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Simon Review Paper #66

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**THE SIMON REVIEW
PAPER #66**

**WHERE IS ILLINOIS NOW
AND WHERE IS IT GOING?**

ROB PARAL

PRINCIPAL OF ROB PARAL & ASSOCIATES

SEPTEMBER, 2023



**SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
PAUL SIMON
PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTE**

Where is Illinois Now and Where is it Going?

Granted statehood in 1818, Illinois is slightly over two centuries old. During that time, in approximately fifty-year segments, our state has embodied trends that defined our nation. The early 1880s brought westward expansion by European migrants and the taking of natives' land. The second half of that century saw a population explosion and rapid urbanization. In the first part of the twentieth century, Illinois industrialization was essential to helping our nation win two world wars and establishing the United States as the pre-eminent world power.

Most recently, a new half-century period can be identified. One of profound social and economic change for the state. No longer was Illinois on an endless growth trajectory. Residents shifted their preference to live in one part of the state or another, leaving rural areas for urban and suburban places, including those not in Illinois. The typical Illinoisan looks different: new communities of African Americans, Asians, and Latinos have appeared. Politically, there is a growing divide among the state's internal regions.

These are all profound shifts, and each deserves exploration to understand where our state is going. In this essay, I try to sketch out some of the broad transformations that we are experiencing in our state. On the one hand, I provide a snapshot of where we are today and how we compare to some of our neighbors, but I spend more time on how we have become a different state over the last half-century and how much of our evolution may not be positive for the state as a whole.

Illinois Today

To begin, how do we look? What are the big-picture demographic, social, and economic metrics that define us?

Illinois, as of the 2020 census, is home to 12.8 million residents. We are a big state, the sixth largest in the U.S., home to both some of the most urbanized and dense neighborhoods in North America but also to rural Pope County, that has about 12 persons per square mile.

In the northeast lies metropolitan Chicago, the demographic behemoth, the third largest metro area in the United States, with 9.5 million persons spread across nine Illinois counties and parts of two other states. The region includes extremes of density (more than one Chicago community area has nearly 100,000 people while Alden Township in McHenry County is home to 1,300) and prosperity (just miles apart, Lake Forest city has a median household income of \$189,000 and North Chicago city is at \$47,000.)

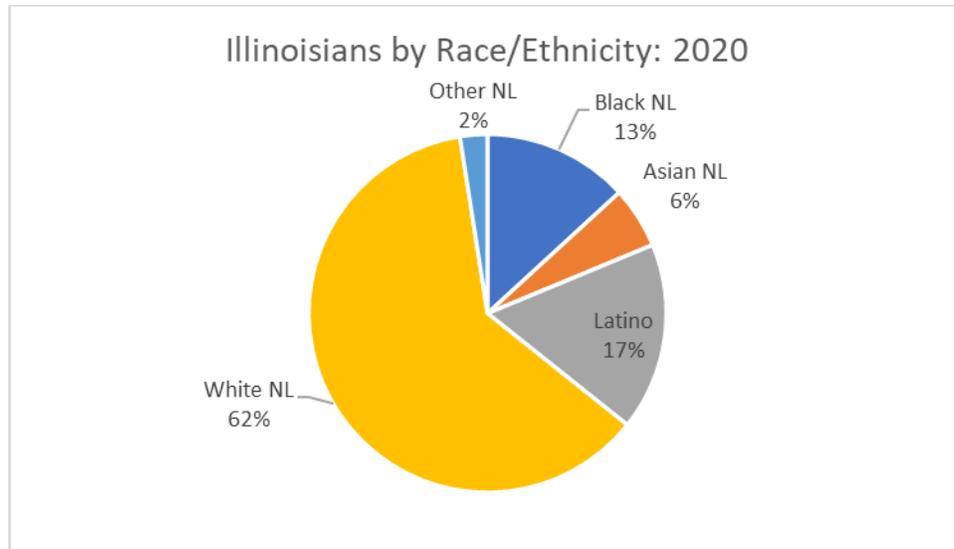
Illinois is also home to many smaller and important metropolitan areas like metro Peoria (403,000 persons), metro Rockford (337,000), and the Illinois portion of metro St. Louis (683,000), to name a few. These metro areas are often defined by particular industrial histories: machine tooling in Rockford, agricultural products in Decatur, government in Springfield, and financially related services in Bloomington.

Chicago, the storied city, has 2.7 million residents and is the third largest city in the U.S. Its neighborhoods span extremes of economic wealth and poverty and racial segregation and integration.

Illinois is home to great racial and ethnic diversity. A majority of Illinoisans, 62 percent, identify themselves as White, non-Latino.¹ Latinos at 17 percent are the second largest major group, followed by African Americans or Blacks at 13 percent and Asians at six percent.²

¹ Latinos may be of any race. Thus, I use “non-Latino” to describe persons who are not Latino but are White, Black, or Asian.

² Following conventions of the federal government, I use “Black” and “African American” interchangeably.



Behind the broad racial/ethnic categories lies even more diversity. The Illinois Asian population is about 29 percent Indian, 20 percent Filipino, 17 percent Chinese, and 13 percent Korean. Most Latinos are of Mexican origin, about 78 percent, but 9 percent are Puerto Rican, and 4 percent are Central American.

Illinois is among a handful of “gateway states” that receive a disproportionate share of new immigrants to the United States. As of the 2016-2020 period, there were 1.8 million immigrants living here. The foreign-born population is extremely diverse, with the three largest groups – Mexico, India, and Poland – representing three different continents. The top ten countries represent about two-thirds of all immigrants, with the remaining third including persons from throughout Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America.

