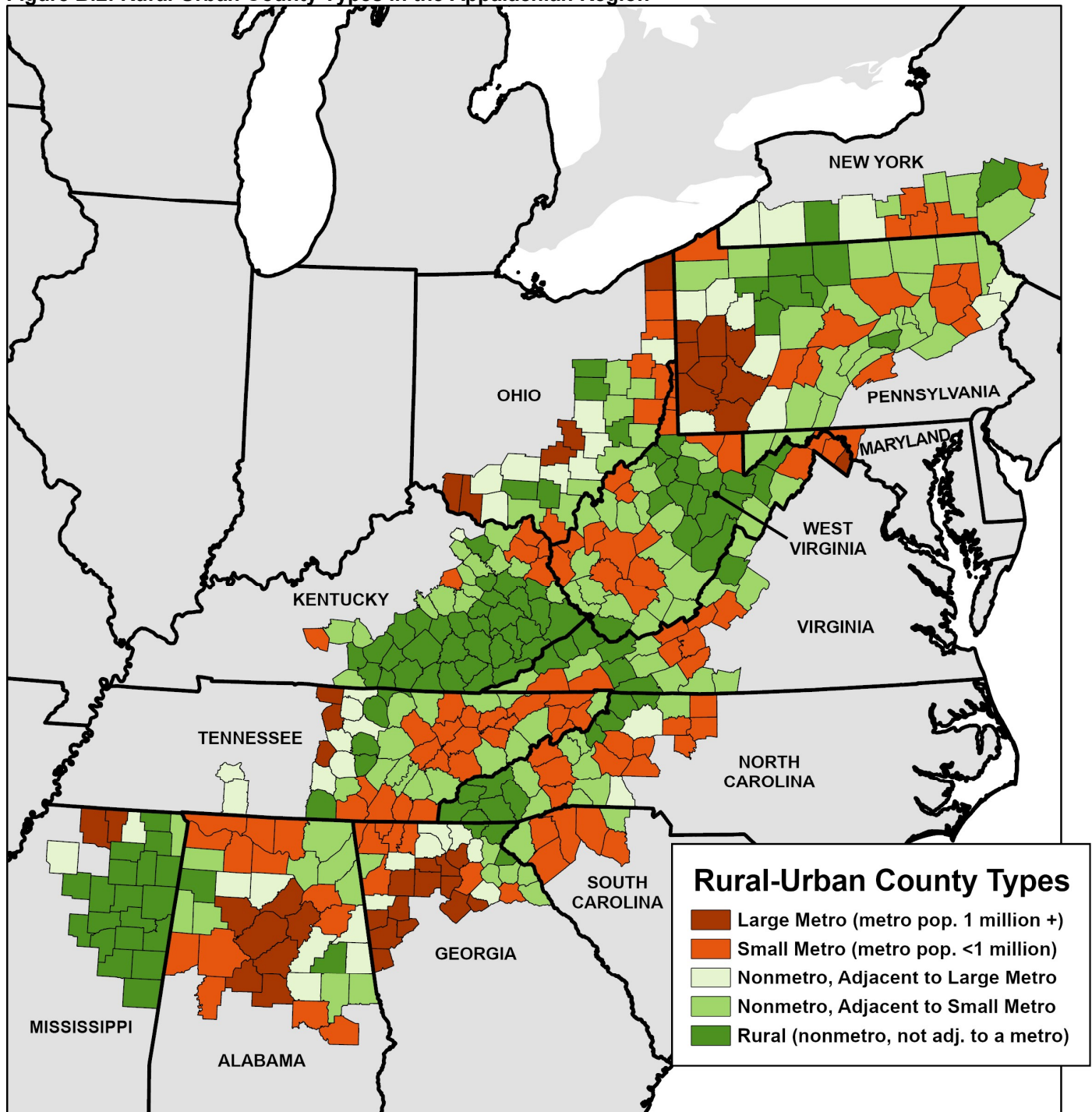


Map Title: Appalachian Subregions

Data Source: Appalachian Regional Commission.

The Appalachian Region covers 206,000 square miles and includes all of West Virginia and portions of 12 other states from New York to Mississippi. The 423 counties of the Appalachian Region are grouped into five subregions, based on similarities in economic and demographic characteristics and geographic location.

Figure B.2: Rural-Urban County Types in the Appalachian Region



Map Title: Rural-Urban County Types in the Appalachian Region

Data Source: USDA, Economic Research Service, 2024 Urban Influence Codes condensed by ARC.

While Appalachia is a distinct part of the United States, the Appalachian Region is far from homogeneous, including both rural counties and major metropolitan areas such as Pittsburgh, Birmingham, and parts of suburban Atlanta. This map shows the rural-urban type for each Appalachian county.