
URBAN AND RURAL AREAS IN THE STATE OF HAWAII: 2020

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STATE OF HAWAII

April 2024



This publication is produced by the Research and Economic Analysis Division (READ) of the Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism (DBEDT), State of Hawaii. It was prepared by Carlie Liddell, Research Statistician.

An interactive map of Hawaii's urban areas can be found [online](#).

Urban-rural classification

The U.S. Census Bureau's urban-rural classification is a delineation of geographic areas used to identify urban areas in the nation. Urban areas are "densely developed territory, and encompass residential, commercial, and other non-residential urban land uses." ¹ Rural areas are any areas that do not meet the criteria for "urban."

The Census Bureau's urban-rural classification is used by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to delineate metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas. The classification impacts how hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funding are distributed through grants, with specific grants established for urban and rural areas. Federal grants to support rural areas might focus on education, business enterprises, or healthcare access. Federal grants targeting urban areas might focus on transportation, housing, or urban revitalization. Having data to support these targeted geographies is useful for policy planning and funding acquisition.

Changes to the urban-rural classification for 2020

The U.S. Census Bureau updates and releases changes to urban and rural area definitions once a decade, along with the release of the decennial census. In 2010, there were two types of urban areas-- 1) urbanized areas with populations of 50,000 or more, and 2) urban clusters with at least 2,500 people, but less than 50,000.

For 2020, the Census Bureau changed its criteria for urban areas in the following ways:²

- All qualifying areas are now "urban areas." The Census Bureau no longer distinguishes between "urbanized areas" and "urban clusters."
- Qualifications were updated to include housing unit density in addition to population density. The minimum population threshold required is 5,000 (increased from 2,500) or 2,000 housing units.
- The jump distance was reduced from 2.5 miles to 1.5 miles. Jump distance is the distance along roads used to connect urban areas surrounded by rural areas.

Changes to the Census Bureau's criteria resulted in the reduction of urban-classified areas in Hawaii. Eight areas that were previously defined as "urban" are now "rural," and Hawaii's total urban land area decreased by 91 square miles between 2010 and 2020.

Some smaller centers of population that were previously defined as urban—like Honokaa on Hawaii Island and Lanai City—are now defined as rural. The reduction in the jump distance used to connect an urban area together also impacted some of the more spread-out urban areas from 2010. For example, Hawaiian Paradise Park on Hawaii Island is now defined as rural due to this change in jump distance. On the other hand, the

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, "2020 Census Urban-Rural Classification Fact Sheet" (December 2022), <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/factsheets/2022/dec/2020-census-urban-rural-fact-sheet.pdf>. Accessed April 23, 2024.

² U.S. Census Bureau, "Differences between the Final 2020 Census Urban Area Criteria and the 2010 Census Urban Area Criteria" (December 2022), https://www2.census.gov/geo/pdfs/reference/ua/Census_UA_CritDiff_2010_2020.pdf. Accessed April 23, 2024.

addition of housing units as a qualifier for “urban” status means that areas with many seasonal or short-term rental housing units may retain their urban status even if the area’s permanent resident population does not meet the new threshold. One such area is Princeville on Kauai.

Table 1. Urban and Rural Land Areas, by County: 2020

Area type and subject	State of Hawaii	Hawaii County	Honolulu County	Kauai County	Maui County
Total land area					
Square kilometers	16,634.15	10,433.64	1,555.61	1,605.49	3,039.41
Square miles	6,422.44	4,028.43	600.62	619.88	1,173.51
Urban					
Square kilometers	783.21	131.34	480.37	60.23	111.26
Square miles	302.40	50.71	185.47	23.26	42.96
Percent ¹	4.7	1.3	30.9	3.8	3.7
Rural					
Square kilometers	15,850.94	10,302.30	1,075.24	1,545.26	2,928.15
Square miles	6,120.05	3,977.72	415.15	596.62	1,130.56
Percent ¹	95.3	98.7	69.1	96.2	96.3

¹ Percent of the state or each county's total land area.

