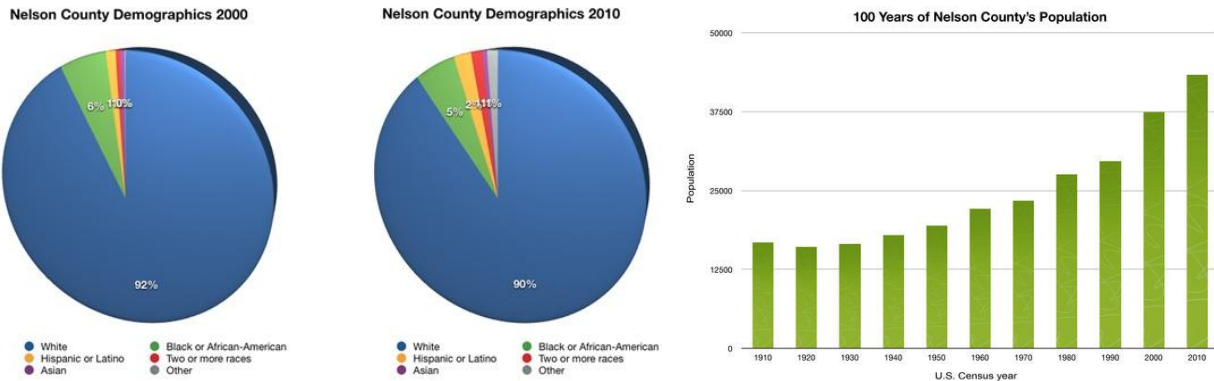


Census 2010 released: Nelson County shows fast growth in U.S. Census Some minority groups show big increases

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By Erin L. McCoy

This article is the first in a three-part series exploring the implications of the 2010 U.S. Census for Nelson County. Read Sunday's paper for a closer look at Census results for Nelson County cities. On March 30, an article will discuss the Census' impact on redistricting and the county's comprehensive plan.



The results are in: Nelson County is the 12th fastest-growing county in Kentucky.

Since 2000, the population of Nelson County has grown 15.9 percent: from 37,477 to 43,437 in 2010. Fairfield was the 11th fastest growing city in the state, while Bardstown was the 31st most populous.

Nelson also ranked the 23rd most populous county in the state of Kentucky, according to numbers released last week by the U.S. Census Bureau. The first data on Kentucky rolled out last week, in which city and county populations were broken down by race and national origin. The population of eligible voters was also counted.

The census, which is conducted every 10 years and mandated by the U.S. Constitution, provides population and demographic information that is used to draw voting districts from county-level magisterial districts to U.S. congressional districts. It also provides a picture of communities on very local levels.

Few local officials were surprised to learn how fast Nelson County is growing. In fact, the 2000 census showed even more growth: a 26.1 percent increase over the previous decade.

"The growth in this county that I have seen from this counter has been phenomenal," Nelson Circuit Court Clerk Diane Thompson said. The circuit clerk's office handles everything from courtroom documentation to driver's licenses. From the traffic Thompson has seen, "I would have guessed it would have been lots more," she said.

Nelson County has issued 31,715 driver's licenses, Thompson said. The population older than 18 in 2010 was 32,152, according to the census.

The county clerk's office has seen evidence of growth as well.

"The voter registration itself continues to climb," County Clerk Elaine Filiatreau said. Nelson County has 29,350 registered voters — 91.3 percent of those who are eligible.

Nelson County Judge Executive Dean Watts believes most of the population increase occurred before the housing market collapse in 2008.

“I’d say most of that new growth happened during the first five to seven years of that 10-year period,” he said. He attributed much of the growth to “our proximity to Louisville and most certainly our livability in Nelson County. I think our tax rates are reasonable overall. I think we have a good educational system.”

He said Nelson County’s fast-rising population can be advantageous in Frankfort, particularly when the county applies for grant programs and discretionary grants.

“The politicians keep a strong eye on that,” he said.

The percentage of citizens living in the county rather than in incorporated cities is up, according to Joint City-County Planning Commission Director Jan Johnston. About 68.9 percent are county residents, up from 67.5 percent.

The growth rate in unincorporated areas of the county was 18.2 percent, and although 1,249 housing units were empty throughout the county, Johnston said still more housing may be necessary.

“For significant growth, that means that we’re going to have additional housing,” she said.

Minority populations increase

Nelson County’s minority population was up 2.3 percent from 2000, showing the greatest increases in the Hispanic or Latino population and those who identified themselves as being of two or more races (a category which does not include Hispanic).

In fact, the population of multiracial people in Nelson County nearly tripled between 2000 and 2010, up from 0.5 percent to 1.3 percent of the population. Kentucky as a whole saw an increase of 69.8 percent in people identified as being of two or more races.

Meanwhile, the Hispanic population more than doubled, up from 1.1 percent to 2 percent of the population. A similar increase was seen on a statewide level.

The Asian population in Nelson County showed a slight increase as well.

Though the black population in Nelson County increased 5.6 percent in the past 10 years, only 5 percent of Nelson County residents identified themselves as black, down from 5.5 percent in 2000. However, 70.6 percent of African-Americans in Nelson County lived in Bardstown in 2010.

Kentucky-wide, 7.8 percent of the population is black.

More than half of Nelson County’s multiracial population and nearly half of Hispanics lived in Bardstown.

Thompson said she’s noticed an influx in people from other countries coming to Nelson County. “There’s not a day that goes by that I don’t deal with someone trying to transfer a license in from another country,” she said.

But Gail Hart, an English as a Second Language instructor at Bardstown-Nelson County Adult and Community Education, said a rise in the minority population hasn’t necessarily translated to a rising demand in ESL classes.

“I think that in the beginning there were more classes because they were brand new to the country,” she said. Today, many immigrants’ children have grown up speaking English and don’t need lessons, she said.

In 2010, 48 percent of the Hispanic population was younger than 18. In Nelson County as a whole, 26 percent of the population was younger than 18, compared to 18 percent statewide.

Bardstown City Schools Director of Pupil/Personnel Todd Hood said he hasn't seen an increase in demand for ESL classes, either.

"We have not had to add many programs for kids with a different language," he said. Similarly, diversity seems to be holding steady.

"As far as diversity I think our numbers would be about the same, although there has been an increase in our population," he said.

School populations

Population estimates have played a large role in the development of a district facilities plan, he said. During the past several months, a local planning committee has been discussing the district's growing population and considering options for relieving schools that are becoming more and more crowded. A facilities plan drafted by the LPC opens up the possibility of a new school in the district to relieve population pressures.

Bardstown City Schools Superintendent Brent Holsclaw said Nelson County's population increase in the 2010 U.S. Census was expected, and won't change the nature of the facilities plan.

"Usually the census is the basis of what we use for projected growth," he said. "It has validated what we thought was going to happen."