
March 28, 2001

Arizona Owes Growth Spurt Largely to an Influx of Hispanics

By MICHAEL JANOFFSKY

Population growth that is giving Arizona two additional Congressional seats came about largely because of a soaring Hispanic population in the state in the last 10 years, according to census figures released today.

As the state population grew to 5.1 million in 2000, a 35.4 percent increase over the 1990 adjusted population of 3.7 million, the Hispanic population grew by nearly 80 percent, to 1.29 million from 733,153. Hispanics now make up a quarter of the Arizona population, compared with less than 20 percent a decade ago.

The 2000 census shows non-Hispanic whites being nearly 64 percent of the population, compared with 57 percent in 1990; American Indians, nearly 5 percent, a drop of 0.68 of a percentage point from 1990; and blacks, about 3 percent, a drop of 0.24 of a percentage point.

The new census also showed that unlike in Florida and other states where the rising numbers are spread out fairly evenly around the state, the growth in Arizona was highly concentrated in metropolitan areas. The state's most populous county, Maricopa, which includes Phoenix, grew by 40.9 percent, to 3 million from 2.1 million in 1990.

Pima County, which borders Mexico and includes the state's second-largest city, Tucson, grew by nearly 23 percent, to 843,746.

Tom Rex, research manager for the Center for Business Research at Arizona State University, said the growing number of Hispanics in Arizona reflected a vacuum in the labor pool. With fewer native-born people to fill jobs as the country's economy was heating up in the early 1990's, he said, larger numbers of Hispanics were drawn to fill the jobs, which paid higher wages than were available in Mexico and other countries.

"We don't know yet how many of these people came from other countries or from California and Texas," Mr. Rex said. "But it's fair to conclude that the bulk of them entered the country illegally. In a sense that immigration bailed the country out. Otherwise, a labor shortage would have had a real effect on our economy."

To examine population trends in the last decade, The New York Times compared 2000 census figures to adjusted figures from the 1990 census to improve accuracy after the completion of the 1990 census.

The adjusted 1990 figures were based on a detailed survey of 170,000 households conducted several months after the original census was completed. The second survey found that the 1990 census missed 8 million people, many of them poor blacks and Hispanics, and that it double-counted about 4 million people.