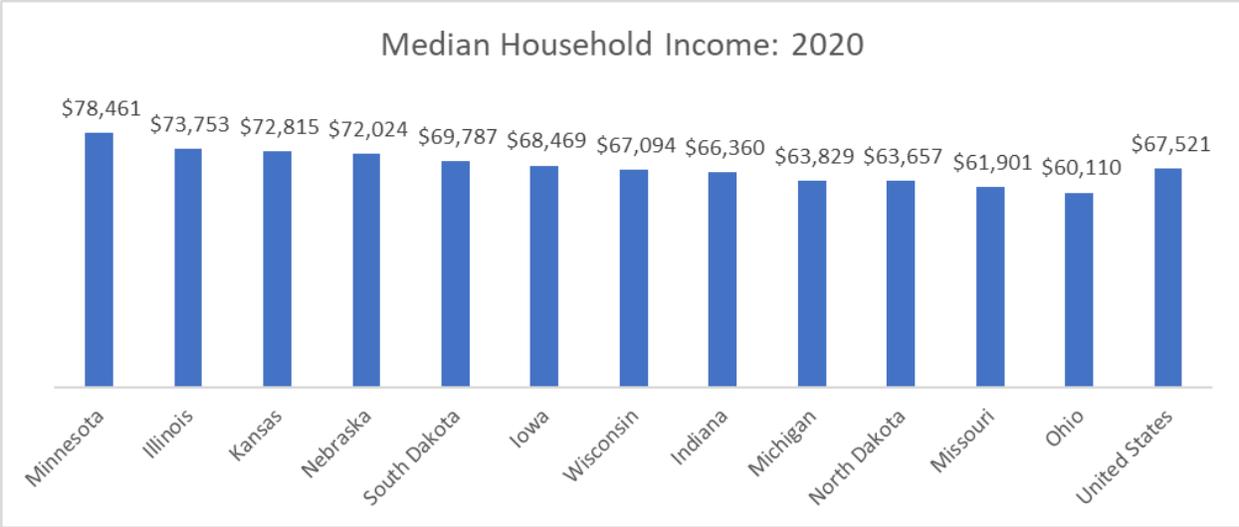
Table 1: Immigrants in Illinois: 2016-2020

Total	1,779,063
Mexico	628,401
India	158,225
Poland	127,303
Philippines	89,324
China	75,286
Korea	38,739
Pakistan	30,785
Ukraine	25,432
Vietnam	24,253
Guatemala	23,216
Other	558,099

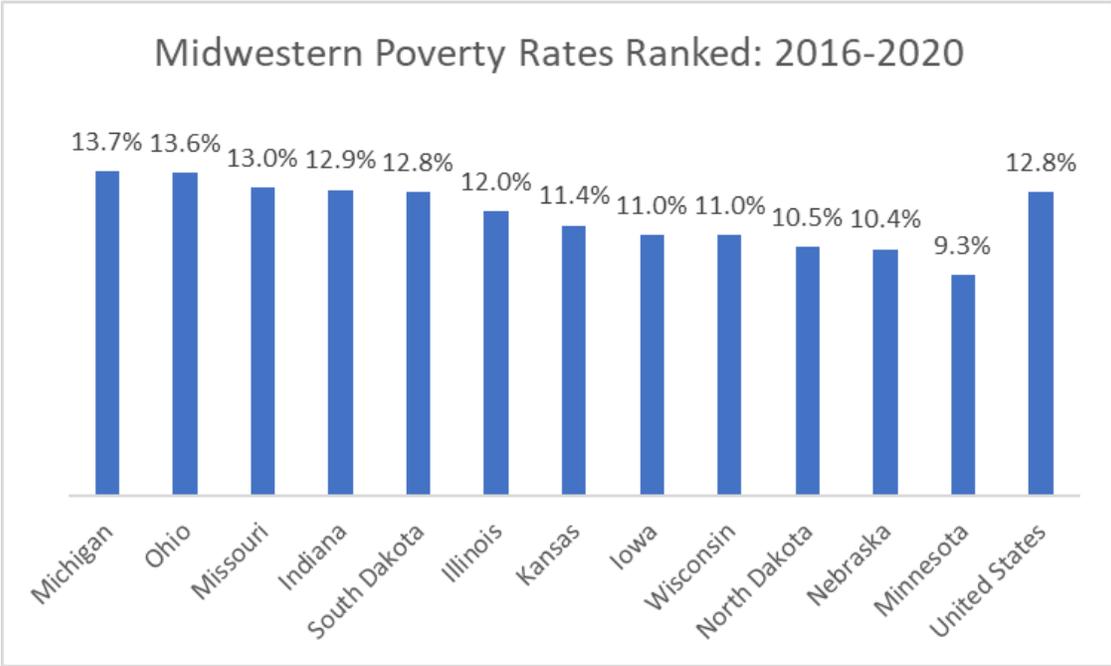
Source: American Community Survey

Many Illinois residents are a fourth, fifth, or older generation in the United States yet continue to specify their ancestry when asked. Some 1.5 million Illinoisans report German ancestry, 844,000 Irish, 610,000 Polish, 520,000 Italian, and 141,000 Swedish.

We are among the wealthier states. Our median household income was almost \$77,000 in 2020, placing us 17th among the 51 states and the District of Columbia and well ahead of the national median. Only Minnesota has a higher income than Illinois among our midwestern neighbors.



Illinois ranks in the middle of the midwestern states in terms of poverty rate, at 12.0 percent, and is below the national rate of 12.8 percent. (In 2022, a family of four was below the poverty level if it had an income of less than \$27,750.)



From these high-level indicators, one can say that Illinois continues its historical tendency to represent something like the middle of the pack in many of its demographics. Our racial breakdown roughly mirrors that of the nation, and we resemble the county as a whole with our many rural counties mixed with numerically dominant metro areas. The state's poverty rate is neither low enough to brag about nor nearly high enough to rank high compared to our neighbors. The relatively high household income marks us as a home to prosperity, at least for a large segment of the population.

From the current snapshot, one might say, "What's to worry about?" Well, the problem is that we are becoming a more unequal state, where resources are becoming concentrated geographically, where many residents don't share in the wealth creation, and where prosperity is increasingly linked to a piece of paper (or a digital record) of a bachelor's degree. We are also a state where, by at least some measures, political polarization is on a steady march.

