

## Manufacturing- Part 5: Specialization <sup>[1]</sup>

### Manufacturing

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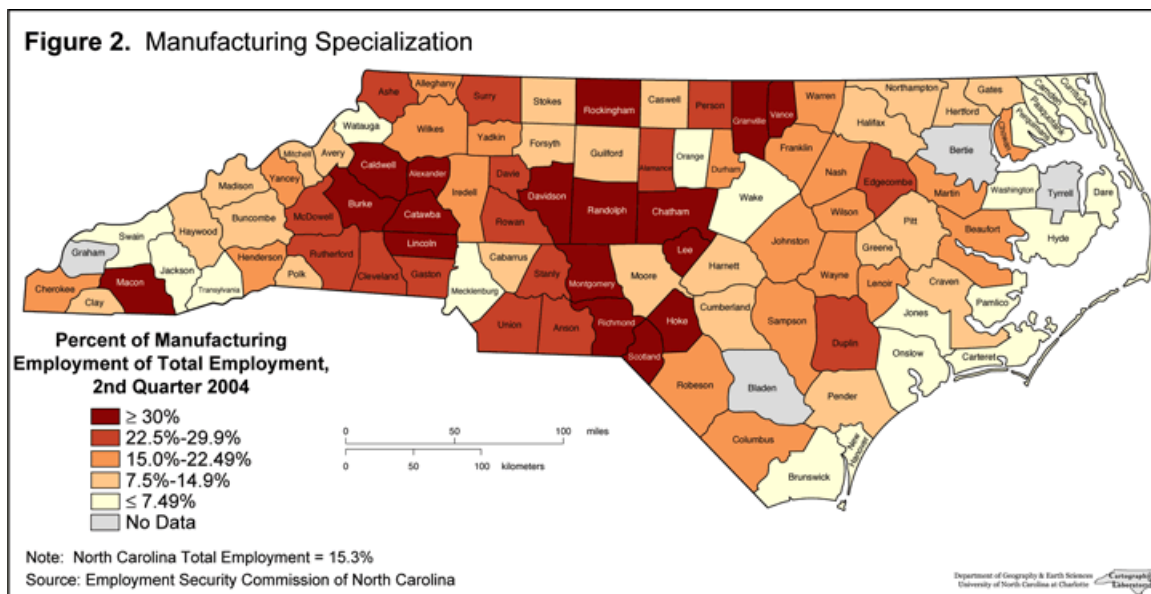
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### Part 5: Specialization



The dispersion of factories throughout the state has led to a number of areas that have economies that are relatively specialized in manufacturing. This is displayed in Figure 2, which shows the proportion of total employment in each county that is in factory jobs. Statewide, that figure in 2004 was, as noted above, 15.3 percent.


The heaviest relative concentration of industrial employees is found primarily on the Piedmont, of course. This includes counties that recorded 30 percent of all jobs in factories, double the statewide share. They are clustered primarily around [Hickory](#) <sup>[22]</sup> and to the northeast of [Charlotte](#) <sup>[23]</sup>. A great number of other areas throughout the state also had proportions greater than 15 percent. They are especially noteworthy on the Inner Coastal Plain, a region generally considered to have agricultural economies. In fact, the rural dispersion of manufacturing is revealed by the shares that are found in counties that are not classified in Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), Combined Metropolitan Statistical Areas (CMSAs) or Micropolitan Areas (McrSAs). Definitions of all three of these areas can be found in the Population chapter. The newly created McrSAs are comprised of non-MSA counties that contain an urban place with a population of between 10,000 and 50,000.

There are 30 North Carolina counties that are not found in either of these three categories and thus they can be considered to be the state's most rural areas. Factory employment is reported for 26 of these most rural areas and half of them have proportions that exceed the statewide average, including three that have more than 30 percent of all of their workers in factories. As previously noted, in most cases, these rural industrial economies are heavily concentrated in the very labor-intensive industries that are vulnerable to competition from low-wage, off shore producers.

Several of these rural counties exemplify their dependence on factory jobs and their recent losses [Ashe](#) <sup>[24]</sup>, [Martin](#) <sup>[25]</sup>,

Montgomery <sup>[26]</sup>, and Richmond <sup>[27]</sup> counties had manufacturing proportions that ranged between 24 and 45 percent of total employment in 2004. Between 1990 and the second quarter of 2004 they collectively lost 9,158 factory jobs, a decrease of over 59 percent, double the statewide rate of loss. Consequently, their average unemployment rate was 9.4 percent in 2003, well above the statewide rate of 6.5 percent. Unfortunately, the statistics on specific industries is too sketchy for some of these counties, making it impossible to discern just how much the Textiles-Apparel-Furniture industries contributed to these losses. However, in Montgomery and Richmond counties, which had a combined total of 14,661 factory workers in 1990, the decline in Textiles-Apparel-Furniture jobs accounted for two-thirds of their 40 percent manufacturing employment loss between 1990 and 2004. While not comprehensive, these numbers still tend to support the idea that rural counties have been more severely impacted by the loss of these labor-intensive factory jobs than have most other parts of the state.

Another feature of this pattern is that the areas that are the largest manufacturing employers actually recorded relatively small shares of jobs in factories. The largest was Guilford County <sup>[28]</sup>, which had 39,208 factory workers, followed by Mecklenburg's <sup>[29]</sup> 36,962. Yet Guilford's share, 14.6 percent, was less than the state average, and Mecklenburg's was just 7.3 percent. Wake <sup>[30]</sup>, another major factory employer, recorded only a 5.5 percent share of all jobs in manufacturing.

Keep reading >> Manufacturing- Part 6: Implications of Industrial Changes<sup>[18]</sup>  <sup>[18]</sup>

## Subjects:

Industry <sup>[31]</sup>

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