



Growth and Change: Population Change in Ohio and its Rural-Urban Interface

The Exurban Change Project and
Swank Program in Rural-Urban Policy
Summary Report
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The Ohio State University

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Executive Summary

In 2003, the OSU Exurban Change and Swank programs produced a policy brief documenting Ohio population movements and land use patterns for the 1990s. With the new Strickland administration's TURN-AROUND Ohio plan, we believe this is an excellent opportunity to revisit how the state is currently faring and make comparisons to the latter 1990s, when the State's prospects seemed more secure. We divide the discussion into multiple topics, first moving from a state-level perspective to metropolitan/non-metropolitan distinctions, and then examining some broader trends at the rural-urban interface. Finally, we disaggregate the data to present local patterns of evolving communities in Ohio.

One pattern that reveals itself again and again is that Ohio is not faring well on a national basis or even compared to its Great Lake state peers. Moreover, this is not due to recent events but is a result of forces at work during the national economic boom during the latter 1990s, perhaps even dating back to the 1960s (Note 1). Despite stagnant population growth in Ohio on the whole, there has been a substantial redistribution of where Ohioans are residing, with substantial growth in the rural-urban interface areas of the state. So, in addition to the challenges associated with tepid population growth, there are also local and state level challenges arising from the exurbanization of the state.

Though this discussion will answer many questions about the current condition of the state, it will also raise additional questions about why we got ourselves in this situation and how we can do better. This additional analysis requires significantly more background on economic conditions, which is a topic we explore in subsequent policy briefs.

Overview

Using the 2005 US Population Census estimates, this report summarizes recent changes in population across the State of Ohio, and in particular, at Ohio's rural-urban interface. This report contains two sections. The first section provides the context for growth and change in Ohio and focuses on metropolitan and non-metropolitan Ohio. The second section explores growth and change in Ohio's municipalities. Finally, the Notes and References section contains all pertinent end-notes and citations for this report.

The following are the summary findings for each section, followed by the conclusions of this report.

Section I Findings

- Population growth is a good measure of community well-being because people "vote with their feet" and move to (away from) areas with high (low) quality-of-life and strong (weak) economies.

- Ohio's weak population growth is not a new phenomenon. Since 1995, Ohio ranks among the lowest in the country, even below our Great Lake neighbors, who share many of the same factors impeding faster growth.
- Ohio especially lags the nation in the population growth of its 16 metropolitan areas—with Columbus being the major exception.
- Rural Ohio is almost performing as well as rural America in terms of population growth.
- Revitalizing Ohio's relative prospects relies on generating faster growth in its urban areas.
- While Ohio is not faring well at an aggregate level, there are pockets of growth. Regional population growth is fastest in the 3 C's corridor and slowest along the West Virginia border.
- At finer levels of aggregation, growth is declining within five miles of the urban cores of Ohio's urban centers with at least 50,000 residents. Population growth is quite robust 10 to 15 miles away from the urban core, but rapidly declines thereafter.
- Ohio's growth is sprawling away from its urban cores. Sprawling development could produce other costs in terms of road congestion, lost green space, and environmental degradation.
- There are reasons to believe that the long-run prospects for Appalachia will improve as its beautiful surroundings attract new residents from across the U.S. To increase this likelihood, the region should improve its supporting "social infrastructure."

Section II Findings

- The total number of Ohioans residing in townships has steadily grown over the last 45 years, and so far in the 21st century, it

continues to grow substantially.

- The growth in Ohio townships is despite the loss of population due to annexation (which is largely indeterminable) and overall tepid population growth in the state of Ohio.
- Likewise, as indicated in Part 2.0, Ohio's largest cities are, on average, losing population.
- Between 2000 and 2005, the estimated notable growth is occurring in exurban cities, villages and townships. During the 1990s, the highest rates of growth were suburban cities, villages and townships.
- There are many township experiences in Ohio, with some townships governing over 10,000 people and almost an equal amount governing under 500 people.
- Estimates for 2005 show in both absolute and percentage terms that the townships between 1,000 and 2,500 people are expected to grow the most, 45,839 or 40.8%. This is a departure from the 1990 to 2000 period when growth was more evenly distributed in the more populous townships.

Conclusions

- Ohio's weak population growth is not recent. It dates back to at least the middle of the 20th Century.
- Ohio especially lags the nation in the population growth of its 16 metropolitan areas—with Columbus being the exception.
- Rural Ohio is almost performing as well as rural America in terms of population growth.
- Revitalizing Ohio's relative prospects relies on improving growth in its urban areas.
- Although these changing patterns across the state are revealing, to better appreciate their nature, more assessment of changing commuting patterns and shifts in industrial structure are needed. This will be the topic of future policy briefs.

- The trend for Ohio population growth to occur in unincorporated townships continues.
- Township population growth occurs in favored corridors.
- More growth is estimated to be taking place in medium-size townships versus the trend in the 1990s in large townships which suggests a trajectory of change.
- Most population growth is occurring in ex-urban cities, villages and townships.
- Because of these patterns of population change, two important local governance issues are raised: 1. How do townships with low population best provide services to meet resident's needs? Does it involve joint service relationships with the county or other townships?; and, 2. How do townships with high population best provide services to meet resident's needs, particularly infrastructure? Does it involve cooperative relationships with neighboring municipalities?

Exurban Change Project

The Exurban Change Project provides analysis of economic, social, agricultural, and land use changes of Ohio's regions and localities focusing on areas in rural-urban transition. The overall goal of the project is to perform applied research on these topics and to disseminate data and research results to local officials, professionals, and interested citizens to support their planning and decision making. The project is an effort of the Department of Human & Community Resource Development and Department of Agricultural, Environmental, and Development Economics. All reports (including this report), analysis, and data published by the project can be found online at <http://aede.osu.edu/programs/exurbs/>.

Swank Program in Rural-Urban Policy

The Swank Program in Rural-Urban Policy at The Ohio State University was established in 1995 to provide educational programs, research and expert consultation on economic, environmental, resource, legal and human issues that affect individuals and communities at the rural-urban interface. Competition for resources presents continuing public policy challenges in Ohio where a large agricultural industry surrounds large urban population centers. The goal of the Swank Program in Rural-Urban Policy is to lead a nationally and internationally recognized research and outreach program focused on priority issues related to rural-urban interdependencies. In turn, the Swank Program will help inform and facilitate teaching and student research at Ohio State and elsewhere. Visit the Swank Program web site for publications, presentations, events and the like:
<http://aede.osu.edu/programs/Swank/>