



CORNWALL POLICY BRIEF

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Unbalanced Growth in North Jersey Since 1970: Getting from Eastward No! to Eastward Ho!

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The 2000 U.S. Census brought an upbeat message: several communities in Northern New Jersey are growing again. After continued population losses over the 1970s and 1980s, the 1990s saw the addition of thousands of people in many of the older urban centers and suburbs. The largest city in the region, Newark, had virtually stemmed the hemorrhaging of population that had plagued it for decades. Paterson added more than 8000 people, growing by almost 6 percent. Jersey City raised its population by more than 11,000 people or 5 percent, while Elizabeth added more than 10,000 people or nearly 10 percent. Several smaller communities in North Jersey also showed significant gains. Much of the population increase is due to rising immigration in the region. In some cases, improved public transit access to New York City has drawn younger families with children to North Jersey's older suburbs.

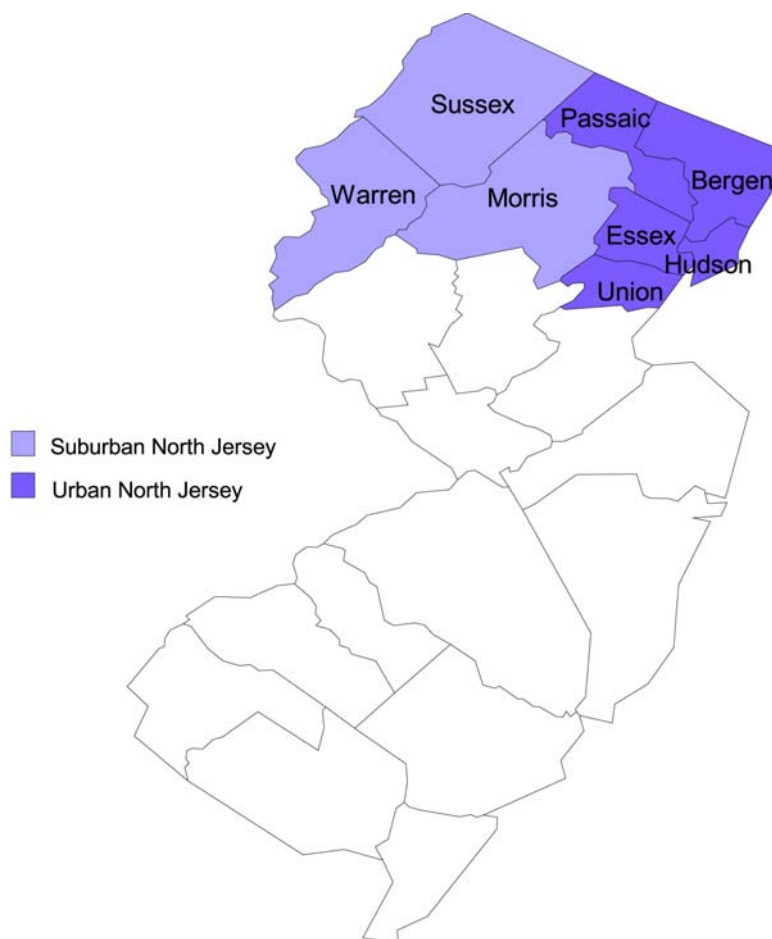
Just how critical is North Jersey's recent growth? A longer look at growth patterns in the region puts the issue in perspective. But it also underscores the importance of Governor James McGreevy's new initiatives to implement the state's smart growth policies. In the post-World War II era, rapid growth virtually defined North Jersey. Indeed, by 1950 all but one North Jersey county (Hudson) was growing. But by the 1970s the construction of interstate highways, escalating urban crime, civil disorders, and rapid middle-class out-migration from central cities conspired to alter growth trends. This Policy Brief examines North Jersey's population patterns in the aftermath of its peak period of growth during the 1950s and 1960s. In doing so, it sheds light on the significance of recent population gains in some of the urban centers of North Jersey and how critical it is for public officials, homebuilders, real estate investors and financial institutions to contribute to the advancement of these trends.

