

RESEARCH & POLICY

INSIGHTS



Indiana's Economic and Workforce Regions: Demographic Trends

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INTRODUCTION

Recently, Governor Braun [confirmed](#) the 15 READI regions as Indiana's official economic and workforce planning framework. This confirmation was based on a [study](#) completed by the Indiana Business Research Center looking at labor force sheds and commuting distance. Now, other state agencies, such as the Department of Workforce Development, are [planning](#) to realign their existing regions. In other words, READI regions have become the official footprint for state-level regional development efforts.

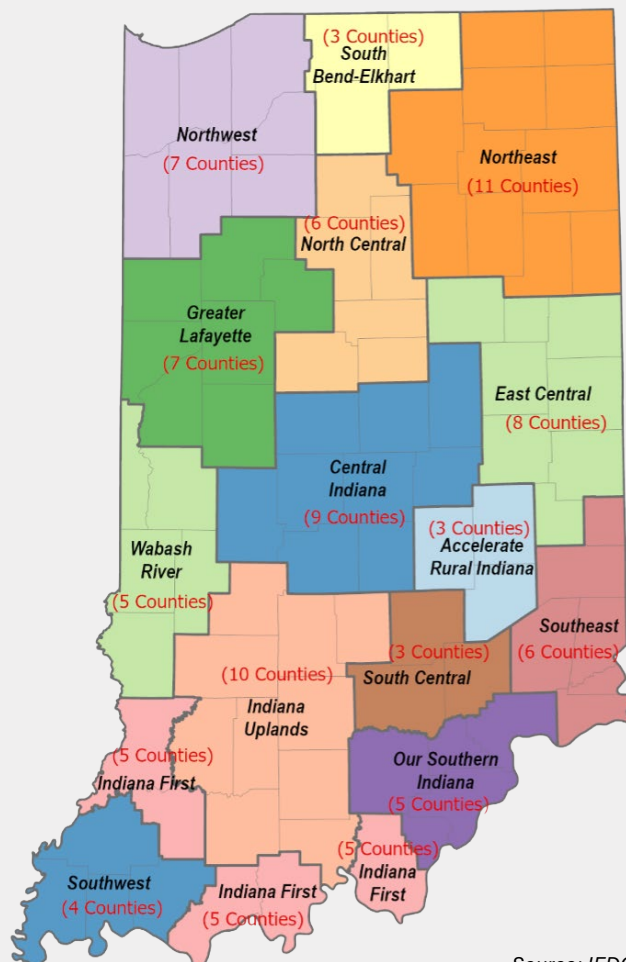
For this reason, the Purdue Center for Regional Development (PCRD), analyzed specific macro indicators of these regions to provide a much needed socioeconomic and demographic context. These can also serve as a baseline as stakeholders continue their READI work while additional state agencies align their efforts.

Often, the larger socioeconomic and demographic context as well as trends over time are overlooked as policies and/or programs are drafted, implemented, and evaluated. While policymaking takes into consideration data and impacts are measured also with data, these tend to look at one point in time and/or focus on specific areas or trees, overlooking the broader context or forest and trends, under which they take place.

The objective of this number-crunching is to better describe the regional socioeconomic and demographic landscape as well as better contextualize and interpret progress and impact, or lack thereof, of regional development efforts.

Figure 1 shows a map of the regions, including the number of counties per region (in parenthesis). The largest region by number of counties is northeast with 11, followed by Indiana Uplands with 10, and Central Indiana with nine counties. The smallest region is a three-way tie between Accelerate Rural Indiana, South Bend-Elkhart, and South Central with three counties each.

