

Tribes and the Census

The American Indian and Alaska Native Population Continues Its Steady Upward Growth

The Census Bureau released its latest population estimates for the nation as a whole, all states and all counties late last week. The numbers show that the American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) population is continuing its steady upward growth since the 2010 decennial census.

According to the Bureau estimates, the AI/AN only¹ population stood at 3.2 million, compared to a total of 2.9 million counted in the 2010 Census. The AI/AN multi-racial population grew from 2.3 million in 2010 to an estimated 2.6 million in 2017. The total of both components of the AI/AN population was 5.2 million in 2010 and an estimated 5.8 million in 2017.

The AI/AN only population far outpaced the growth in the total US population of all races. The total national population grew in the seven years after the 2010 Census by just 5.5%, compared to the 9.8% growth in the AI/AN only population.

The AI/AN population was also estimated to have the lowest median age of any of the five major racial groups. Overall, the median age for the AI/AN only population in 2017 was estimated at 31.3 years, just a bit younger than the median age for the Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander population of 31.5 years. These ages were considerably younger than the median age for the total population of all races, 38.0 years.

Although the AI/AN only population is the youngest among the major racial groups, the AI/AN youth count (for ages under 18) barely increased over the 2010 to 2017 period. It registered just one-tenth of one percent higher than the number in 2010. Still, that exceeded the growth of the total population of all races in this age range. The total youth population actually declined by seven-tenths of one percent.

The AI/AN multi-racial population grew by an even larger percentage than the AI/AN only population, according to the Census Bureau estimates. From Census Day 2010 to July 1, 2017 it increased by 11.9%.

¹ The AI/AN only population consists of those persons who identify AI/AN as their only race in response to the race question on a Census form. The Census Bureau calls them the AI/AN "alone" population. Those who identify as AI/AN and also as one or more of the other races are called the AI/AN "in combination" population, referred to in this newsletter as the AI/AN multi-racial population. The combination of the AI/AN "alone" and AI/AN "in combination" populations are termed the AN/AN "alone or in combination" population by the Bureau.

Growth Rates Vary by Geographic Area

The Bureau's Population Estimates Program (PEP is the Census acronym) produces data at the national, state and county levels. It does not publish estimates of changes in the population by race for any type of AI/AN geographic area.

To provide some idea of the possible trends in reservation areas, the analysis done for this newsletter examined the data for 28 counties or county equivalent areas where the AI/AN only population in 2010 was 1,000 or more and that population constituted 50% or more of the total population of all races. Eight of these areas are in Alaska, with the other 20 in the 48 contiguous states.

The growth rates of the AI/AN only population in the two sets of areas -- Alaska and the "Lower 48" -- were very similar. The growth rate for the 8 Alaska Boroughs or Census Areas was 3.3% over the seven year period. The 20 counties in the "Lower 48" states had a growth rate for the AI/AN only population of 3.2%. Both rates are considerably below the equivalent rate of 9.8% for the AI/AN only population nationally.

A number of counties lie at the other end of the spectrum in terms of the size of their AI/AN only populations. This analysis looked at the growth of the AI/AN only population in 20 counties with the largest, predominantly off-reservation populations as counted in 2010. The picture was mixed.

For all of the 20 counties examined, the growth rate in the AI/AN only population was just 8.1% from 2010 to 2017, slightly lagging the national rate of 9.8%. However, the individual county growth rates varied considerably. For 7 of the 20 counties, the growth rates exceeded 10%; for one it was over 20%. The AI/AN only population actually declined by well over 2% in one of the counties. This may indicate a greater dispersion of the AI/AN only population throughout off-reservation areas nationwide.

How the Estimates Are Produced

The Census Bureau uses a complicated set of procedures to produce the annual PEP estimates. Although complex, the basic idea is simple. The estimates start with the population as counted in the last decennial census, in this case the 2010 Census. Then all births are added, all deaths are deducted and the net migration of persons moving in and out of the particular geographic area since the decennial produce the estimate for the future period, in this case July 1, 2017.

The detailed 17-page public description of the methodology the Bureau uses to produce the PEP estimates makes no mention of whether any data unique to the AI/AN population, such as IHS health records, are used in the process.

For the analysis in this newsletter, all of the Census Bureau's Population Estimates Program counts have been adjusted to make the numbers comparable to the numbers in the decennial census and the Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS).

The data used for the Bureau's PEP program come from a master file that has just the five major racial categories established in OMB's Statistical Directive 15: White; Black or African-American; American Indian and Alaska Native; Asian; and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander. However, the decennial census and the ACS have six racial categories. The sixth is called "Some Other Race." It is used primarily by persons identifying as Hispanic who do not consider themselves to be any one of the five major racial groups defined by OMB.

To adjust the numbers in the PEP tables to match the numbers used in the decennial census and the ACS, this analysis adjusted the latest PEP figures using the ratio between the PEP figure for Census Day 2010 and the actual 2010 Census count.

The table on the following page is a summary of the data discussed in this newsletter.

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Census Bureau Population Estimates - 2017

Date	Population All Ages		Youth Population		AI/AN Mixed Race Population	
	Total Population, All Races, Both Sexes	American Indian and Alaska Native Only, Both Sexes, All Ages; Adjusted Counts	Total Population, Both Sexes, Under 18 years	American Indian and Alaska Native Only, Both Sexes, Youth Under 18 Years; Adjusted Counts	American Indian and Alaska Native Multi-Racial, All Ages; Adjusted Counts	American Indian and Alaska Native Only or Multi-Racial, All Ages; Adjusted Counts
4/1/2010	308,745,538	2,932,248	74,181,467	888,372	2,288,331	5,220,579
7/1/2010	309,338,421	2,942,326	74,120,796	887,755	2,297,616	5,239,942
7/1/2011	311,644,280	2,981,333	73,910,207	884,675	2,334,544	5,315,877
7/1/2012	313,993,272	3,022,202	73,700,360	884,287	2,371,807	5,394,010
7/1/2013	316,234,505	3,061,536	73,574,334	884,393	2,408,881	5,470,417
7/1/2014	318,622,525	3,101,558	73,571,046	886,254	2,446,745	5,548,302
7/1/2015	321,039,839	3,141,222	73,628,376	887,790	2,485,233	5,626,454
7/1/2016	323,405,935	3,180,253	73,658,812	888,601	2,523,864	5,704,117
7/1/2017	325,719,178	3,218,289	73,655,378	889,016	2,561,305	5,779,594
	Percent Increase, Total Population, All Races, Both Sexes, All Ages 2010 to 2017	Percent Increase, AI/AN Only Population, Both Sexes, All Ages 2010 to 2017	Percent Decrease, Total Population, All Races, Both Sexes, Ages Under 18 2010 to 2017	Percent Increase, AI/AN Only Population, Youth Ages Under 18 2010 to 2017	Percent Increase, AI/AN Multi-Racial Population, All Ages 2010 to 2017	Percent Increase, AI/AN Only or Multi-Racial, All Ages 2010 to 2017
	5.5%	9.8%	-0.7%	0.1%	11.9%	10.7%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2017 Population Estimates Program, Tables PEPASR6H and PEPASR5H