

STATE DEMOGRAPHIC CENTERS: THEIR CURRENT STATUS

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An element common to the statistical planning needs of many State and local programs is demographic information, that is, statistical data on the size, characteristics, and geographic distribution of the population. Such information serves a variety of governmental purposes below the national level. These include, for example, establishing program targeting needs in human services (health, education, social services, employment training), estimating population-related demand for capital improvements, allocating revenues under the many statutory formulae that include a population size factor, and conducting social and economic research for States and local areas.

Associated with the growing use of State and local demographic information has been the emergence in recent years of identifiable centers, within State government, capable of processing, analyzing, and disseminating population information directly relevant to the needs of specific State and local programs. Because development of such "State demographic centers" has proceeded almost autonomously, that is, largely in the absence of Federal guidance, standards, and resources, little comparative information has heretofore been available on the nature of the centers--on the scope of their activities, on the adequacy of their resources to meet the public's need, and on the way in which their activities articulate with those Federal statistical agencies whose capabilities they assist in extending at the state and local levels.

Recognizing the importance of strengthening the capability of States to make the most effective use of Census information, particularly as we approach the 1980 Census of Population, a survey of states was undertaken under the auspices of the Southern Regional Demographic Group,¹ to collect comparative information on the way in which state governments are presently organized to respond to State and local needs for demographic services.

The Survey

The survey, which covered 16 Southern states and the District of Columbia,² was designed to provide information on the nature of the

administrative environment within which demographic research and services are provided by State government in the South, on the personnel and budgetary aspects of these activities, and on the nature of the actual services rendered. While the survey focussed on the Southern Region of the United States, it is our impression--after reviewing results of the survey with State officials outside the Region and with staff of the U.S. Bureau of the Census--that the general characteristics of the State operations and the issues surrounding them are not unique to the South. Indeed, because of the rapid modernization of government in the South, State demographic activities in this Region may be at the forefront of developments elsewhere in the Nation.

The survey entailed sending questionnaires to each State in the Region and to the District of Columbia, directed to those government officials thought to have the most comprehensive perspective and knowledge of state statistical activities. These were Officers of State Budget, State Planning officials, and technical persons identified by the U.S. Bureau of the Census as State Liaison for coordinating county population estimation activities.³ Completed questionnaires were received from all the areas.

Results of the survey provide a source of comparative multi-state information on the way in which States provide statistical information on population to their constituents; on the way in which State governments extend the data use capabilities of the Census Bureau; and on how State demographic centers constitute an unheralded but important element of the larger national statistical system.

Administrative Setting

In many different agencies of State government there exists an impressive capability to use population statistics, particularly information from the Census of Population, in support program needs. For example, State health departments use population data in the analysis of vital statistics; Employment Security Commissions and State Departments of Labor use demographic information and methods to carry out manpower and labor force analyses; and the use of Census data and projection methods is often important in State economic development activities. More recently, population work has come to be associated with yet another administrative setting within State government, namely Offices of State Planning, which are emerging as the State foci for planning coordination among line departments.⁴ These offices, which often work closely with the Governors' Offices and which provide program analysis support to the State Budget function, are now found in virtually every Southern State.⁵

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The ubiquity of Census data and demographic capabilities in State government has had two important consequences over the years. The first is that many departments prepared their own current population estimates and population projections for the State and its geopolitical subdivisions long before the Census Bureau initiated similar activities at the National level. A second consequence of the dispersion of demographic work among State programs, was confusion among users, both local and State agencies, of a 'best' place to obtain demographic technical assistance and population data. This was complicated particularly with respect to identifying an 'official' set of population estimates and population projections which could be regarded as methodologically reliable and officially sanctioned for, say, planning or State revenue distribution purposes.

From a situation in which many State agencies have played a role in demographic work, there developed in many States the recognition of a need for a 'lead agency' that could carry the burden of providing official, authoritative figures to the public; that could consolidate costly data resources; that could coordinate liaison with local and Federal officials with respect to Census data; and that could respond to or coordinate responses to population queries directed at State government. This movement toward 'lead agency' designation was given impetus during the 1960's by two developments: the emerging planning coordination role of Offices of State Planning and the initiation of the Census Bureau's program, in 1967, to cooperate with States in the production of county population estimates.⁶ A key feature of the Census Bureau's program was a requirement that the Governor designate a State official who would serve as State Liaison to the U.S. Bureau of the Census for population estimates. In his role, the State Liaison would provide the Census Bureau with State-based data for the Census production of his State's figures; and he would review the Census Bureau's results for his State. Gubernatorial designation of the State Liaison was tantamount to identifying the State lead agency for demographic activities from among the many engaged in demographic work. These lead agencies hereinafter are referred to as "State demographic centers," although we recognize that important demographic work, in support of State programs, is carried out in many other State agencies; and State-related population research is often carried out by State universities as well.

