



## 2020 Census: Municipal Population Shifts in New York State

### Overview

New York State’s population totaled over 20.2 million in 2020, up 823,000 or 4.1 percent since 2010. This growth was nearly twice the rate seen in the prior decade (2.1 percent), although it was still well below the nationwide rate of 7.2 percent.<sup>1</sup> Most of this increase was in New York City, which grew 7.7 percent between 2010 and 2020, to 8.8 million, far faster than the aggregate rate for any class of local government in the rest of the State. (The remainder of this report highlights our decennial census analysis of the State’s remaining cities, as well as its towns and villages.<sup>2</sup>)

The combined population of the State’s cities outside of New York City, nearly 2.3 million persons, has grown by 2 percent compared to 2010. (See Figure 1.) Although fewer than half of them – 29 out of 61 – experienced increases in population, their aggregate growth marks the first time since 1960 that total city population throughout the rest of the State has increased. (New York City’s population, in contrast, has been increasing every decade since 1980.)

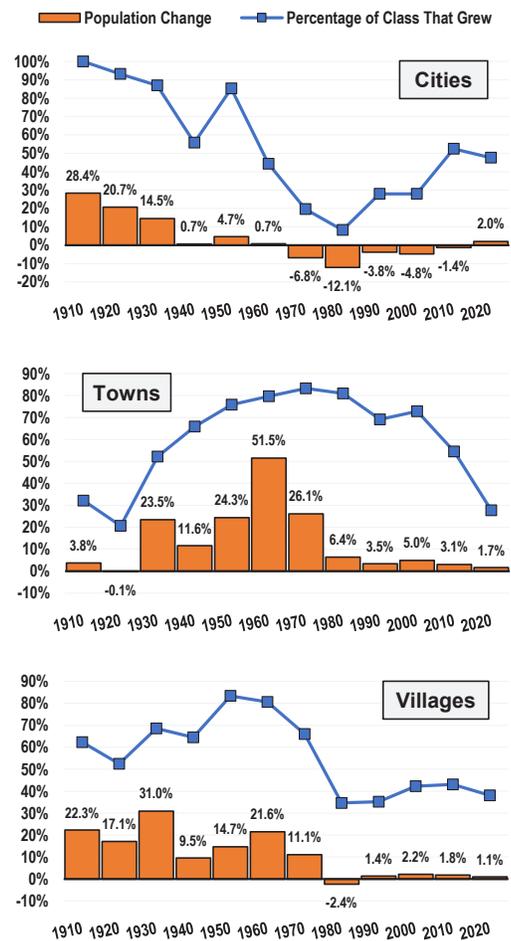
Statewide town population was over 9.1 million in 2020, an increase of only 1.7 percent over the past decade. This is the slowest growth in total town population in many decades. Only 259 towns or 28 percent saw population increases, much lower than the 55 percent of towns that grew between 2000 and 2010.

The total number of people living in villages in 2020 was 1.9 million, up only 1.1 percent since 2010. However, this slower growth was largely due to the fact that 22 villages dissolved over the decade. The aggregate population of the 533 villages that existed in both 2010 and 2020 grew 2.3 percent. Of these, only 203 had population increases during the period.

The release of a new decennial census count can affect cities, towns and villages in several ways, and local officials should be aware of some of the major impacts. Population changes can affect certain revenues, such as local sales tax distributions and federal aid, and change the need for municipal services and infrastructure, among other things. (See page 7 for more details.)

