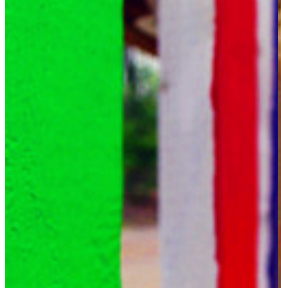


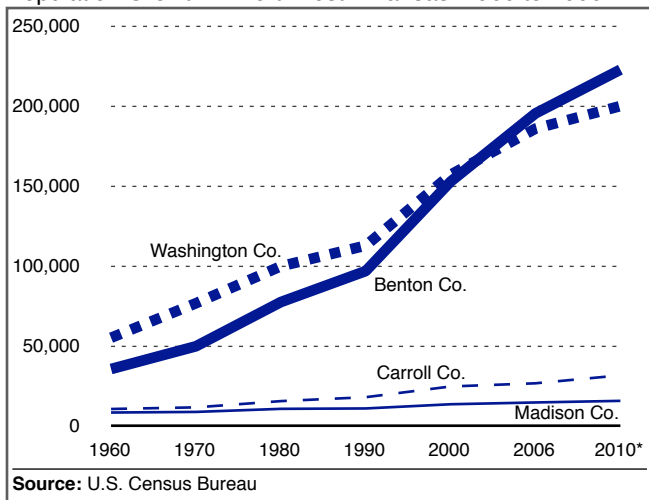
Chapter 2

Social and Demographic Composition: Growth and Diversity



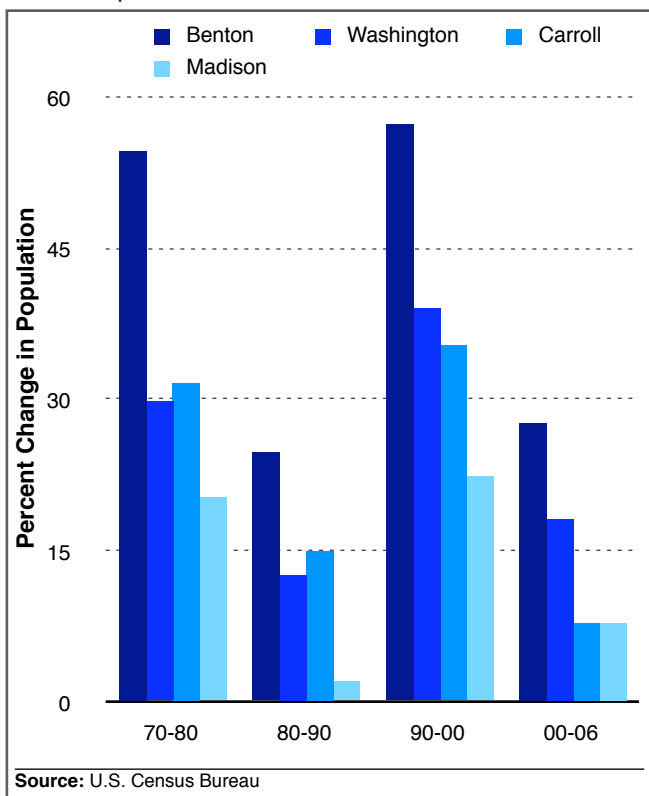
Growth & Change in Northwest Arkansas

Figure 2.1
Population Growth in Northwest Arkansas: 1960 to 2006



Northwest Arkansas has experienced dramatic population growth over the past forty-plus years. As one of the fastest growing regions in Arkansas, significant population shifts, particularly in Washington and Benton Counties, have created tremendous challenges - and opportunities - for the region.

