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Minorities in Md. increasing, census shows

Latino population grows; non-Hispanic whites decrease

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The number of minorities -- and especially Latinos -- in Maryland is continuing to grow as the state's white population shrinks.

According to U.S. Census Bureau figures released today, the state's population of non-Hispanic whites decreased by 21,428 between 2006 and 2007, while the Latino population of all races grew by 17,779.

Latinos now account for just over 6 percent of the state's 5.6 million people, whose overall numbers edged upward marginally in the past year.

From a racial standpoint, whites account for 63.6 percent of Maryland's population, African-Americans for 29.5 percent and Asians for 5 percent.

"Maryland has been changing for a while, and these numbers reflect that continuing trend," said Audrey Singer, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.

To some degree, the Maryland numbers also reflect national movements. The nation's Latino population increased 1.4 million to 45.5 million. Latinos now account for 15.1 percent of the total U.S. population of 301.6 million. They remained the nation's largest minority group, followed by blacks at 40.7 million.

Four states and the District of Columbia are "majority minority," meaning that minorities make up more than 50 percent of the population. Maryland, Nevada and Georgia are inching toward inclusion in that group with minority populations of 42 percent.

In Maryland, the growth of the Hispanic population in absolute terms has exceeded the growth of the non-Hispanic population for the past three years.

"It's a pretty dramatic difference if you're looking over the course of the decade," said Mark Goldstein, an economist with the Maryland Department of Planning.

In contrast, during the first year of the decade, the growth in the non-Hispanic population was three times that of the Hispanic population.

A large part of the growth in the Latino population can be attributed to immigration, Goldstein said.

Also, the number of minority births in the state has been creeping up since the beginning of the decade. During the past two years, minority births exceeded those of non-minorities.

The majority of children younger than 5 in Maryland are minorities, and public schools are already majority-minority. "That's your work force for the future. The work force will be far more diverse," said Dunbar Brooks, data development manager at the Baltimore Metropolitan Council.

Brooks calls the increase in the Chesapeake region's Latino population a natural outgrowth of its relative economic health and proximity to the nation's capital.

Although there has been a downturn in the housing market, he said, the local economy was fairly robust until recently. Construction has provided jobs for many Latino immigrants, he said, and over time word has gotten out about the region's desirability. "As communities grow and thrive, they become attractive in and of themselves," he said.

Census data showed that the state's median age continued to rise from 37.2 to 37.4, but Mark Mather, a demographer at the Population Reference Bureau, noted an interesting trend among baby boomers. Since 2000, Maryland has seen a 9 percent decline in its older boomer population (57 to 61) -- a relatively large exodus, compared with other states.

Many boomers moved here because of jobs, but as they near retirement, it makes sense to relocate somewhere less expensive and more hassle-free, he said.

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