State overview

In 2020, 302 square miles of Hawaii’s land area were classified as urban, with 1.25 million people living in these urban areas. The State had an urban population density of 4,142 people per square mile on average. About 475,500 housing units were in urban areas, and there was an average of 1,572 housing units per square mile in these areas. Hawaii’s urban areas accounted for 86.1 percent of the total population and 84.7 percent of total housing units while encompassing 4.7 percent of the total land area.

Rural areas cover 6,120 square miles, or 95.3 percent, of Hawaii’s land area. There were about 200,000 people living in rural areas in the state, who made up 13.9 percent of the state’s total population in 2020. There were about 86,000 housing units in rural areas, and an average housing density of 14 housing units per square mile. Just over 15 percent of the state’s housing units were in rural areas. Because of the criteria and definition changes discussed in the previous section, Hawaii’s rural areas are more densely populated than in 2010. In 2010, there was an average of 18 people per square mile in rural areas. In 2020, there were 33 people per square mile in rural areas.

Table 2. Urban and Rural Populations and Housing, By County: 2020

Area type and geography	Land area (sq. mi.)	Population			Housing units		
		Number	Percent ¹	Density ²	Number	Percent ¹	Density ²
State of Hawaii	6,422.44	1,455,271	100.0	226.6	561,066	100.0	87.4
Urban	302.40	1,252,450	86.1	4,141.8	475,469	84.7	1,572.3
Rural	6,120.05	202,821	13.9	33.1	85,597	15.3	14.0
Hawaii County	4,028.43	200,629	100.0	49.8	88,691	100.0	22.0
Urban	50.71	81,258	40.5	1,602.4	35,846	40.4	706.9
Rural	3,977.72	119,371	59.5	30.0	52,845	59.6	13.3
Honolulu County	600.62	1,016,508	100.0	1,692.4	370,665	100.0	617.1
Urban	185.47	999,341	98.3	5,388.1	365,736	98.7	1,971.9
Rural	415.15	17,167	1.7	41.4	4,929	1.3	11.9
Kauai County	619.88	73,298	100.0	118.2	30,157	100.0	48.6
Urban	23.26	42,365	57.8	1,821.7	17,488	58.0	752.0
Rural	596.62	30,933	42.2	51.8	12,669	42.0	21.2
Maui County	1,173.51	164,836	100.0	140.5	71,553	100.0	61.0
Urban	42.96	129,486	78.6	3,014.3	56,399	78.8	1,312.9
Rural	1,130.56	35,350	21.4	31.3	15,154	21.2	13.4

¹ Percent of the state or county's total area.

² Density is population or housing units per land area square mile.

