

New report finds Houston metropolitan area is more diverse, less segregated

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Dramatic growth over the past 20 years has made Houston the most ethnically diverse large metropolitan area in the country and reduced its segregation, according to a new report from Rice University's Kinder Institute for Urban Research and the Hobby Center for the Study of Texas.

The report, "Houston Region Grows More Ethnically Diverse, With Small Declines in Segregation," also found that two Houston suburbs -- Pearland and Missouri City -- have slightly surpassed Houston as the region's most diverse cities. The researchers used [census data](#) from 1990, 2000 and 2010 to analyze the region's growth and changes over the past 20 years.

Houston metro region's widespread growth and diversity are attributable to a 1965 shift in [immigration laws](#), said report co-author Michael Emerson, co-director of the Kinder Institute and the Allyn and Gladys Cline Professor of Sociology. That year marked a dramatic shift in how visas were granted; the United States began giving the same number of visas to every country in the world. The impact has been the substantial ethnic diversification of the immigration population. Before 1965, the immigration population was predominately from Europe; now it is coming principally from Africa, Latin America and Asia.

Emerson said that while the entire country has felt the effects of this transition, the Houston metropolitan region's position as an "immigrant gateway" has meant that its population in both the city and the metro

area has shifted to one where Anglos are now a numerical minority.

"The majority of the Houston metropolitan area's growth has taken place since 1965, fueled by diverse immigrants and the children they have had since arriving," Emerson said. "As a result, the degree of diversity has even surpassed the nation's largest metro area, New York City."

And Houston's diversity extends beyond the city itself, according to report co-author Jenifer Bratter, director of the Kinder Institute's Race Scholars program and an associate professor of sociology.

"Houston is one of a handful of what is known as majority-minority cities, where Anglos represent less than 50 percent of the population," Bratter said. "And while Houston is one of the country's most diverse major cities, Pearland and Missouri City are now on par with Houston as the area's most ethnically diverse cities. Pearland and Missouri City are also significantly less segregated than the city of Houston."

Report co-author Junia Howell, a Rice graduate student in sociology, said the occurrence of more diverse cities is rare.

"This is very different from what's happening in most regions across the U.S.," she said. "The common assumption is that suburbs are more homogenous than central cities, but places like Missouri City and Pearland are breaking that mold."

Howell said the smaller levels of segregation in Houston's outlying areas could be attributed in part to the lack of established segregation patterns, such as those found in Houston and similar large cities across the country.

"Because diversity is increasing across the region, there are these new suburbs being created quickly that lack these traditional patterns," she

said.

Other findings in the report:

- Black-Latino segregation in the region has declined more rapidly than segregation between any other ethnic groups.
- Blacks are most segregated where they represent the largest absolute and relative numbers.
- The smaller the percentage of Anglos in an area, the greater their segregation from other groups.
- Asians live closest to Anglos and continue to be significantly segregated from blacks and Latinos.

The authors hope their study will highlight Houston's diversity relative to the rest of the country and show how people in the metro region are living amid these population changes. According to Emerson, the extensive diversity of the Houston region offers great potential for moving toward being a world-class city.

"Harnessing the burgeoning ethnic diversity of the Houston region is a signature opportunity to lead the nation in the transition to a fully inclusive, unified multi-ethnic region," he said. "How Houston handles this transition will go far in shaping the vitality of its future."

P. Wilner Jeanty, a research scientist and demographer for the Kinder Institute and Mike Cline, a research scientist in the Department of Sociology were also study co-authors. The Kinder Institute and the Hobby Center funded the research.

More information: Houston Region Grows More Ethnically Diverse, With Small Declines in Segregation: ow.ly/9oj37

Provided by Rice University

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