CHAPTER 14
Demographics

DEFINING DEMOGRAPHICS

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GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS—THE TOOL OF DEMOGRAPHICS

POLITICAL PLANNING
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- Site Selection
- Investment Demographics
- Demographics of Human Resource Management

CORPORATE DEMOGRAPHY

SHOULD YOU PURSUE A CAREER IN DEMOGRAPHICS?

ESSAY: The Demographics of Grand Juries—A Case Study

From Population: An Introduction to Concepts & Issues. 8th Edition. John R. Weeks. Wadsworth. Belmont, CA. 2002

It is no great exaggeration to say that every piece of information you have gleaned from the previous 13 chapters could be of great value to people seeking solutions to many practical dilemmas, and it is my purpose in this chapter to show you how to mine this treasure trove. To this end I begin with a definition of demographics (the popular name for applied demography) and then move to a discussion of its uses. These include political planning (such as legislative analysis and campaign strategy), planning for social purposes (such as education, public services, health services, and criminal justice), and planning in business (marketing, site selection, investment, and management demographics). I will also mention a whole new field of corporate demography that uses the concepts and methods of demography, but applies them to firms rather than to people. To help inspire you to find a useful purpose in your own life for demographic information, I conclude the chapter with a discussion of applied demography as a career choice.

Defining Demographics

Throughout this chapter I will use the terms "**demographics**" and "**applied demography**" interchangeably, even though the former term is clearly the most popular. Demographics is often used in the singular, meaning the application of demographic information and methods in business and public administration, and it is also seen in the plural, referring to the demographic information itself (Merrick and Tordella 1988). The major difference between demographics and the field of demography more generally is that the latter is concerned especially with producing new knowledge and understanding of human behavior, whereas the former is concerned more with the use of existing knowledge and techniques to identify and solve problems. Thus in this chapter you will not necessarily learn anything about demographic behavior that I have not already discussed in earlier chapters, but you will learn new ways to apply that information and bring solutions to problems that have a demographic component. What might those problems be?

The Uses of Demographics

Because we live in a social world, many if not most of the decisions that have to be made about life involve people; and when the issues relate to how many people there are, and where they live and work, and what are they like, then demographics becomes part of the decision-making process (Pol and Thomas 2001), in which you systematically lay out a strategy for achieving your goal. These goals will obviously be different depending upon whether your problems relate to business, social planning, or political planning.

Demographics are central to the political process in the United States. The constitutional basis of the Census of Population is to provide data for the **apportionment** of seats in the House of Representatives, and this process reaches down to the local level, as well, as I will discuss in more detail later in the chapter. Legislators also ask questions about how population growth and distribution influence the allocation of tax dollars. Will the increase in the older population bankrupt the social security system? Would federal subsidies to inner-city areas help lower the unemployment rate?

Are illegal aliens creating an undue burden on the criminal justice systems in border counties? Politicians are not completely altruistic, of course, and have been known to use demographics for their own personal use when campaign time rolls around. What are the characteristics of a candidate's supporters and where are these voters located?

Social agencies have also recognized the value of demographics for planning. School districts ask: How many students will there be next year? Or: Do we need to redraw school attendance areas? Police departments need to ask what the changes in population growth might portend for criminal activity in their areas. Health officials plan services by identifying specific high-risk populations (people who have an unusually high need for particular services) and attempting to meet their needs: Where is the best location for a new skilled nursing facility? Or: Does the community hospital really need an additional 40 beds?

There are several major uses to which demographics are regularly put by people in business, including marketing strategies, site selection, investment decisions, and management of human resources. Marketing demographics answer questions such as: Who buys my product, and where are those people located? Site selection answers the basic question of: Where should I locate my business? Investment demographics answer questions like: What are the potentially most profitable kinds of products in the future? What other countries might have a market for my products or services? Human resource management demographics look at questions such as: Is my company hiring the proper racial and ethnic mix of employees? Will future labor force shortages prompt me to discourage older employees from retiring?

The field of corporate demography is interested in the population of private businesses in a region, and seeks to explain the processes of birth (business creation), aging (the survival and maturity of businesses), death (the closing of a business), and migration (when businesses move in, out, or around). But no matter what your applied interest in demography might be, the literal explosion in the use of demographic information and resources can be traced to computerized geographic information systems (GIS).

Geographic Information Systems—The Tool of Demographics

"We know who you are and we know where to find you" could be described as the motto of marketers and political strategists. The combined computerization of demographic (who you are) and geographic (where to find you) data has created a revolution in the access an organization has to information about potential customers or clients or voters. Maps, census and survey data, and computers form the principal components of the geographic information system, as I mentioned in Chapter 2. To be useful, the data must be geographically referenced—they must have some geographic identifier (an address, ZIP code, census tract, county, state, or country, for example, going from most to least specific) that permits them to be linked to the map. Demographic data are virtually always geographically referenced (and have been in the United States since 1850), and the Geography Division of the U.S. Bureau of the Census works closely with the Population Division to make sure that data are identified for appropriate levels of "census geography," as shown in Table 14.1.