A Changing Illinois

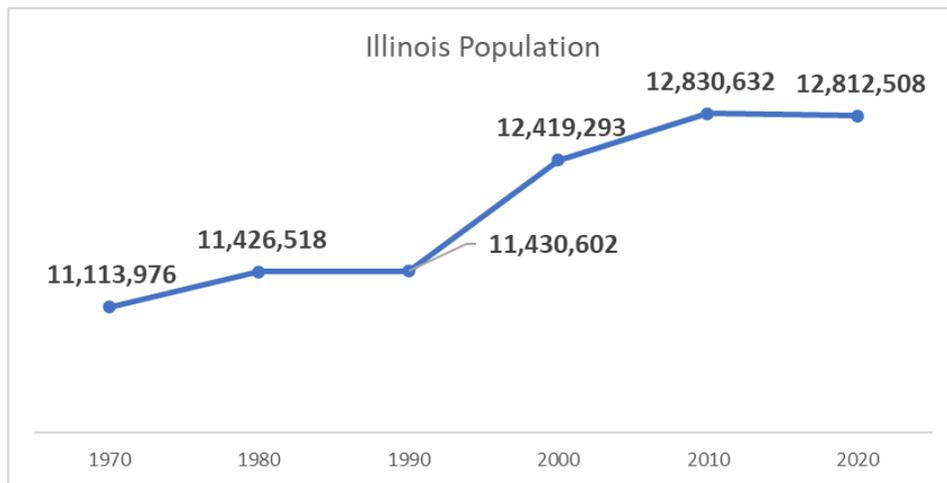
A Slow-Growth State with Internal Rebalancing

Where are we going as a state? What are the trends set in motion over the past half-century? It would be hard to discuss change taking place in Illinois without addressing, first and foremost, the overall population numbers. Certainly, for the news media but also for many public-policy enthusiasts, the latest versions of Census Bureau numbers on Illinois population are tracked almost like the midwestern weather: obsessively, with a touch of defensiveness. "Are we up or down?" "Whose leaving and who's coming?" "Well, it's not so bad." It almost gets to the point of "Are we still loved?"

The truth of the story is that we have had a slow-growth state for the past decade. Over the last decade, we were up some years and down in others like, yes, a barometer. Our growth

patterns, though, are not unique, and they reflect those of other Midwestern (and, by the way, Northeastern) states, which have been losing residents to the south and west for decades.

But our slow growth does hurt. Over the last ten years, Illinois lost its proud position as the fifth largest state to Pennsylvania (of all places). The 2020 census reported that Illinois fell by about 18,000 persons since the previous census, and the repercussions included the loss of a congressional seat. Assuming that the state’s congressional delegation pulls together on at least some issues that benefit Illinois, probably few political developments cause as much damage as losing a congressional district.



(It hardly soothes our wound to know that the Census Bureau has admitted that it missed almost two percent of Illinois in the 2020 census. The revised estimates suggest that the state grew and surpassed 13 million persons by 2020. Unfortunately, the official census results remain, and the damage has been done.)

If it makes us feel any better, low growth is endemic to our region. Iowa, Michigan, and North Dakota have declined in one recent decade or the other, and virtually all the midwestern

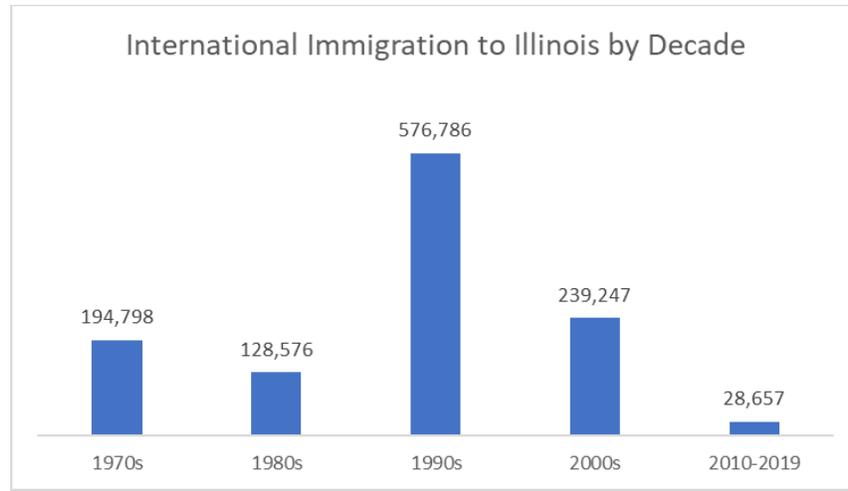
states lag the national average in growth.

Decade-to-Decade Growth Rates in the Midwest					
	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
	-1980	-1990	-2000	-2010	-2020
Illinois	3%	0%	9%	3%	0%
Indiana	6%	1%	10%	7%	5%
Iowa	3%	-5%	5%	4%	5%
Kansas	5%	5%	9%	6%	3%
Michigan	4%	0%	7%	-1%	2%
Minnesota	7%	7%	12%	8%	8%
Missouri	5%	4%	9%	7%	3%
Nebraska	6%	1%	8%	7%	7%
N. Dakota	6%	-2%	1%	5%	16%
Ohio	1%	0%	5%	2%	2%
S. Dakota	4%	1%	8%	8%	9%
Wisconsin	7%	4%	10%	6%	4%
Midwest	4%	1%	8%	4%	3%
<u>U.S.</u>	<u>11%</u>	<u>10%</u>	<u>13%</u>	<u>10%</u>	<u>7%</u>

The problem for the Illinois population is not the so-called natural increase, which refers to the number of births over deaths in a given year. There are many more births than deaths in the state. On top of that, tens of thousands of immigrants from abroad move to Illinois each year. No, the problem for Illinois is that too many residents born here decide to leave. Who does not have a friend that graduated from a school in Illinois and moved to a Sun Belt state? Who does not know a farmer, factory worker, policeman, or office worker who, after a lifetime in Illinois, retired to Florida? On average, about 96,000 more Illinois residents leave the state each year than are offset by people moving to the state from another part of the U.S. It is this imbalance of out-migration/in-migration that suppresses Illinois' population.