Figure 1. Land and Population in Urban Areas as a Percentage of Total: 2020

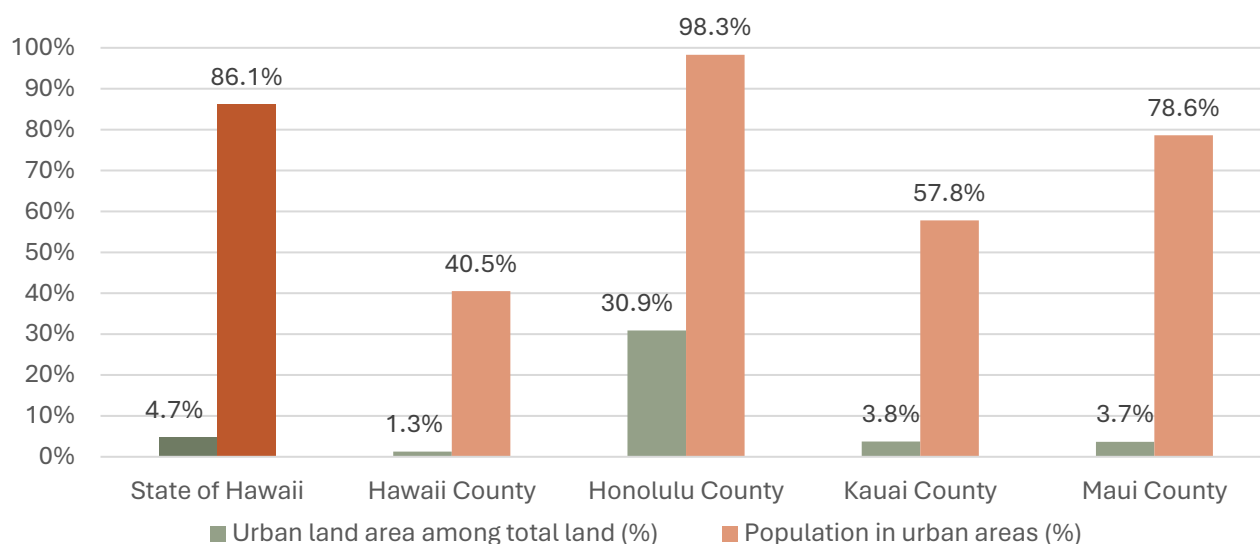
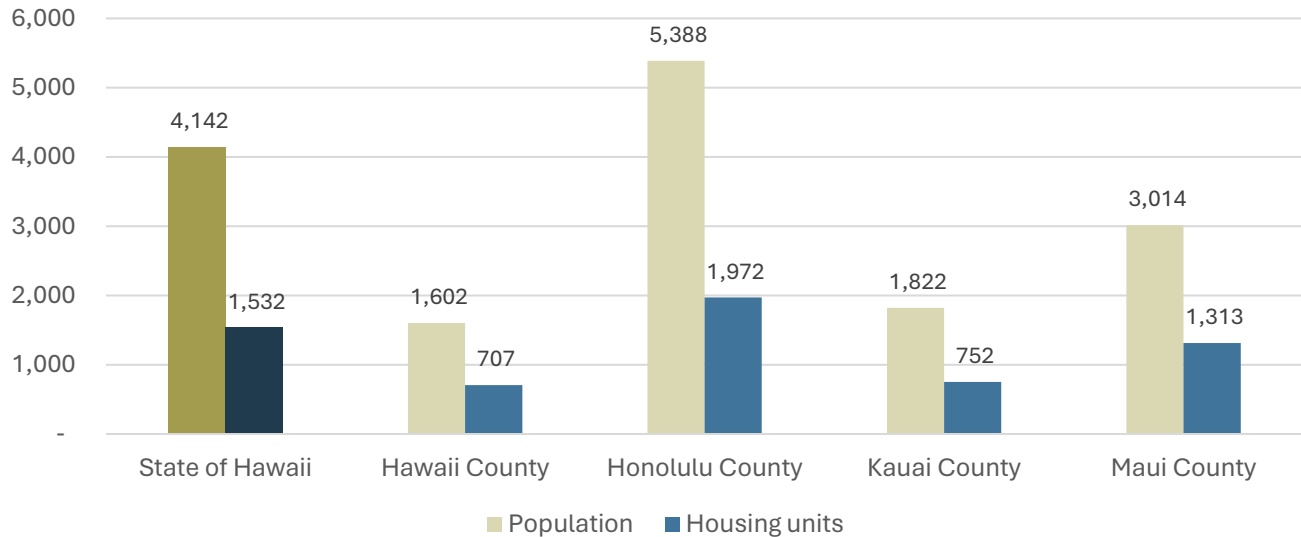


Figure 2. Urban Population and Housing Units per Square Mile of Land



Hawaii County

Nearly all, 98.7 percent, of Hawaii County’s land area is designated as rural. Making up 59.5 percent of the total population, around 119,000 people lived in rural areas on Hawaii Island in 2020. The county’s rural population density was 30 people per square mile. Rural area housing units mirror rural population—59.6 percent of total housing units are in rural areas. The county had a rural housing density of 13 units per square mile.

Hawaii County’s urban spaces make up just 51 of Hawaii Island’s 4,028 square miles. About 41 percent of the county’s population lives in urban areas. Average density in Hawaii County’s urban areas is 1,602 people and 707 housing units per square mile.

Urban areas

Hawaii County’s largest urban area is Hilo. It is a mostly contiguous area including Papaikou, Paukaa, and Wainaku with Hilo as the urban nucleus. The Hilo urban area had a population of around 41,400 people in 2020, and 21 percent of the island’s population lived in the 23 square miles that encompasses the area. There were about 17,000 housing units in the Hilo urban area. The population density was 1,767 people and the housing density was 720 units.

