



Diversity in Illinois

Changing Meanings, Demographic Trends, and Policy Preferences



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Diversity in Illinois: Changing Meanings, Demographic Trends, and Policy Preferences

By Cedric Herring and Loren Henderson

As the demography of the nation continues to change, diversity has become an increasingly important topic that poses numerous philosophical, political and policy challenges. For many people, diversity is good because it is associated with removing barriers that have historically kept people of color, women, the disabled, members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community, and others from gaining access to the corridors of power.

It has become common for proponents to claim that diversity represents a compelling state interest because it is good for business and economic development. Advocates for diversity suggest that it leads to closer examination of assumptions because people from varied backgrounds create complex learning environments that lead to better solutions to problems. As a result, it helps meet the society’s needs, enriches understanding of the pulse of the marketplace, and improves the quality of products and services offered. Diversity brings with it different perspectives and fresh ideas. It is associated with strong growth, positive images, fewer discrimination lawsuits, and an enhanced ability to hire qualified workers. Because of these supposed competitive advantages, the state should be aggressive about cultivating diversity.

At a fundamental level, a key question is: how should we live together? Should we pursue “assimilation” and conformity to the norms of the mainstream or should we promote some kind of “pluralism” and celebration of diversity? What criteria should we use to determine when cultural practices are unacceptable? What are the limits to tolerance? And how should the state respond when the preferences of groups are in conflict with each other?

Governments can respond to diversity with a range of policy instruments that include prevention, encouragement, discouragement, and enforcement. Concrete policy issues that touch on debates about diversity include affirmative action, gay marriage, immigration policy, and other contentious issues. Ultimately, policymakers need to be sensitive about the issues at stake and informed about the implications of their choices.

This chapter provides a discussion of the changing meaning of diversity, a brief demographic profile of Illinois, an overview of some of the changes in the state’s population base, and a summary of public opinion concerning policy issues that relate to diversity.

The Changing Meaning of Diversity

For some people, the term “diversity” provokes intense emotional reactions because it brings to mind such politically charged ideas as “quotas.” Yet at its base, the term merely refers to human qualities that make people different from one another. Dimensions of diversity include but are not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, physical abilities, geographic location, and class and socioeconomic status. It is an all-inclusive term, but battle lines are often drawn around which groups are to be included and groups against which discrimination can be legitimate. In essence, discussions about diversity should not only contain observance and celebration of difference, but also examination of concepts such as equity, parity, fairness, inclusion of the previously excluded, etc.

The politics surrounding inclusion have shifted dramatically over the past half century. In the early 1940s, President Roosevelt encouraged nondiscriminatory hiring prac-

Table 1
Percentage Changes in the Racial and Ethnic Composition of Illinois, 1990-2005

Race/ Ethnicity	1990		2005		1990-2005	
	Number	As Percentage of Total	Number	As Percentage of Total	Change	% Change
White (non-Hispanic)	8,556,289	74.9%	8,462,115	66.3%	-94,174	-1.1%
Black	1,707,405	14.9%	1,940,032	15.2%	232,627	13.6%
Hispanic (non-Black)	850,312	7.4%	1,735,818	13.6%	885,506	104.1%
Asian & Others	316,596	2.8%	625,406	4.9%	292,143	97.5%
Total	11,430,602	100.0%	12,763,371	100.0%	1,332,769	11.7%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990 Census of Population and Housing and the March 2005 Current Population Survey.

tices among defense contractors. Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and subsequent federal laws prohibit engaging in practices that discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age and disability. In addition, Executive Order 11246 issued in 1965 required government contractors to take affirmative action to overcome past patterns of exclusion and discrimination. Through this government action, American society has said that equal opportunities must be given to all people with similar qualifications and accomplishments. These mandates eliminated formal policies that discriminated against certain classes of people, and they raised the costs for failing to implement fair employment practices. These laws remain a part of the legal responsibilities under which employers operate today.