Figure 1

### Population Change in New York State by Class of Local Government, 1910-2020



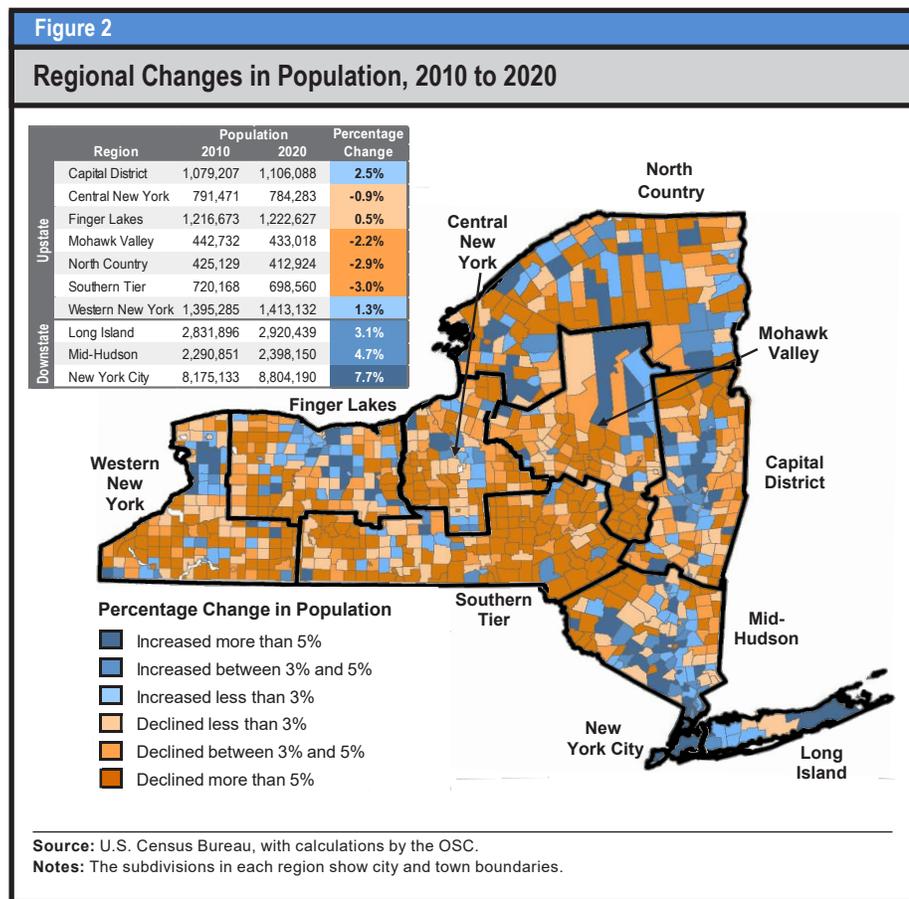
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, with calculations by the Office of the State Comptroller (OSC).  
Notes: "Cities" does not include New York City.

**FIND DETAILED DATA ONLINE.** To view detailed Census data profiles for an individual county, city, town or village, readers can access our online [Interactive Census Dashboard](#).



## Regional Patterns

The Mid-Hudson region's population grew 4.7 percent to nearly 2.4 million, the largest percentage increase of any region outside of New York City. Long Island, the State's second-most populated region, increased by 3.1 percent from 2010 to over 2.9 million people. Conversely, the Southern Tier experienced the largest percentage decrease at 3.0 percent, closely followed by the North Country and Mohawk Valley, with declines of 2.9 percent and 2.2 percent, respectively. (See Figure 2.)



Downstate, in the area surrounding fast-growing New York City, the aggregate population of cities, towns and villages all grew, although some individual local governments had declines.<sup>3</sup> Villages had the strongest total growth, at 6.8 percent, with those in the Mid-Hudson region growing fastest of all, at 8.5 percent. Long Island's towns – including eight of the State's largest (with populations exceeding 100,000) – grew by 3.1 percent in aggregate. Hempstead in Nassau County – the largest town in New York at over 793,000 – also added the most people from 2010 to 2020, increasing by nearly 34,000 (4.4 percent).

Upstate, in contrast, saw more decreases than increases. As a class, upstate villages collectively declined by 6.8 percent, and North Country villages were the hardest hit of any class in any region, declining by 12.2 percent. Upstate town population in aggregate dropped by 0.3 percent. However, total upstate city population increased by 0.8 percent, which was the first time these cities as a group had grown since 1950.