The distribution of agencies with lead responsibility for State demographic work is shown in Table 1. In the South, the majority of such centers are situated in State agencies, the balance in State universities. Among those located in agencies of State government, the predominant administrative setting is in Offices of State Planning. Seven of the ten State agency centers are in these offices; and the survey indicates that there is increasing movement of the demographic function toward this central location in State government. In

response to a question on where these functions were previously located in State government, two States reporting such an interagency transfer specified a movement from the State Department of Health to the Office of State Planning.

In States where the Governor had designated the State University to act as Liaison to the Census Bureau for county population estimation, centers tended to be concentrated in the University bureaus of business and economic research. These bureaus have long served a function of providing extramural technical assistance in business, economics, and statistics to the State and local business community.⁷

Outside the Southern Region, Table 1 shows that State demographic centers are more often situated in State government agencies than in State universities; and among State agencies, State Health Departments and State Planning Offices play the role of lead demographic agency with equal frequency.

Functions

All the State demographic centers, by Gubernatorial designation, serve as State Liaison to the U.S. Bureau of the Census program for county population estimation. In that role, the State Centers accumulate necessary data for the Census estimation program; and they also review the final estimates prepared by the Bureau prior to official release. State centers' demographic activities usually go considerably beyond that. Many centers prepare sets of State population projections for counties and for smaller areas since these are not available from the U.S. Census of the Bureau. In all the Southern states, centers maintain files of published census information and have access to tapes of unpublished Census information. Two of the centers, in addition, are official Census Tape Processing Centers.

All centers report providing both statistical information and analytical technical assistance to other public agencies, and, within resource constraints, to private requestors. The volume of technical assistance services was not recorded on a uniform basis among the States; however, some respondents did provide some such information. One area, predominantly urban in character, reported responding to about 2,000 requests for demographic information each year; a similar figure was provided by a center in a predominantly rural State.

Personnel

In the South, the average personnel complement of the State demographic centers was between three and four persons including a programmer and at least one junior level person who served as a statistical clerk. The size of the units ranged, however, from as small as a single professional staff member to centers with as many as six staff members.

Questions about the length of professional service were asked in the survey. For seven of the 16 responding areas, results showed that the

senior professional had been working in the center for less than five years; in one-fourth for less than one year. Such a record of short average tenure suggests that the centers experience considerable staff turnover; and indeed this has been identified independently by Census bureau staff as a considerable impediment to the success of the local population estimation program in which the States participate cooperatively with the Bureau. Census staff noted that their contacts with State demographers in the cooperative population estimation program had changed by 25-percent in a recent six months period.

Budgets

Average annual outlays in FY1975 for State-sponsored demographic activities were about \$54,000 per center (Table 2). However, budgets varied considerably among States, from less than \$30,000 per year to almost \$100,000. Only three states supplemented State revenues with Federal grants to support central demographic activities. These Federal matching supplements, known as HUD-701 grants are available for general 'state planning' purposes;⁸ they do not constitute a stable fiscal base with which to support sustained statistical programs at the State level.

Table 2 also indicates that State budgets expended for demographic activities are allocated mainly to build the State agency staff function, rather than to purchasing consulting services. Of the 17 reporting areas, only three used consultants. Average expenditures for consulting were small in comparison with total program outlays, about \$12,000 annually.

To determine if there were any systematic variation in State demographic outlays, we related total expenditures to two variables, population size and per capita income for the States. Population size was viewed as a proxy for demand for State services, while income was seen as a measure of potential State resources. The analysis indicated that size of State is unrelated to expenditures for demographic services, but that there is a reasonably strong and statistically significant relation between outlays and State per capita income. Large income differences among Southern States, ranging from \$2,600 to \$5,300 in 1970, were associated with the variation in outlays for State demographic centers shown in Table 2.

