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THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF GEORGIA I: POPULATION TRENDS AND PROJECTIONS TO 2030

Georgia is one of the fastest growing states in the union having nearly doubled its population over the past quarter century. According to the United States Bureau of the Census, the population of Georgia totaled 8.8 million people as of July 2004 and ranked as the ninth most populous state, up from fifteenth as recently as 1970. Much of Georgia's population growth during the 1970-2004 period has been spurred by Net Domestic Migration as good economic prospects lured workers from states near and far. However, in recent years, international migration to the state has played an increasingly significant role. These migration trends are gradually causing the state to become more diverse. Based on U.S. Census Bureau statistics, roughly 33 percent of Georgia's population is minority, up from about 29 percent in 1990. African-Americans dominate the minority population of Georgia, accounting for nearly 2.5 million of the state's roughly 3-million minority population. Georgia is now the fourth largest state in regards to African-American populations, trailing only New York, Florida and Texas. Trends in Georgia's minority populations include:

- A 43 percent gain in African-American population between 1990 and 2003, an increase of 752,000.

Only the state of Florida, with African-American gains of 947,000 during this same time period outgrew Georgia in this category.

- A four and a third fold increase in Hispanic populations during the 1990-2003 period from 100,000 to 541,000 people. The Hispanic population in Georgia in 2003 amounted to 6.1 percent of the total population, up from 1.6 percent in 1990. In terms of percentage growth only North Carolina, whose Hispanic population grew nearly five-fold, surpassed that of Georgia. Three-quarters of Georgia's Hispanic population growth was accounted for by those of Mexican origin.
- Asian population growth of 187 percent between 1990 and 2003, a gain of 138,000 people. Georgia's Asian population amounts to 212,000 people and Georgia is now the fourteenth largest state in regards to Asian population and is second only to Nevada in terms of Asian population growth rate from 1990 to 2003.

Population trends within the state have varied widely. In regards to overall population distribution metropolitan Atlanta accounts for greater than 53 percent of Georgia's total population. Nearly 80 percent on metropolitan Atlanta's population is concentrated in the close-in ten county Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) area. The regions of

North, Central and South Georgia account for roughly 13 percent, 15 percent and 20 percent of the state's population, respectively. Metropolitan Atlanta also dominates population growth. During the 1970-2004 period the population of metropolitan Atlanta grew more than twice as fast as that for the rest of the state. Within the metropolitan Atlanta area, the average annual rate of population growth for the 18 metropolitan counties that lie outside of the ARC zone was nearly 25 percent higher than it was for those counties within the ARC zone. Much of the increase in non-ARC metropolitan population is due to gains in net domestic migration, particularly from the nearby ARC counties. On the other hand, international migration has generally played a more significant role in the population growth of the ARC counties.

A notable development within the state is the stark contrast between the ARC counties and those in other parts of Georgia. For instance, residents in the ARC counties are generally more diverse, younger, more densely populated, better educated, more mobile, and have higher incomes than those in other regions of the state. Just looking at ethnic diversity, we find:

- Between the years 1900 and 2000 African-American residents in the state of Georgia grew by roughly 600,000 people, more than 400,000 of these resided in the ARC counties. By 2000, DeKalb and Fulton counties accounted for three out of every ten African-Americans in the state. Two other ARC counties—Clayton and Cobb—accounted for another one out of ten. Altogether, the 10 ARC counties accounted for 47 percent of all African-Americans in the state, a little more than the combined shares of all the counties of Southern and Central Georgia.
- In the case of Hispanic growth, the ARC counties accounted for nearly 200,000 of the 330,000 gain in population from 1990 to 2000. The ARC is home to three out of every five Hispanics in the state of Georgia. Even more striking, however, is the fact that four ARC counties—Gwinnett, DeKalb, Fulton and Cobb—is home to one out of every two Hispanics in the state.
- During the years 1900-2000, overall Asian population gains in Georgia amounted to a little over 100,000, however, 82,000 of this was accounted for by the ARC counties. More than 75 percent of all Asians who reside in Georgia live in the ARC region. Seven out of ten Asians in Georgia reside in the ARC counties of Gwinnett, DeKalb, Fulton, Cobb and Clayton.

If population trends in the major Georgia regions continue at their 2000-04 pace, the state population of Georgia will reach 10.7 million by the year 2015 and 14.4 million by 2030. By 2015, Georgia will have added roughly 1.9 million new residents, with nearly three-quarters of this increase coming

from metropolitan Atlanta. Another 13 percent will be accounted for by the North Georgia counties, exactly equaling the shares for Central and South Georgia counties combined. Metropolitan Atlanta will comprise 57 percent of the state's population and the population in non-ARC metropolitan Atlanta counties will surpass that of both North and Central Georgia regions. Between 2015 and 2030 Georgia will have added another 3.7 million people, roughly 2.9 million of which will reside in metropolitan Atlanta. If these projections hold true, the population of metropolitan Atlanta in 2030 will reach almost 9 million people, larger than the current population of the entire state. By 2030, more than six out of every ten Georgia citizens will live in metropolitan Atlanta and even though the population in the outlying counties of metropolitan Atlanta will be less than half that of the ARC counties, it will rank as the second largest region in Georgia. Falling to third place, down from second in 2015, will be South Georgia with a population of nearly 2 million people. Fourth place will be occupied by North Georgia whose population would have surpassed that of fifth place Central Georgia during the 2015 - 2030 period.

Increasing populations and growing densities will no doubt place strains on Georgia's road transportation networks, water resources and educational services, which are already under considerable stress. However, growing pains should be eased somewhat by the fact that Georgia authorities today—unlike in previous decades—are well aware of the general growth prospects for the state. Having already dealt with significant growth, Georgia should be better positioned to handle the additional influx of people and growing demand on its resources during the next quarter century. Indeed, infrastructure needed to accommodate growth has already been established in some instances. English as a Second Language Programs and bi-lingual classrooms in a number of school systems are cases in point. Nevertheless, Georgia will have to make some tough choices in the years ahead. This is particularly true in the areas of transportation and water resource management.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Glenwood Ross is an assistant professor of economics at Morehouse College and the Director of the Economic Studies Abroad Program in South Africa—a joint initiative between the economics departments at AYSPS and Morehouse College. Ross' research interest focuses on issues related to urban economics, economic development, and economic pedagogy. He is currently engaged in an effort to examine trends in poverty concentrations in urban areas. Another line of

research investigates developments in foreign direct investment in sub-Saharan Africa. Dr. Ross holds a Ph.D in economics from Georgia State University.

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