Declining immigration numbers exacerbate our population problem. Illinois, more than Sun Belt states like Florida, Texas, or California, has disproportionately relied on international

immigration to buoy its population. It is no coincidence that the jump in Illinois population in the 1990s (by almost a million persons) occurred during one of the highest immigration decades in U.S. history when immigration to Illinois exceeded half a million persons. But immigration is on the decline. In 2011, for example, about 31,000 immigrants came to Illinois, but in 2020, the number was down to about 11,000.



Statewide population counts in Illinois are one story. Still, another is the relocation of Illinois residents within the state. If the state-level picture is that of a flat, sometimes up, sometimes down trend, things are more complicated when we zoom into the county and regional levels.

Counties that have grown since 1970 are found across Illinois, as may be seen in the accompanying map. They range from Winnebago on the Wisconsin border to Massac across the river from Kentucky and from Kankakee on the east to Madison and Monroe on the west. The trouble is that the growth counties are outnumbered by declining counties. In particular, almost every county near the state's eastern and western borders has lost population.

The important thing to understand about the Illinois counties with population decline, however, is not whether they are east or west or north or south. It is that they are not

metropolitan counties. Only seven Illinois counties that lost population since 1970 are in metropolitan areas.

Population loss is largely rural loss, and population gain is largely metropolitan gain in metro areas around Bloomington, Danville, Moline-Rock Island, Decatur, Cape Girardeau, Carbondale, Marion, Champaign-Urbana, Chicago, Kankakee, Peoria, Rockford, St. Louis, and Springfield.

Such is the magnetic power of metropolitan areas in Illinois that these regions have grown in population by *1.8 million* or 19 percent since 1970. Population outside those metro areas is down by 111,000 or negative seven percent.

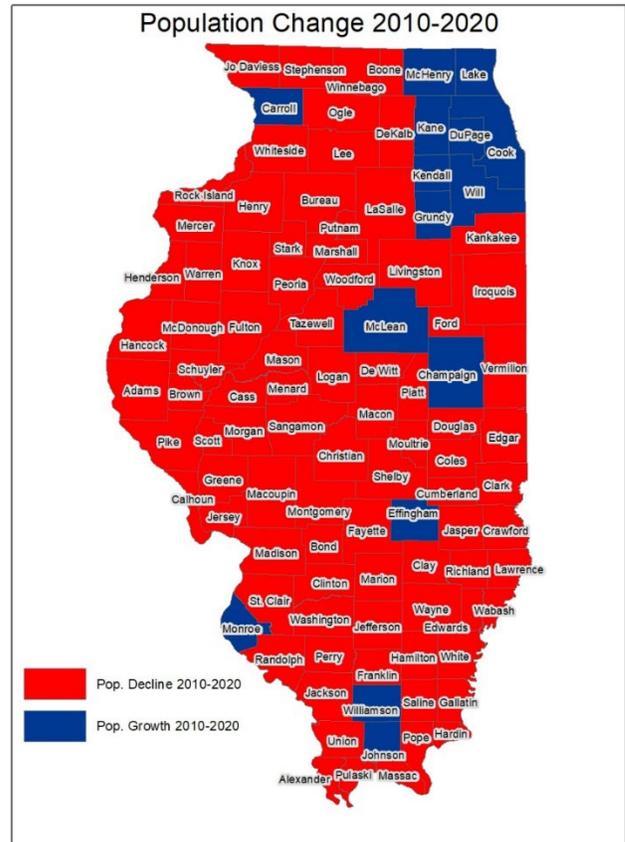
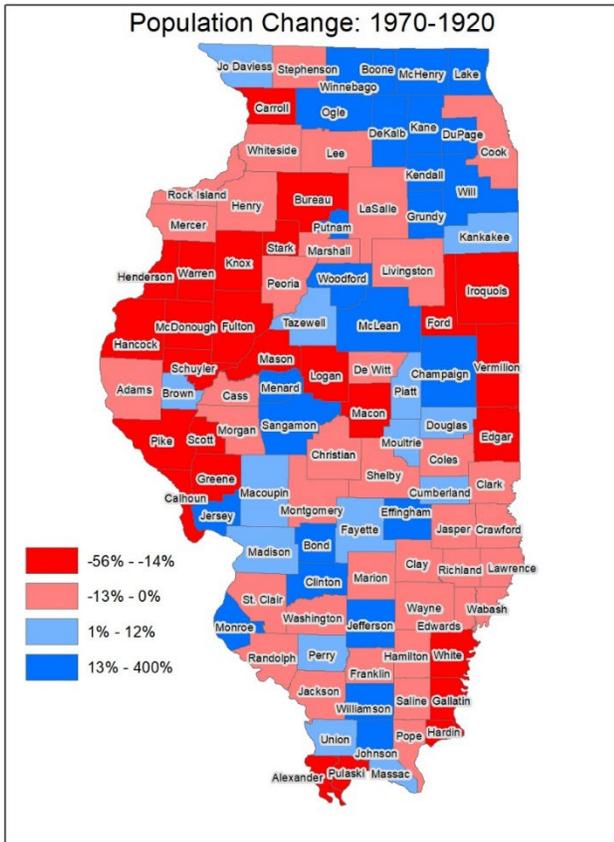
Metro Population Change in Illinois				
	1970	2020	# Change	% Change
In metro area	9,580,591	11,390,788	1,810,197	19%
Not in metro area	1,533,385	1,421,720	-111,665	-7%
Statewide	11,113,976	12,812,508	1,698,532	15%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The intricacies of population change that is taking place in metropolitan Chicago could warrant its own report. The region has large swaths of urban, suburban, and even semi-rural areas that are marbled through with rich veins of social class, race, privilege, and poverty. Suffice it to say that each county of metro Chicago except for DeKalb grew in number over the last decade, while only seven counties downstate had growth. The metro Chicago area is like that corner of the game board where the marbles keep rolling to.