At 21 square miles, the Kailua (Kona) urban area is similarly sized to the Hilo urban area. It, however, had a smaller population—about 33,000 people, with a population density of 1,548 people per square mile. Despite the 8,000 population difference between the two areas, the Kailua (Kona) urban area had only 1,000 fewer housing units. Thus, at 738 units per square mile, it had a higher housing density than Hilo.

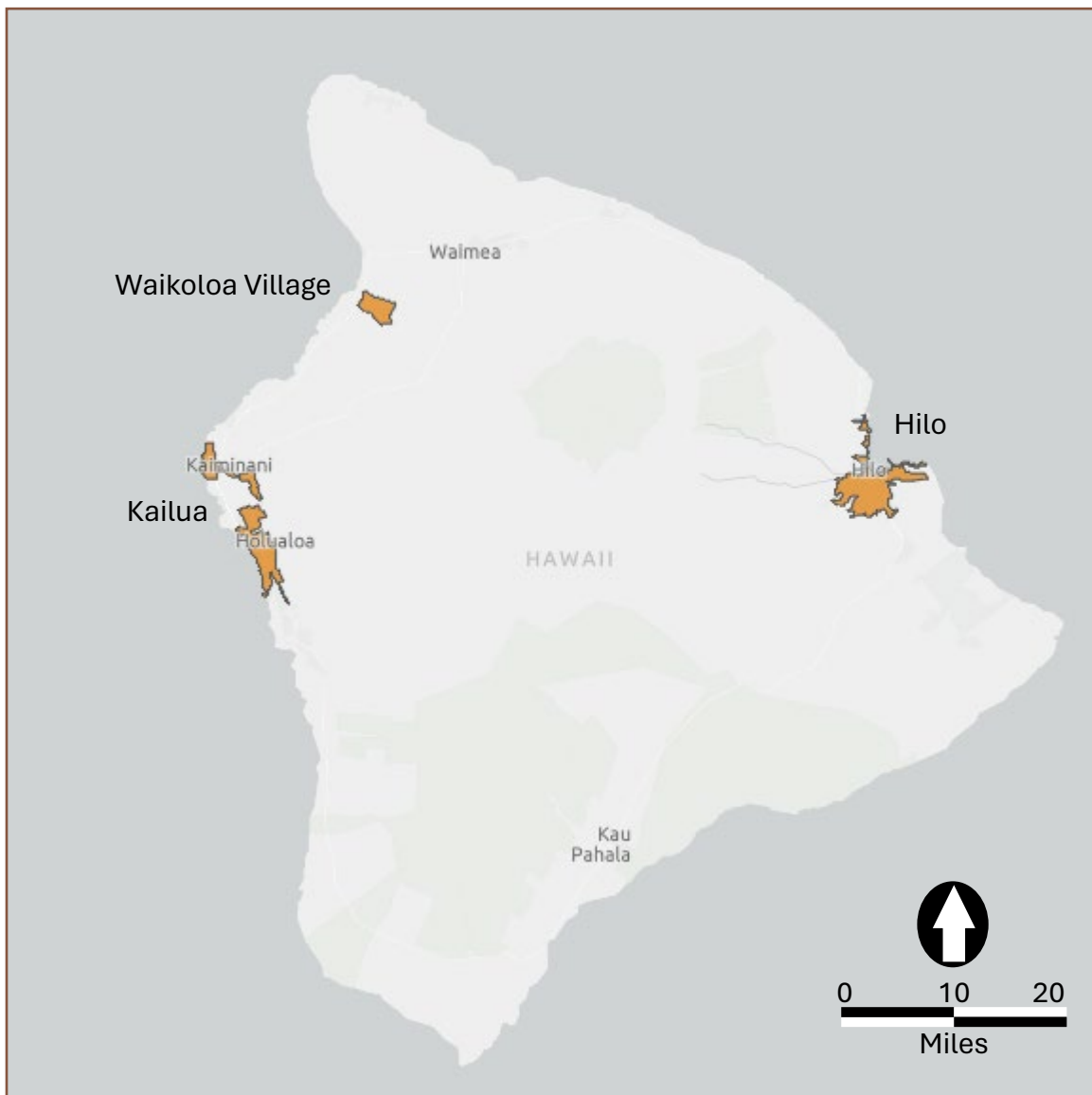
The smallest urban area in Hawaii County is Waikoloa Village, which had a population of about 7,000 people within 6 square miles in 2020. Waikoloa Village had a population density of 1,150 people per square mile. The area had about 3,200 housing units and a housing unit density of 543 units.

