

Population Change in Wisconsin, 1990-2000

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Abstract

Although Wisconsin's population increased by almost 10 percent during the 1990s, that increase was well below the national average. Every county except Milwaukee gained population, and the fastest rate of growth was observed in central and northern areas and in suburban southeastern parts of the state. Natural increase was the major component of growth in metropolitan counties, and migration in non-metropolitan ones. Wisconsin has become a demographically more mature state, and it has above the national average median age and proportion of very old population. Most of Wisconsin's rural areas have a surplus of male population; females outnumber males in urban regions. The most remarkable change has been recorded in the racial and ethnic composition of the state population, especially an unprecedented increase of the Hispanic population, significant decline of population of European ancestry, and territorial dispersal of most minority groups. The changing population will have an effect on the state's political and economic conditions.

Introduction

Although the 1990-2000 period recorded a 9.65 percent increase in population size and the decade had the second fastest population growth in Wisconsin's history in terms of absolute population change, that increase was well below the national average (13.2 percent). However, it was the highest percent increase in the state since 1950 (Wisconsin State Data Center 2001B, 2001C). Every county except Milwaukee gained population. Four areas of strong population growth could be identified in Wisconsin: the Fox Valley in the northeastern part of the state, northwestern counties bordering the Twin Cities in Minnesota, Dane County in south-central part of the state, and suburban areas of southeastern Wisconsin. Marquette County ranked first in population growth rate (28 percent), followed by St. Croix (26 percent), Walworth (25 percent), and Washington (23 percent) counties. On the other hand, a number of communities (usually small towns) located in southwestern (Grant and Lafayette Counties) and west-central (Trempealeau and Buffalo Counties) parts of Wisconsin, in addition to Milwaukee County, recorded a population loss during the 1990s (see Zaniewski Figure 1 at center and Table 1).

Components of Population Change

Natural increase and migration played an almost equal role in population change in Wisconsin during the examined period. Natural increase was the major component of growth in metropolitan counties, while migration was the leading component in non-metropolitan ones (Wisconsin State Data Center 2001C). In the twenty

metropolitan counties natural increase was twice as large as migration; in the non-metropolitan parts of the state, migration was four times greater than natural increase (see Zaniewski Figures 2 and 3 at center). Migration was by far the most important component of growth in Marquette County, and natural increase in Menominee County.

Almost a quarter of Wisconsin's counties recorded a negative rate of natural increase during the 1990s, primarily in northern and central parts of the state (see Zaniewski Figure 4 at center). Most of these counties are retirement areas and have high proportions of older people. On the other hand, Menominee County, an Indian reservation, had the highest rate of natural increase, twice as high as the second ranking place, Brown County. Considering the two components of population change, almost three-fourths of Wisconsin's counties (52) have been characterized by population growth due to positive net migration and natural increase. Most of the remaining counties (16) have also been gaining population, but due to positive net migration only (predominantly rural areas of central and northern Wisconsin). Only four counties were characterized by negative net migration rates, and three of them gained population because of relatively high natural increase. Milwaukee County lost population because negative net migration was greater than positive natural increase.

Changes in Age Structure

Wisconsin became a demographically older state during the 1990s, and it had above the national average median age and proportion of very old population (see Zaniewski Figure 5 at center). The

Table 1. Fastest and slowest growing large communities (over 20,000 people) in Wisconsin, 1990-2000.

<i>City/Village</i>	<i>County</i>	<i>Population in 2000</i>	<i>Percent Change</i>
Oak Creek	Milwaukee	28,456	45.8
Franklin	Milwaukee	29,494	35.0
Sun Prairie	Dane	20,369	32.7
Fitchburg	Dane	20,501	31.0
Muskego	Waukesha	21,397	27.3
De Pere	Brown	20,559	23.9
Menomonee Falls	Waukesha	32,647	21.6
La Crosse	La Crosse	51,818	1.3
Superior	Douglas	27,368	0.9
Beloit	Rock	35,775	0.6
Racine	Racine	81,855	-2.9
West Allis	Milwaukee	61,254	-3.1
Wauwatosa	Milwaukee	47,271	-4.2
Milwaukee	Milwaukee	596,974	-5.0

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 1994, 2001.

median age of the state's population increased from 32.9 years in 1990 to 36.0 years in 2000. In particular, northern and central parts of the state have been known for demographic maturity, i.e. low fertility and high mortality rates (see Zaniewski Figure 6 at center). These areas have been attracting fairly significant numbers of retired people from other parts of Wisconsin and neighboring states, particularly Illinois. The median age of population in Vilas and Iron Counties is over 45 years, and in many townships and places located in northern Wisconsin it is over 50 years. The same areas also have a high proportion of population over 65 years of age. The village of Sister Bay (Door County) is the most mature place in Wisconsin; the median age of its population is 61 years, and over 46 percent of its population is 65 years of age or older.