Why focus on North Jersey? To best understand patterns of urban and suburban growth and decline, we need to develop a regional perspective. New Jerseyans identify strongly with their home communities. Yet, public issues such as smart growth, economic development, neighborhood revitalization, and affordable housing need to be framed in more expansive parameters. Typically, as life circumstances and resources permit, most households migrate freely, moving from community to community, county to county, and among cities, suburbs and rural areas. To appreciate the significance of recent growth patterns in several of North Jersey's older communities, it is necessary to examine population shifts within and among the region's counties over a more extended historical period. Recent Census releases give us a snapshot in time, rather than a longitudinal landscape, of changes and continuities. This Policy Brief offers a longer view and a regional perspective.

The Eight Counties of Northern New Jersey

While not everyone will agree about which counties make up "Northern New Jersey," we have chosen to include the eight northernmost contiguous counties (Figure 1). They are Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Morris, Passaic, Sussex, Union, and Warren. 1/

Figure 1: Northern New Jersey Area



Together, they compose three Primary Metropolitan Statistical Areas (PMSAs), as defined by the Bureau of the Census. Bergen, Passaic, Essex, Hudson and Union counties are almost entirely urbanized and we refer to them collectively as “Urbanized North Jersey.” Morris, Sussex and Warren counties are more suburban and rural in nature and we refer to them collectively as “Suburbanizing North Jersey.” Urbanized North Jersey includes many of the state’s oldest manufacturing and port communities such as Newark, Jersey City, Hoboken, Bayonne, Elizabeth, Paterson, Union City, and Weehawken. It also encompasses several older suburban towns served by passenger rail service, including Westfield, Montclair, Glen Ridge, Maplewood, South Orange, Ridgewood, and Glen Rock. Suburbanizing North Jersey includes several rapidly developing townships such as Mount Olive, Randolph, Washington, Vernon, Montague, Wantage, Allamuchy, Blairstown, and Independence. 2/ Farmland, forested tracts, parks and historic sites also exist. A portion of the Highlands, one of the last forested reserves in New Jersey, cuts diagonally through Suburbanizing North Jersey.

North Jersey: The Big Picture

Overall, from 1970 to 2000 the eight-county North Jersey region grew by only one percent or slightly less than 38,000 people (Fig. 2). During the 1970s population actually declined by almost 165,000 people and over the following decade, it dropped another 65,000. During the 1990s however, growth shot up by nearly 268,000 people. The net effect over the 30-year period was that North Jersey’s overall population rose from 3.96 million to a shade over 4 million. This amounts to an average net gain in the region of 1259 people per year over the 30-year period. In contrast, the entire state of New Jersey expanded its population by 18.3 percent or about 1,313,000 people over the same period. Rising from 7.17 million in 1970 to 8.48 million in 2000, New Jersey’s 30-year growth rate amounted to an average of almost 44,000 people annually. Thus, North Jersey’s share of the state’s overall growth since 1970 has amounted to less than three percent (Fig. 3). Nevertheless, though North Jersey’s 30-year growth rate has been outpaced by the rest of the state, and though only 8 of the state’s 21 counties are in North Jersey, nearly one-half of the state’s population still lives in that region.