## City Trends

Nearly all (11 out of 12) of the State's largest cities outside New York City experienced growth between 2010 and 2020, increasing by a total of 4 percent. Mount Vernon's population grew the fastest, at 9.8 percent, but Buffalo added the most people (17,039) – an increase of 6.5 percent – after losing more than half its population from 1950 to 2010. Growing at a brisk 8 percent, Yonkers passed Rochester as the State's third largest city. (See Figure 3.)

Conversely, almost all (10 out of 12) of the State's smallest cities shrank, declining in aggregate by 3.9 percent. Hudson saw its population drop by over 12 percent, to fewer than 6,000 residents, which was the largest percentage decline of any city in the State.

As shown in Figure 4, the population growth in the cities of Buffalo, Rochester and Syracuse was part of a pattern of growth within their metropolitan areas. In many cases the cities' growth was as strong, or in the case of Buffalo, even stronger than that of the towns and villages immediately surrounding them. The same pattern can also be seen in other cities that experienced growth, including in the Capital District, which is anchored by the medium-sized cities of Albany, Schenectady and Troy.

To a lesser degree, even some smaller cities that experienced growth, such as Ithaca, Kingston and Middletown, were part of overall metropolitan growth patterns.

This is notable because, while the towns and villages in larger metropolitan areas had experienced growth in recent decades, the central cities of these areas had often seen simultaneous population declines.

**Figure 3**

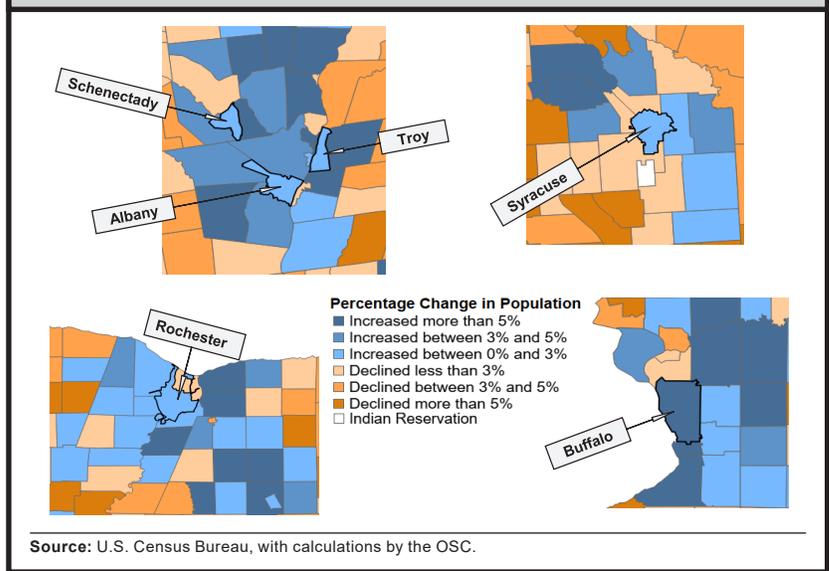
### Population Changes in the Largest and Smallest Cities in New York State

City Name	Population		Percentage Change
	2010	2020	
Buffalo	261,310	278,349	6.5%
Yonkers	195,976	211,569	8.0%
Rochester	210,565	211,328	0.4%
Syracuse	145,170	148,620	2.4%
Albany	97,856	99,224	1.4%
New Rochelle	77,062	79,726	3.5%
Mount Vernon	67,292	73,893	9.8%
Schenectady	66,135	67,047	1.4%
Utica	62,235	65,283	4.9%
White Plains	56,853	59,559	4.8%
Troy	50,129	51,401	2.5%
Niagara Falls	50,193	48,671	-3.0%
Oneida	11,393	10,329	-9.3%
Ogdensburg	11,128	10,064	-9.6%
Rensselaer	9,392	9,210	-1.9%
Port Jervis	8,828	8,775	-0.6%
Hornell	8,563	8,263	-3.5%
Johnstown	8,743	8,204	-6.2%
Norwich	7,190	7,051	-1.9%
Salamanca	5,815	5,929	2.0%
Hudson	6,713	5,894	-12.2%
Mechanicville	5,196	5,163	-0.6%
Little Falls	4,946	4,605	-6.9%
Sherrill	3,071	3,077	0.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, with calculations by the OSC.  
Notes: Does not include New York City.

