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UNH Research Finds Migration Making Most American Counties More Diverse

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DURHAM, N.H. – Migration increased the diversity of the population in two-thirds of U.S. counties between 2000 and 2010, according to new research released by the Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire, but the influence was far from uniform as it varied by race, age group and region of the country.

The research found that blacks and Hispanics of all ages migrated to areas that are predominantly white, while movement of the white population varied considerably by age. White young adults (age 20-39) moved to counties in large urban centers with relatively high levels of blacks and Hispanics, but older whites tended to move to predominantly white counties. Diversity grew the most in the suburbs and fringes of several metropolitan areas, mostly in the Northeast and Midwest, and the least in parts of the South, Southwest and Appalachia.

“Migration can serve an integrating function when people from different races move into the same area, but it can also reinforce existing racial boundaries and diminish local diversity when people from different racial groups sort themselves into homogeneous communities,” the researchers said. “We found that net migration had the overall effect of increasing diversity among U.S. counties over the past 20 years but we also found evidence of older whites moving away from more diverse counties toward whiter ones, suggesting that factors continue to limit integration among some groups.

The research was conducted by Richelle Winkler, associate professor of sociology and demography at Michigan Technological University, and Kenneth Johnson, senior demographer at the Carsey School and a professor of sociology. The full report can be found here: <https://carsey.unh.edu/publication/moving-diversity>

The Carsey School of Public Policy conducts research, leadership development, and engaged scholarship relevant to public policy. They address pressing challenges, striving for innovative, responsive, and equitable solutions at all levels of government and in the for-profit and nonprofit sectors.

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