

# Feature Article

**Wisconsin's People:** A Portrait of Wisconsin's Population on the Threshold of the 21st Century

**Wisconsin's People**

---



*Department of Tourism*

**WISCONSIN'S PEOPLE: A PORTRAIT OF WISCONSIN'S  
POPULATION ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE 21ST CENTURY**

**Table of Contents**

INTRODUCTION .....	101
POPULATION GROWTH AND SOURCES OF GROWTH .....	102
COMPONENTS OF POPULATION GROWTH .....	103
INCREASING DENSITY .....	106
THE DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION GROWTH .....	108
AGE AND SEX COMPOSITION .....	115
RACE AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY .....	117
ANCESTRY .....	128
WISCONSIN'S FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION .....	134
WISCONSIN HOUSEHOLDS AND FAMILIES .....	137
WISCONSINITES AT WORK .....	139
UNEMPLOYMENT .....	145
INDUSTRY .....	147
HOW WISCONSINITES GET TO WORK .....	151
INCOME AND POVERTY IN WISCONSIN .....	160
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT .....	164
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES .....	167
HOUSING IN WISCONSIN .....	168
IN CLOSING .....	173

## WISCONSIN'S PEOPLE: A PORTRAIT OF WISCONSIN'S POPULATION ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE 21ST CENTURY

Paul R. Voss, Daniel L. Veroff, and David D. Long  
Applied Population Laboratory  
Department of Rural Sociology  
University of Wisconsin-Madison

### Introduction

In addition to meeting its constitutional requirement of providing the numbers used to reapportion the House of Representatives every ten years, the decennial census provides a variety of social and economic statistics about the nation's people, families and housing. These statistics are mandated by a myriad of federal laws and administrative rules for administering programs and implementing formulae-driven funding activities such as the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, the Community Development Block Grant Program and the Job Training Partnership Act. Every year, based on census data, over \$100 billion in federal funds are allocated back to state, local and tribal governments under more than 100 different programs.

The census is a large and costly activity, and the American people, having paid for the effort through their federal taxes and contributed to the activity by their voluntary responses to census questionnaires, expect some return on their census investment that goes beyond federal program administration. The U.S. Census Bureau understands that. Beginning one year after the census enumeration, the Census Bureau gives back to the people, and to the neighborhoods and communities in which they live, a staggering amount of data. Many observers refer to this activity as one of updating the statistical portrait of our nation, our communities and neighborhoods.

As a consequence, the decennial census and the release of fresh census data becomes an occasion for stocktaking. How has our statistical portrait changed since the last census? How does our community measure up relative to its own goals or with respect to comparable communities nearby? Which neighborhoods have changed the most, and how? Where are the needs greatest, and where are the resources most abundant?

While individual census responses are protected by law, when these responses are aggregated the census becomes the statistical camera that every ten years takes the snapshot of our country, our 3,100 counties, our 39,000 units of local government, and literally millions of small units of "statistical geography" (census blocks, block groups, and city tracts) that can be used to analyze virtually every large neighborhood and all remote, rural, portions of this vast nation. Today, while satellite cameras take pictures and provide "pixel" readings to enable monitoring of changes on the land, so too the nation's decennial census provides demographic "pixels" with which to capture change in population size, geographic distribution and composition along such dimensions as household and family characteristics, labor force

participation, income and poverty measures, veteran status, commuting to work, housing characteristics, and a host of additional items – each required by federal statute for program administration and funding.

The 2000 Census reveals that, standing on the threshold of the 21st century, Wisconsin is a state growing at annual rates not far above or below the national average. The distribution of the state's population between urban and rural areas also is similar to the U.S. average. While our population is becoming increasingly more diverse in terms of its racial and ethnic mix, Wisconsin is still overwhelmingly a White, non-Hispanic population.

In this article, we examine what the 2000 Census reveals about the people, the families, and the communities of Wisconsin. In the next two sections we discuss overall population growth in the state and the sources of that growth. We then discuss one of the implications of population growth: an increasing density of population settlement across the landscape. In the context of the geographic distribution of Wisconsin's population, and the geographic distribution of population change, we introduce the concepts "urban" and "rural" and discuss how the state's population has become increasingly urbanized during the past century. We also introduce the somewhat related concepts of "metropolitan" and "non-metropolitan" distribution. In each of these topic areas, we also draw some brief comparisons with the pace of population change in Wisconsin relative to its neighbors in the Midwest. Following this, we present data for several of the most basic demographic approaches to "segmenting" the population. We discuss at some length both the age and sex composition of the population as well as the state's racial and ethnic diversity. Major trends are identified that have an inherent demographic momentum likely to influence the demographic future of the state. Having discussed race and ethnicity, we shift attention to the somewhat related concept of ancestry as measured in the decennial census. This leads us next to a brief section on the foreign-born population in Wisconsin. This is followed by sections that deal with household and family composition in the state, the nature of work in Wisconsin, income and poverty measures, educational attainment, and a brief section on what the census can tell us about persons with disabilities. A final section takes a look at housing data from the 2000 Census. We conclude with a brief commentary on what this demographic portrait of Wisconsin's people says about us, and how this portrait may change in coming years.

## **Population Growth and Sources of Growth**

Wisconsin's population stood at 5,363,675 on April 1, 2000 (Fig. 1). This number represents an addition of approximately 472,000 persons since the 1990 Census, the second highest numerical increase between two censuses since statehood in the middle of the 19th century (Fig. 2). Only in the 1950s, when Wisconsin added 518,000 residents, was the numerical growth higher – although the sources of growth in the 1950s differed significantly from those of the 1990s. Coming at the height of the post-World War II baby boom, growth during the 1950s was due entirely to the large difference between births and deaths (roughly 567,000). During the 1950 to 1960 period, the state actually lost residents through the migration