

RECENT POPULATION TRENDS IN ILLINOIS

CARL SWISHER

Northwestern University, Evanston

Illinois grew from 7,897,241 inhabitants in 1940 to 8,684,531 inhabitants in 1950.¹ This increase of 10 percent is 4.5 percent below the national rate of increase during the same interval, but the absolute gain of this state exceeded that of many of the states having more startling rates of gain. Since early in the second quarter of this century, there has been a gradual population movement toward the urban centers of the northern part of the state. As a result, almost 80 percent of the people now live in incorporated urban settlements of 1,000 or more.

An analysis of these recent trends in population changes indicates that they are closely related to the conditions within economic regions. For the purpose of this paper the economic regions recently established by the Bureau of Census have been used as a basis for the mapping of population trends. The patterns thus introduced reflect a number of conditions closely associated with the change of population in Illinois during the past decade. Three categories of change are outstanding: (1) those regions whose rate of increase has exceeded that of the state; (2) those regions that have increased more slowly than the state; and (3) those regions that have decreased in population.

ECONOMIC REGIONS INCREASING AT A RATE GREATER THAN THAT OF THE STATE

The economic regions that show a rate of population increase greater than that of the state as a whole are the four that contain metropolitan centers of 50,000 or more. Two of these regions are in the northern part of the state and two are in the central part of the state.

The two northernmost regions, encompassing the Rock River Valley and the Chicago metropolitan districts, have had a large absolute increase in urban population; however, in each region the percentage of increase in rural population exceeds that of the urban areas within the region or that of the region as a whole. This is a reflection of the increasing movement toward the rural-urban fringe of the large cities. Economic circumstances attract people toward the large metropolitan areas, but the city with its associated ills discourages residence within the city itself.

Although urban gains slightly exceed rural gains in the East St. Louis area, there is also evidence of a rural-urban fringe movement in this economic region. It is probable that the influence of St. Louis, Missouri, is felt strongly on the Illinois side of the river.

Conditions are different in the two regions in central Illinois that in-

¹ U. S. Bureau of Census, Preliminary Population Report: 1950. Washington: Gov. Printing Office, 1950.

creased in population at a rate greater than that of the state. Here also are recorded high urban gains, but rural gains are absent or less prevalent than in northern Illinois. Rural population is more nearly in balance with urban population in the central part of the state than it is in the northern part; hence, any trend toward a rural or suburban movement from the cities is masked by the flood of people leaving the farms. This trend is best illustrated by the economic region containing Peoria, Springfield, and other smaller cities. This region had the greatest urban gains as well as the greatest rural losses during the past decade.

ECONOMIC REGIONS INCREASING AT A RATE LESS THAN THAT OF THE STATE

Three economic regions increased in population at a rate less than that of the state. They are in the central and north-central part of the state, fairly close to large metropolitan areas. Because the rural population of these regions has changed little since 1940, the gains may be attributed primarily to urban growth. The rate of gain has not been large because the moderate-sized cities in these regions are not capable of absorbing large numbers of people as are the cities in the regions of greatest gain.

ECONOMIC REGIONS OF DECREASING POPULATION

The four economic regions in southern and southeastern Illinois have had the greatest losses in population. The loss has been both rural and urban except along the Wabash River Valley, where activities as-

sociated with the petroleum industry and war production caused at least a temporary increase in urban population. One region, the southernmost in the state, lost more than one-tenth of its population, a loss largely attributed to the desertion of the unproductive farms of the "Illinois Ozarks." The same can be said of other regions that never received the total benefits of glaciation that are found in the central and northern parts of Illinois.

The fifth economic region recording a loss is surrounded by regions that gained in population. It has trends comparable to those of neighboring regions. That is, an urban increase of 44 percent was coupled with a rural loss of 20 percent. This urban growth of nearly 50 percent may indicate that the region would have increased in population had more or larger urban centers been present to absorb the great numbers of people who left the rural areas.