Changes in Racial and Ethnic Composition

The most remarkable change has been observed in racial and ethnic composition of the state's population, particularly an unprecedented increase of the Hispanic/Latino population (Voss et al. 2003, Wisconsin State Data Center 2001A). The Hispanic/Latino population more than doubled since 1990, and the rate of increase was almost twice above the national average. Currently, it is the second largest minority group in Wisconsin, with a total population of over 192,000 (3.6 percent of the total state's population). Although Milwaukee has the largest concentration of population of Hispanic origin, other large Hispanic centers include Racine, Kenosha, Madison and Green Bay (see Zaniewski Figure 7 at center). A relatively large proportion of Hispanics is also found in rural regions of central

and southeastern Wisconsin. In addition to Milwaukee, the largest numerical increase of Hispanics was recorded in Green Bay, Madison, Racine, Kenosha, and Beloit. Good economic conditions of the 1990s attracted many migrant workers from Texas and other western states. These migrants found employment not only in agriculture, but also in forestry, particularly Christmas tree farming, printing, food preparation, or meatpacking industry and decided to stay rather than follow seasonal agricultural opportunities (Pabst 2001). Among large cities, Green Bay and Beloit recorded the highest rates of Hispanic population increase (586 percent and 371 percent respectively) since 1990. Heavy recruitment of Hispanic workers by the meatpacking industry in 1993-94 led to this increase in Green Bay. The growth of the Hispanic population in the Janesville-Beloit area can be attributed to a good economy and proximity to Chicago and Milwaukee (Cruz 1998, Pabst 2001).

African Americans, the largest minority group in Wisconsin, comprise over 6 percent of the state's population and are heavily concentrated in Milwaukee County (73 percent of the total black population in Wisconsin). Over 38 percent of the population in the city of Milwaukee is of African American origin. Other significant African American clusters are the cities of Racine (22 percent of its total population) and Beloit (17 percent). Since 1990, Madison, Kenosha, Racine, and Fitchburg (Dane County) have recorded the largest absolute increase in the African American population. Other areas characterized by a significant increase include several of Milwaukee's suburban communities (Brown Deer, Franklin),

Oshkosh, Green Bay, and Fond du Lac. The Milwaukee-Waukesha metropolitan area is characterized by the second highest white-black segregation in the nation (after Detroit). To achieve full territorial integration, 82 percent of African Americans would have to move within that urban agglomeration (Armas 2001, Sykes 2001).

The population of Asian and Pacific Islander origin accounts for two percent of Wisconsin's total population. Unlike African Americans and Hispanics, the Asian American population is more dispersed. Milwaukee County, the largest cluster of Asians in the state, accounts for 27 percent of the state's Asian population. On the other hand, population of Asian origin comprises 4.8 percent of the total population in Marathon County, 3.9 percent in Dane, 3.6 percent in Sheboygan, and 3.5 percent in La Crosse Counties. Areas with the largest absolute increase of Asian population during the 1990s include the cities of Milwaukee, Madison, Green Bay, Wausau, and Appleton. The Hmongs comprise the largest Asian group in Wisconsin, and their number more than doubled during the 1990s. The most rapid population growth took place in central and eastern parts of the state (for example, nine percent of Wausau's population is Hmong). Fast growth rates among the Hmong people in Wisconsin reflect both high migration (mainly from California) and high fertility rates. Changes in California's welfare laws in 1997 pushed many Hmongs to other parts of the country. Although some states in the southeast recorded a very high increase of the Hmong population during the 1990s, California, Minnesota and Wisconsin together account for 83 percent of the Hmongs in the United States (Peterson 2001B).

Native Americans are the smallest minority group in Wisconsin (47,228 people, or 1.3 percent of the state's total population). This group is characterized by a relatively high degree of dispersion. Although Milwaukee County is the largest cluster of Native Americans in Wisconsin, it accounts for only 17 percent of the Native American population in the state. The city of Milwaukee lost over 17 percent of its Native American population during the 1990s. Another characteristic of this group is its concentration in rural areas, especially in northern parts of the state. In Menominee County and several towns located in Ashland, Bayfield, Shawano, and Vilas Counties, Native Americans comprise a majority of the population. Although there are eleven Indian reservations in Wisconsin, only one-third of Native Americans reside there, and on one reservation

(Oneida) they comprise only 15 percent of the reservation's total population. The state's Native American population increased by 20 percent during the 1990s. Brown County, particularly the city of Green Bay, had the greatest absolute increase of Native American population during this time period. Many areas around Indian reservations in northern and west-central parts of Wisconsin also recorded a fairly large percent increase of Native American population. One reason for this increase has been a return migration to reservations and Indian trust lands due to better employment opportunities resulting from casinos and industries associated with gaming activities (hotels, gas stations, or convenience stores). Another factor was a greater pride in American Indian heritage, especially among the younger generation, and a willingness to relocate to reservations or adjacent areas (Johnson 2001A).