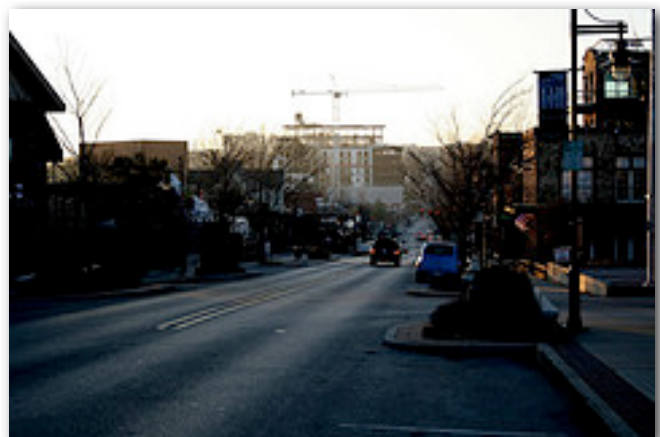
Figure 2.2
Rate of Population Growth in Northwest Arkansas: 1970-2006



- ★ Overall, general population growth in Carroll and Madison Counties was relatively constant between 1960-1990. Since 2000, both counties registered small increases in population growth.
- ★ Benton County's growth was noteworthy between 1990 and 2000. By 2004, Benton County became the most populous county in Northwest Arkansas.
- ★ 2010 projections show continued growth in all four of the Northwest Arkansas counties.

As Figure 2.2 shows, there has been a surge-lull-surge-lull pattern to the population change in each of the four counties in Northwest Arkansas since 1970.

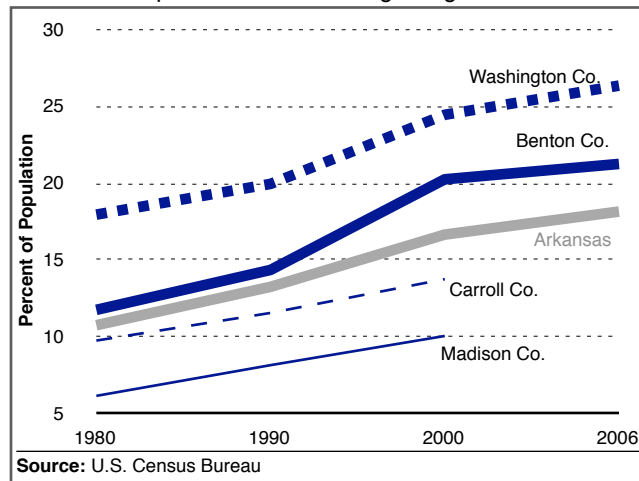
- ★ Benton County had the highest percent change in population growth between 1970 and 2006.
- ★ Madison County had the lowest percent change in population growth between 1970 and 2006.
- ★ After a slowdown between 1980-1990, the population in Northwest Arkansas counties expanded appreciably.
- ★ Since 2000, the percent population change in the region has slowed markedly, although Benton and Washington Counties continue to experience double-digit percentage change growth.



Human Capital and Social Capital

Figure 2.3

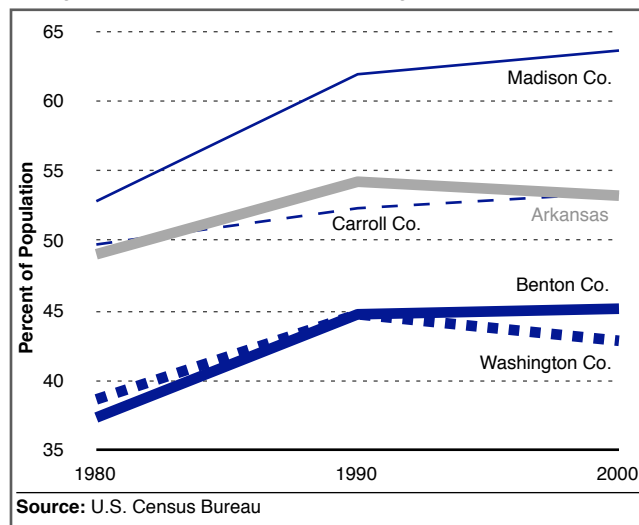
Percent of Population 25+ w/ College Degree: 1980-2006



One of the notable demographic shifts in Northwest Arkansas has been the increase in the number of residents, age 25 years and older, with a college education (see Figure 2.3). This type of change in a community's aggregate education level is often described as an increase in *human capital*. For individuals who exchange their human capital for such things as wages and health benefits, investments in human capital are critical for assuring one's own economic security. For communities, increasing human capital is integral for future economic growth because of the link between human capital and productivity.