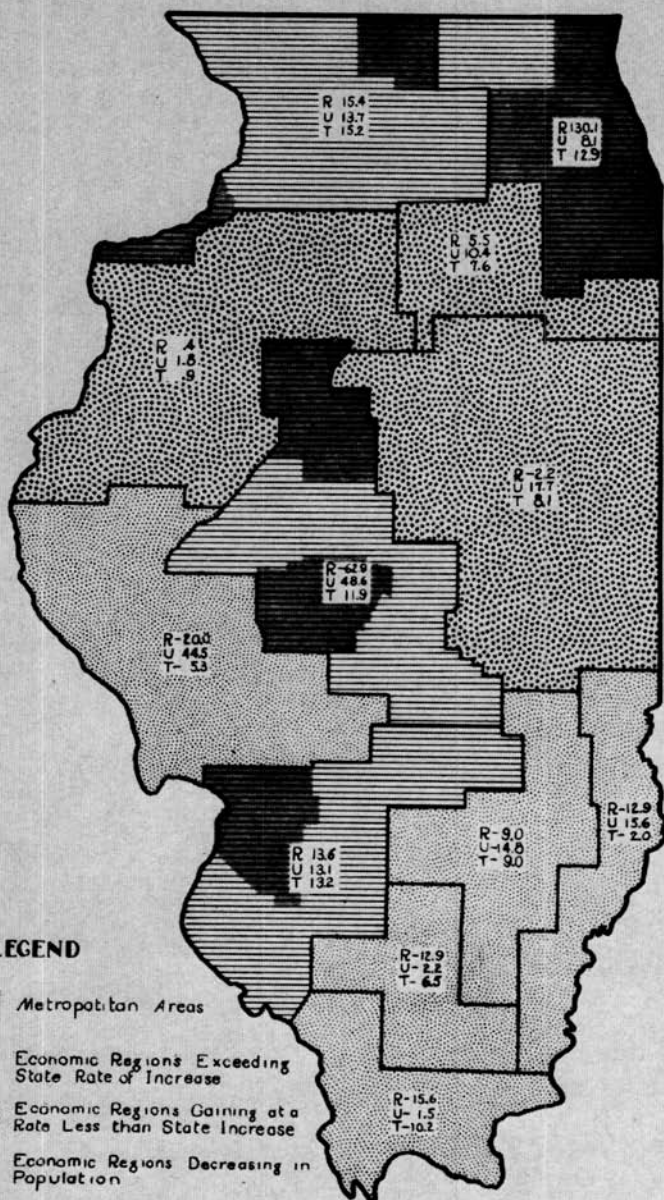
EXPLANATION OF TRENDS

Attractive forces. — The population trends presented indicate that there must be a strong attractive force present in the cities. An examination of the Census of Manufacturing for 1947 shows that the regions attracting population also offer the highest wages and salaries to employees in manufacturing. A list of regions according to gains or losses in population is not identical with one showing average wage and salary payments, but that tendency is undeniably present.





Industrial development causes a snowballing effect in population growth.² For example, industry was

² Renner, George. "Geography of Industrial Location," *Economic Geography*, XXIII (1947), p. 181.

RECENT POPULATION TRENDS IN ILLINOIS



LEGEND

-  Metropolitan Areas
-  Economic Regions Exceeding State Rate of Increase
-  Economic Regions Gaining at Rate Less than State Increase
-  Economic Regions Decreasing in Population

R Rural Change in per cent
 U Urban Change
 T Total Change
 - Denotes a Decrease

SCALE 0 15 30

first attracted to the Rock River Valley in northwestern Illinois by the abundant productive labor supply.³ The presence of industry attracted other workers, markets expanded, industry increased, and the cycle continued until the region became the leading region in population growth the past decade. Some of the same conditions exist in the East St. Louis region, but there the emphasis is more on cheap unskilled labor than on skilled labor as it is in the Rock River Valley.⁴

During World War II high wages offered by ordnance plants and by industry based upon a war economy emphasized the movement toward metropolitan areas. Many of the people remained in the cities after the war, and thus were influential in city growth during the past decade.

Although no study has been made of the migration of returning veterans from their former homes, it appears likely that many moved to the metropolitan regions to find work after they returned.

Unattractive forces. — There are two major kinds of unattractive forces evident in the recent population trends. The first is the limited employment market of rural areas, and the second is the previously mentioned unsuitability of the large city's living conditions.

The limited labor market on today's farm is a result of ever-increasing mechanization as well as the poorer farmers' inability to pay wages high enough to compete with

those of industry. Regions of low average farm value, such as the one in the very southern part of the state, have had the greatest relative losses of population. Thus, it seems that the farm worker responds to the beckoning high wages in the city.

On the other hand, it appears that many people become overburdened by the high taxes, the noise, grime, and traffic of the metropolis. They want to be outside the city, where the business of living is less exacting.⁵ Many commute for miles every day so that they may spend their nights and week-ends in the country. That is the explanation for the tremendous rural increase near Chicago.

ECONOMIC REGIONS AS A BASIS OF STUDY

Since one city may influence an area much larger than the political subdivision that city is in, a regional approach is desirable if one is to see the overall relationship of one force to another. The economic regions outlined by the Bureau of Census provide such a basis of study. In Illinois, at least, population patterns fit into the regional setting quite well. The ties between the economies of the several regions designated and population movement are strong enough to give such a basis value.

Under some conditions it is conceivable that the economic region would not serve as a good basis of study. For example, if one were studying minute details of population migration, he would wish to use another areal unit. Then, too, region-

³ Alexander, John W., *Geography of Manufacturing in the Rock River Valley* (University of Wisconsin: 1949), p. 153.

⁴ Alderfer, E. B. and Michl, H. E., *Economics of American Industry* (McGraw-Hill Publishing Co., Inc.: 1942) p. 13.

⁵ Colby, Charles C., "Centrifugal and Centripetal Forces in Urban Geography," *Annals Association of American Geographers* (Jan. 1933), p. 4.

al influences are subject to change, so a sequential study would have to deal with changing regional boundaries. The economic regional approach would have little value in a state where one line of endeavor dominated the entire area of that state.

In spite of several obvious disadvantages, it appears that the use of economic regions could provide the social scientist with a new and useful framework for research.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ALDERFER, E. B., and MICHL, H. E., *Economics of American Industry*. McGraw-Hill Publishing Co., Inc.; 1942.
- ALEXANDER, JOHN W., *Geography of Manufacturing in the Rock River Valley*. University of Wisconsin; 1949.
- COLBY, CHARLES C., "Centrifugal and Centripetal Forces in Urban Geography," *Annals Association of American Geographers*, Jan. 1933.
- RENNER, GEORGE, "Geography of Industrial Location," *Economic Geography*, XXIII 1947.
- U. S. Bureau of Census. *Census of Agriculture: 1945*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1947.
- U. S. Bureau of Census. *Census of Manufacturing: 1947*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1949.
- U. S. Bureau of Census. *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940. Population, Vol. I*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1942.
- U. S. Bureau of Census. *Preliminary Population Report: 1950*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1950.