Table 3. Urban Areas, Population, and Housing, Hawaii County: 2020

County and urban area	Population	Housing units	Land area (sq mi.)	Population density ¹	Housing density ¹
Hawaii County urban areas	81,258	35,846	50.71	1,602.4	706.9
Hilo	41,410	16,878	23.44	1,766.7	720.1
Kailua	33,024	15,746	21.34	1,547.6	737.9
Waikoloa Village	6,824	3,222	5.93	1,150.3	543.1

¹ Density is population or housing units per land area square mile.

Figure 3. Map of 2020 Urban Areas, Hawaii County



Honolulu County

About 31 percent of Honolulu County's land area is designated as urban, and nearly a million people lived in those urban areas in 2020. Honolulu County's urban population density was 5,388 people per square mile. There were 365,700 housing units in urban areas, and there was an average of 1,972 housing units per square mile in these urban areas.

Honolulu County has the smallest percentage of rural land area, 69 percent. There were about 17,000 people living in the 597 square miles making up Honolulu County's rural areas. The rural population density was 41 people per square mile, and the rural housing density was 12 housing units per square mile. Only 1.7 percent of people on Oahu lived in a rural area.

Urban areas

Honolulu County has four distinct urban areas, with the largest being the Honolulu area. The Honolulu area is a noncontiguous urban area that spans from East Honolulu to Pearl City, Waipahu, and Ewa Beach. The area also includes "hops" to Mililani and Schofield Barracks and "jumps" to Waianae and Makaha. The area is 145 square miles, which is 78 percent of the island's urban land area. This area had a population density of 5,886 people per square mile and a housing density of 2,178 units per square mile. At 853,000 people, 84 percent of Honolulu County's population lived in this area in 2020.

The Kailua--Kaneohe urban area is a mostly contiguous area which includes Kahaluu, Ahuimanu, and Waimanalo, with Kailua and Kaneohe as the urban nuclei. The area makes up 30 square miles. The Kailua--Kaneohe urban area had a population of 118,000 people and 40,000 housing units in 2020. The density for this area was 4,033 people per square mile and 1,368 housing units per square mile.

Honolulu County's two remaining urban areas are much smaller, both in terms of land area and population. The Pupukeya urban area runs along the island's North Shore in a narrow band made up of 8 square miles. It extends from Kawela Bay to Mokuleia. The area had a population of 15,500 people in 2020, and a population density of 1,987 people per square mile. It had 6,500 housing units and a housing density of 833 units per square mile.