Figure 2.4

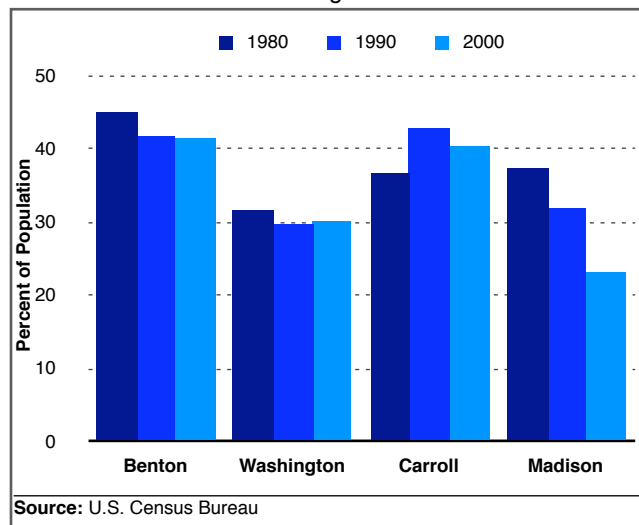
Living in Same Residence 5 Years Ago: 1980-2000



Residential stability is often viewed as a necessary precondition for building cohesive, healthy communities. Conversely, high rates of residential turnover are seen as a disruptive, disorganizing force. One of the main drawbacks of residential instability is that it limits residents' ability to associate with and get to know one another. In other words, residential instability limits the social connectedness among neighbors who have difficulty acquiring adequate levels of *social capital*.

Figure 2.5

Different Residence 5 Years Ago: Moved From Out of State



★ Northwest Arkansas demonstrates two distinct patterns of residential stability, presented in Figures 2.4.

“Movers” Between 1980 and 2000, fewer than half of the residents of Benton and Washington Counties lived in the same residence for at least five years. Relative to the rest of Arkansas, these two counties demonstrate significantly lower levels of residential stability.

“Stayers” Between 1980 and 2000, at least half of the residents of Madison and Carroll Counties lived in the same residence for at least five years. The level of residential stability in Madison County far exceeds the state average.

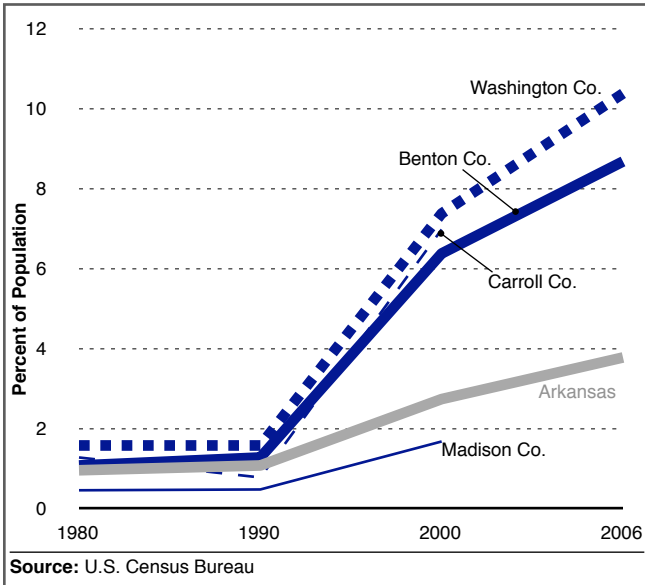
★ Of those who reported living in their residence for less than five years, most moved from an in-state location.

★ Benton County consistently has experienced the highest percent of out-of-state migration.