FIGURE 1. Indiana's Economic and Workforce Regions



Source: IEDC

DATA & METHODS

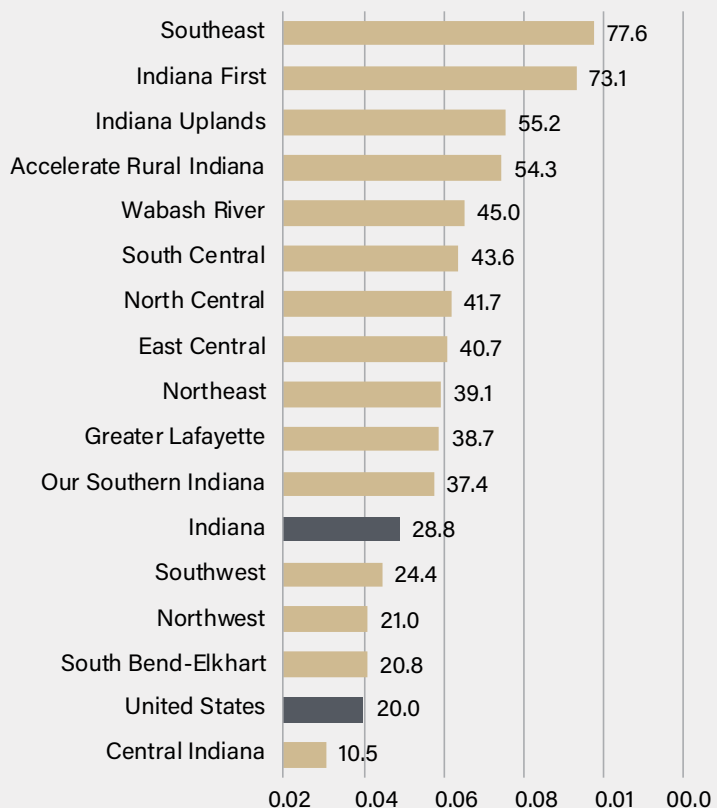
County-level data was aggregated to the regional level while state and national data was included for comparison purposes. Descriptive analyses were completed. Two points in time (years) were used to identify trends¹. Most data were obtained from the 5-Year American Community Survey (ACS)², the Bureau of Economic Analysis, the Federal Communications Commission, and County Business Patterns, to name a few.

RESULTS

This report analyzed six variables related to demographics: percentage rural³, percentage population change, components of population change, households with children, age groups, older-younger ratio, and race/ethnicity.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of the population residing in rural areas in descending order. Four regions had more than half of their population living in rural areas, with Southeast having the highest share with more than three-quarters of its population residing in rural areas, while Central Indiana had the lowest share at 10.5 percent. Indiana's share was higher than the nation's, 28.8 percent versus 20 percent.

FIGURE 2. 2020 Percentage Rural Population



Source: 2020 Decennial Census

¹ Most of the variables were analyzed using the 2013 to 2023 period. Different periods utilized, due to data availability, are clearly noted.

² This dataset is based on surveys and therefore has a margin of error. We do not consider the MOE when interpreting results because the objective is purely descriptive. Also, county-level data is aggregated to larger regional data, which typically reduces the MOE. However, any percentage change results of one percentage point or lower may indicate no change.

³ Rural population was defined by the 2020 Decennial Census.

Table 1 showcases population change between 2013 and 2023. Four Indiana regions outpaced the state and only two outpaced the nation. Four regions saw their population decline during this period. As of 2023, the most populous region was central Indiana with a little more than 2.1 million residents while the least populous was Accelerate Rural Indiana with less than 100,000 residents.

TABLE 1. 2013-2023 Population Change

Population	2013	2023	% Change
Accelerate Rural Indiana	87,565	88,491	1.1
Central Indiana	1,894,212	2,109,483	11.4
East Central	385,478	373,577	-3.1
Greater Lafayette	298,603	308,331	3.3
Indiana First	129,729	127,436	-1.8
Indiana Uplands	372,158	372,178	0.0
North Central	226,249	225,629	-0.3
Northeast	767,977	810,583	5.5
Northwest	853,162	870,723	2.1
Our Southern Indiana	272,630	292,320	7.2
South Bend-Elkhart	514,169	526,944	2.5
South Central	151,319	158,649	4.8
Southeast	124,896	126,726	1.5
Southwest	301,477	303,921	0.8
Wabash River	189,089	185,140	-2.1
Indiana	6,568,713	6,880,131	4.7
United States	315,993,715	336,806,231	6.6

Source: U.S. Census Population Estimates

What drove this population change? To answer this question, we looked at cumulative⁴ components of population change. The Census Bureau calculates three components of population change: natural (births minus deaths), international (net inflow/outflow of international residents), and domestic (net inflow/outflow of residents within the United States)⁵.

Table 2 breaks down the cumulative components of population change for each region, the state, and the nation. All regions gained population due to international inflows while only four regions gained population due to domestic inflows. Five regions lost population due to a natural decrease. For the state, natural increase was the highest contributor to population increase followed by international and domestic.

