

THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

CENSUS: Almost all Inland growth thanks to Latinos, Asians



LORI KRUEGER/CSUSB

Incoming freshman students are greeted by faculty and staff during the SOAR orientation at Cal State San Bernardino's Santos Manuel Student Union. The Census Bureau shows that in the past two years almost all Inland growth has been from Latinos and Asians coming to the area.

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The Inland area would have virtually stopped growing between 2010 and 2011 if it hadn't been for the 76,000 additional Latino and Asian residents, newly released census data shows.

San Bernardino County continued a two-decade trend of losing white residents as its Hispanic population edged toward becoming the majority that experts have been predicting. Latinos comprised 49.9 percent of the county's residents in July 2011, up from 49.2 percent in April 2010, the Census Bureau found.

"It's almost certainly a majority now," said Hans Johnson, a senior fellow at the San Francisco-based Public Policy Institute of California.

In the nearly 11 months it took the government to collect and analyze statistics, higher birth and lower death rates among Hispanics all but assured that San Bernardino County has a Latino population over 50 percent, he said.

In Riverside County, Hispanics comprised 46.1 percent of residents in 2011.

The population estimates are based upon information such as birth, death and tax records. They are the first population updates since the April 2010 census.

The nation reached a milestone in 2011 when, for the first time, a majority of children 1 year and younger were non-white. The Inland area long ago passed that mark. Nearly 80 percent of children younger than 5 in the region are non-white.

The data is the most recent evidence of the dramatic, long-term shift in the Inland area's racial and ethnic make-up.

In 1990, about 26 percent of the region's residents were Latino and 62 percent were white, non-Hispanic. Today, about 36 percent of more than 4.3 million Inland residents are white. San Bernardino County's white population fell by 6,500 between 2010 and 2011, to less than 33 percent of the total.

The Latino growth trend likely will continue for many years, said Johnson, co-author of a 2008 report called "The Inland Empire in 2015."

Inland Latinos are, on average, younger than whites and blacks, census data shows.

"That means they're more likely to be forming families and having children," Johnson said.

Immigration directly from foreign countries to the Inland area is lower than in the boom years of the early and mid-2000s, and increased border enforcement, lower birth rates in Mexico and other factors portend slowed immigration in coming years, he said.

But far more Inland population growth is from births outnumbering deaths.

About two-thirds of Inland Latinos are U.S.-born.

CONTINUING DRAW

Even with a stubbornly high unemployment rate, the Inland area remains a draw for Latinos from coastal counties, said Emilio Amaya, executive director of the San Bernardino Community Service Center, an immigrant-assistance organization.

"Rent is still more affordable, and the cost of living is lower," he said.

The region's cheaper housing, long a lure for newcomers of all ethnicities, is also why the Asian population continues to grow, said Rasmey Sam, executive director of the Asian American Resource Center in San Bernardino.

Some Asians saved up money for years to move out of rental units in Los Angeles and Orange counties, he said.

"Now with houses so cheap, they're taking the opportunity to move out here and buy a house," Sam said.

Only about 6 percent of the region's population is Asian, but the Asian community's growth rate is even higher than the Latino community's. The number of Asians in the Inland area has nearly tripled since 1990, to more than 262,000. Nearly two-thirds of Inland Asians are immigrants, according to census estimates.

MOVE FROM LONG BEACH

Monirath Phann, a Cambodian immigrant, moved last year from Long Beach to San Bernardino with her husband, their two children and her parents.

Years ago, the move from their heavily Cambodian neighborhood in Long Beach would have been less likely, said Phann, 35, who arrived in Long Beach from Cambodia with her parents when she was 2.

"Before, people would travel (from San Bernardino) to Long Beach to get groceries or things for the house," she said. "Now there are (Asian) supermarkets out here to get groceries, there are events for the community and there are resources for the community."

The family attends a Buddhist temple in Loma Linda — one of at least three Cambodian Buddhist temples in San Bernardino County — and goes to the Asian American Resource Center for a various services.

Phann's parents take English classes there and socialize with other Cambodians, and her children take Cambodian language classes.

The family moved to San Bernardino after Phann's husband lost his factory job and found work in San Bernardino at an Asian supermarket, Phann said.

The cheaper rent makes it easier to pay the bills, and the family likes the lower population density in the Inland area, she said.

"It's not as crowded here," said Phann, whose parents are from the Cambodian countryside. "In Long Beach, the houses are closer to each other. Here it's a lot more spread out."

The rise in the percentage of Inland residents who are Latino and Asian will continue to increase the political competitiveness of the region, which has long been dominated by Republicans, said Karthick Ramakrishnan, an associate professor of political science at UC Riverside.

Asians and Latinos are more likely to vote Democratic than other Americans, surveys have found.

This year, several Inland congressional and state legislative races in areas that had been solidly Republican are viewed as competitive.

“Latino growth is the primary factor,” Ramakrishnan said. “They’re making it more politically balanced.”