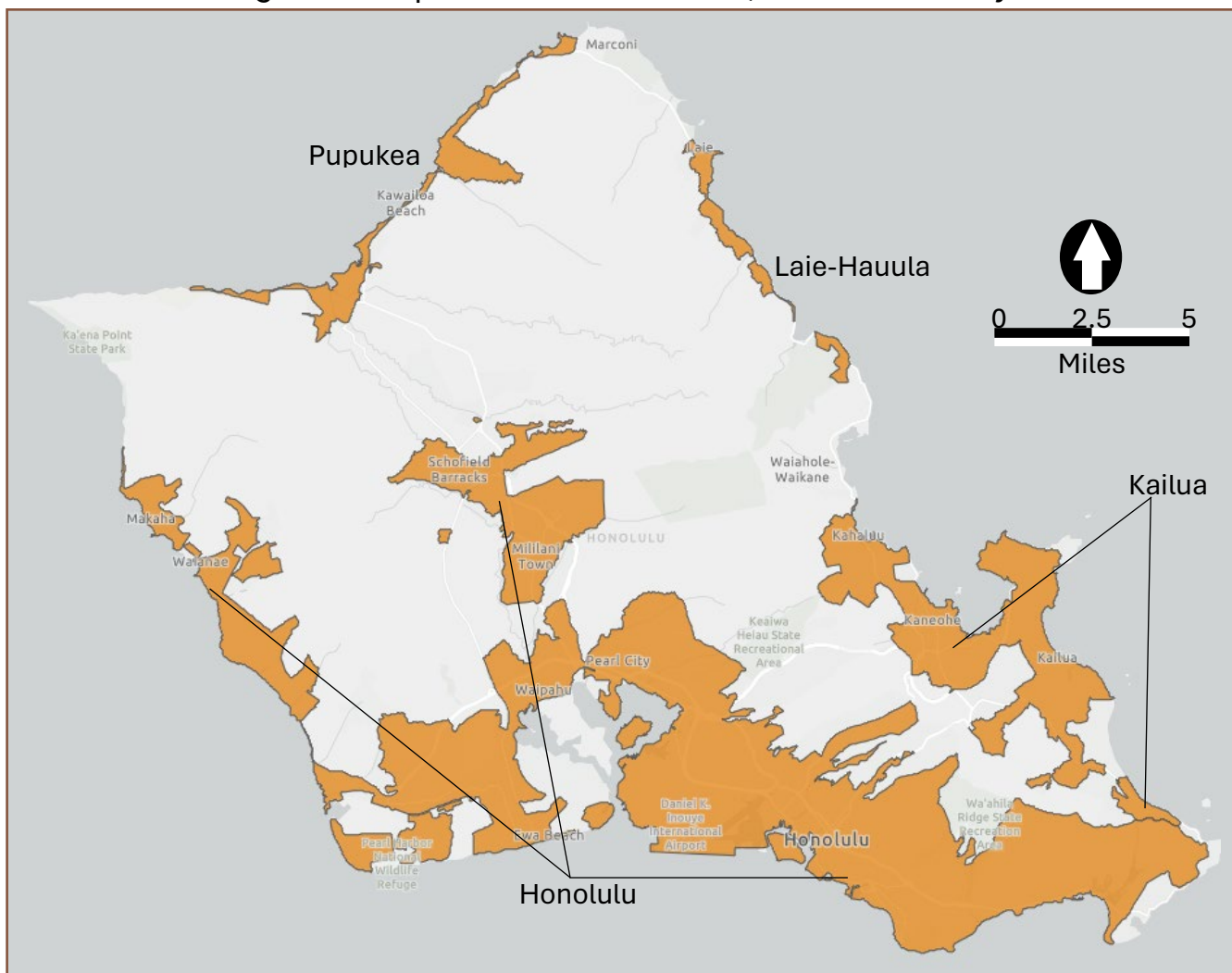
At 3 square miles and 12,500 people, the Laie--Hauula area was the county's smallest urban area in 2020. It includes a contiguous stretch along Route 83 from Laie down to Punaluu and then "jumps" to Kaawa. It had a population density of 3,663 people and a housing unit density of 1,010 units.

Table 4. Urban Areas, Population, and Housing, Honolulu County: 2020

County and urban area	Population	Housing units	Land area (sq mi.)	Population density ¹	Housing density ¹
Honolulu County urban areas	999,341	365,736	185.47	5,388.1	1,971.9
Honolulu	853,252	315,727	144.97	5,885.6	2,177.8
Kailua--Kaneohe	118,092	40,063	29.28	4,032.6	1,368.1
Laie--Hauula	12,488	3,443	3.41	3,662.7	1,009.8
Pupukea	15,509	6,503	7.81	1,986.8	833.1

¹ Density is population or housing units per land area square mile.

Figure 4. Map of 2020 Urban Areas, Honolulu County



Kauai County

Kauai County was the second most rural county in the State, with 42.2 percent of the population (about 31,000 people) living in rural areas in 2020. Kauai had the highest rural population density at 52 people per square mile and the highest housing density at 21 housing units per square mile. Kauai's rural areas made up 597 square miles, which is 96.2 percent of the total land area.

Kauai's urban areas made up 23 square miles and encompassed 57.8 percent of the population in 2020. Kauai County's urban population density was 1,822 people per square mile, and the urban housing density was an average of 752 housing units per square mile.

Urban areas

Kauai has four areas that meet the urban definition, the largest of which is Kapaa, which also includes Wailua and Wailua Homesteads. The area had a population of around 18,000 people and just over 7,000 housing units in 2020. About 25 percent of the County's population lives in this area, and it had a population density of 1,617 people per square mile. The housing unit density was 632 units per square mile, and this was the lowest housing density of all of Kauai's urban areas.