Figure 2: Population Growth in Northern New Jersey and New Jersey Overall, 1970 - 2000

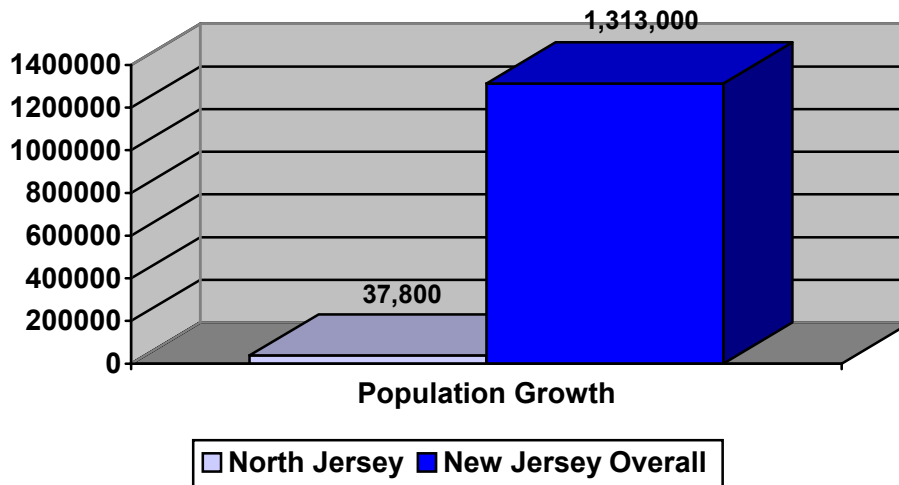
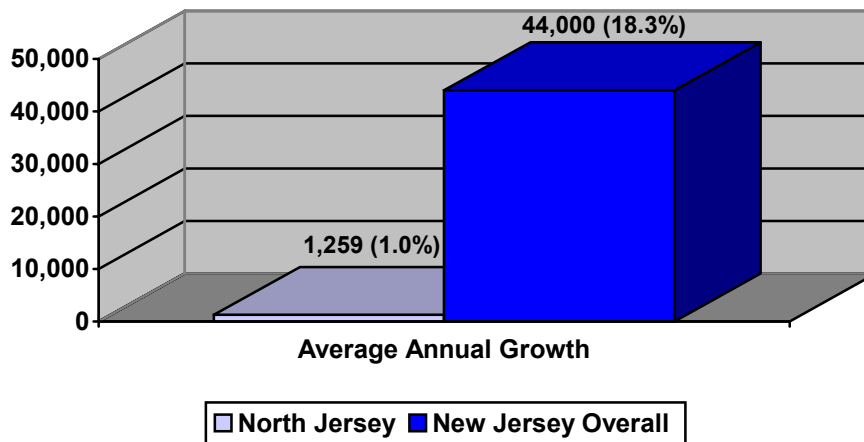


Figure 3: Average Annual Rate of Population Growth in Northern New Jersey and New Jersey Overall, 1970-2000



Urban North Jersey

A closer look at North Jersey’s population history since 1970 shows that the five counties of Urban North Jersey -- located in closest proximity to New York City -- have experienced sharply different patterns from those of Suburbanizing North Jersey (Fig. 4). Only two of these counties have had a net gain in population since 1970: Hudson (1136 people or 0.2%) and Passaic (26,264 people or 5.8%). Within Hudson County, growth was also uneven. Virtually all of the net losses occurred in three old industrial port communities: Hoboken, Jersey City and Bayonne. The greatest gains were further northward in North Bergen, Union City, West New York and Guttenberg. Similarly, in Passaic County, while the largest net loss was in Clifton (-3765 or -4.6%), four communities – Passaic City, Paterson, Wayne and West Milford – accounted for gains totaling 31,169 people. These patterns more than offset losses in Clifton and several other Passaic communities.

