U.S. County Population Trends, 1790–2010
New Perspectives Using Spatially Standardized Data

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THE TREND MEASUREMENT PROBLEM

• How have long-term population trends varied among counties?
• When was each county first settled by U.S. citizens?
• Which county populations were peaking in any given year?
• How stable have county populations been?

Using census counts alone to answer such questions is unfortunately problematic. For example, between 1900 and 1910, the population of Arapahoe County, Colorado, dropped from 153,017 to 10,263 while the Denver region where the county had been split in two parts, and the area containing most of its 1900 population became the new Denver County. What then is the historical population trend of that area? Or of any others where boundary changes have occurred?

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Although these estimates are not uniformly accurate, they still enable more complex and consistent meaningful spatial analyses, mitigating the basic problem of boundary changes. These maps present, for example, the misconception that residents had migrated County had been split in two parts, and the area containing most of its 1900 population became the new Denver County. What then is the historical population trend of Arapahoe County before 1910 while Denver sprang up from nothing?

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