

Research finds that after Chicago, Pittsburgh is the most decentralized metropolitan region in the nation

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(PhysOrg.com) -- In 2007, Pittsburgh, after Chicago, was the most decentralized metropolitan region in the United States, according to the Metropolitan Power Diffusion Index (MPDI) released by the Center for Metropolitan Studies (CMS) in the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs.

The MPDI is a single score that measures how many separate local, county, and special-district governments provide 11 common public services and how much each of those governments spends in providing those services. The services measured include fire, central staff services, public buildings, highways, housing and community development, libraries, police, sewerage, solid waste management, and water utilities. The more individual governments there are spending greater amounts of money on the services, the higher the MPDI score. The data used to compute the MPDI are from individual government financial data compiled and distributed by the U.S. Census Bureau's Census of Governments program.

Decentralized governments are those that have more governing bodies making decisions on public services; more centralized governments have fewer governing bodies making the same decisions.

"This data will help local governments, researchers, and analysts explore policy questions," said Pitt professor David Y. Miller, director of the

CMS. “The purpose of the MPDI is not to determine whether centralized or more decentralized systems are better. Part of the purpose of putting out this measurement is to allow for more analytical work to be done with this data.”

According to Miller, researchers are encouraged to use the MPDI to study the relationship between the level of decentralization and other policy-relevant issues affecting metropolitan regions.

Rounding out the top 10 decentralized metropolitan regions in the [United States](#) are St. Louis, New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Houston, Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, Denver, and Cincinnati.

Researchers calculated the score for 942 micropolitan and metropolitan regions for the 20-year period between 1987 and 2007 and found that the areas are becoming more decentralized. The Census Bureau defines a metropolitan area as a core urban area with a population of 50,000 or more; a micropolitan region is an urban core with a population of at least 10,000, but less than 50,000. Having calculated the MPDI scores in 1987, 1997, and 2007, the CMS found the average metropolitan region became more fragmented by 5.4 percent. The average rate of decentralization slowed to 1.4 percent between 1997 and 2007.

Of the regions analyzed in 2007, 712, or approximately 75.6 percent, had scores that made them more fragmented than they were in 1987. Of those regions, 10.7 percent were rapidly decentralizing, with rates of change in excess of 20 percent.

Colorado Springs tops the list of metropolitan regions that have rapidly decentralized, with Jacksonville and Cape Coral-Fort Myers, Fla.; El Paso; Tucson; Denver; Austin, Texas; Little Rock, Ark.; Salt Lake City; and Omaha decentralizing at a relatively rapid rate compared to other areas.

El Paso has the distinction of being among the most rapidly decentralized regions while claiming the title of one of the most centralized metropolitan areas. While El Paso scored low on the MPDI index as a highly centralized region, the CMS found that the Texas metropolitan area is also rapidly decentralizing, owing to the fact that its score in 1987 was 33 percent lower than its score in 2007.

Joining El Paso on the list among the most centralized metropolitan areas, with populations greater than 500,000 people, are Honolulu; Baltimore; Lakeland-Winterhaven, Fla.; Palm Bay, Fla.; New Orleans; Durham-Chapel Hill, N.C.; Albuquerque; Las Vegas; and Tucson.

California dominated the list of metropolitan areas that were centralizing. Six of the top 11 were from that state: Modesto, San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Jose, San Diego, and Fresno. Other large metropolitan regions that were becoming more centralized in 2007 were Oklahoma City; Portland, Ore.; Baton Rouge, La.; Rochester, N.Y.; and Boise City, Idaho.

A Look by Region

Metropolitan regions look very different across the country. Those in the Northeast are, on average, the most decentralized, CMS research found. Given relatively high levels of fragmentation, regions in this part of the United States were also the slowest to further decentralize, at a rate of 4.3 percent between 1987 and 2007.

Regions in the Midwest are second to the Northeast in decentralization, but are becoming more decentralized at a much faster rate, 5.5 percent.

Metropolitan regions in the South are, on average, the most centralized. However, the South decentralized at a quicker rate, 6 percent, than either the Northeast or the Midwest.

Finally, metropolitan regions in the West are, on average, the second most centralized. Between 1987 and 2007, metropolitan areas in the West were “decentralizing” the most, at a rate of 10.7 percent.

The CMS offers a report card of trends in governmental diffusion between 1987 and 2007 for all 942 micropolitan and metropolitan regions. Summaries available through the CMS include analysis of trends by region and population size.

In addition, the CMS provides a downloadable database that permits researchers to not only describe variation and trends in local governance structures across [metropolitan areas](#) for 1987, 1997, and 2007, but also to use the measure as a correlate with other important demographic, environmental, and socioeconomic characteristics of [metropolitan regions](#).

More information: To view the database visit www.metrostudies.pitt.edu

Provided by University of Pittsburgh

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