⁴ These numbers are published annually. 2013-2023 were added to calculate each cumulative component of population change.

⁵ Numbers may not match population change numbers in Table 2 due to residuals.

TABLE 2. 2013-2023 Cumulative Components of Population Change

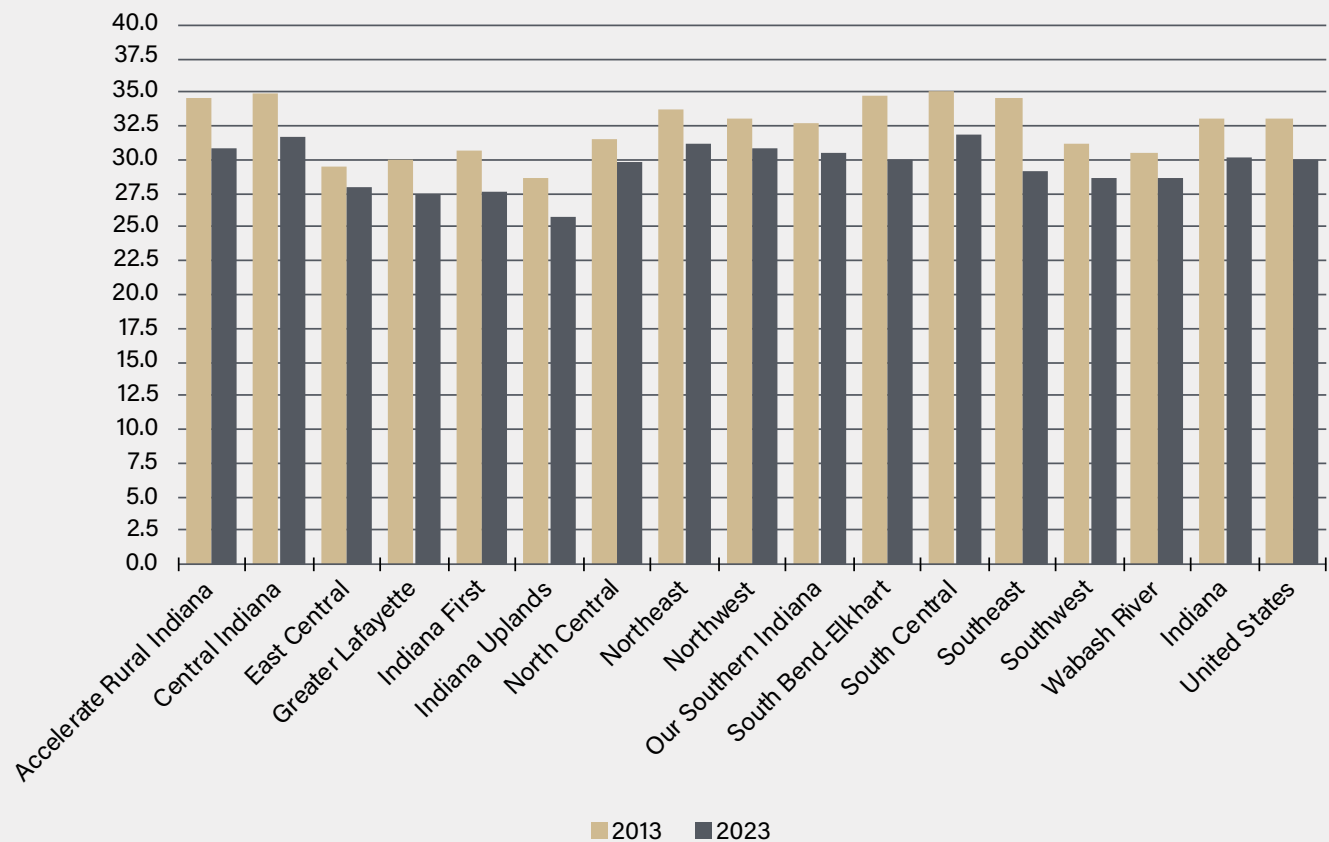
Region	Natural	International	Domestic
Accelerate Rural Indiana	275	597	-215
Central Indiana	87,229	52,866	52,924
East Central	-8,356	2,581	-9,562
Greater Lafayette	9,508	16,309	-7,290
Indiana First	-1,052	551	-130
Indiana Uplands	1,889	9,857	-5,308
North Central	-1,673	1,756	-5,516
Northeast	30,467	8,218	-1,298
Northwest	5,415	4,127	-10,461
Our Southern Indiana	271	1,514	12,782
South Bend-Elkhart	19,767	8,034	-16,632
South Central	3,973	6,382	-2,807
Southeast	-143	334	650
Southwest	1,323	2,360	708
Wabash River	-484	1,524	-4,197
Indiana	148,409	117,010	3,648
United States	9,210,691	8,691,547	0