By the late 1970s and into the 1980s, there was growing recognition that, while legal mandates were necessary, they were not sufficient for ensuring the effective management of diversity. To promote organizational cultures that would support more diversity, many companies began to offer training programs aimed at “valuing diversity.” During the 1990s, diversity rhetoric shifted to emphasize the “business case” for diversity. Essentially, the argument made was that managing diversity effectively is a business necessity not only because of the nature of labor markets, but also because a more diverse work force produces better business results. Exploiting the nation’s diversity

was viewed as key to future prosperity. The argument was that discrimination limits the potential of the society because it leads to under-utilization of pools of talent. Such practices were no longer practical or feasible in an increasingly diverse society. The new imperative for diversity advocates was to expand the talent pool and, thereby, strengthen America’s institutions. In the 21st century, diversity has become an essential business concern as well as a concern for residents of the state.

The Changing Demography and Diversity of Illinois

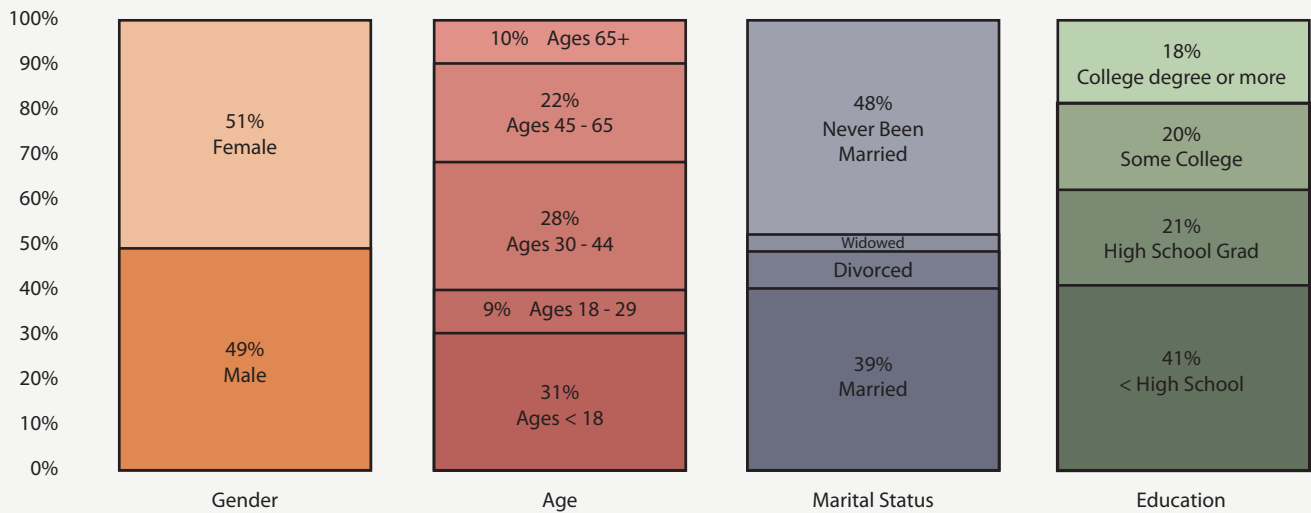
The population of Illinois grew moderately between 1990 and 2005, increasing from 11.43 million in 1990 to 12.76 million in 2005 (an 11.7 percent increase). Table 1 presents the percentage changes in the racial and ethnic composition of Illinois from 1990 to 2005. It shows that in that time period, the number of non-Hispanic whites decreased by 1.1 percent. Meanwhile, the number of blacks grew by 13.6 percent, the number of Latinos grew by more than 100 percent, and the number of Asians and others grew by nearly 100 percent.