Lihue is the nucleus of the noncontiguous urban area that also includes Puhi and Hanamaulu and the condo-style resort areas on Kauai Beach Road. The resident population was almost 16,000 people in 2020, and there were 5,500 housing units in the area. The population density was 2,256 people per square mile, and the housing density was 786 units per square mile.

Kekaha and Princeville are smaller urban-defined areas in Kauai, both in population and land area. The Kekaha urban area is 2 square miles and includes Waimea. It had a population of 5,700 people, with a population density of 2,811 people per square mile. There were 2,000 housing units and a housing density of 1,027 housing units per square mile.

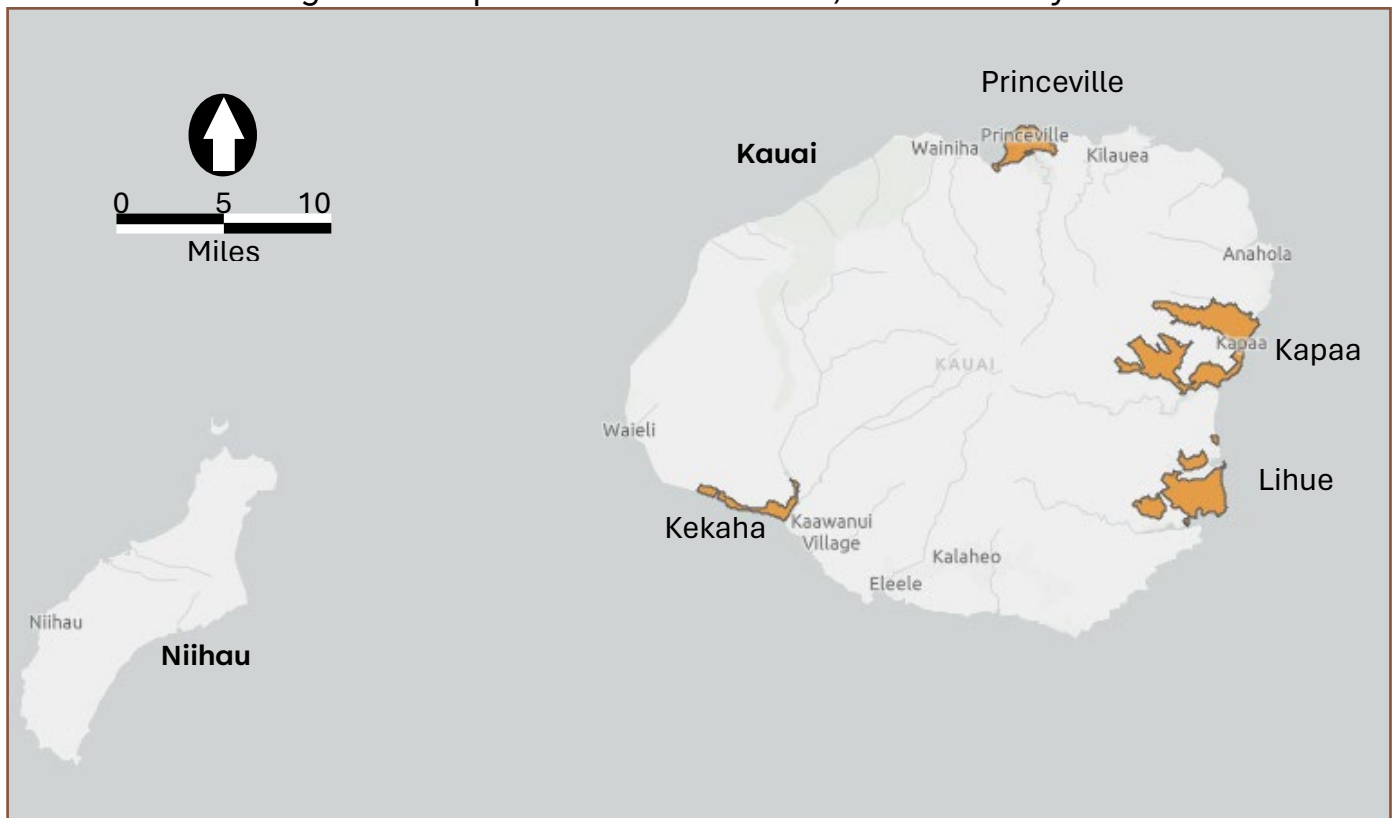
In Princeville, the number of housing units outnumbered the number of residents, and it is defined as an urban area due only to the updated definition which includes housing unit density as a criterion for "urban" status. It is the only urban-defined area in Hawaii that did not meet the population density threshold in 2020. The area, which also includes Hanalei, had a population of 2,500 people and 2,700 housing units. The housing unit density was 941 housing units, and the population density was 874 people per square mile.