Source: U.S. Census Population Estimates

Next, and continuing to understand population change, we looked at the percentage of households with children. **Figure 3** shows that the percentage of households with children decreased across all regions in Indiana as well as the state and the nation. The largest decrease among Indiana regions was Southeast, going from 34.4 percent in 2013 to 29.1 percent in 2023.

The Central Indiana and South Central regions were tied with the highest share of households with children, at roughly 31.6 and 31.7 percent respectively. Indiana Uplands, on the other hand, had the lowest share with 25.6 percent.

FIGURE 3. Percentage Households with Children



Source: 5-Year ACS

Regarding age groups, Census data was analyzed by grouping the population into under 18 (children), 18-24 (college-age), 25 to 54 (prime working age), 55 to 64 (pre-retirement age), and age 65 or older (retirement age). **Figures 4 & 5** showcase the share of the population by these selected age groups.

As of 2023, Indiana Uplands had the lowest share of children (20.3 percent) while South Bend-Elkhart had the highest (25.1 percent). Regarding prime working age, Central Indiana had the highest (40.4 percent) while East Central had the lowest (34.5 percent). When it comes to senior residents, Southeast Indiana had the highest share (19.1 percent) while Central Indiana had the lowest share (14.2 percent).

It is important to note that the share of children, college-age, and prime working age among ALL regions, the state, and the nation declined between 2013 and 2023. Pre-retirement and senior residents increased, also, across ALL regions, the state, and the nation.