Figure 1 (pg. 82) shows some other selected characteristics of the Illinois population. It shows that about half of the population is male (49 percent) and half is female (51 percent). It also shows that 31 percent of residents are below the age of 18, 9 percent are between 18 and 29, 28 percent are between 30



Figure 1
Selected Characteristics of the Illinois Population, 2005

Source: March 2005 Current Population Survey.



and 44 years old, 22 percent are between 45 and 64, and 10 percent are 65 or older. Thirty-nine percent are currently married, and 48 percent have never been married. Forty-one percent have not graduated from high school, 21 percent have a high school diploma or equivalent (but no further education), 20 percent have some college but no degree, and 18 percent have a college degree or more.

The Census Bureau does not collect information about sexual preferences, so estimates presented in Figure 1 come from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth for respondents between the ages of 15 and 44. In response to questions about sexual preferences, 10 percent of men and 11 percent of women might be considered members of the LGBT community. The Illinois Opinion Monitor (a random-sample survey of the adult population in Illinois conducted as part of the Cooperative Congressional Election Study) provides slightly lower estimates for Illinois for this age range for men (7.5 percent) and women (7.0 percent). The Illinois Opinion Monitor¹ also estimates that nearly 1 in 4 (24 percent) Illinois residents identify themselves or some member of their family as a member of the LGBT community. In the last census, Illinois was among the top 10 states in the percentage of residents who are foreign born. By 2000, it ranked fifth in the size of its foreign-born population, and also in

the number of new immigrants since 1990. But immigrants are unevenly spread throughout the state. In Chicago, immigrants are 22 percent of the population. In the “collar suburbs,” they are 15 percent of the residents. In areas outside of the Chicago metropolitan area, they are 4 percent, and they are 2 percent of the population in other cities in the state.

Table 2 shows that between 1990 and 2005, the native-born population in Illinois grew by a modest 5.2 percent from 10.5 million to 11 million. In contrast, the foreign-born population in Illinois increased from just over 950,000 (8.3 percent of the population) to an estimated 1.74 million (13.7 percent of the population). This represents an 83 percent increase.

The racial and ethnic compositions of the native-born and immigrant populations differ fairly substantially. According to the 2005 Current Population Survey, non-Hispanic whites make up nearly 70 percent of native-born residents in Illinois. African Americans are 19 percent. Latinos are slightly less than 10 percent. And Asians and other racial and ethnic groups make up about 2.5 percent of the native-born population. In contrast, Latinos comprise more than half (51 percent) of immigrants. Asians and others make up 21 percent of the immigrant population. Blacks are 5 percent, and non-Hispanic whites make up less than a quarter (23 percent).

¹ To learn more about the Illinois Opinion Monitor, see http://www.igpa.uillinois.edu/opinion_monitor/about.asp

Different parts of the state vary in their racial and ethnic composition. In Chicago, blacks are the plurality of residents, as 35 percent of Chicago residents are black. Latinos are 31 percent, non-Hispanic whites are 29 percent, and Asians and others are 5 percent of the city’s population. In contrast, more than two-thirds (68 percent) of the residents in the suburbs of Chicago are non-Hispanic whites, 11 percent are black, 15 percent are Latino, and 7 percent are Asian and other groups. Outside the Chicago metro area, 86 percent are non-Hispanic whites, 8 percent are black, 3 percent are Latino, and 3 percent are Asian and others. In other cities in Illinois, whites are 75 percent of the population and blacks are 20 percent. Statewide, whites are 62 percent, blacks are 17 percent, Latinos are 15 percent, and Asians and others are 5 percent of the population.

Public Opinion and Diversity Policies

Residents of Illinois are split over many of the policy proposals that revolve around issues of diversity and inclusion. Illustrative of this are current debates surrounding such policy issues as affirmative action, immigration, and gay rights. To the degree that demographic sub-populations differ in their priorities and policy preferences, shifts in Illinois’ population base are likely to have an impact on the public’s opinion of several policy issues and priorities. It is, therefore, informative to understand public opinion about various diversity and inclusion policy options.

