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## SOUTH DAKOTA DEMOGRAPHICS

### **What Is Demography?**

Demography is the scientific study of the size, distribution, and composition of human populations. Think of it as taking a snapshot of the country. Like a real photograph, it can capture a thousand different details, and by looking at a series of photos over time we can see the changes that have taken place.

In 1990, the year of the most recent census, the South Dakota population was reported as 696,004. By 1995, it was estimated that South Dakota's population had increased to 729,000. Every 10 years the United States takes a census as required in the U.S. Constitution, Article I Sec. 2. The census is taken to assure that there will be fair representation in legislative bodies. Over time the census has become more than just a head count, it contains detailed information that is used to make decisions in many different areas.

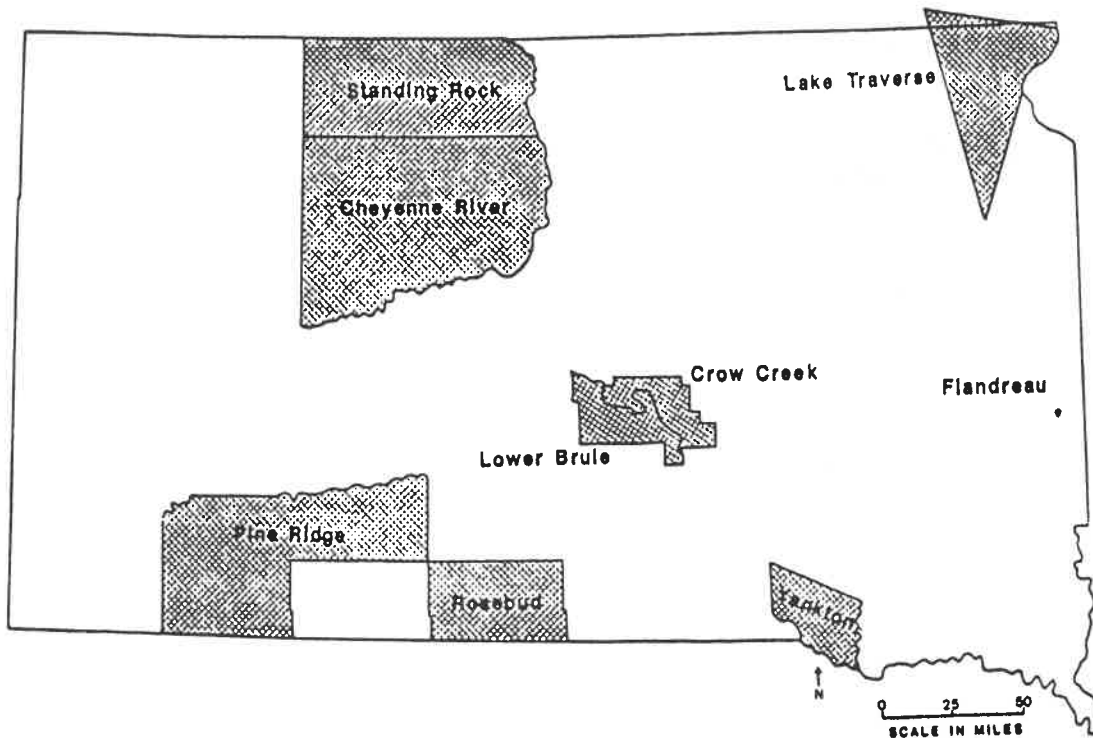
### **How Has The Population Of South Dakota Changed?**

In the early 1800's, when Lewis and Clark explored what is now known as South Dakota, they encountered Arikara people, an agricultural group that lived in villages along the Missouri. Other native groups inhabiting the region in the 1800's included a federation of about 13 nations collectively known as the Sioux. Unfortunately, this name is derived from

a derogatory description of this group used by the Ojibwa. There are three major language groups among the Sioux in South Dakota; the Dakota, Lakota and Nakota. A brief description of the complex history and distribution of these groups in South Dakota during the 1800's is included in *The Geography of South Dakota* (Hogan, 1995). Native people are well-represented in today's population, both across the state and in the 8 federally recognized reservations located in the state (See Figure 1.)

Although the early pioneer settlement of this region was by white, native-born Americans, many groups of European immigrants have had an influence. The nationalities that have had the greatest impact on South Dakota are the English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh, Germans, Norwegians, Dutch, French, Czechs, Danes, Poles, Russians, Hungarians, Greek, Portuguese, and Italians. More recent immigrants to South Dakota have been from Asia and Latin America.