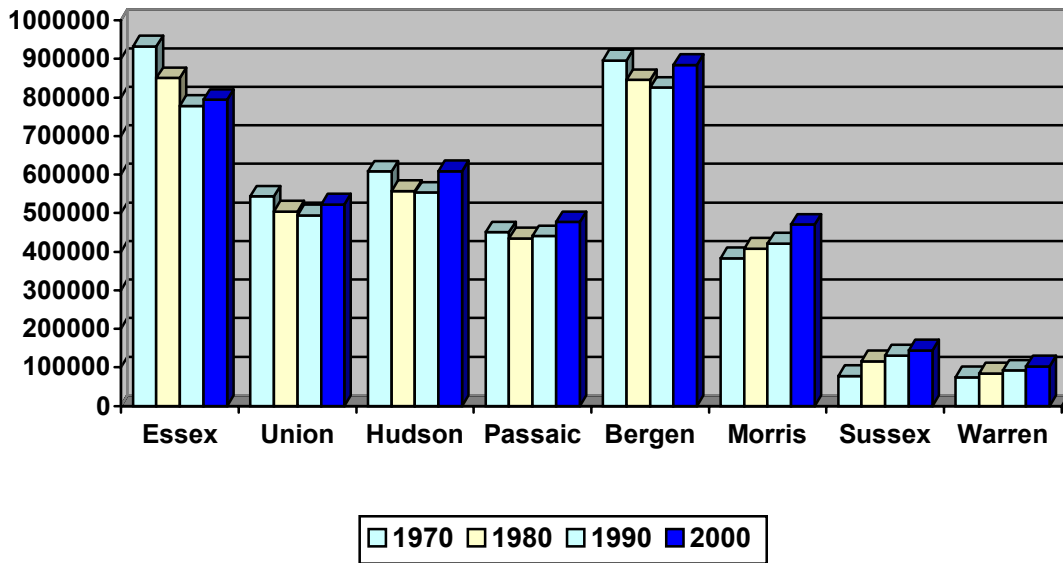
In Urban North Jersey’s other three counties there were net population losses over the three decades. Bergen County lost 12,033 (-1.3%) and Union County declined by 20,575 (-3.8%). But by far, the greatest losses were recorded in Essex County. Essex lost almost 139,000 people (-14.9%) from 1970 to 2000. Once numbering more than 932,000 people, Essex had fewer than 794,000 people by 2000. Of the 22 municipalities in Essex, 16 suffered a net loss of population over the three decades. Overall, Urban North

Jersey experienced a net loss of 144,166 people (-4.2%) from 1970 to 2000. More than 96% of this loss occurred in Essex County alone. These figures emphasize the extreme patterns of uneven growth in Urban North Jersey since the 1970s and underscore how significant urban population gains have been to the region over the 1990s.

Suburbanizing North Jersey

Thirty-year trends in North Jersey’s three suburbanizing counties present a very different picture (Fig. 4). It is hardly news that Morris, Sussex and Warren counties have undergone substantial growth in recent decades. Major corridors such as I-78, I-80, I-280 and I-287 have opened vast areas to the northwest and west of the urbanized counties to new residential subdivisions, shopping complexes, and office parks. New Jersey Transit rail service provides many commuters daily access to employment centers such as Morristown, Newark, Jersey City, and Manhattan. As a result, Morris County, the largest of the three, experienced a gain of 86,758 people (22.6%) from 1970 to 2000. Most of its growth occurred in the county’s western half however. Nearly all of the 11 communities losing population in Morris were in the eastern part of the county in closest proximity to Essex County. Sussex and Warren counties, further removed from Urban North Jersey, have undergone rapid suburbanization more recently than Morris. Since 1970 Sussex increased by 66,638 people (86%), while Warren gained 28,548 (38.6%). Overall, Suburbanizing North Jersey experienced net growth of 181,944 people (34%) during the three-decade period.

Figure 4: Population in the Eight Counties of Northern New Jersey, 1970 - 2000, Decennially



Urban vs. Suburbanizing Counties : The Bottom Line

The forgoing analysis has identified two key population dynamics: 1) Urban North Jersey, while experiencing wide variations in growth internally, has lost significant population overall during the past 30 years, while 2) growth in Suburbanizing North Jersey has continued unabated over the same period. While Urban North Jersey lost a total of more than 144,000 people, Suburbanizing North Jersey rose by almost 182,000 people. Not only did the suburbanizing counties gain as many people as the urban counties lost, they increased their population by an additional 38,000. Simply put, the trend in North Jersey over most of the past three decades has been, “Westward Ho! Eastward No!” Below we argue the importance of achieving a more balanced set of growth trajectories, which we call, “Eastward Ho!”