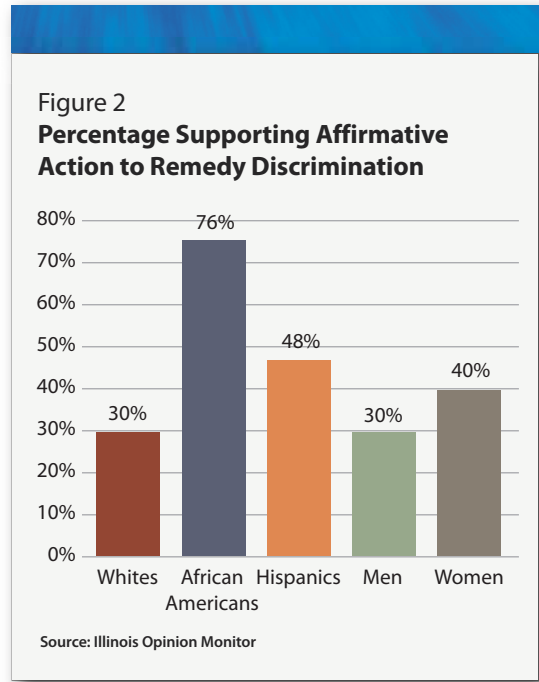


Figure 2 presents data from the Illinois Opinion Monitor. The chart shows that residents of Illinois are deeply divided by race on the issue of affirmative action. There also is a gap by gender. In particular, the graph illustrates that 76 percent of African Americans support the view that if a “company has a history of discriminating against blacks when making hiring decisions, then they should be required to have an affirmative action program that gives blacks preference in hiring.” About half (48 percent) of Hispanic respondents support this view. But only 30 percent of whites do. Women (40 percent) are also more likely to support affirmative action to redress past discrimination than are men (30 percent).

Figure 3 shows that Illinois residents are also at odds with each other over the issue of



Residents of Illinois are split over many of the policy proposals that revolve around issues of diversity and inclusion.

Nativity Status	1990		2005		1990-2005	
	Number	As Percentage of Total	Number	As Percentage of Total	Change	% Change
Native-Born	10,478,330	91.7	11,020,336	86.3	542,006	5.2
Foreign-Born	952,272	8.3	1,743,035	13.7	790,763	83.0
Total	11,430,602	100.0	12,763,371	100.0	1,332,769	11.7

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1990 Census of Population and Housing and the March 2005 Current Population Survey.



Governments can respond to diversity by encouraging it, discouraging it, by ignoring it, etc. Ultimately, policymakers need to be sensitive about the issues at stake and informed about the implications of their choices.

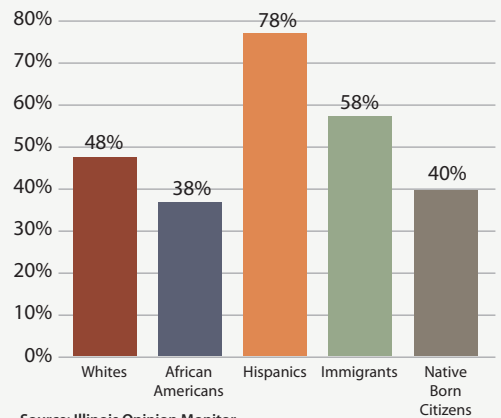
immigration. In particular, when asked whether undocumented immigrants should be “required to go home” or “be granted some kind of legal status that allows them to stay here,” 78 percent of Hispanic respondents said they believe undocumented residents should be allowed to stay. But fewer than 4 in 10 African Americans held such a belief, and about half of whites preferred this policy option. Similarly, 58 percent of immigrants believe that undocumented residents should be allowed to stay compared with 40 percent of native-born residents.

A final kind of diversity and inclusion policy issue involves gay rights. In this instance, the issue is whether members of the LGBT community should be denied the right to marry. Figure 4 shows that a clear majority (58 percent) of Illinois residents oppose a “constitutional amendment banning gay marriage.” The graph shows that 63 percent of those with ties to the LGBT community oppose a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage. It also shows that more than half (57 percent) of those outside of the LGBT community oppose such a constitutional amendment.

