

Community Fact Sheet

University of Arkansas Community and Family Institute

The Changing Face of NW Arkansas

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Figure 1. Total Population in NW Arkansas Counties: 1960 to 2006

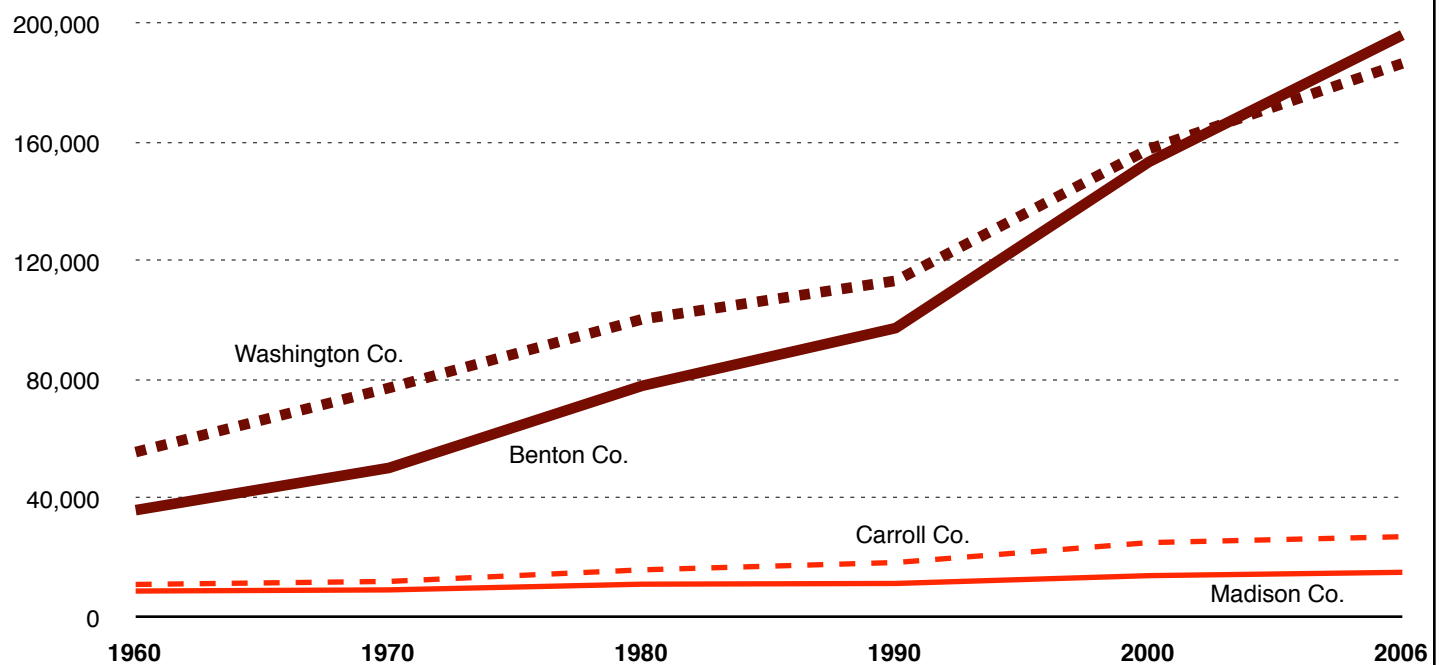
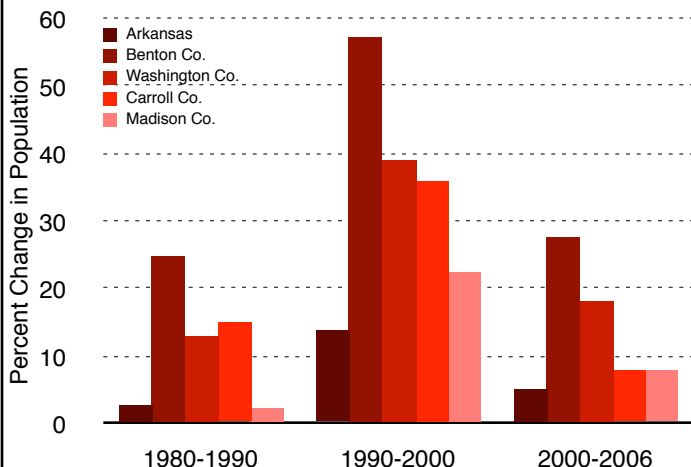


Figure 2. Rate of Population Change: 1980 to 2006



Northwest Arkansas counties have experienced dramatic growth in the last 40-plus years (Figure 1). As one of the fastest growing regions in all of Arkansas, significant population shifts in Benton and Washington counties have created an assortment of challenges and opportunities for the region. Consider:

- Between 1960 and 2000, the population of NW Arkansas counties increased on average 25 percent.
- During the 1990s the population of NW Arkansas exploded, increasing significantly even in traditionally rural counties (i.e. Carroll and Madison counties). The rate of growth for NW Arkansas far outpaced that for Arkansas as a whole (see Figure 2).