It is accurate to say, in fact, that metro Chicago has been the key to maintaining a somewhat stable population in Illinois. And perhaps, surprisingly, for those who may see exaggerated images of a chaotic Chicago in the popular media, people seem to be voting with

their feet by moving to that city, so much so that the city is key to maintaining the Chicago metro



area's growth. Chicago rose by about two percent during the 2010s as the state overall fell slightly. Southern Illinois: whether you want to or not, you should thank Chicago for keeping our population up. (The second map below shows counties of growth, blue, and counties of decline, red, between 2010 and 2020.)

A Much More Diverse State Emerges

The total population numbers mask another reality about change in Illinois. In racial terms, the state in the last half-century has intensely diversified. Non-White persons have grown in number by nearly three million in the last half-century. The state has added hundreds of thousands of Black non-Latinos and Asian non-Latinos, and 1.8 million Latinos.

With all the increase in Asian, Blacks, and Latinos, one group’s story explains the slow statewide growth: White, non-Latinos in Illinois have plummeted in number by 1.8 million persons since 1970. White, non-Latinos, with their population loss, have fallen from 85 to 62 percent of the population since 1970. Latinos have risen during that period from two percent to 17 percent of Illinoisans. Black non-Latinos have seen their share change but little, remaining at 13 percent. Asians, meanwhile, who are still the smallest of the major racial groups at 632,000, have soared from less than one percent to almost six percent of the state.

Race/Ethnicity in Illinois

Black NL	1,403,700	1,621,569	217,869	16%
Asian NL	50,300	682,399	632,099	1,257%
Latino	243,500	2,083,005	1,839,505	755%
White NL	9,371,400	7,594,355	(1,777,045)	-19%
Other NL	18,000	303,936	285,936	1,589%
<u>Total</u>	<u>11,086,900</u>	<u>12,285,264</u>	<u>1,198,364</u>	<u>11%</u>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Race/Ethnic Distribution in Illinois

	1970	2020	Point Change
Black NL	12.7%	13.2%	0.5
Asian NL	0.5%	5.6%	5.1
Latino	2.2%	17.0%	14.8
White NL	84.5%	61.8%	(22.7)
Other NL	0.2%	2.5%	2.3
<u>Total</u>	<u>100.0%</u>	<u>100.0%</u>	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

We may associate Chicago and its metro area with diversity, however, non-white communities have grown across the state. Persons who don't identify as White are a quarter or more of the population in half a dozen metro areas in Illinois. Non-metro counties are changing as well. Cass County, located northwest of Sangamon County (home to Springfield), saw its nonwhite population rise from one percent in 1980 to 31 percent in 2020. (Much of the Cass growth involved Latinos drawn to jobs in the meatpacking industry.)

Non-White Share of Selected Metro Populations in Illinois

	<u>1980</u>	<u>2015 – 2019</u>	<u>Point</u>
Bloomington-Normal, IL	6%	20%	+15
Champaign-Urbana-Rantoul, IL	13%	33%	+20
Chicago, IL	31%	48%	+18
Decatur, IL	11%	24%	+13
Kankakee, IL	16%	28%	+12
Rockford, IL	12%	30%	+19
St. Louis, MO/IL	19%	23%	+4

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Economic Rewards Are Concentrating

As the state's population has reorganized itself to the benefit of metro areas, some of those metro areas have performed better than others. Households in metro Chicago have higher

median incomes, \$74,600, than Illinois overall, at \$68,400, and Chicago-area income is higher than many other metro areas such as Decatur (\$53,700), Rockford (\$56,900) or Rock Island (\$59,900).

But over time, Bloomington-Normal is the star performer. While Bloomington's incomes are slightly down in the last decade, they are up 20 percent since 1970. (All discussion in this essay of income uses inflation-adjusted data.) It is worth noting that Bloomington is home to disproportionately high numbers of jobs in the white-collar, finance, insurance, and real estate sectors. About 26 percent of Bloomington area workers are in those sectors compared to nine percent of all Illinois workers.

In the last decade, at least, the Chicago area median income has grown faster than other areas, at four percent growth in the last decade compared to negative four percent in metro Peoria or negative three percent in metro Rockford. Another sign of the relative wealth of metro Chicago is that, of 18 Illinois zip codes with median household incomes above \$150,000 income, 14 are in the Chicago area. Amid this wealth growth in northeast Illinois, the city of Chicago has had an especially high-income run-up, with its household median income jumping 11 percent in the last decade and 18 percent since 1970. The jump in Chicago, as in any area, can reflect lower-income persons leaving the area, but it likely also reflects households with higher earning power moving to the city.

Household Income Change in Illinois by Metropolitan Area

	<u>Median HH Income</u>	<u>% Growth 2010-2020</u>	<u>% Growth 1970-2020</u>
Bloomington-Normal, IL	\$68,037	-1%	20%
Champaign-Urbana Rantoul, IL	\$54,897	0%	-2%
Chicago metro area	\$74,621	4%	10%
Chicago city	\$62,097	11%	18%
Davenport, IA - Rock Island- Moline, IL	\$59,876	4%	0%
Decatur, IL	\$53,725	2%	-7%
Kankakee, IL	\$59,370	-1%	n/a
Peoria, IL	\$60,094	-4%	-2%
Rockford, IL	\$56,899	-3%	-12%
St. Louis, MO/IL	\$65,725	4%	11%
Springfield, IL	\$62,590	0%	11%
Illinois	\$68,428	3%	n/a
U.S.	\$64,994	5%	7%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Household incomes in rural areas also appear to be declining compared to other parts of the state. Incomes of households not in a metro area were about 82 percent of the incomes of persons in metro Chicago in 1980. By 2010, the households outside the Chicago area had incomes that were down to 77 percent of Chicago regional incomes. The rural income decline is not just versus metro Chicago. A similar pattern is true when comparing rural incomes to those of metro Bloomington.

It is not only geography that is linked to increased income disparities. We are seeing some of our largest communities slip behind others as the fruits of economic growth are not

enjoyed equally. On the one hand, Asian and Latino households have seen their incomes rise almost as fast (Latinos) or faster (Asians) than non-Latino Whites in Illinois since 1980. Black median household incomes, however, have grown much more slowly, at six percent compared to 16 percent for Whites.