FIGURE 4. 2013 Percentage Population by Age Groups

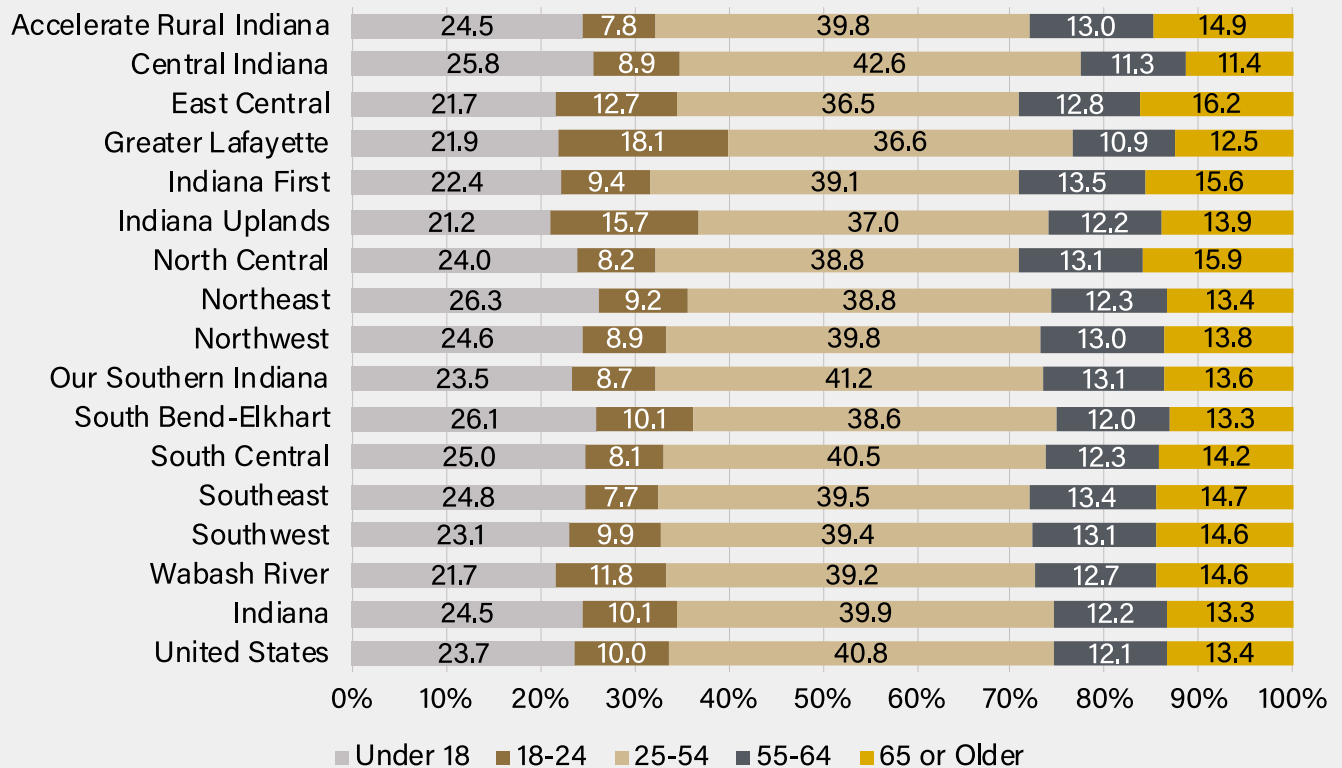
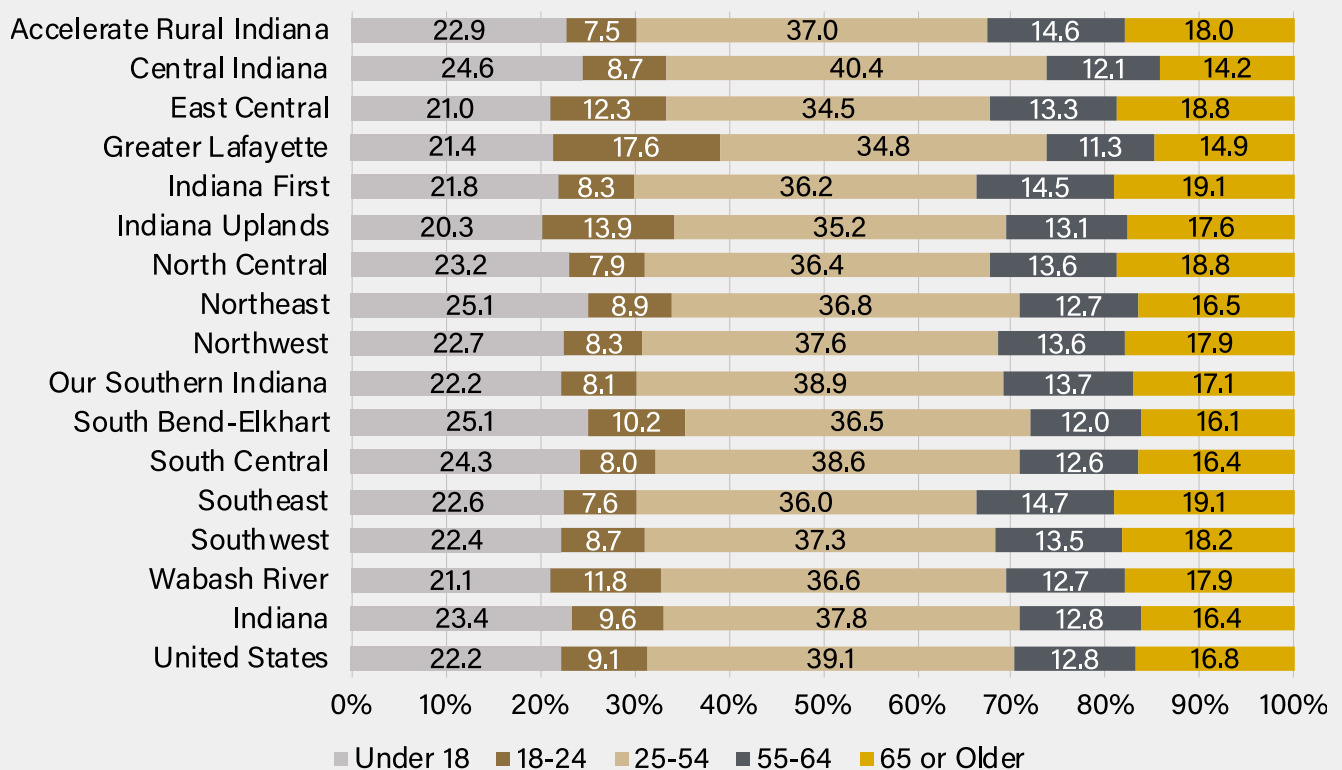