In-Migration

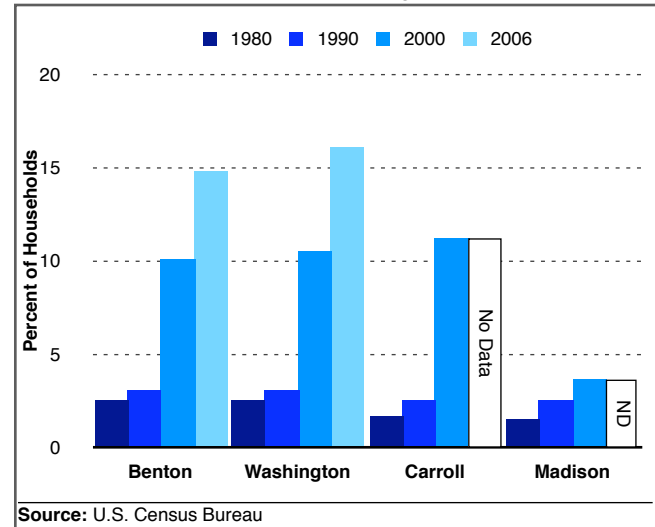
Much of the population growth in Northwest Arkansas has come from the in-migration of foreign-born residents. Since 1990, increases in the number of foreign-born residents in Northwest Arkansas far outpaced the growth in foreign-born residents in other regions of Arkansas.

Figure 2.6
Percent of Population Foreign-Born: 1980-2006



- ★ Between 1990 and 2000:
 - * Benton County's foreign-born population increased nearly 500 percent
 - * Carroll County's foreign-born population increased more than 800 percent.
 - * Madison County's foreign-born population increased more than 300 percent.
 - * Washington County's foreign-born population increased 460 percent.
- ★ The number of foreign-born residents living in the state of Arkansas increased 137 percent between 2000 and 2006.
- ★ Since 1980 there have been increases in every Northwest Arkansas county in the proportion of the population who speak a language other than English at home.
- ★ By 2006, English was not the primary language spoken in approximately 15 percent of households in Benton and Washington Counties.

Figure 2.7
Percent Households: Other Than English Spoken in Home



In 2007, the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation commissioned a study entitled “*A Profile of Immigrants in Arkansas.*” Several important findings in that study are echoed in the dynamics of the Northwest Arkansas region. The report notes the following:

- ★ “Arkansas had the fourth-fastest-growing immigrant population nationwide between 1990 and 2000: 196 percent.”
- ★ “The highest foreign-born population shares can be found along the western edge of Arkansas, with the largest communities in Springdale, Rogers, and Fayetteville.”
- ★ “The number of children in immigrant families in Arkansas grew 276 percent between 1990 and 2000, a rate exceeded by only one other state—North Carolina.”

In addition to increased racial diversity, Northwest Arkansas communities experienced significant shifts in their ethnic composition. Most notable has been the substantial increase in the number of residents who are of Hispanic background or origin.

In characterizing Arkansas and these regions with an expanding Hispanic population, the Rockefeller reports goes on to say:

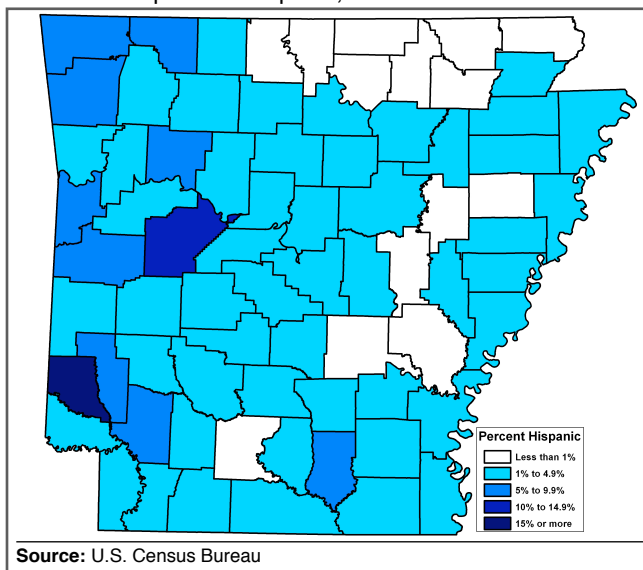
- ★ “Like other Southern states with large shares of Mexican immigrants, Arkansas has many undocumented immigrants. In 2004–05, 51 percent of Arkansas immigrants were

undocumented, compared with 29 percent nationally.”

