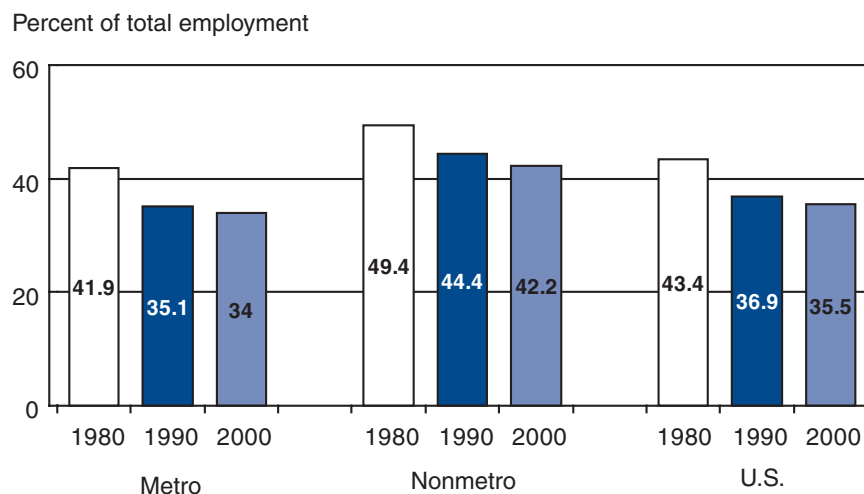


Rural Low-Skill Employment Declines Outpace the Nation's

The rural low-skill share of employment fell 2.2 percentage points during the 1990s, from 44.4 to 42.2 percent (fig. 1). Nationally, the decline in low-skill share was 1.4 percentage points, from 36.9 percent to 35.5 percent. The number of workers in low-skill jobs actually rose in the rapidly expanding economy of the 1990s, but the skilled workforce grew faster, hence the decline in share. To understand the impact of declining low-skill share, imagine that the share of low-skill rural jobs had not changed between 1990 and 2000. Given brisk employment growth overall, about 550,000 more low-skill jobs would have existed in rural areas by the end of the decade than actually did.

The decline in low-skill employment share during the 1990s appears more modest when compared with the corresponding changes during the 1980s. Nationally, the low-skill share of employment fell 6.5 percentage points in the 1980s, compared with 1.4 percentage points in the 1990s. In rural areas, a 5-percentage-point drop in the 1980s was followed by a 2.2-percentage-point drop in the 1990s.

Figure 1
Metro and nonmetro low-skill employment share, 1980, 1990, and 2000



Source: Economic Research Service/USDA, using data from the 2000 Current Population Survey.