Budget constraints constitute one of the most pressing and oft-cited problems of State demographic centers, even as they are for other Federal-State statistical activities.⁹ In attempting to identify issues and problems that impede the effective provision of State demographic services, we asked open-ended questions about possible resource constraints. Seven areas provided comments focussing on budget problems; they are reproduced in full below:

- Budget is inadequate to provide more than minimal service.
- Budget limitations have prevented expansion of research into related areas,

curtailed survey and field work, and exacerbated retention of staff.

- The State has decided that it needs demographic expertise at constant funding.
- The few demographic services [available in the State] are provided at the initiative of individual State agencies and must be incorporated into their separate operating budgets.
- The best that can be said [for this State's demographic budget] is that with a relatively good memory and graduate assistants who are replaced every other year, and with inadequate facilities to meet our needs, I have been able to hold things together. I hope we have been of some use to those who are working with State problems with needs for demographic inputs. [No budget data available for this university-based Center.]
- Small budget!
- We get numerous requests for demographic services from Federal, State, and local agencies, none of which are accompanied by offers of financial assistance. All of the funding for the Demographic Unit comes from State funds and, as such, priorities usually are arranged accordingly. It would be helpful to get some Federal funding, especially when massive Federal requests are made.

We believe that the addition of age, race, and sex to the current estimates program would be an asset to all users of demographic data. However, at this time, we do not have sufficient funds to expand into this area.

Reports and Publications

All the reporting areas provided information on publication activities during the 1970-75 period, as summarized in Table 3.¹⁰ A total of over 100 reports were issued, according to the survey results. Of these, less than half were publications of population estimates and population projections. Most were methodological and analytical studies, focussing on such subjects as migration, the analysis of demographic change, and general reports on the socio-economic characteristics of the population of the State and smaller areas.

Coordination of State Demographic Activities

That many State agencies have developed demographic expertise in support of their own programs has given rise to a considerable diffusion of these statistical resources, and has sometimes led to problems of statistical coordination. Dispersal of these capabilities, moreover, has often been at the expense of developing a strong, fiscally viable, professionally-staffed function that could serve many agencies and the public more generally as well. While emergence of the State planning function and Gubernatorial designation of a State liaison to the Census Bureau for population estimation have promoted

consolidation of the State function, the survey results suggest that many States still bear the imprint of dispersed agency involvement in population statistics.

This expresses itself in two ways: one is that respondents in one-fourth of the areas did not know that there had been a Gubernatorially-designated liaison with Census Bureau staff for population estimation. Another related manifestation is continuing redundancy in the production of population estimates and population projections for substate areas such as municipalities. In one reporting State, three agencies currently prepare alternative population projections for counties. In another State, similar services are provided by the State Planning Office, the State Health Department, and the State university. In a third State, population estimates are prepared by one branch of the State university; projections by another.

The survey showed that the problems of coordination and redundancy of estimates were viewed as serious by State officials. An in-depth study by Rosenberg in North Carolina identified this as a major concern of State data users as well. One user noted,¹¹

We are in need of population bases which meet the highest standards of reliability. We are presently considering the use of the postcensal estimates prepared by one agency, but to date have no evidence that they are any better than other estimates of like specificity prepared by two other agencies.

Evans, commenting on his experience in South Carolina, writes,¹²

We discovered in our work with State agencies that there were eight persons in seven different agencies making county population estimates and projections. In most cases there was a lack of methodology, or the person performing the work did not have sufficient qualifications to know whether the methodology was good or bad.

Fragmentation of State demographic services, and statistical services more generally, should be understood as partly reflecting the disjoint, episodic way in which Federal statistical activities are initiated in support of larger programs.¹³ It also reflects an absence of statistical coordination at the Federal level due to a paucity of resources provided to the Statistical Policy Division of the Office of Management and Budget for this purpose.¹⁴ Accomplishments in statistical coordination and consolidation of demographic services at the State level must be viewed as a tribute to State initiatives rather than as emulation of a Federal model.¹⁵

Cooperative Programs and Resources

State demographic centers, as an element of

the national statistical system, can be viewed within the broad perspective of Federal-State statistical activities, in which partnerships have been forged between the Federal government and States for the collection, processing, and use of statistics in a number of areas. Such joint Federal-State statistical partnerships have evolved over the past 50 years, beginning in agriculture and labor statistics and now covering many subject areas. Cavanaugh, in a recent review, identified "cooperative statistical programs" in areas that include vital statistics, crime statistics, law enforcement, manpower and employment projection, income occupation, and labor force.¹⁶ Duncan and Wallman have described cooperative programs in additional areas.¹⁷