- ★ “Arkansas’ Hispanic children—those with foreign- or native-born parents—have poverty rates over twice as high as those for non-Hispanic white children but below the rate for black children.”
- ★ “Limited English proficient (LEP) students—those reported by the schools as having limited English skills—are concentrated in a hand-full of districts, mostly in northwest and western Arkansas.”

Figure 2.8

Percent of Population Hispanic, 2000



- ★ In 1990, Hispanic residents comprised about 1 percent of the statewide population. By 2000, the percentage of Hispanics in Arkansas had increased to nearly 8 percent.
- ★ In 2000, Benton, Carroll, and Washington Counties all had nearly 10 percent Hispanic residents.

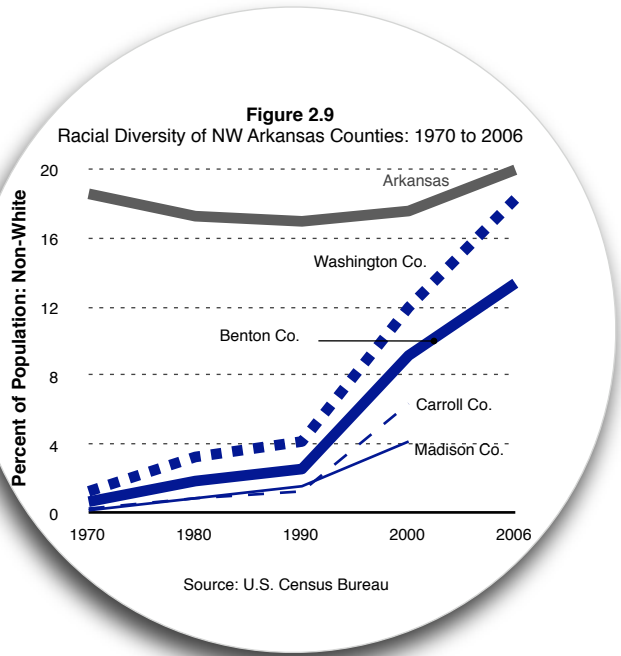
*"Give me your tired, your poor
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free..."
~ Statue of Liberty Inscription*

Indicator in the Spotlight:

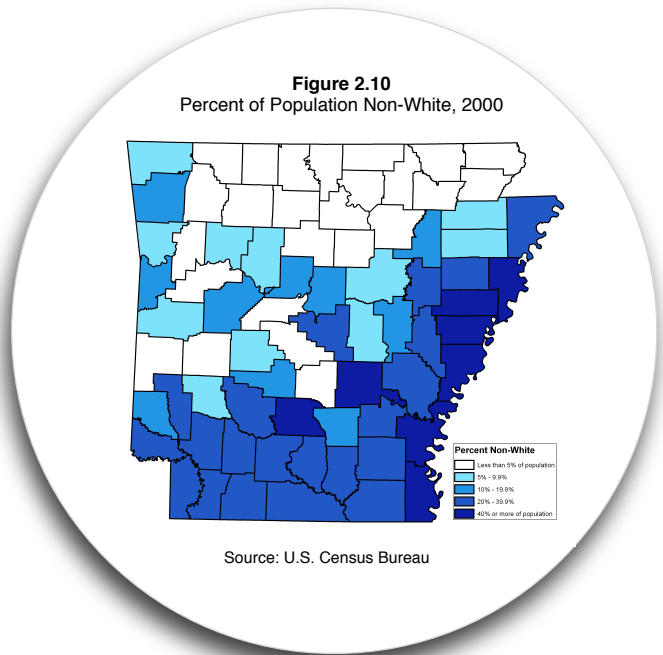
Racial and Ethnic Diversity

As suggested, increased racial and ethnic diversity has been an important part of Northwest Arkansas' population shifts over the last thirty-five years. Prior to 1990, the racial composition of the Northwest Arkansas region was monochrome - in the extreme. That year, more than 95 percent of the total population in each of the four counties was White. Since then, however, the demographic composition of Northwest Arkansas has changed considerably.

