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The Census Counts...and How!

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The founders of the United States understood the importance of accurately counting the nation's population in order to allocate representation in the national legislature. As called for in the Constitution of the United States, the nation's first census was conducted in 1790. The U.S. Census Bureau's role has expanded since then. The Bureau's data are routinely relied upon for allocating federal, state and local government resources, and for guiding private investment. Local governments play a critical role in ensuring the quality of these data, primarily through their role in verifying annual estimates of population, and by helping to ensure that each decennial Census provides a complete count of local populations.

Annual Estimates of Population

The constitutional mandate requires that a complete enumeration of the population be carried out every ten years, with the next such enumeration scheduled for 2010. In order to track population changes between census years, the Census Bureau partners with the states to produce annual estimates of county and municipal populations. Cornell University's Program on Applied Demographics (PAD) represents New York State in this partnership. PAD is designated by the Governor of NYS to perform in this role, as a coordinating agency in Empire State Development's State Data Center Program.

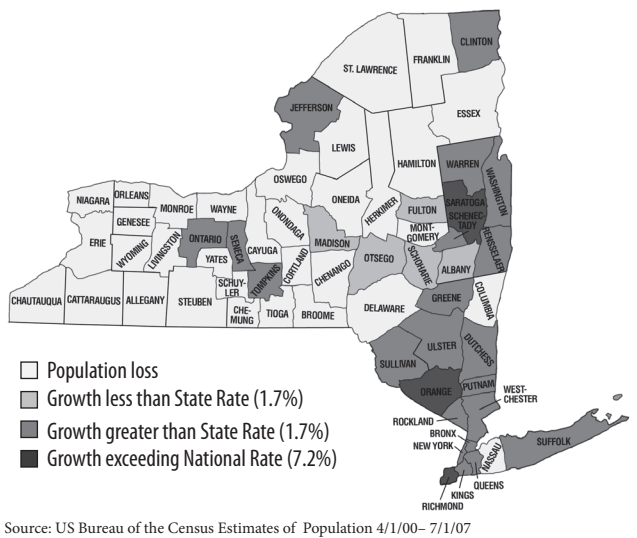
The most recent estimates of county population are for July 1, 2007. Figure 1 shows that the general pattern of growth and decline in NYS differs between downstate and upstate. Growth is generally seen in the portion of the state extending from the New York City metropolitan area, up the Hudson River to the Capital District region while the upstate areas to the north and west are generally lagging behind or declining. In total, 33 counties (32 in Upstate) lost population since the last census. There are notable exceptions to this pattern. For example, largely due to the influence of their dominant employers, Tompkins County (Cornell University) and Jefferson County (Fort Drum) have exceeded NYS's average rate of growth since 2000.

The Census Bureau's method to estimate changes in county population relies upon administrative records and surveys that are uniformly available for all counties. The Bureau recognizes that this method is not perfect, and that estimates for certain groups of people—college students, young adults launching their careers, immigrants, military personnel, and new residents of rapidly developing areas—may contain errors. The Bureau encourages counties—working with their state representative (in NYS that is Cornell's PAD)—to review the estimates and make recommendations for corrections. Local data on changes to the housing stock are accepted as an alternative data source. Working with Cornell's PAD, eight counties—Bronx, Jefferson, Kings, New York, Queens, Richmond, Rockland, and Westchester—have succeeded in having their initial estimates corrected.

Complete Count in the 2010 Census

It is likely that NYS will lose 2 Congressional seats after the 2010 Census. Four existing upstate Congressional districts are in areas of

Figure 1: Population Growth by County 2000–2007



population loss. A shrinking share of the national population results in a smaller share of federal representation and funding for some programs. Within the state, representation and government funding tied to population will shift away from the declining areas of upstate toward the growing areas of downstate. With these issues in mind, the state cannot afford to have any residents missed in the upcoming census or for the current population estimates to *underestimate* the number of residents. To help ensure a full and accurate census count in 2010, NYS needs to ensure that the Census Bureau has a complete list of all living quarters, and it must motivate all New Yorkers to be counted.

The Census Bureau's Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA) coordinated by Empire State Development's NYS Data Center Program, and carried out by planning and municipal offices throughout the state has just been completed. It was an enormous undertaking with local governments containing 93 percent of the state's housing units agreeing to participate. Preparation now shifts to educating local officials and residents about the importance of responding to the 2010 Census. NYS will continue to work with county and regional agencies to improve understanding of the Census process and energize community leaders and organizations as April 1, 2010 approaches.

The 2010 Census will be a watershed moment for NYS, with congressional representation and hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funding at stake. NYS and its local municipalities need to work together to obtain a full count of our population, as if our future as a state depends on it. Considering the consequences of an inaccurate count, it does! ▲

* See CaRDI website for contact information