Figure 3. Increasing Racial Diversity of NW Arkansas Counties: 1970 to 2006

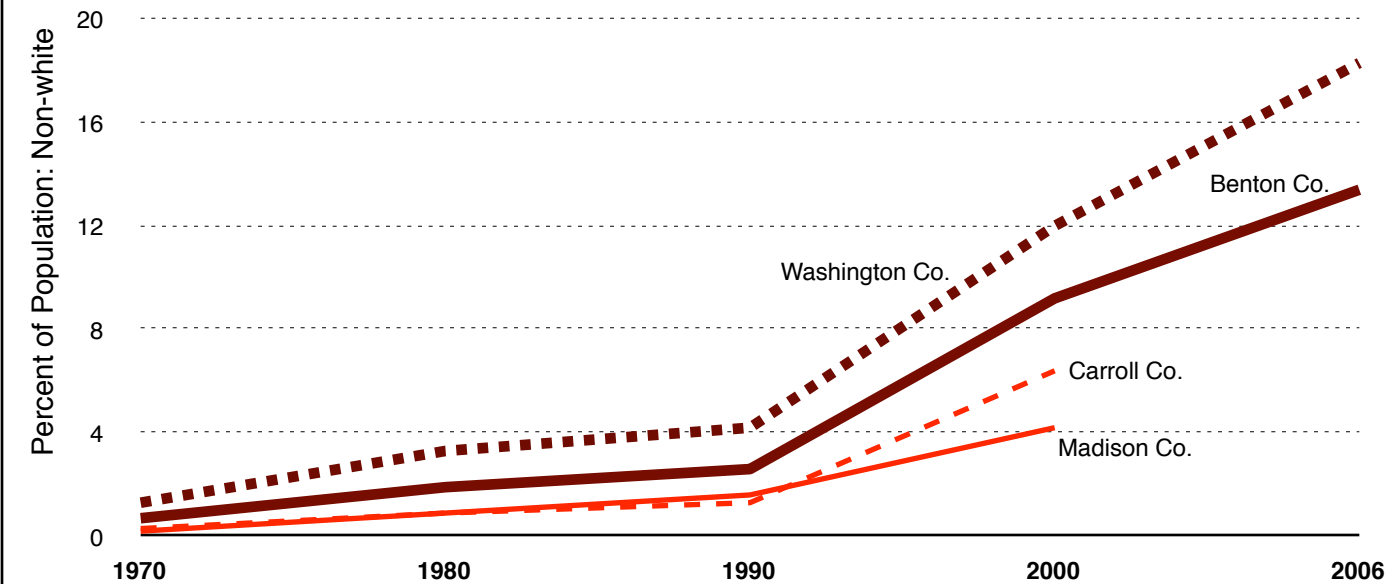


Figure 4. Percent Population Hispanic Arkansas Counties: 2000

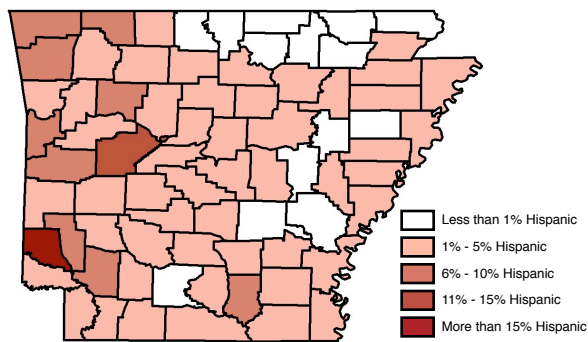
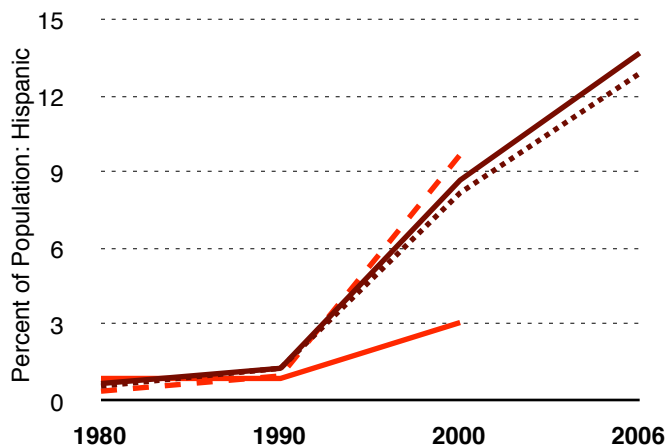


Figure 5. Percent Population Hispanic NW Arkansas Counties: 1980 to 2006



- The greatest population growth occurred in Benton County. Since then, population growth in all four NW Arkansas counties has slowed markedly.

Increased racial and ethnic diversity has accompanied NW Arkansas' population growth. Data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau clearly show this trend (Figure 3). Prior to 1990 the racial composition of the region was monochrome in the extreme. As recently as 1990, in excess of 95 percent of the total population of all four NW Arkansas counties was White. By 2000, however, the region's racial diversity had increased significantly. And by 2006, the racial composition of Benton and Washington counties (data were not available for Carroll and Madison counties) began to approach that of the United States as a whole.

In addition to increased racial diversity, NW Arkansas communities have experienced a dramatic change in their ethnic makeup as well. Most notable has been a dramatic increase in the number of residents who are of Hispanic background or origin (see Figure 4 and Figure 5). (Note: Hispanic background/origin is not an indicator of racial group membership.) In 1990 Hispanic residents comprised 1.1 percent of the total population; in 2000 that figure had increased to 7.4 percent. By 2006, residents claiming Hispanic heritage made up 13.7 percent of Benton County and 12.9 percent of Washington County.

Source Information

All of the data presented in this report come from the U.S. Census Bureau. Information presented for 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2000 are from reports published from the Decennial Census for each of those years. Data presented for 2006 are based on published estimates of the American Community Survey.