

INTRODUCTION

-Although the Census largely categorizes geographic areas as either urban or rural,¹ previous GIS scholarship indicates that as much as 37% of the contiguous U.S. population resides in exurbs, low-density communities located beyond the suburban fringe.²

-In recent years, the exurbs have experienced a dramatic influx of population: by some accounts, the exurban population is growing twice as fast as its metropolitan counterpart,³ and exurban housing density is projected to outpace urban and suburban housing densities by the year 2020.⁴

-The impetus to study the exurbs is heightened by the fact that there is little consensus on what constitutes an exurb. While exurbs have been operationalized using an array of criteria, ranging from levels of nocturnal light to septic tank placement to population density, scholars have conceded that the exurbs remain "an uncertain geospatial concept."⁵

-Given that the exurbs are home to a significant proportion of the coterminous U.S. population, but are only vaguely defined, as well as the fact that they are sites of rapid demographic change, it is an opportune moment for scholars to direct their attention towards the exurban landscape.

METHODS

- In an effort to supplement recent qualitative work on the exurbs of Los Angeles,⁶ as well as to assess the extent of exurbs in the shadow of a major urban center, I focus exclusively on LA County.

-After joining 2010 census tract shapefiles and demographic data in ArcGIS and selecting only those tracts located within LA County but outside of the city of Los Angeles (see **Figure 1**), I applied a sequence of logical filters that selected tracts according to features discussed in the exurban literature (see **Table 1**).

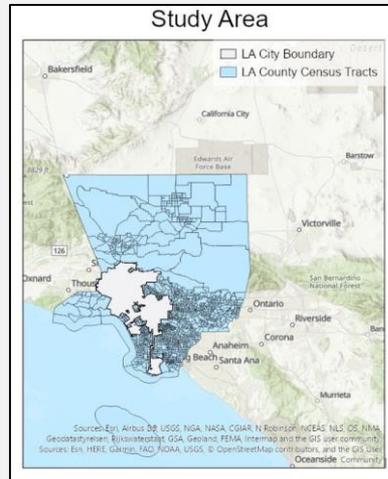


Figure 1. LA County Census Tracts Outside of City Limits (N = 1,209)

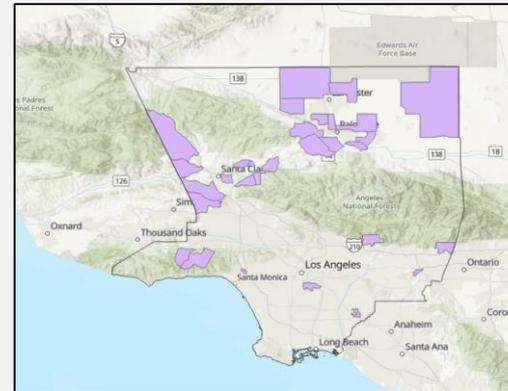


Figure 2. Exurban Census Tracts in LA County (N = 31)

ADDITIVE CRITERION	N =
2010 LA County Tracts with Constant Boundaries Outside of City Limits	1,209
2000-2010 Population Growth Exceeds the City of LA	482
2010 Population Density Lowest Quartile	121
2010 Housing Density Lowest Quartile	31

Table 1. Number of Tracts Eligible for Each Successive Criterion

DISCUSSION

-Consistent with extant scholarship, exurban tracts tend to cluster at the outskirts of the county. As illustrated in **Figure 2**, exurbs are concentrated in the northern regions of Los Angeles County.

-However, the incidence of exurban tracts near major cities (e.g., Santa Monica and Long Beach) indicates locational heterogeneity that warrants further exploration.

-Subsequent analyses will identify exurbs across the contiguous U.S. using additional years of Census data and a more expansive definition of exurbanicity that incorporates other features salient in the literature, such as proximity to a metropolitan statistical area (MSA), commuting flow patterns, and land use classifications.

- While limited in scope, the present analysis lays the foundation for future studies of the exurban neighborhoods that a growing number of mainland U.S. residents call home.

REFERENCES

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