

Census 2000—Northwest Indiana’s Changing Population

Executive Summary

The recent 2000 census provides an opportunity to examine how the population of Northwest Indiana (the Region—Lake, Porter, and LaPorte counties) has changed. This report looks at changes that have occurred over a 30-year period, covering the 1970-2000 decennial censuses. Issues related to overall population changes for the Region as a whole, as well as specific segments of the Region, are addressed. The implications of these changes for the Region and its constituent parts are challenging.

Findings

- ▶ The Region has experienced a slight increase in population during the past 30 years, with a sharp decline in the 1980s nearly offset by moderate growth in the 1990s. Porter County experienced the largest growth (68.5%) from 1970 to 2000, while Lake County declined 12.9 percent from 1970 to 1990 before rebounding slightly in the 1990s. The population of LaPorte County increased moderately (4.5%).
- ▶ Much of the decline in Lake County’s population is because of a sharp decline in the population of the urban core cities of East Chicago, Gary, and Hammond. Over the 30 years studied these three cities lost one-third (33.9%) of their population. In contrast, the rest of Lake County grew 23.3 percent, and the balance of the Region gained 28.1 percent.
- ▶ The Region has become more diverse racially/ethnically, with larger percentages of blacks and Hispanics. However, this regional diversity masks continued segregation within the Region. The majority of blacks (81.4%) in Northwest Indiana live in the city of Gary, and 87.1 percent of the Region’s Hispanics live in either East Chicago or Hammond.
- ▶ The Region’s population is aging, with 12.7 percent of area residents aged 65 and older in 2000 (compared to 7.1% in 1970). The percentages aged 85 and older have increased from 0.5 percent in 1970 to 1.4 percent in 2000.
- ▶ The majority of households in the Region are owner occupied (71.4%), though variations exist. Home ownership is lower in Lake County (69%), especially in the urban core (57.1%). Regardless of geographical segment, home ownership is much lower for blacks (47.1% regionally) than for whites (77.7%).

Implications

- ▶ The continued “white flight” from the urban core continues to exacerbate geographical segregation of racial and ethnic groups. This can only serve to heighten an “us versus them” mentality in the Region, particularly in Lake County.
- ▶ The increasing number of Hispanics raises the likelihood of a larger number of residents for whom English skills are limited or nonexistent. This has implications for various social services, including education and public safety.

- ▶ The aging population will place increased strain on social services, particularly as more elderly reach the status of “old old” (aged 85 and older). This is especially the case in the urban core, where increases in population of “old old” residents is concurrent with declines in overall population.
- ▶ The continued population decline of the urban core also represents a “wealth drain,” as those who are able to move out of these cities are wealthier than those left behind. This leads to a decline in financial resources available to the cities, further straining problems in provision of services.
- ▶ Politically, those who seek elected office must be more aware of the growing minority segments of the population. Nowhere is this more evident than in Gary, where 84 percent of residents are black, and in East Chicago, with its 51.6 percent Hispanic portion.

Dealing with these population changes and their implications will require strong leadership at both the local, county, and regional level. While some of the issues seem specific to certain localities (i.e. the urban core), their impact will be felt beyond those areas. Thus, solutions will need to be regional in nature in order to be effective. ♦