- ★ By 2000, Northwest Arkansas was in the midst of a racial diversity explosion. Between 1990 and 2000 the number of non-Whites increased by 350% in Benton County, 280% in Washington County, nearly 500% in Carroll County, and 260% in Madison County.
- ★ By 2006, racial diversity in Washington and Benton Counties approached the average for the state of Arkansas.
- ★ The level of racial diversity in Benton and Washington Counties in 2000 was similar to that found throughout western and central Arkansas.
- ★ By far, the regions displaying the highest levels of racial diversity were eastern and southern Arkansas.
- ★ In 2000, Phillips County had the largest non-White minority population (60.7%) and Cleburne County had the lowest non-White minority population (1.8%).



"Prejudice is a burden that confuses the past, threatens the future, and makes the present inaccessible." ~ Maya Angelou



What People Are Saying About... Race Relations

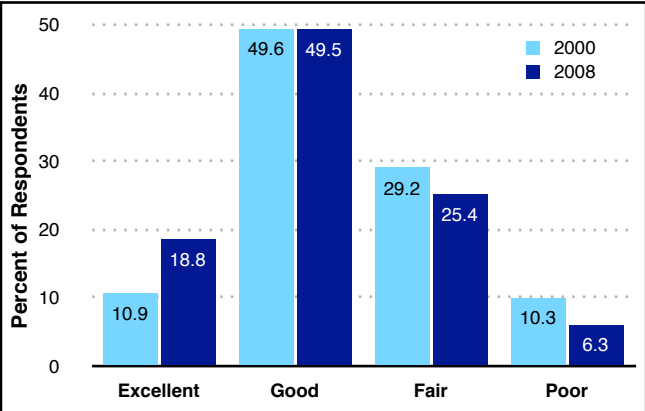
It is clear that Northwest Arkansas is experiencing rapid social and demographic changes. Quite often, increased cultural diversity is viewed positively by community members, as a collective asset and source of community pride. Culturally diverse communities provide the context in which residents can develop new dialogues and forge new understandings. In sum, cultural diversity is thought to enrich the social experiences of community members and improve overall quality of life.

But, change is not always easy. As beneficial as diversity can be, it must also be acknowledged that sudden demographic shifts can also result in increased social conflict.

So, how do the residents of Northwest Arkansas feel about race and ethnic relations in the region?

Most residents have a positive view of race relations and things appear to be improving. Between 2000 and 2008 the percentage of respondents who described race relations as “*excellent*” nearly doubled.

Figure 2.11
Race/Ethnic Relations: Northwest Arkansas Communities



Sources: Northwest Arkansas Community Survey, 2000; Northwest Arkansas Omnibus Survey, 2008.