Table 1 shows the estimated populations of South Dakota beginning with the first census taken after statehood in 1890 through the most recent census in 1990. As mentioned above, a census is just a snapshot of a moment in time. The population numbers in Table 1 show the broad picture. There is, however, much information to be seen when we look closer. The population of South Dakota



**Figure 1. Federally Recognized American Indian Reservations In South Dakota.**  
(Taken from Hogan, 1995).

has roughly doubled in the past 100 years. Why has this happened? Of course more people have moved into the state over time and the people in the state have had children. Will the population double in the next hundred years? If we look closer at the population numbers we may be able to answer these questions. During the periods between 1930 to 1940 and 1960 to 1970 the population went down. A decline of over 60,000 people was recorded between 1930 and 1940. This decline is roughly equivalent to the present day population of Rapid City. There are probably two main reasons for the decline in the population numbers between 1930 and 1940. The first reason is that this was the time of the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl. From about 1930 to 1940 America suffered its worst modern economic disaster. In the Midwest there was a prolonged drought. During this time many businesses and

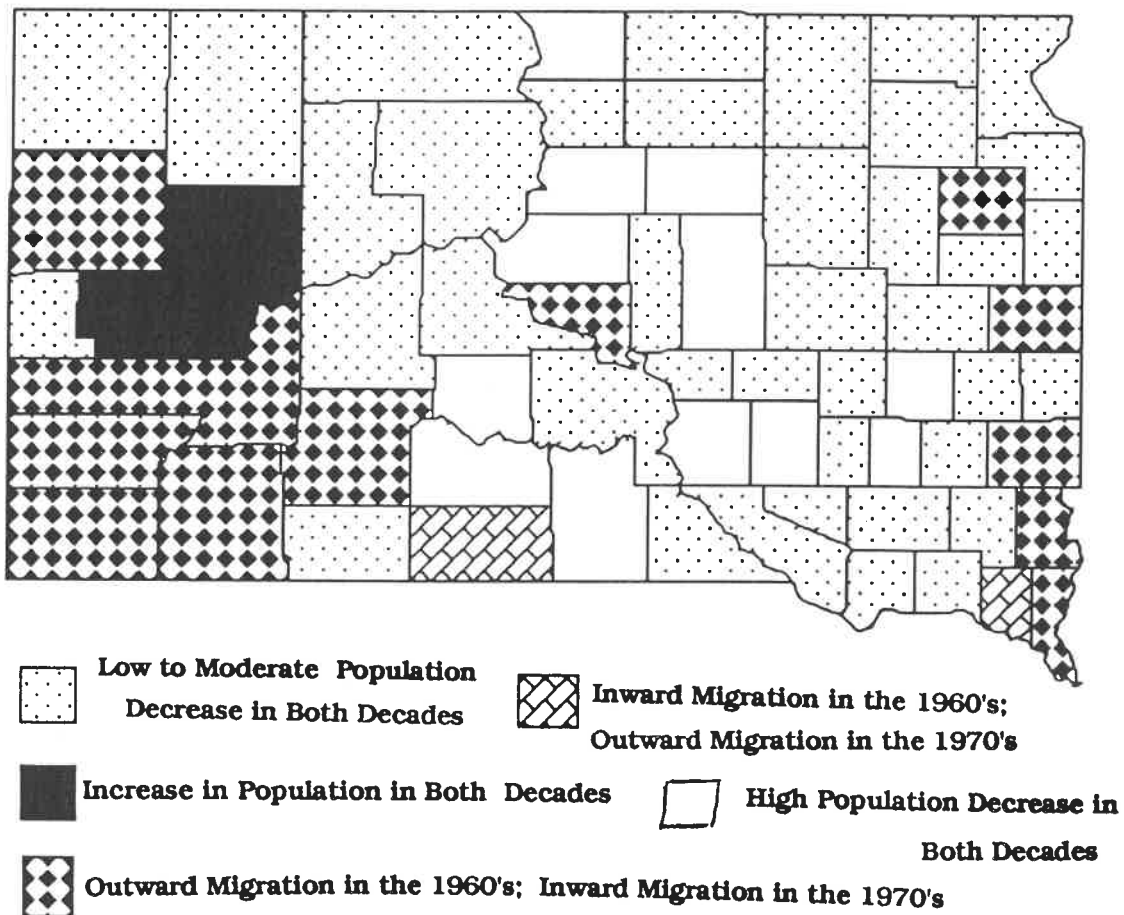
farms went bankrupt. across the country. Many people had to leave South Dakota, a very rural state, to find work elsewhere.

