

'Explosion of diversity' sweeps U.S., census shows

WASHINGTON (AP) -- America's growing diversity has reached nearly every state.

From South Carolina's budding immigrant population to the fast-rising number of Hispanics in Arkansas, minority groups make up an increasing share of the population in every state but one, according to figures released Tuesday by the Census Bureau.

"This is just an extraordinary explosion of diversity all across the United States," said William Frey, a demographer at the Brookings Institution, a Washington think tank. "It's diversity and immigration going hand in hand."

West Virginia is the exception, with its struggling economy and little history of attracting immigrants. ([See state-by-state comparisons](#))

Frey said states that attract large numbers of immigrants can consider it a "badge of economic success." There have, however, been backlashes.

"In some places it will be a while before they are accepted by the locals," Frey said. "All we have to do is look at this immigration debate."

Immigration policy is a big issue in this year's midterm congressional elections, and the new data help explain why.

Immigrants -- legal and illegal -- make up a growing portion of the population in 46 states and the District of Columbia. Nationally, they went from 11.1 percent of the population in 2000 to 12.4 percent last year.

The 2005 figures are from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey, which is replacing the "long form" on the 10-year census. Starting this year, the annual survey of about 3 million households provides yearly data on communities of 65,000 or larger. By 2010, it will provide annual multiyear averages for the smallest neighborhoods covered by the 10-year census.

The data released Tuesday cover race, immigration, education and age characteristics. Economic and housing data will be released in the coming weeks.

The survey, which cost \$170 million in 2005, has limitations. For example, only people living in households were surveyed. That excludes the 3 percent of people who live in nursing homes, hospitals, college dormitories, military barracks, prisons and other dwellings known as group quarters.

Also, the numbers for Gulf Coast states do not reflect the effects of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, which scattered hundreds of thousands of people last year.

Among the findings:

- Education levels increased in every state from 2000 to 2005. Nationally, the share of adults 25 and older with at least a high school diploma increased from 80 percent to 84 percent. The share of adults with at least a bachelor's degree increased from 24 percent to 27 percent.
- Every state is getting older. Nationally, the median age -- the one at which half the population is older and half is younger -- went from 35.3 in 2000 to 36.4 last year.
- Hispanics increased their hold as the country's largest minority group, at 14.5 percent of the population, compared with 12.8 percent for blacks. Hispanic is a term for people with ethnic backgrounds in Spanish-speaking countries. Hispanics can be of any race, and most in the U.S. are white. When demographers talk about the shrinking percentage of white people in America, generally they are talking about whites who are not Hispanic.
- Such whites are a minority in four states -- Hawaii, New Mexico, California and Texas -- and the District of Columbia. The share of white people fell below 60 percent in three other states: Maryland, Georgia and Nevada. Nationally, non-Hispanic whites make up about 67 percent of the population, down from 70 percent at the start of the decade.

California, New York, Texas and Florida have the nation's largest immigrant populations. The new data show that immigrants will travel beyond those states if there are jobs available.

South Carolina's immigrant population grew by 47 percent since 2000, more than any other state. The Hispanic population grew by 48 percent in Arkansas, the most for any state.

Michael MacFarlane, South Carolina's state demographer, said immigrants and Hispanics were attracted by a healthy economy that offered jobs requiring few skills.

"They are in all sorts of construction, food processing, service jobs, the whole spectrum, where they used to be primarily in agriculture," MacFarlane said.

West Virginia, meanwhile, was one of only two states in which the percentage of white people grew. The other was Hawaii, where whites are an increasing minority.

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