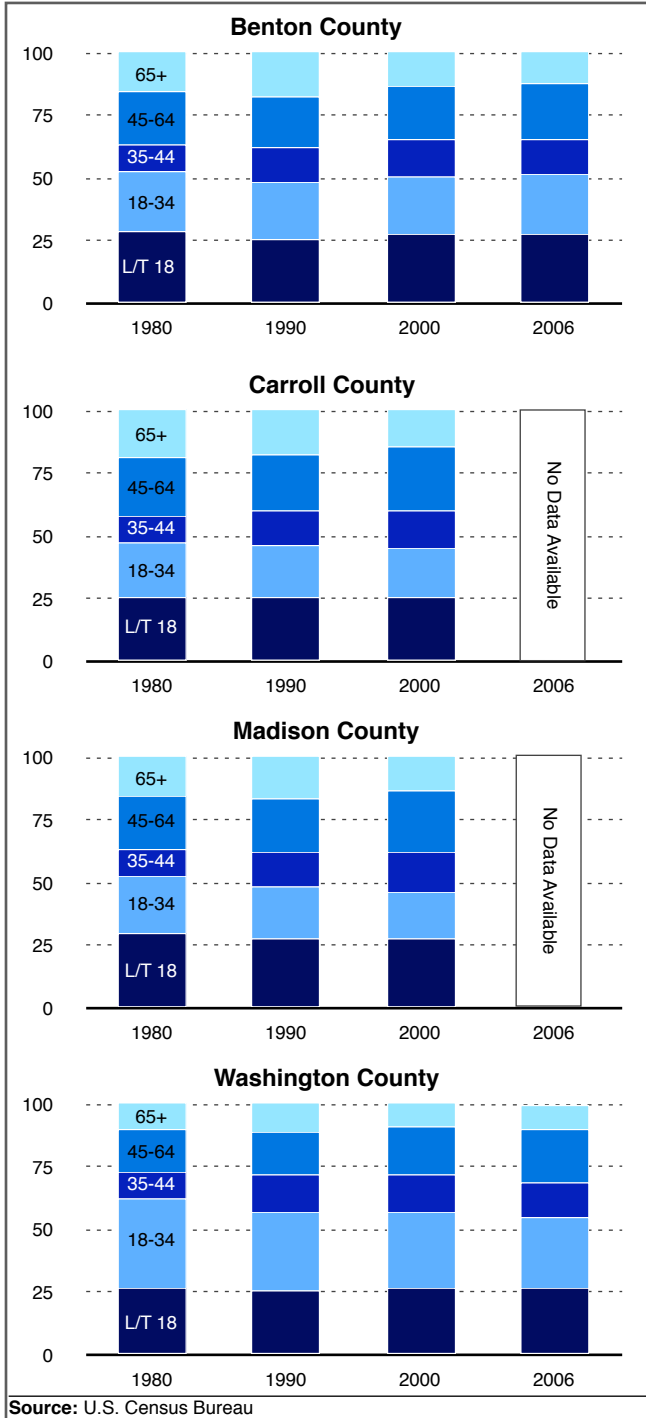
- ★ A majority of residents in 2000 and 2008 described racial and ethnic relations in Northwest Arkansas as *excellent or good*.
- ★ Roughly one-third of Northwest Arkansas residents described racial and ethnic relations as *fair or poor*.
- ★ The 2008 survey results show that race and ethnic relations in Northwest Arkansas are improving.
- ★ The number of *fair and poor* responses declined substantially over the last eight years, while the percentage of respondents reporting race and ethnic relations as *excellent* nearly doubled.



Changing Age Structure

Whether a result of aging-in-place, or immigration, important changes have taken place in Northwest Arkansas with regard to the age composition of its residents. While the population in these counties age, there continues to be important growth among its younger cohorts.

Figure 2.12
Age of Northwest Arkansas Residents: 1980-2006



- ★ In the four Northwest Arkansas counties, the 35-44 age group, which represents the core workforce population, has expanded steadily since 1980.
- ★ While the retired population has grown in many places throughout the United States, the percentage of persons age 65 and over has slowly declined or remained constant in Northwest Arkansas counties.
- ★ Since 1980, the size of the 18-34 age group in Washington County has been much larger than Benton, Carroll, and Madison Counties.
- ★ Residents between the ages of 45-64 represent the fastest growing age group in the Northwest Arkansas region. By 2006, this cohort was nearly twice the size of its older (65+) and younger (35-44) cohorts in Benton and Washington Counties.
- ★ By 2010, it is expected that there will be some compositional changes in the Northwest Arkansas age structure; more elderly aging-in-place and a continued growth of the workforce cohort.



What's It All Mean?

The data presented in the preceding pages make it abundantly clear: Northwest Arkansas has experienced rapid growth between 1980 and 2000 but since 2000, that growth has slowed down. Nevertheless this pattern raises two questions for consideration: 1) What is the nature of this growth? and 2) What are its consequences?

In general, the population expansion in Northwest Arkansas can be summarized with one word: *diversity*. The rapid influx of people has brought about dramatic changes in the sociodemographic profile of the region. Residents of Northwest Arkansas in the 21st Century are significantly more likely to be members of racial and ethnic minority groups, more likely to have immigrated

to the United States, and more likely to have a college education. In sum, Northwest Arkansas' growth has brought about a significant expansion of the region's human, social, and cultural capital. And the good news is that these changes are generally seen in a positive light by most residents.

The growth over the past few decades has created both opportunities and challenges for the region's residents. For example, the arrival of foreign born immigrants provides established residents with opportunities to enhance their own human, social, and cultural capital. At the same time, however, this sudden influx of foreign-born populations also presents Northwest Arkansas with some of its greatest challenges.