As of 2020, the relative economic position of African Americans in Illinois has slipped against that of Whites, with Black households earning 63 percent of White households in 1970 but only 57 percent of White households fifty years later. The position of Latinos vis-a-vis Whites has remained largely unchanged.

Median Household Income

	<u>1980</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>Change 1980-2020</u>
Black NL	\$50,896	\$53,933	6%
Asian NL	\$90,121	\$110,057	22%
Latino	\$61,121	\$69,904	14%
White NL	\$81,074	\$93,844	16%
Other NL	\$63,130	\$85,000	35%
<u>Total</u>	<u>\$76,377</u>	<u>\$84,000</u>	<u>10%</u>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Ratio of Household Income to White Household Income

	<u>1980</u>	<u>2020</u>
Black NL	63%	57%
Asian NL	111%	117%
Latino	75%	74%
White NL	100%	100%
Other NL	78%	91%
<u>Total</u>	<u>94%</u>	<u>90%</u>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Another economic sign of a state separating economically shows up when we look at the

value of a college education for those fortunate enough to be able to acquire one. Over the decades, the fortunes of the highly educated have grown compared to persons without a B.A.

In 1980, the households of persons with a bachelor’s degree had incomes that were 42 percent higher than the incomes of persons without a B.A. By 2020, households of persons with B.A.’s had incomes that were 83 percent higher than households of persons of lower education.

Ratio of HH Income of Persons with B.A. Degree to Persons Without B.A. in Illinois

<u>1980</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2020</u>
1.42	1.63	1.65	1.79	1.83

Source: author’s calculations from Census Bureau data

Disproportionate economic returns to having a college degree are furthermore seen in terms of what workers are paid for the job they do. In the last decade, workers in “white collar” occupations related to management, business, science, and the arts had the highest income growth, with their household incomes rising five percent in the 2010s, compared to, for example, growth of two percent among “blue collar” workers with jobs in production, transportation and material moving.

Change in Median Household Income by Occupation: Illinois 2010-2020

Management, Business, Science, & Arts Occupations	5%
Service Occupations	3%
Sales & and Office Occupations	4%
Natural Resources, Construction, & Maintenance Occupations	4%
Material Moving Occupations	2%

Source: American Community Survey

Given the importance of higher education, it's worth noting who does and does not have a college degree. Some 67 percent of Asian non-Latinos, for example, have at least a B.A. degree, as do 40 percent of White non-Latinos. Only 23 percent of Black non-Latinos and 16 percent of Latinos have a four-year college degree. At least 40 percent of Illinois residents in the metro Chicago area have a B.A. compared to 25 of persons outside of metro Chicago. Again, the picture that emerges is of income rising or falling behind, based on the group you were born into or the area where you live.

Percentage of Persons with a B.A. Degree in Illinois: 2015-2019

By Race/Ethnicity	
Black NL	23%
Asian NL	67%
Latino	16%
White NL	40%
Other NL	40%
Total	36%

By Region	
Downstate	25%
Suburban Chicago Metro, Except Cook County	42%
Suburban Cook	40%
Chicago	42%

Source: American Community Survey

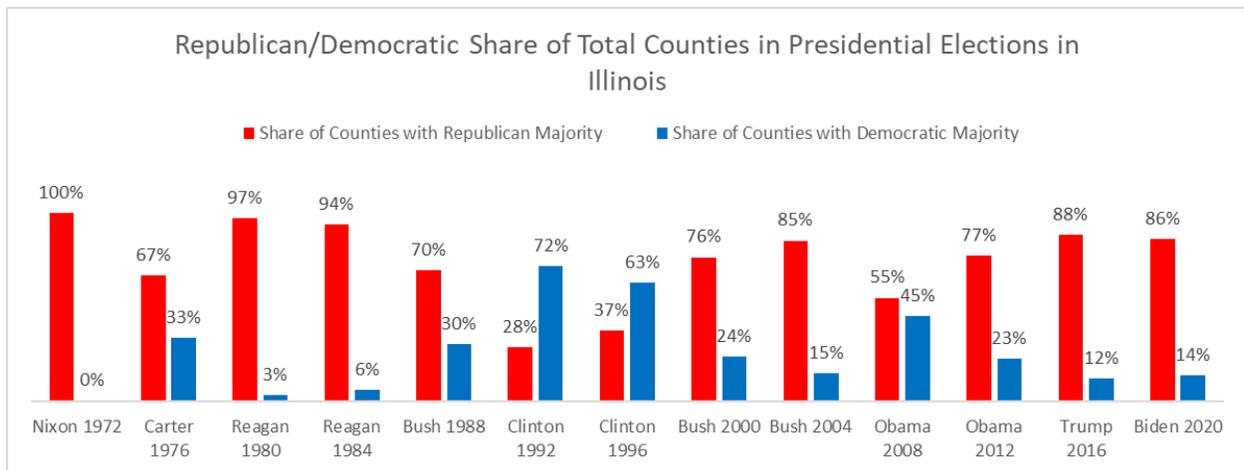
The Illinois Electorate: A Tally of Two States

Voter preferences for Democratic or Republican presidential candidates tell us a lot about attitudes toward the issues featured in national campaigns: taxes, crime, immigration, and civil rights. Every four years, we have a presidential contest that gives us a glimpse of how similar or dissimilar our Illinois neighbors are to one another, and, for better or worse, the election results reveal a growing divide between upstate and downstate, metro and non-metro, and blue and red.

Vote totals determine elections, and if a low-population county chooses one candidate or another, it probably has little effect on a statewide race. But a purely geographic analysis of where the red and blue majorities illustrate one facet of a growing divide.