Year of Census	Total Population
1890	328,808
1900	401,570
1910	583,888
1920	636,547
1930	692,849
1940	642,961
1950	652,740
1960	680,514
1970	666,257
1980	690,768
1990	696,004
1995	729,000*

**Table 1. South Dakota Population from 1890 Through 1990.** (Source: Andriot 1983 and 1990 U.S. Census.) \* Estimated.

The second reason is that during this time the mechanization of farming began. With the widespread use of tractors, there was a decreased need for human labor. What may have taken three or four people to get done on the farm, could now be done by one person with the help of tractors and trucks. The second big decline between 1960 and 1970 was just a continuation of what had started in the 30's and 40's. Along with the mechanization of the farm there was an increase in the average size of farms. Between 1935 and 1982 the size of farms

increased 264.9% (or over 2 1/2 times). With the increase in farm size and the decrease in the amount of labor needed to run farms, there was a shift in where people live in the state. Between 1970 and 1995, the population of the United States grew by 29.2% while the population of South Dakota grew only by 9.4%. South Dakota presently ranks as the 45th most populated state, a drop of one place from its 1970 ranking as 44th most populated.



**Figure 2. Patterns of Population Migration In South Dakota In The 1960's and 1970's.**

## Where Do People In South Dakota Live?

In 1995, there were 9.6 people per sq. mile (over 3.5 people per sq. kilometer) in South Dakota. Of course there are not 9.6 people living on every square mile in the state. In reality the density, people per square mile, of the South Dakota population varies. For a state that is considered rural, over 50 percent of the population lives in towns with a population greater than 2,500 people. In addition, more than 50% of South Dakota's population lives in an eastern corridor running north to south 50 miles from Interstate 29. In most South Dakota counties there has been an outward migration for reasons stated earlier. However, there are counties with increases over the past few decades (See Figure 2.) Table 2 shows the population of the ten largest cities in South Dakota taken from the 1990 census.

City	# of People	Percent of Population
Sioux Falls	100,814	14.5 %
Rapid City	54,692	7.9 %
Aberdeen	24,927	3.6 %
Watertown	17,592	2.5 %
Brookings	16,220	2.3 %
Mitchell	13,789	2.0 %
Pierre	12,906	1.8 %
Yankton	12,703	1.8 %
Huron	12,488	1.7 %
Vermillion	10,034	1.4 %
TOTAL	276,165	39.5 %

**Table 2. 1990 Population of the Ten Largest Cities in South Dakota** (Source 1990 U.S. Census)

Figure 2 and Table 2 show that Brookings Co.-Brookings, Codington Co.-Watertown, Pennington Co.-Rapid City, the Black Hills area, and Minnehaha Co.-Sioux Falls are areas where there has been growth in population. Table 2 shows that nearly 4 out of every 10 South Dakota residents live in one of the state's 10 most populated cities. Notice that

most of these cities are close to an interstate or are within the 50 mile eastern corridor near I-29.

## Who Are The People Living In South Dakota?

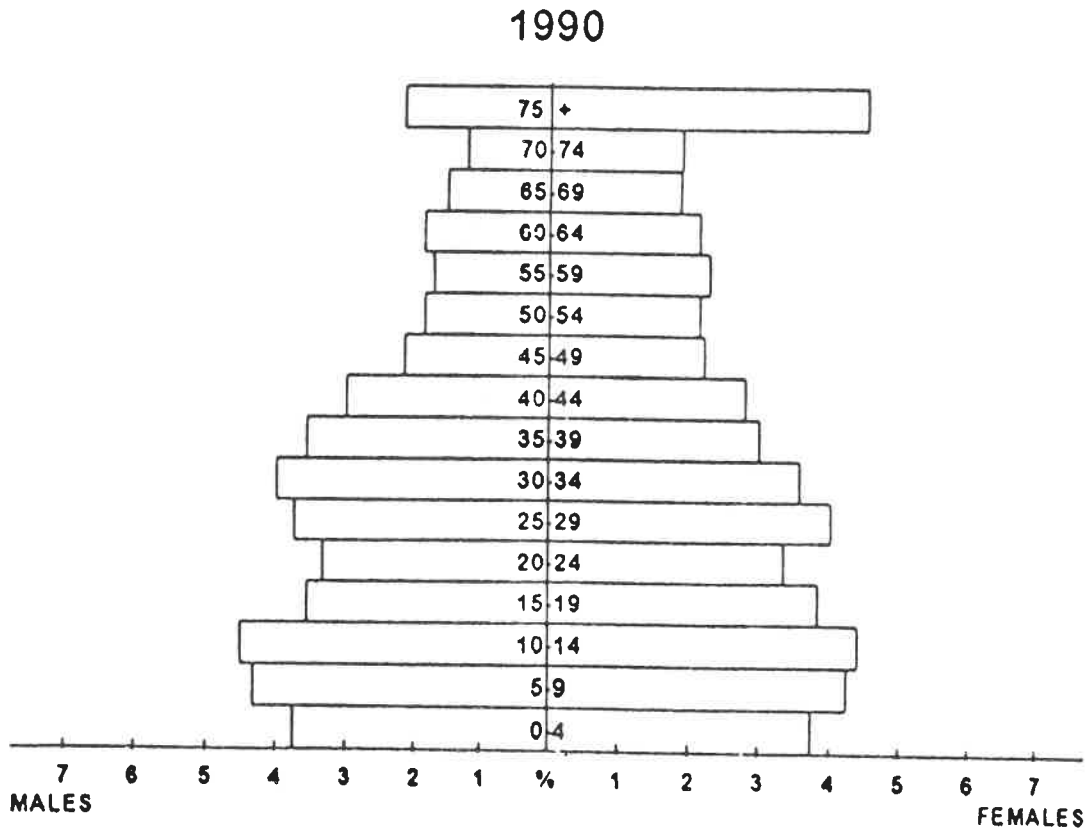
We can look at many different aspects of a population; ethnic diversity, average income, age distribution, and how many cars per household. The list is endless. Table 3 breaks down the population of South Dakota by ethnicity and gender. As expected, the two most common ethnic groups in South Dakota are Caucasian and Native American. Census data do not break the information down more specifically. Gender ratios are about equal; half female and half male.