**Figure 4**

### Patterns of Population Growth Within Selected Metropolitan Areas, 2010 to 2020



## Demographic Changes

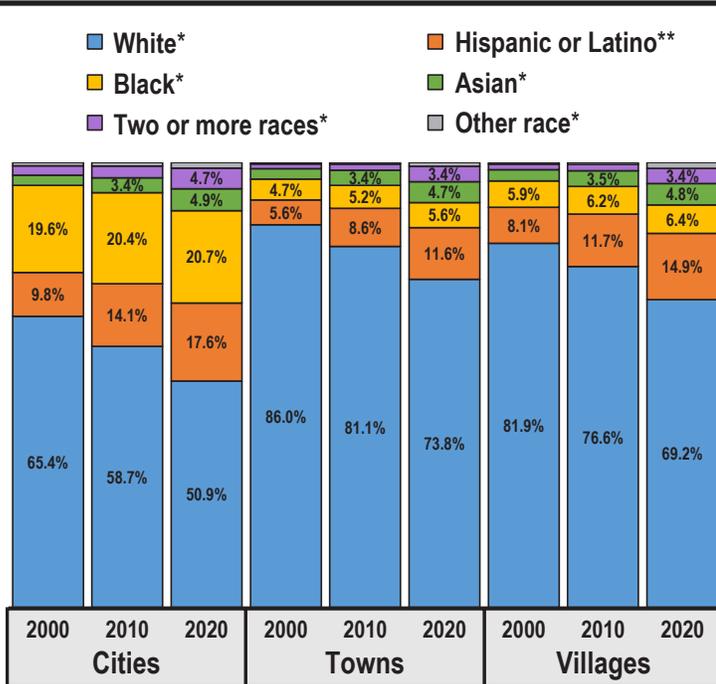
The ongoing shift toward a more diverse society in New York continued over the past decade. Statewide, the number of White persons declined by 6.2 percent, and the Black population fell by 0.9 percent. Meanwhile, all other racial and ethnic groups experienced population increases, including persons of Hispanic and Latino origin and Asian Americans, at 16 percent and 36 percent, respectively. White persons still accounted for just over half of the State's population in 2020, although that was down from more than 58 percent in 2010.

Generally speaking, the area of the State outside of New York City has been following a similar trend, with many cities, towns and villages becoming more diverse. For instance, the percentage of the population reported as White has been gradually decreasing in recent decades in all classes of local government. In cities outside of New York City, this group decreased by nearly 12 percent between 2010 and 2020 and now accounts for just under 51 percent of the aggregate population.<sup>4</sup> (See Figure 5.)

Figure 5

### Race and Ethnicity Groups

Share of Total Population by Class of Local Government



### Population Change by Class of Local Government

Race or Ethnicity	2010 to 2020		
	Cities	Towns	Villages
White*	-11.6%	-7.5%	-8.8%
Hispanic or Latino**	27.5%	37.9%	27.9%
Black*	3.5%	9.3%	4.2%
Asian*	48.7%	42.3%	38.4%
Two or more races*	83.2%	164.3%	141.8%
Other race*	54.9%	111.3%	194.7%