Most Illinois counties have voted for Republican candidates going back to 1972 when Richard Nixon carried each county in the state, including Cook County. The exception was the

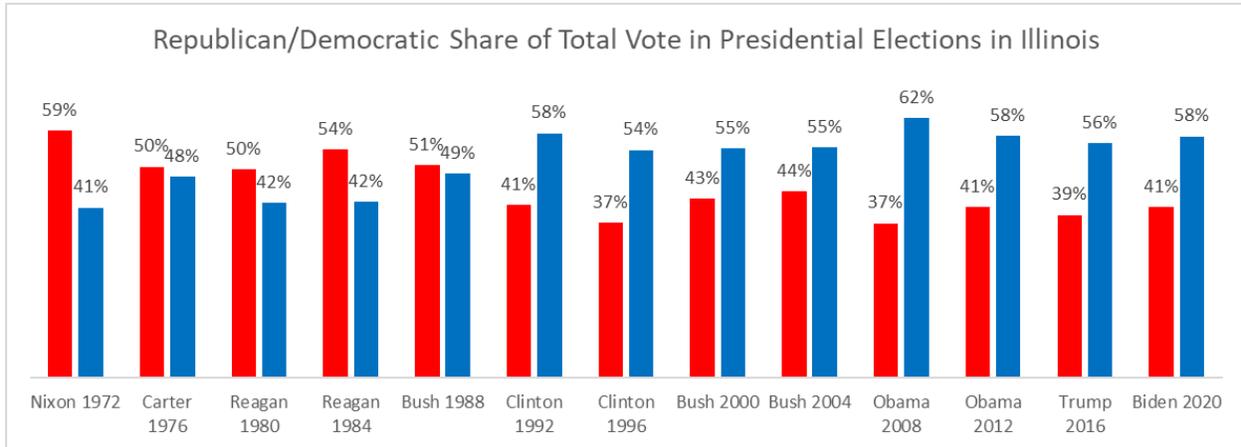
Bill Clinton candidacies of 1992 and 1996 when Clinton carried most counties and racked up even more counties than Illinois resident Barack Obama in his own elections of 2008 and 2012. After the Clinton victories of the 1990s, Illinois returned to its pattern of most counties voting red. Obama carried only 48 of the 102 Illinois counties in 2008 and only 23 counties in 2012. Donald Trump in 2016 carried 90 of the 102 counties for the highest county total since Ronald Reagan in 1984. Trump again won 88 counties in 2020. The last two elections featuring candidate Donald Trump saw Illinois counties vote red at levels not seen since the 1980s.



A completely different story involves the actual numbers of votes that win elections, and in this regard, Illinois has been a solidly blue state since 1992. The lower population, generally more rural counties of Illinois may support Republican presidential candidates, but the highly populated counties have clearly preferred Democratic candidates for the last thirty years.

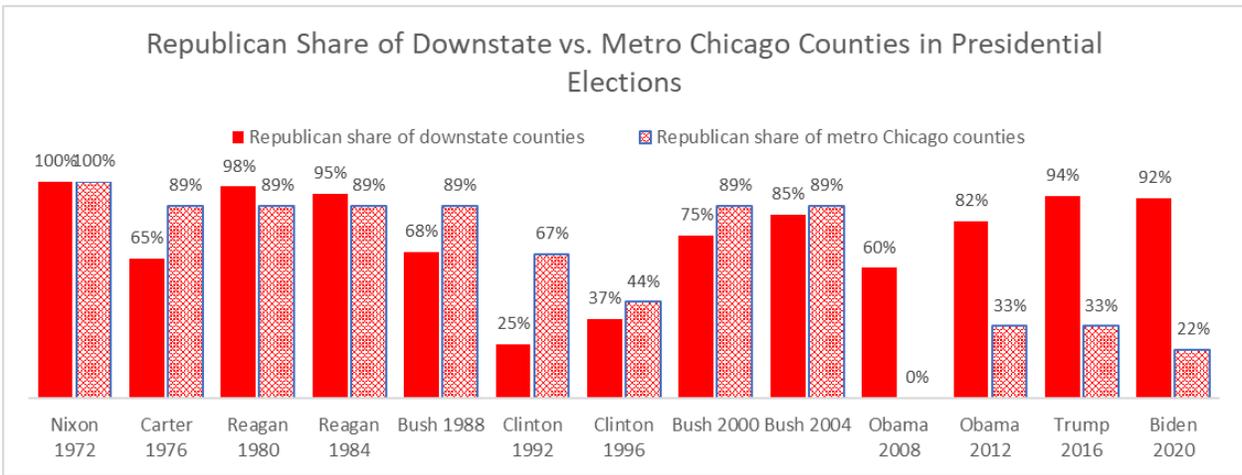
Republican presidential candidates carried Illinois in the 1970s and 1980s, but with the exception of the Nixon election, the Republicans won with relatively small margins in several elections. But when Illinois turned Blue in 1992, it did so in a big way. The Democratic candidates often won by margins that rivaled or exceeded Nixon's. Especially in the last four

elections, the Democratic candidates didn't just win but, as they say, crushed it, with margins of victory of at least 16 points.



The blueing of Illinois has a lot to do with and is one more example of, how metro Chicago is moving in a different direction than the rest of the state. It is in the metro Chicago counties that Republicans are performing worse than at any time in the last fifty years. None of the nine Chicago-area counties voted Republican in 2008, and after that, never more than a third of them did. In the Biden- Trump contest of 2020, only Grundy and McHenry counties, which are the most geographically peripheral to metro Chicago, went for Trump.

The preferences of metro Chicago matter to the partisan separation going on in Illinois because more and more voters live in that area, and more and more of them vote for Democrats, at least in presidential elections. Between 1972 and 2020, the metro Chicago share of votes went from 63 to 67 percent. And metro Chicago is very blue. Although it has 67 percent of voters, it gave Joe Biden 77 percent of his Illinois votes in 2020.