Category	Number of People	Percent of Population
Total	696,004	
Male	342,498	49.2 %
Female	353,506	50.8 %
Caucasian	637,515	91.6 %
African Am.	3,258	<1.0 %
Am. Indian	50,575	7.3 %
Asian	3,123	<1.0 %
other	1,533	<1.0 %

**Table 3. South Dakota's 1990 Population According to Gender and Ethnicity.** (Source 1990 US Census)

Year	Number of Native Americans
1890	19,854
1900	20,225
1910	19,137
1920	16,384
1930	21,833
1940	23,347
1950	23,344
1960	25,794
1970	32,365
1980	44,948
1990	50,575

**Table 4. South Dakota Native American Populations Between 1890 and 1980.** (Source US Census data)



**Figure 3: Age and Gender Composition of South Dakota, 1990** (Source: Satterlee, 1993).

Table 4 shows the change in Native American population in South Dakota during the past century. There are no accurate data for populations before the pioneer settlement of the state. Unfortunately, census data do not include population totals for the individual Indian nations. It should also be noted that population counts of Native Americans have been historically inaccurate with most demographers believing that this group has been undercounted. Therefore, census counts should be interpreted as conservative estimates with the actual population anywhere from 5 to 15 % higher.

The *median age* of the South Dakota population is over 30 years of age. Figure 3 shows the age and sex composition of South Dakota from the 1990 census. Think of it as a pyramid whose shape reveals valuable information. The

pyramid shows a population that is aging. This pyramid instead of being broader at the bottom than at the top is more like a rectangle with the top slightly pushed in. This shape shows a declining rate of births and an increasing elderly population (Satterlee 1993).

### What Do South Dakota Demographic Data Tell Us?

In June of 1995, Harold Hodgkinson of the Center for Demographic Policy reported to the South Dakota legislature. He made a number of observations and offered several conclusions concerning South Dakota's population. First, the State's birth rate and in-migration rates are below the national average while the infant death rate is above the national average. South Dakota's population will, therefore, continue to grow at a very slow

rate in the foreseeable future and the state's ranking in terms of population is likely to continue to fall - probably to 47th by the year 2010. South Dakotans are not exceptionally well educated, ranking 24th in terms of adults with high school educations and 38th as far as college educations are concerned. Only 17.3% of South Dakota's adults have a college education compared to 20.3% nationally. On the positive side, South Dakota ranks very low in unemployment. In 1993, for example, only 3.5% of South Dakota's population was unemployed compared to 6.8%

nationally. While employment is high, salaries and wages are low. As of 1990, over 50% of the households in the state had incomes under \$25,000. Moreover, over 70% of the children in South Dakota have either both, or their only parent, in the work force - a figure nearly 10% higher than the national average.

The population data included here show only a small part of what a demographic study can teach us. From this information, we see trends that will be important in making decisions for the future of South Dakota.

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### Resources for Teachers

- Web Site <http://www.census.gov>
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