\* Non-Hispanic

\*\* All races

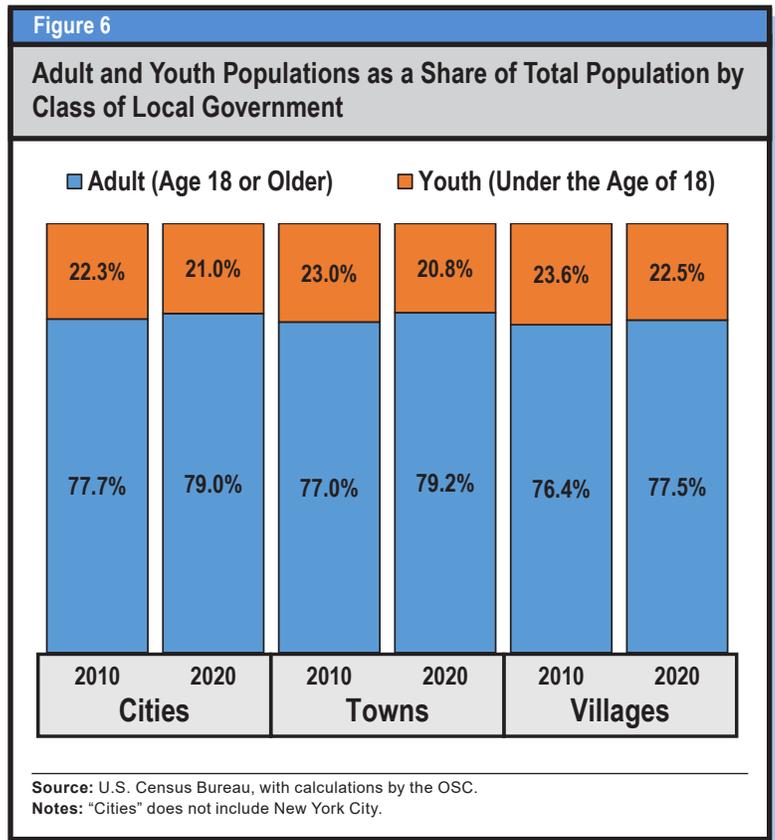
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, with calculations by the OSC.

Notes: "Cities" does not include New York City. The race categories do not include persons of Hispanic or Latino origin, which are shown as a single category inclusive of all races reporting that ethnicity. "Other race" includes American Indian and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, or some other reported race. Data labels less than 3 percent are not shown in the stacked bar chart above.

Conversely, the population that identifies as Hispanic or Latino increased anywhere from 28 percent to 38 percent by class of local government. Over the past few decades, this group has continued to increase steadily as a percentage of the population of cities, towns and villages alike, with the largest recent growth in towns. The Asian American population also had significant double-digit growth in all classes of local government, but only accounts for around 5 percent of the total population. The number of people reporting being of two or more races also increased significantly, but makes up an even smaller portion of the overall population.

Bucking the statewide trend, the number of Black persons actually increased in all classes of local government outside of New York City. Towns experienced the largest increase in Black population, at 9.3 percent.

Another change that has been happening across New York is the gradual aging of the overall population. In cities, towns and villages, the share of persons age 18 years or older is increasing. (See Figure 6.) In 2020, adults made up 80 percent of the total State population, up from nearly 78 percent in 2010. Meanwhile, the youth population dropped from 22 percent to just over 20 percent. More granular data by age have not yet been made available by Census.



## Housing Statistics

Housing statistics tend to reflect changes in total population. Across New York, the number of housing units increased by 4.7 percent between 2010 and 2020. Occupied units grew by 5.4 percent and vacant units declined by 2.2 percent, dropping the State’s vacancy rate from 9.7 percent to 9.1 percent.<sup>5</sup>

However, the changes in these measures outside of New York City indicate somewhat slower growth. By class, cities in the rest of the State experienced 3.6 percent growth in the number of residential properties, faster than towns or villages. Nearly 89 percent of all cities saw their housing stock increase over the past decade. However, aggregate growth by class in towns and villages was slower, and more than half of all towns and nearly 40 percent of all villages had declines in total housing units. (See Figure 7.)

