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N.J. is becoming more diverse, but that change is not happening everywhere, study finds

By **Bill Duhart | For NJ.com**

New Jersey's population has become more diverse over the past two decades, but the trend is not spread evenly among its 21 counties, according to a study published this month by the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University.

The report used the 2020 Census and created a rating system to measure diversity. The index was based on the percentages of the county populations for each racial or ethnic group.

"This story paints a demographic portrait of who we are as a state, in terms of our ethnic and racial makeup," said John Froonjian, executive director of the Hughes Center. "It's important that we understand our identity as a state, region or county. Changes in our population makeup may affect our culture, affect our government and the marketplace. People need to be aware of what's happening in their backyards."

The most diverse counties were Cumberland, Essex, Hudson, Middlesex, Passaic, Somerset and Union. The least diverse were Cape May, Gloucester, Hunterdon, Monmouth, Ocean, Salem, Sussex and Warren counties.

Atlantic, Bergen, Burlington, Camden, Mercer, and Morris counties were rated as moderately diverse.

Black residents grew as a percentage of county populations at a lower rate than Asian and Hispanic groups, the study found. The Black population In Union County grew by 10% from 2000 to 2020. It was in single digits in all other counties.

Counties where people of Hispanic origin grew as a percentage of the population by more than 10 percent from 2000 to 2020 include Bergen (11%), Cumberland (15%), Mercer (12%), Passaic (13%) and Union (14%).

Counties where people of Asian origin grew by more than 10 percent from 2000 to 2020 include Hudson (19%), Mercer (11%), Middlesex (20%) a d Somerset (15%).

Whites declined as a percentage of the population in 13 of 21 counties, but still make up nearly 55% of the population. Hispanics account for nearly 21%, Blacks 15% and Asians 10% of the total state population.

Some of the results in South Jersey showed the most contrast. Cumberland was singled out as one of the most diverse counties, while being bordered by Cape May, Salem and Gloucester counties, among the least diverse.

"If you look at counties that have a good deal of diversity, their median age tends to be lower than the mostly white, non-diverse counties," Froonjian said. "You look at a county like Cape May that is strongly dominated by non-Hispanic whites, a lot of retirees, they're not having babies. But you look at Cumberland, Hudson, Essex, where you have a very diverse group of people, younger people, they're having more children."

Froonjian said Cumberland County also has three cities, Bridgeton, Millville and Vineland, but Salem and Gloucester are largely rural.

"In order to effectively care for constituents, state representatives and policymakers need to know the characteristics of the communities that they serve," said Emily Kramer, an undergraduate student at Stockton who wrote the study.

Froonjian said much of the diversity in New Jersey is driven by immigration and that benefits the state.

"Diversity is a strength," he said. "It makes us a very vibrant state. We've always been diverse. It's part of our makeup, our character."

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