Conclusions

Diversity has been a governmental issue since the early 1940s when President Roosevelt encouraged nondiscriminatory hiring practices among defense contractors. Since then, policymakers have confronted pressures for greater institutional inclusion of people of color, women, members of the LGBT community, and other previously excluded or disadvantaged groups. For many years, governmental initiatives were all that were in place to direct an attempt at corporate diversity and give excluded groups opportunities to succeed. It has only been within the last few years that more companies have begun to realize that, as our country continues to become more diverse, their success will be tied to issues of diversity and inclusion. This becomes even more apparent when reviewing population trends that are moving toward a more diverse total popula-

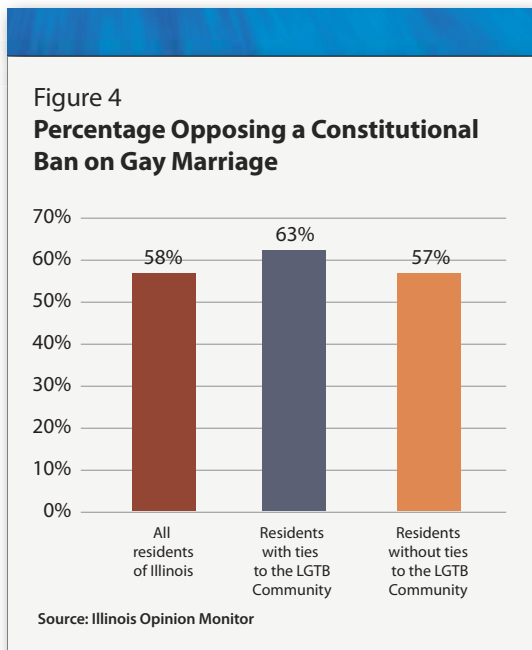
Figure 3
Percentage Believing Undocumented Residents Should be Allowed to Stay in the U.S.



tion and a shrinking straight, white, native-born male population.

So we return to our initial set of questions: how should we live together? How should the state respond when the preferences of groups are in conflict with each other? Policy leaders will need to foster cultural understanding, partnership and good will. They will need to fight the temptation to exploit cultural differences for short-term political gain. They will need to encourage cross-cultural and inter-faith dialogue, seek common ground and build relationships based on trust and mutual respect. Those in positions of power and responsibility will need to focus on shared humanity despite political and policy differences. They will need to be able to lead us to work through our differences and deal with the inevitable policy tensions in a constructive manner.

Currently, the Illinois General Assembly is considering legislation that could expand diversity and increase inclusion. But there are also proposals that could curtail diversity efforts. In particular, HB1331 and SB0085 of the 95th General Assembly would allow one’s designated domestic partner to qualify as a surviving spouse for purposes of survivor and death benefits. While not offering the same benefits as marriage to LGBT couples, such legislation would expand their rights and



benefits. Similarly, the Illinois General Assembly is considering legislation (HB1100) which would expand the rights of immigrants by allowing the issuance of driver’s licenses to undocumented immigrants that would not be traceable by federal agencies for identification or any other official purpose. But also, there are potential proposals on the horizon that would limit the use of affirmative action and, therefore, limit access to higher education for many racial minority students. In particular, proponents of the Michigan Civil Rights Initiative, which banned the use of affirmative action in institutions of higher education in Michigan, have identified Illinois (along with two dozen other states) as likely targets for similar initiatives.

As mentioned above, governments can respond to diversity by encouraging it, discouraging it, by ignoring it, etc. Ultimately, policymakers need to be sensitive about the issues at stake and informed about the implications of their choices. The process calls for openness, consultation and participation, and for solutions to be found those involved should recognize the historical and cultural experiences that contribute to our diversity as a state.



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