Recent changes in the distribution of Wisconsin's population have slightly reduced territorial segregation of minority groups, particularly that of Asian Americans (see Table 2). However, the African American population is still characterized by the highest degree of territorial segregation, and it recorded the slowest progress toward spatial de-concentration among all minority groups during the 1990s. About 85 percent of all African Americans in the state live in the cities of Milwaukee, Racine, Madison, and Kenosha. The city of Milwaukee, characterized by one of the highest white-black segregation in the nation, is home for 73 percent of all African Americans in Wisconsin. By comparison, only 52 percent of Wisconsin's Hispanic population lives in these four cities, and 43 percent of the state's Asian population is concentrated in Milwaukee, Madison, Wausau, and Green Bay.

Although there were no major changes in patterns of distribution of most ancestry groups in the state, there were some surprises with regard to the rate of population growth among people of European ancestry. Most large European ancestry groups recorded a decline in their numbers, including the German, English, French, Slovak, Czech, Dutch and Swedish groups. The population in each of these groups has declined by at least ten percent since 1990. The notable exceptions were the Italian and Norwegian ancestry groups – they increased their size by 34 and 23 percent respectively. Several other groups, most of them of East and South European origin (Romanian, Ukrainian, Portuguese, and Greek), also recorded a

Table 2. Change in territorial segregation of major racial and ethnic groups in Wisconsin between 1990 and 2000 as measured by the *Index of Dissimilarity*.

Group	Index of Dissimilarity		Percent Change
	1990	2000	
African American	0.8132	0.7581	93.2
Native American	0.6819	0.5579	81.8
Asian & Pacific Islander	0.6678	0.4979	74.6
Hispanic/Latino	0.5999	0.4990	83.2

Source: computed by the author from U.S. Census Bureau 1994, 2001.

The *Index of Dissimilarity* is the relationship between the state's total population and the population of a particular racial group at the census block group level. Lower values of the index indicate a greater territorial dispersion, and the percent change of the index values reflects the speed of (or progress toward) spatial de-concentration.

significant population increase, at least in relative terms. The population of Sub-Saharan African ancestry increased by 263 percent, the highest percent increase for any ethnic or ancestry group. However, the largest absolute increase (112,000) and the second highest percent growth rate (58 percent) were recorded among people claiming U.S. or American ancestry. This increase was at the expense of various European ancestry groups, mainly those of West European origin. Today, more people of European ancestry identify themselves as American because of the loss of emotional connection to ancestry by the second or third generation, combined with intermarriage.

Major reasons for the changing ethnic (ancestry) composition of the U.S. population include recent immigration trends, declining ethnic awareness (ethnic identification) among some groups of Americans, particularly those of European origin, census sampling procedures, and distrust or misunderstanding of census surveys among many recent immigrants. Immigration, undoubtedly, contributed to a significant increase in the size of Asian and Hispanic groups. It also led to the increase in populations of persons of Ukrainian, Romanian, or Albanian ancestry. The collapse of communism in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe opened a door to the West for many people, and thousands came to the United States during the last decade. Political transformation (emergence of several new countries in Eastern Europe) may also explain an increase in the population of several East European ancestry groups. After Ukraine and Slovenia became independent states, for example, some Americans were probably more likely to emphasize their Ukrainian or Slovene roots in the 2000 census than they were in 1990. Other factors, particularly the census sampling procedures and self-identification as a primary method of data collection on ancestry may also explain some

changes in ancestry composition of the state's population. Two examples are used to explain these factors. There was a significant increase in population of Norwegian ancestry (59,928 persons or 23 percent) during the 1990s which can not be fully explained by trends in migration or natural increase. Despite a large immigration from Poland to the U.S. (over 190,000 people) during the same period, the population of Polish ancestry in Wisconsin virtually remained the same in size (although it declined by almost 4 percent, or 246,000 people, in the entire country). Since the long census form with the question on ancestry was mailed to only every sixth household, it is very unlikely that the same individuals had a chance to answer the ancestry question for both the 1990 and 2000 census. Thus, the sampling methodology may have lead to significant under- or over-counts, particularly of small and unevenly distributed ethnic groups.