Table 5. Urban Areas, Population, and Housing, Kauai County: 2020

County and urban area	Population	Housing units	Land area (sq mi.)	Population density ¹	Housing density ¹
Kauai County urban areas	42,365	17,488	23.26	1,821.7	752.0
Kapaa	18,212	7,118	11.27	1,616.6	631.8
Kekaha	5,724	2,092	2.04	2,811.3	1,027.5
Lihue	15,885	5,538	7.04	2,255.8	786.4
Princeville	2,544	2,740	2.91	873.6	940.9

¹ Density is population or housing units per land area square mile.

Figure 5. Map of 2020 Urban Areas, Kauai County



Maui County

About 129,500 people, 78.6 percent of the population, lived in Maui County's urban areas, all of which were located on Maui Island. Maui's urban area made up 43 square miles, and the urban population density was 3,014 people per square mile. There were over 56,000 housing units in urban areas and a housing density of 1,313 housing units per square mile. Matching the population distribution, 78.8 percent of housing units were in urban areas.

Maui County's rural areas, which span most of Maui Island and all of Molokai and Lanai, made up 96.3 percent of the total land area. There were about 35,300 people and 15,000 housing units in Maui County's rural areas. The rural population density was 21 people per square mile and there was an average of 13 housing units per square mile.

Urban areas

Maui County's urban areas are located on Maui Island. The most populous urban area was Kahului--Wailuku, which had a population of almost 58,000 people in 2020. It had a population density of 4,284 people per square mile, which made it the State's second densest urban area. Despite 35 percent of Maui County's population living in the Kahului--Wailuku urban area, only 26 percent of the county's housing units were in this area.

The Kihei urban area, which also includes Wailea, had a resident population of around 27,000 and 17,400 housing units. The area was home to 16 percent of the County's population but 24 percent of the County's housing units. This was due to the many short-term rentals and seasonal units in the area, which are still calculated as housing units by the Census Bureau despite not being regularly occupied. The 8 square mile urban area had densities of 3,300 people and 2,137 housing units per square mile.

At 16 square miles, the Upcountry areas of Pukalani--Haiku-Pauwela--Makawao make up the largest urban-defined land area on Maui. The population was 23,300 in 2020, with 9,000 housing units. It had the lowest population (1,461 people) and housing (564 housing units) densities among the County's urban-defined areas.

The Lahaina--Napili-Honokowai urban area had a population of 21,400 people at the time of the 2020 decennial census. There were 11,600 housing units in the 5 square mile urban area. The area includes a contiguous area between Napili and Kaanapali then a "jump" to Lahaina. There were 4,005 people and 2,179 housing units per square mile.

The population and housing figures are from the 2020 decennial census and therefore do not include the impacts of the August 2023 wildfires.

Table 6. Urban Areas, Population, and Housing, Maui County: 2020

County and urban area	Population	Housing units	Land area (sq mi.)	Population density ¹	Housing density ¹
Maui County urban areas	129,486	56,399	42.96	3,014.3	1,312.9
Kahului--Wailuku	57,905	18,348	13.52	4,284.0	1,357.4
Kihei	26,878	17,408	8.14	3,300.2	2,137.4
Lahaina--Napili-Honokowai	21,398	11,642	5.34	4,005.4	2,179.2
Pukalani--Haiku-Pauwela-Makawao	23,305	9,001	15.95	1,460.8	564.2

¹ Density is population or housing units per land area square mile.

Figure 5. Map of 2020 Urban Areas, Maui County