The changes in occupied and vacant housing units outside New York City also differed from the statewide averages, and varied among classes of government. Once again, the increase in the number of occupied housing units from 2010 to 2020 was highest in cities, at 3.7 percent, but this class also saw a 2 percent increase in vacant units, so overall city vacancy rates stayed fairly constant. In contrast, towns had a slightly lower increase in occupied housing units and a corresponding decrease in vacancies, leading to a decline in town vacancy rates from 11.4 percent to 10.9 percent. Only village vacancy rates rose in aggregate, as the class saw a slight (1.4 percent) increase in occupied housing units at the same time as a large (5.8 percent) increase in the number of vacant units. (See Figure 8.)

Figure 7

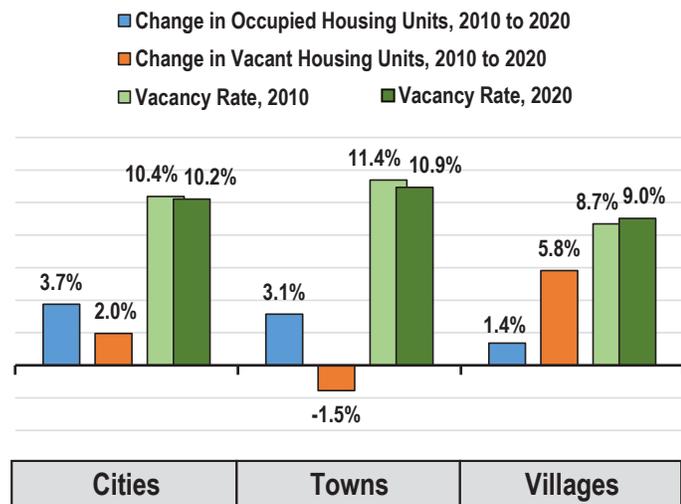
### Total Housing Units by Class of Local Government

	Number of Units		Percentage Change	Share of Class That Grew, 2010 to 2020
	2010	2020		
Cities	1,013,898	1,050,010	3.6%	88.5%
Towns	3,719,192	3,816,082	2.6%	47.7%
Villages	779,716	793,150	1.7%	60.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, with calculations by the OSC.  
Notes: "Cities" does not include New York City.

Figure 8

### Selected Housing Statistics by Class of Local Government



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, with calculations by the OSC.  
Notes: "Cities" does not include New York City.

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## Municipal Impact

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There are several things that local officials should be aware of when assessing the results of the 2020 census. Population growth or decline can affect a municipality's revenue sources and infrastructure needs. Demographic changes, such as the number of children or seniors, can affect the need for certain municipal services.

### Challenges for local governments with population declines

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- Since many counties distribute sales tax collections to municipalities within their borders based on decennial population, intra-county population shifts could affect sales tax revenues for these local governments.<sup>6</sup>
- Long-term population loss and increasing vacancy rates could lead to a reduction in the property tax base.
- Federal aid for certain programs is at least partially based on the latest decennial census. While most federal aid dollars are distributed to the State, some federal programs provide funding directly to local governments.<sup>7</sup>

### Opportunities for local governments experiencing rapid population growth

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- Population growth generally increases a local government's tax base and is often associated with economic growth. However, an especially rapid increase can bring its own challenges, including strains on existing municipal services (such as public safety, refuse collection and recreation) and infrastructure (such as public drinking water and sewer systems and local roads).

### New needs for local governments due to changes in the residential age distribution

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- A local government with an aging population may face increasing pressure to provide certain elder services such as in-home care, home-delivered meals, or emergency and nonemergency transportation, among other things.
- In addition, a municipality with a decreasing youth population may need to close or repurpose buildings to manage its existing resources efficiently.
- Conversely, a growth in the number of children may require a municipality to focus more on youth development programs or child and family services.