Why is Growth Desirable?

Some observers may argue that Urban North Jersey had “overgrown” during the post-war decades and that moderate de-population was in the best interests of the sub-region. However, it is not growth, per se, but the quality and character of growth that should be of concern. During Urban North Jersey’s post-war

decades the rate of growth was too great for the existing available space and public facilities. As a result, housing was frequently overcrowded and public facilities such as schools and parks were overstressed. Many housing units were uninhabitable and some contained no indoor plumbing. Federal programs such as Interstate Highways and Urban Renewal demolished thousands of housing units, reducing housing supply. Housing abandonment and arson contributed further to the loss. It was difficult for Urban North Jersey to accommodate rapid growth under these circumstances.

Today however, cities such as Newark, Paterson, Elizabeth, Jersey City and Bayonne contain considerable land that is vacant or underutilized. Brownfields, cleared renewal sites, and unused industrial and warehouse facilities, for example, offer opportunities for such communities to accommodate more housing and population. Additional space is available through clearance of deteriorated or abandoned homes and replacement with medium-density apartments and townhouses. And, notwithstanding current federal policies on the demolition of public housing towers, there are opportunities for market-rate and subsidized high-rise apartment, condominium and cooperative developments in appropriate locations. In short, central cities in Urban North Jersey have considerable capacity to absorb additional population.

But there is more to this story than space. Urban infrastructure such as sewer and water lines, electric and gas lines, and public streets in decaying neighborhoods may be inefficiently operated because they were designed for larger populations. Similarly, mass transit cannot operate efficiently where population densities are too low to provide adequate ridership. Crime rates often increase in neighborhoods where, due to population losses, there are too few “eyes on the street.” Empty or underutilized business properties provide few jobs for residents. Moreover, underutilized land yields lower property tax revenues and vacant retail stores generate no sales tax revenues. For all of these reasons, Urban North Jersey’s recent growth trends are extremely good news and continued growth is critical to the sub-region’s future.

Eastward Ho! Through Smart Growth Planning

In the mid-1980s New Jersey adopted one of the first statewide growth management laws in the nation and in the early 1990s, it completed its State Development and Redevelopment Plan. Recently updated, the plan seeks to reduce sprawl by limiting growth in rural areas to existing town centers and by attracting development to the older urban and suburban communities through reinvestment. The plan has had only limited success thus far. While recent growth trends in Urban North Jersey offer some cause for optimism, our analysis shows that from a regional perspective, development is still highly unbalanced. These patterns offer a most compelling argument for reducing the imbalance between the eastern and western sub-regions, a strategy we term, “Eastward Ho!” Governor James McGreevy’s promise to fight sprawl by enhancing opportunities and incentives for urban infill couldn’t come at a better time. Empowering state agencies to make decisions to fund new infrastructure in furtherance of this policy could have a significant effect on North Jersey. Increased funding for open space acquisition under the state’s Open Space Preservation Program is another Smart Growth tool. As the most densely populated region in the most densely populated state in the nation, North Jersey commands the highest priority under Governor McGreevy’s new initiative. State and federal efforts to formulate an effective “Eastward Ho! strategy are among the most promising options to advance urban revitalization and reduce urban sprawl in North Jersey.

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1. For data from the 1970-2000 censuses (inclusive) on Northern New Jersey’s individual municipalities, visit the Center’s website under “database” at www.cornwall.rutgers.edu.
2. A recent Star-Ledger five-part series described in admirable detail the complexities of suburban growth in an area bordering Suburbanizing North Jersey. See, “The View from Schley Mountain,” by Steve Chambers, “ at www.nj.com/specialprojects/