Metro Chicago Share of Total Votes Cast

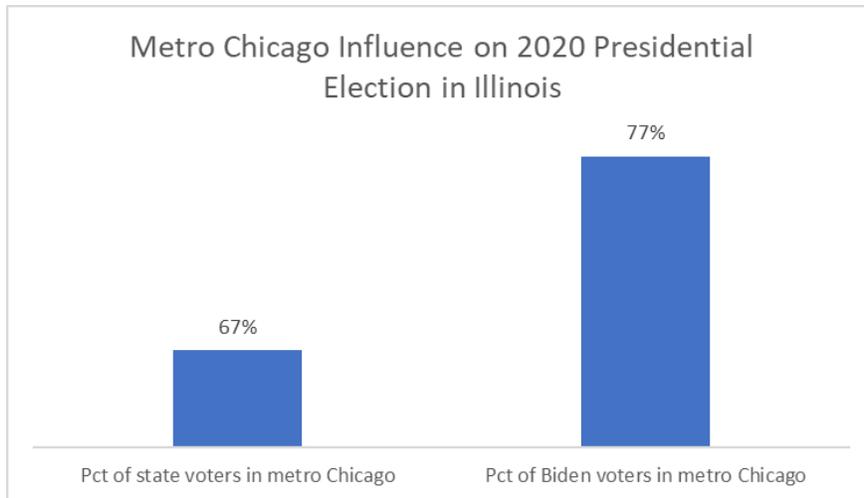
1972 2020

63% 67%

Based on current 9-Country Region

Democratic/Republican Winner of Metro Chicago Counties in Presidential Elections

COUNTY	Nixon 1972	Carter 1976	Reaga n 1980	Reagan 1984	Bush 1992	Clinton 1988	Clinto n 1996	Bush 2000	Bush 2004	Obam a 2008	Obam a 2012	Trum P 2016	Biden 2020
Cook	R	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
DeKalb	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	R	R	D	D	D	D
Will	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	R	R	D	D	D	D
Lake	R	R	R	R	R	R	D	R	R	D	D	D	D
Kane	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D
DuPage	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D
Kendall	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	D	R	R	D
Grundy	R	R	R	R	R	R	D	R	R	D	R	R	R
McHenry	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	D	R	R	R



If part of the story of solid and growing partisanship in Illinois is the story of blue metro Chicago, another part is the story of reliably red downstate counties. Eighteen Illinois counties have never voted for a Democratic presidential candidate in the last fifty years, and most of them have declined to change their tendencies. Half of them actually increased their votes for Republicans.

The three counties that became less red between 1972 and 2020 may come as no surprise given the trends discussed in this essay: Lee and Ogle counties, both of which had more than a ten-point decline in Republican votes, border metro Chicago. Woodford County lies in metro Peoria and borders metro Bloomington-Normal.

Republican Share of Vote in Nixon and Biden Elections

County	Nixon 1972	Biden 2020	Point Change
Adams	70%	72%	2
De Witt	65%	70%	4
Edwards	74%	84%	10
Effingham	66%	78%	12
Ford	75%	72%	-2
Iroquois	76%	77%	1
Lee	69%	58%	-11
Livingston	72%	70%	-2
Logan	70%	68%	-2
Menard	70%	68%	-2
Morgan	66%	64%	-2
Ogle	74%	61%	-13
Scott	66%	77%	11
Stark	72%	69%	-3
Wabash	68%	75%	7
Washington	69%	77%	8
Wayne	70%	84%	14
Woodford	73%	68%	-5

Conclusion: Be Careful with Your Crystal Ball

At the tail end of a fifty-year period of change in Illinois, it is hard to expect that the beginning of the next half-decade will be much different. Nothing suggests that in the near future, Illinois is going to reverse the flow of residents leaving the state nor the internal movement into metro areas. Meanwhile, the federal government has failed for 40 years to enact an immigration policy that's in tune with local needs for workers, consumers, and taxpayers and which could again re-populate our state.

We can expect the racial diversity of recent decades to continue apace. Asians and Latinos are younger and are having more children than Whites or Blacks. We are coming off of a

period of high immigration, which usually consists of young adults. We can look for growth and family-building to mark those communities and the state for years to come.

Our economic polarization, consisting of higher paid jobs being created in metro areas and higher returns being paid to college education, reflects national trends reaching back to the end of the Second World War. Unionization is at an all-time low, despite some recent worker-organizing victories at companies like Amazon and Starbucks. Government redistribution policies have arguably gone in the wrong direction in terms of tax cuts that benefit the wealthy. Illinois' wrong-headed dependence on property taxes to fund education will continue to mean that richer communities have more money for schools, and the resulting disparate outcomes for children's education will continue to divide the state.

Having said all that, few people in mid-century Illinois foresaw the state's coming industrial explosion and the related, massive immigration of the late 1880s. No one in the early 1900s predicted that Americans would soon fight in two horrific world conflicts. In the 1950s, the coming civil rights victories were not remotely guaranteed, the Vietnam War was off the radar screen, but no one expected computer technology to turn our world upside down.

So, none of us today should be too sure of where Illinois will go. Climate change is degrading our life and life chances on this planet, and cooler, water-rich states like Illinois may look increasingly attractive compared to, say, Dallas, where there were 40 days of 100-degree weather in August 2022. Businesses may be unsustainable in the 1000-year drought of the southwest, where the Colorado River is drying up, and the nation's largest water reservoir (Lake Mead) is 65 percent empty.

The long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic combined with technologies of remote work will only be revealed over time. Will the office towers of Chicago empty, or will thousands

of young workers continue to pour into the city to work hybrid schedules? Will the increase in vegetarianism, veganism, and the development of meatless alternatives change the face of agriculture in Illinois?

So much we don't know. But we have a great state that has helped set the pace for centuries. Let's see what Illinois can do.

Rob Paral is a Chicago-based consultant to health, human service, government, and philanthropic entities in Illinois. His firm, Rob Paral and Associates, has assisted more than 100 organizations to better understand the community they serve.

Rob is a Nonresident Fellow at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and is a Senior Research Specialist with the Great Cities Institute at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He may be reached via www.robparal.com

GREETINGS FROM ILLINOIS



Paul Simon Public Policy Institute
Southern Illinois University
Mail Code 4429
1231 Lincoln Drive
Carbondale, Illinois 62901

618/453-4009
paulsimoninstitute@siu.edu
www.paulsimoninstitute.org



SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
PAUL SIMON
PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTE