

A Comparative Study of Rural Level-of-Living Indexes in Indiana Counties

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Regional differences within Indiana have long been the subject of considerable interest. This paper is concerned with the contrast which now exist in the rural areas of the state. The object is to determine whether county differences in standard of living are still closely bound to the natural productivity of the soil, or whether the growth of Indiana's cities has produced conditions and demands for specialized agricultural crops which may have resulted in an increased level-of-living for agricultural families in counties with large urban populations.

The Federal Census item "Farm-Operator Family Level-of-Living Index" can be helpful in measuring the basic differences between geographical areas. The four components on which this index is based include: 1) percentage of farms with electricity; 2) percentage of farms with telephones; 3) percentage of farms with automobiles; and 4) average value of products sold or traded in the year preceding the census per farm reporting (adjusted for changes in purchasing power of the farmer's dollar). These indexes do not represent a particular standard; they indicate only the county level expressed as a percentage of the average of all counties in the United States.

The average index value for Indiana in 1950 (based upon the value 100 for the United States as a whole for 1945) was 149. The indexes for 1950 ranged from a minimum of 91 for Scott County to a maximum of 188 for Benton County. When the values for the state's counties are suitably grouped, and this information is reproduced on a map of Indiana, certain geographical contrasts are readily apparent (Fig. 1).

Sixteen counties with values comprising the entire two highest categories are located in the central and northern part of the state. In fact, all but one of the counties with indexes above the central grouping of values (141-160) are north of the southern limit of the Wisconsin glaciation ("1" in Fig. 1). This single exception is Vanderburgh County on the Ohio River, whose value is 161.

The twenty-five counties comprising the three lowest categories are located in the southern half of the state, with the two exceptions of Starke and Lagrange, which are in the extreme northern portion of the state. Furthermore, the twenty-three southern counties are all or mostly south of the southern limits of Wisconsin glaciation. Eight of the ten lowest counties are south of the Illinoian glaciation limits ("2" in Fig. 2).

The counties having level-of-living values within the central grouping (141-160) are scattered throughout the limits of Indiana. However, only four are either entirely or mostly within the non-glaciated area.

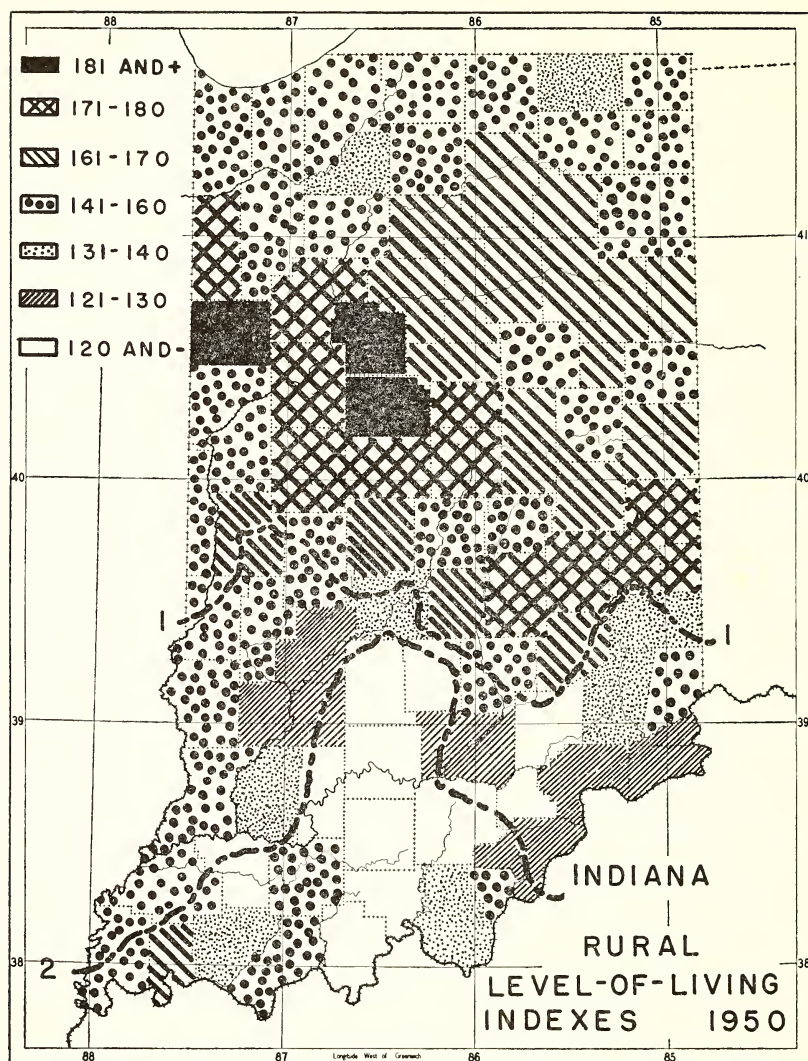


Figure 1.

In fact, only seven are within the area covered by Illinoian glaciation. Eight of these counties form a solid tier along the Wabash River in the southerly part of its course. Another continuous tier lies generally along the northern border of the state.

When examination is made of the level-of-living values for counties containing large cities, certain conclusions can be drawn. Nine counties in Indiana comprise all or part of eight Standard Metropolitan Districts.

These include Lake County (part of the Chicago Metropolitan Area); St. Joseph County (South Bend); Allen County (Fort Wayne); Delaware County (Muncie); Marion County (Indianapolis); Vigo County (Terre Haute); Vanderburgh County (Evansville); and Floyd and Clark counties (part of the Louisville Metropolitan Area). The seven Metropolitan Areas within the northern and central part of the state are comprised of counties which have rural level-of-living indexes which are lower than or no more than equal to their surrounding counties. In the case of Marion County (Indianapolis), six of the neighboring counties have indexes which have substantially greater values. Vanderburgh County and Floyd and Clark counties do have bordering counties which have rural level-of-living indexes somewhat below that of their own.

To summarize:

- 1). The counties with the lowest level-of-living values are generally within the non-glaciated area of Indiana.
- 2). The counties with the highest level-of-living indexes are all within the central portion of Indiana's area of Wisconsin glaciation.
- 3). The counties wholly or largely within the Illinoian glaciated area have level-of-living indexes well below those of the Wisconsin glaciation but decidedly above those of the non-glaciated counties.
- 4). The presence of cities either large or small appears to have little influence upon the rural level-of-living index. The possible exception to this observation includes both Evansville in Vanderburgh County and Floyd and Clark counties, which comprise a portion of the Louisville Metropolitan Area.

Literature Cited

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