

Another take on the 2020 Census

By: [Joe Nathanson](#) August 26, 2021



The 2020 U.S. Census data release, known as P.L. 94-174, made headlines locally and nationally when it was made available earlier this month. Attention has rightfully focused on the use of the data for its intended purpose – the drawing of new boundaries for state legislative districts across the country and for carving out new congressional districts in the 44 states that have two or more congressional seats.

In the weeks and months ahead we'll be hearing much about the squabbles as the two national political parties jockey for partisan advantage. And, a spotlight will certainly be placed on Maryland, a poster child for gerrymandering, as it relates to its eight seats in the House of Representatives.

Only very basic information is available with this early release, primarily the voting age population down to the smallest piece of census geography, the census block. The total population is also presented by race and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity. These last items are made available, theoretically, in order to assure nondiscrimination in drawing the election boundary lines, although partisan gamesmanship often comes into play with these data items.

More detailed demographic information, including household incomes, the numbers of homes owned or rented, the values of those homes or the rents paid, occupations of the workforce, educational levels, and so much more will have to await the subsequent releases by the Census Bureau in the months ahead.

Early findings

From the data now available we are still learning quite a bit about our changing nation, state, and region. We have a nation that is increasingly urban and metropolitan, far less white, and with surging Hispanic and Asian minority groups. The official data release has confirmed what estimates had already hinted at.

Maryland, with a white-alone population (not in combination with any other racial category) at 48.9 percent of the total, has now joined five other states — Hawaii, New Mexico, California, Texas, and Nevada – in majority-minority status. In the Baltimore region, Baltimore city (27.8

percent white-alone) has been joined by Howard County (47.9 percent white-alone) in majority-minority status; Baltimore County follows closely with 52.9 percent.

Here is one headline you haven't seen: **Baltimore city is growing.** Unsurprisingly, the attention of city officials and civic leaders has been drawn to the city's loss of population since the 2010 census. Indeed, with an official count of 585,708, the city's head count has fallen below 600,000 for the first time in over a century.

But, by another important measure, the city is indeed increasing its demographic footprint. According to the 2020 census, Baltimore had 251,479 households. That represents an increase of 1,576 households compared to the 2010 count of 249,903. That is a noteworthy reversal of the 2000-2010 experience, when the city lost 8,093 households.

How can this be happening? The very simple explanation is that city households continue to grow smaller. Continuing a decades long trend, the average household size was down to 2.26 persons in 2020.

Official response

When the redistricting data first came out, Mayor Brandon Scott issued a press release stating, "Today's population figures are the culmination of more than 70 years of population decline, showing why we must pivot from the status quo towards inclusive economic policies that improve the lives of our legacy residents, while attracting new residents."

Of course, designing inclusive economic policies to retain and attract new residents would be good governance. But, even now, the city is attracting new residents, while being buffeted by demographic headwinds.

The same press release notes, "Despite the decrease in population, Baltimore's housing market has shown continuous growth since the beginning of the Scott Administration. In the first two quarters of 2021, Baltimore boasted the most improved housing market in more than a decade. In fact, Baltimore's housing market has improved more than *every* surrounding jurisdiction."

The city is indicating a multi-pronged approach towards stabilizing and strengthening the city's population base. One that makes particularly good sense in light of recent trends is articulated by Catalina Rodriguez-Lima, director of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. "As Baltimore continues to be a place of hope and prosperity for immigrant and refugee communities, we must recognize the unique opportunities these communities bring to our city. MIMA remains committed to building upon existing efforts to embrace and integrate new Americans into the fabric of our city."

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