The cooperative statistical programs strive to engage active State participation to upgrade statistical quality, improve statistical comparability among areas, and enhance usefulness of data to the local areas. Federal involvement assures uniform standards, provision of technical assistance and training, and financial assistance to reduce inequities in statistical program resources at the State and local levels. Wallman's recent analysis of cooperative programs stresses that these activities are highly variegated with respect to administrative arrangements, geographic coverage, program scope, resource and personnel configurations, and the respective roles of the Federal government and participating States.¹⁸

So central to the success of these joint statistical endeavors, are Federal resources that Wallman proposes, as a guideline, matching funds for all cooperative statistical activities between States and the Federal government.¹⁹ The provision of Federal financial assistance to States participating in cooperative statistical activities recognizes the important Federal role for reducing geographic inequities in public program resources and for reimbursing States for those costs incurred in statistical reporting and analysis activities required by the Federal government. Many state demographic activities are in compliance with Federal requirements.²⁰

Compared with other cooperative activities, Wallman has noted that Federal investments in State demographic activities have been very limited.²¹ While budgets of cooperative programs are not comparable due to the varying nature of State statistical responsibilities, the level of Federal commitment to these activities is an instructive benchmark. Thus the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Statistical Reporting Service budget, expended for 400 field-based employees, is about \$17 million annually.²² The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics allocates some \$3 million annually to support regional and State operations.²³ The Cooperative Health Statistics System spent nearly \$7 million in FY1975 to support research and development activities that will eventually lead to an operational national health statistics system.²⁴ Finally, in the area of Law Enforcement, some \$21 million has been made available to States in the form of grants for statistical activities.²⁵ Currently, no Federal resources are allocated to States to strengthen their Census data use capabilities, or to participate in the Census Bureau's cooperative

program for population estimation.

Federal and State Roles In Cooperative Demographic Activities

Both Federal and State action can contribute to improving the quality of U.S. demographic services at all levels of government. State initiatives are important particularly in the areas of coordination and consolidation of services. These can reduce redundant acquisition of costly data and duplication of population estimates and population projections. Consolidation of activities might also make available additional resources to strengthen a central capability.

The survey suggests that that is a need for increased Federal commitment to cooperative demographic activities. Areas in which joint activities might be initiated or bolstered include, for example: fostering information exchange on State programs; implementing a broad training program for State personnel on the use of Census data and related statistical information available from Federal agencies; developing methodological guidelines for local population estimation and population projection; and formulating guidelines for quality control. In each of these areas, there are opportunities for joint Federal-State participation.

The survey leaves no doubt that the greatest single requirement for strengthening cooperative demographic activities is provision of matching Federal dollars to supplement existing State investments for this purpose. The provision of resources can serve not only to improve and extend capabilities; it can also serve the important symbolic purpose of recognizing a State role in the national statistical system for Census data use.

Footnotes

1. The Southern Regional Demographic Group is devoted to promoting research and teaching in demography, and to improving the use and quality of demographic information and services. The Association is sponsored by the Oak Ridge Associated Universities, a consortium of 43 colleges and universities in the South.

Papers related to State demographic activities were presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Regional Demographic Group, Atlanta, Georgia, October 1976:

- Frederick J. Cavanaugh, "The Perspective of the Federal Government on the Role of State Government in Demographic Activities: A Joint Governmental Effort."
- Thomas P. Evans, "The Perspective of State Government on Demographic Activity."
- Forrest H. Pollard, "Issues in Relating to State and Federal Agencies."
- Harry M. Rosenberg, "State Demographic Activities--A View from the South."

- William J. Serow, "State and Local Population Estimates: Issues on Relating to Local Government."

2. Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

3. State liaison are listed in U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, "Federal-State Cooperative Program for Local Population Estimates--Status Report: January 1975", Series P-26, No. 118, July 1975.

4. Leonard U. Wilson and L.V. Watkins, "How the States Plan," Challenge 18(6), January-February 1976, pp. 43-51.

5. Council of State Planning Agencies, Council of State Governments, 1970. James A. Catanese, "Testing of An Emerging Model of State Planning: A Report Card," Atlanta, Georgia: Georgia Institute of Technology, May 1972.

6. U.S. Bureau of the Census, op. cit., July 1975, p. 1.

7. E.g., Pollard, op. cit., pp. 1-2.

8. HUD-701 refers to state and local planning grants from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development authorized under provisions of Section 701 of the Housing Act of 1954, as amended.

