

More than numbers

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How many people live in Alabama today? How many reside in the cities of Montgomery, Prattville, Greenville, or elsewhere? Why do people want to know about population size, composition, etc.?

One simple answer to these questions is because population information is vital to socioeconomic development, policy-making, and strategic planning. Population is power; it can help or hurt, depending on its size, composition, resources available, and the allocation of these resources among citizens.

When Adam Smith wrote "The Wealth of Nations" in the 1700s, no one could imagine how influential such a book would be to the world economy. One of his core arguments was that national economies should be less, if at all, regulated so that the supply-demand synergy could work its magic through some sort of invisible hand and infuse the wealth into society.

Under such a model, population plays two key roles. First, population or people can be considered as labor. People are needed to produce goods and services that are necessary for the survival and functioning of the society.

Second, population consumes, or should consume, goods and services produced by the labor. However, in today's economy, producers and consumers may or may not be the same people.

Applied demography can help determine the size and characteristics of producers and consumers. Applied demography is a subfield of population studies that focuses on providing population information to individuals and institutions. Applied demography also brings demographic expertise to answer questions or resolve specific practical problems that arise in the realms of business and government, especially state and local government.

One main focus of the Center for Demographic Research at Auburn University Montgomery is to give state and local agencies accurate and up-to-date population data so they can make informed decisions to improve their work, the quality of lives of their employers and customers and the citizens of Alabama.

Annually, the CDR receives and responds to hundreds of requests for population related information from the media, developers, religious institutions, decision-makers within

business environments, officials from local and state governments, students, teachers, and individuals within the general population.

Some of the recent data requests we received were for county population counts and changes, information on poverty levels for specific areas, life expectancy information for a specific county, current size of land area for the state of Alabama, median housing values for one county and its surrounding areas, population by race for a county, and the number of illegal immigrants in Alabama.

Additionally, we continue to receive daily requests for the various data sheets we produce.

The data sheets produced by the CDR are valuable sources of population information provided at a glance on a large poster. The CDR produces the Alabama Population Data Sheet every two years. Other data sheets are published periodically, such as the Alabama Health Data Sheet, the Alabama Kids Data Sheet, and the Alabama Education Data Sheet.

The 2008 edition of the Alabama Kids Data Sheet will be released this May. These sheets contain important socio-demographic information for each of the 67 counties in Alabama, the state of Alabama, and the United States, for comparative purposes.

The public can learn even more about demographic implications through our articles on population topics published in the *Montgomery Advertiser*. Some of our recent articles focused on HIV/AIDS, marriage, change in racial composition, sex imbalances in school enrollment, and the demography of a Valentine. These articles are available on our Web page.

The CDR provides demographic expertise to national media outlets to explain population trends and changes. We engage in a wide variety of sponsored research activities with clients ranging from private agencies to departments of local, state, and federal government.

Depending on the client's needs, we can design and conduct full research or work on specific steps of the research process, such as questionnaire design, selection of the study population, data collection, data entry, statistical analysis, interpretation of the results, and the production of study reports.

Clearly, there are several applications and potential applications for which population matters. Population size, composition, and change affect and are affected by political, economic, social, and even religious factors. A closer look at the 2007 population estimates recently released by the Census Bureau shows that some counties gained more people, whereas others observed a decline in population size.

Last year's biggest demographic gain was seen in St. Clair County, whose population increased by 4.2 percent between 2006 and 2007. Shelby County came in second, with nearly a 4 percent increase. Montgomery County registered a 1.3 percent increase during the same period. In contrast, Greene County lost nearly 3 percent of its population, followed by Lamar County with approximately a 2 percent decline in population size.

Several factors contribute to these changes, including migration between counties and states, differences in population composition, the number of births and the number of deaths between July 2006 and July 2007. These demographic factors are strongly linked to social and economic factors, as well as other conditions and practices.

Be informed about your demographic surroundings. Get key population facts that will help you make sound decisions about yourself, your family, your community, your business, and your state.

Population matters. The Center for Demographic Research at Auburn Montgomery has the information and the expertise to help.

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