Census results will result in loss of money and influence for Midwest

By Tim Anderson [1]
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In a decade when the U.S. population grew at the smallest rate since the 1930s and the Great Depression, every Midwestern state failed to keep pace with the nation’s 10-year growth rate of 9.7 percent.

One consequence of the 2010 Census [3] for the 11-state Midwest will be the loss of five congressional seats — and five votes in the U.S. Electoral College. The new census data, which were released late last year, will also be used to determine state-by-state allocations of federal funding.

Over the last 60 years, the region has lost 29 U.S. House seats as the result of reapportionment. This time around, Ohio will lose two seats, and Illinois, Iowa and Michigan will lose one each.

Several factors at play

Michigan was the only U.S. state that lost population over the past decade — a period in which that state also experienced the slowest GDP growth in the nation, an average of 1.0 percent a year between 2000 and 2009. Yearly U.S. growth over that same time period was 4.1 percent. All states in the eastern part of the Midwest fell below this national average. (Ohio’s annual GDP growth of 2.4 percent was second-lowest in the nation during this 10-year period.)

Economic conditions are among the factors often used by demographers to explain state-by-state population trends. In turn, economists often look at changes in population to gauge the health of a state’s economy.

For example, as economist William Testa of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago noted last year, net domestic migration (which measures movement from one state to another) helps gauge whether a state is an attractive destination for individuals and families.

“Many U.S. households move very far to find a better quality of life,” Testa wrote. “They seek not only more sunshine and recreational amenities, but also higher income and wages, more employment opportunities and better housing affordability.”

With the lone exception of South Dakota, every Midwestern state experienced a net loss in population as the result of domestic migration between 2000 and 2009, U.S. Census Bureau estimates show. Michigan, Illinois and Ohio (in that order) had the region’s highest rates of domestic out-migration;
Wisconsin, Indiana and Minnesota had the lowest rates.

Another demographic trend driving this year’s census results was growth in the nation’s Hispanic population.

“The diversifying of the population is more extensive in areas of fast population growth,” Audrey Singer, a senior fellow at The Brookings Institution’s Metropolitan Policy Program, wrote in a December article on the latest census results.

“Many of the states that have gained in their head count have gained non-white minorities, especially Hispanics.”

Though the Hispanic population has risen considerably throughout the Midwest, its growth in states such as Texas, Florida, Arizona and Georgia has been greater.

One recent trend that the 2010 Census doesn’t fully capture is the migration slowdown that occurred during the latter part of the decade.

The crash of the housing market and overall economic problems have put the country at a demographic standstill, says demographer William Frey of Brooking’s Metropolitan Policy Program, and the fastest-growing areas of the country — parts of the South, Southwest and West — have been most affected.

In a 2010 interview with CSG Midwest, Minnesota state demographer Tom Gillaspy pointed to housing and economic conditions as two of many factors that could cause a shift in U.S. population trends in this decade and beyond.

Other factors, he said, include the age at which people retire (warmer climates tend to be destinations for retirees) and whether some of the water problems in the South and West intensify.