Migration Trends in Wisconsin

As indicated before, migration played a fairly important role in population growth in Wisconsin during the 1990s (much greater than during the 1970s and 1980s). In 2000, people born outside the state comprised 25 percent of Wisconsin's total population, up from 21 percent in 1990. Several factors contributed to the influx of migrants to Wisconsin during the 1990s, including the growth of high tech (biotechnology) industries accompanied by a high quality of life (safety, schools, traffic) in the Madison area, suburban sprawl from the Chicago area into southeastern Wisconsin, sprawl from the Minneapolis/St. Paul region (Minnesota) into northwestern part of the state, and retirement migration to rural counties in central and northern Wisconsin. However, a significant number of middle-aged adults left

Wisconsin during the 1990s, creating a “brain drain” migration (Johnson 2001B).

The 2000 census contains information on place of residence in 1995 and 2000, and this information can be used to estimate the number of movers to or from Wisconsin as well as their origin/destination during the second part of the 1990s. According to the census data, Wisconsin recorded a positive net-migration during that period, and our state was a particularly attractive place to migrants from Illinois (Wisconsin State Data Center 2003). Minnesota, on the other hand, was the major destination to movers from Wisconsin. Considering the state-to-state migration flows, Wisconsin had a positive net flow from Iowa, Michigan, Indiana, California and thirteen other states in addition to Illinois (see Zaniewski Figure 8 at center). Thirty-two states, including Florida, Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, Kentucky, and Arkansas, had a positive migration balance with Wisconsin, i.e. they were more attractive to movers from Wisconsin than Wisconsin to movers from those states. Milwaukee, Madison and Kenosha were the major destinations to movers from other states, and the highest proportion of migrants among the local population is found along the Wisconsin-Minnesota (Pierce, St. Croix, Polk, and Burnett Counties) and Wisconsin-Illinois (Kenosha and Walworth Counties) borders. Development of the biotechnology industry in the Madison area has lured some migrants from both coastal areas in the U.S. The high quality of life in terms of safety, traffic, and schools also played a role in attracting out-of-state residents. Suburban sprawl from Chicago into southeastern Wisconsin was responsible for high rates of growth in this part of the state (Jones 2003, Peterson 2001A). During the 1990s, over 90,000 immigrants from other parts of the world also came to Wisconsin, mainly from Latin America (45 percent of all immigrants), Asia (33 percent), and Europe (15 percent). Over half of them moved to Milwaukee (34 percent) and Dane (18 percent) counties (U.S. Census Bureau 2003).

Population Trends Since 2000

The population change in Wisconsin since April 1, 2000 was similar to that of the 1990s. According to Wisconsin State Data Center’s statistics, the state had a population of over 5.49 million at the beginning of 2003, an increase of 2.37 percent since the last census date (Wisconsin State Data Center 2004). All but one county (Rusk) recorded a population increase during that period. As in the 1990s, the largest absolute population gain was observed in Dane County, the suburbs of

Milwaukee (Waukesha in particular), the Fox Valley Area (Brown and Outagamie Counties in particular), and northwestern Wisconsin (especially in St. Croix County). Similar to the 1990s, many northern counties were characterized by negative natural increase rates, and the lowest rates of population growth were recorded in southwestern and north-central parts of the state. However, net-migration was the major component of population growth in most counties, and natural increase played the major role in population growth only in Racine, Rock, Lafayette, Wood, and Clark Counties.

Conclusions

Wisconsin, like many other states, is becoming a more ethnically diverse region. Every minority group in the state, and particularly the population of Hispanic/Latino origin, has been growing at a faster rate than the whites for some time. This growth has become best evident in public schools, especially those in Milwaukee, where the white student population has been dropping by 0.5 percent annually in recent years and it now stands at 14.7 percent (Pabst 2004). There are 21 bilingual schools in the city, up from seven ten years ago, and two additional bilingual schools are planned for next school year. Similar trends are observed in other metropolitan parts of the state. The steady increase of the Hispanic/Latino population in Wisconsin and other mid-western states has been labeled by some researchers and the popular media as the “browning of the Midwest” (Guzman and McConnell 2002).

A steady decrease of the state’s political power through the loss of Congressional seats is another implication of Wisconsin’s current population trends. In spite of the increasing population, Wisconsin has been losing seats in the House of Representatives since the 1930s. The state had eleven congressional seats between 1990 and 1930, ten seats until 1970, and nine seats until 2000. Currently, Wisconsin has eight Congressional seats, the same number it had during the 1870s. Similar trends can be observed in other states in the Rust Belt region, and below the national average rate of population growth has been responsible for the loss of Wisconsin’s political influence in Washington, DC.

Finally, the continued population growth in many suburban communities has led to the introduction of restrictive development plans by local authorities, aimed at controlling or slowing down the rate of growth and preserving agricultural

land (Diaz and Green 2001, Johnson 2001). However, most municipalities have difficulties in controlling either the population growth or the loss of farmland.

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