9. Joseph W. Duncan and Katherine K. Wallman, "Regional Statistics and Federal-State Cooperation," keynote address presented at the annual meeting of the Association for University Business and Economic Research, Williamsburg, Virginia, October 20, 1975, p. 11.

10. The list of publications is available, on request, from Harry M. Rosenberg.

11. Harry M. Rosenberg, "North Carolina Demographic Data Needs and Capabilities in Proceedings of the North Carolina Demographic Data Workshop, Chapel Hill: Carolina Population Center, University of North Carolina, 1975, p. 34.

12. Communication with author.

13. Harry M. Rosenberg, "Demographic Data and the Public Planning Mandate," in Proceedings of the North Carolina Demographic Data Workshop, Chapel Hill: Carolina Population Center, University of North Carolina, 1975, p. 11.

Joseph W. Duncan, "Developing Plans and Setting Priorities in Statistical Systems," Statistical Reporter, No. 76-14, August 1976, p. 281.

14. Summary of "Report of the Joint Ad Hoc Committee on Government Statistics," in

Newsletter of the Federal Statistics Users'
Conference, 17(8), August 25, 1976, p. 3.

15. Harry M. Rosenberg, "State Initiatives in Improving Demographic Data," Public Data Use, 3(2), April 1975, pp. 16-21.

16. Cavanaugh, op. cit.

17. Duncan and Wallman, op. cit.

18. Katherine K. Wallman, " 'Getting It All Together': The Development of Appropriate Relationships Between Federal and State Governments for Statistical Programs," paper presented at the Annual Meeting, American

Statistical Association, Boston, August 1976, p. 13.

19. Ibid., p. 19.

20. Ibid., p. 13.

21. Wallman, op. cit., p. 16.

22. Duncan and Wallman, op. cit., p. 5.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid., p. 8.

25. Ibid., p. 6.

TABLE 1. STATE AGENCY WITH PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY
FOR CURRENT POPULATION ESTIMATES
UNITED STATES, 1975

Agency	South ^{a/}		Rest of Nation ^{b/}	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	18 ^{c/}	100.0	34	100.0
University	8	44.4	6	17.7
Center or Institute	2	11.1	0	0.0
Business & Economic Research	4	22.1	4	11.8
Sociology Department	1	5.6	2	5.9
Extension Service	1	5.6	0	0.0
State Government	10	55.6	28	82.3
State Planning	7	38.8	9	26.5
Economic Development	0	0.0	4	11.7
Employment Security	1	5.6	2	5.9
Health	1	5.6	9	26.5
Finance/Budget Control	1	5.6	3	8.8
Labor	0	0.0	1	2.9

^{a/} Includes District of Columbia

^{b/} Excludes Puerto Rico

^{c/} In one of the 17 reporting areas, there are two officially-recognized centers, one in a state agency (State Planning), the other in the state university (Center for Business and Economic Research).

TABLE 2. DISTRIBUTION OF SOUTHERN STATES
BY SIZE OF BUDGET FOR STATE-SPONSORED
DEMOGRAPHIC ACTIVITIES
BY PRESENCE OF FEDERAL SUPPORT
AND BY USE OF CONSULTANTS, 1975

FY 1975 Budget	Number of States	Type and Amount of Federal Support ^{a/}	Use of Consultants
\$ 15,000 - 29,999	4		
30,000 - 49,999	2	One state, HUD 701	One state
50,000 - 69,999	3	One state, HUD 701	
70,000 - 89,999	2		Two states
90,000 - 100,000	3	One state, HUD 701	
Average	\$ 53,900	\$ 28,300 ^{b/}	\$ 12,000 ^{b/}

^{a/} HUD 701 refers to planning grants from the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development under the provisions of Section 701 of the Housing Act of 1954, as amended.

^{b/} Average for these areas.

TABLE 3. STATE-SPONSORED DEMOGRAPHIC PUBLICATIONS
BY TYPE, FOR THE SOUTHERN STATES
1970-1975

Type of Publications	Number	Percent
Population estimates	22	19.3
Population projections	23	20.2
Socio-economic analyses	9	7.9
Migration	12	10.5
Methodology	8	7.0
Demographic analysis	36	31.6
Housing analysis	4	3.5
TOTAL	114	100.0
Average per area	6.7	--

Note: Includes 16 Southern states and the District of Columbia. See text for explanation of number of reporting areas.