The population growth and reduced vacancy rates in the State's largest cities outside of New York City reported in the 2020 Census, for the first time in decades, are encouraging signs of these cities' ability to support existing infrastructure and services. Conversely, the continued population decline in many rural towns may make it harder for them to provide certain services. Whatever the trend in any given local government, however, it is vital that local officials are aware of these changes as they plan for the future. For an interactive way to view your local government's Census results, go to the Comptroller's online dashboard at [www1.osc.state.ny.us/localgov/2020-census-interactive-dashboard.htm](http://www1.osc.state.ny.us/localgov/2020-census-interactive-dashboard.htm). For information on local government multiyear financial planning, capital planning and other technical assistance, see our [Local Government Publications](#) page.<sup>8</sup>

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## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> All population and housing data are taken from the U.S. Census Bureau, *Decennial Census of Population and Housing*, at [www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census.html](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census.html). The 2020 Census encountered unprecedented challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the Census Bureau found that results of the 2020 Census were comparable to key population data benchmarks and aligned with expert research and corresponding findings over the past decade. For more information, see Roberto Ramirez et al., “2020 Census Results Released Today Are Generally in Line With Expectations,” *U.S. Census Bureau*, August 12, 2021, at [www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/08/what-we-know-about-quality-of-2020-census-redistricting-data.html](http://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/08/what-we-know-about-quality-of-2020-census-redistricting-data.html).
- <sup>2</sup> Villages are all located within towns and therefore town population includes village population. Counties are not discussed in this report because their populations are an aggregate of city and town populations. However, decennial census analysis for counties can be found by accessing the Comptroller’s online dashboard, at [www1.osc.state.ny.us/localgov/2020-census-interactive-dashboard.htm](http://www1.osc.state.ny.us/localgov/2020-census-interactive-dashboard.htm).
- <sup>3</sup> Downstate regions outside of New York City include Long Island and the Mid-Hudson. Upstate regions include the Capital District, Central New York, the Finger Lakes, the Mohawk Valley, the North Country, the Southern Tier and Western New York.
- <sup>4</sup> The race categories (e.g. White, Black, Asian, two or more races, and other race) do not include persons of Hispanic or Latino origin, which are shown as a single category inclusive of all races reporting that ethnicity.
- <sup>5</sup> The U.S. Census Bureau defines a housing unit as vacant if no one is living in it at the time of the interview, unless its occupants are only temporarily absent. In addition, a vacant unit may be one which is entirely occupied by persons who have a usual residence elsewhere. For more information, see U.S. Census Bureau, *Definitions and Explanations*, p. 3, at [www.census.gov/housing/hvs/definitions.pdf](http://www.census.gov/housing/hvs/definitions.pdf).
- <sup>6</sup> For more information on county sales tax sharing with other local governments, see Office of the State Comptroller, *Understanding Local Government Sales Tax in New York State*, October 2020, at [www.osc.state.ny.us/files/local-government/publications/pdf/understanding-local-government-sales-tax-in-nys-2020-update.pdf](http://www.osc.state.ny.us/files/local-government/publications/pdf/understanding-local-government-sales-tax-in-nys-2020-update.pdf).
- <sup>7</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Uses of Census Bureau Data in Federal Funds Distribution*, September 2017, at [www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2020/program-management/working-papers/Uses-of-Census-Bureau-Data-in-Federal-Funds-Distribution.pdf](http://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2020/program-management/working-papers/Uses-of-Census-Bureau-Data-in-Federal-Funds-Distribution.pdf).
- <sup>8</sup> Available at: [www.osc.state.ny.us/local-government/publications](http://www.osc.state.ny.us/local-government/publications).



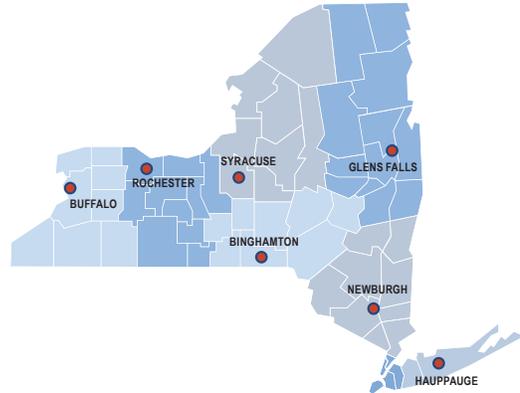
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