FIGURE 5. 2023 Percentage Population by Age Groups

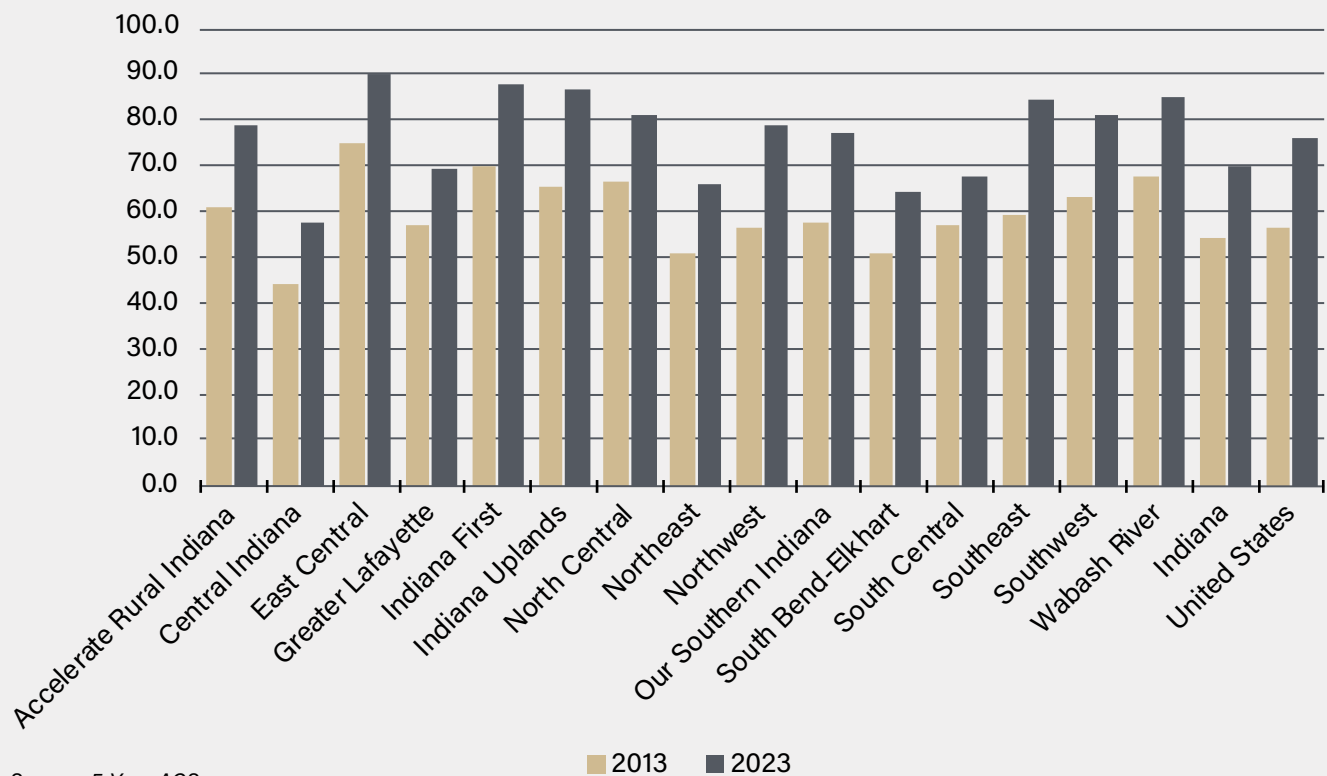


The older-younger (OY) ratio is an indicator that measures the size of the senior population (ages 65 or older) compared to the children population (under 18 years). Like the age-dependency ratio, it illustrates a quickly changing demographic landscape. Any number below 100 means that there are more children than senior residents. A number above 100 indicates that the number of senior residents is larger than the number of children.

Figure 6 shows the OY ratio for Indiana's regions, the state, and the nation. No Indiana region, the state, or the nation has exceeded 100, meaning there are more children than senior residents. However, this ratio increased across the board between 2013 and 2023. East Central had the highest OY ratio as of 2023 with 89.7, followed by Indiana First with 87.6. The lowest OY ratio was in Central Indiana with 57.5.

Collectively, the senior population in Indiana increased by close to a quarter-million between 2013 and 2023 while the children population shrunk by about 1,000 children. As of 2023, the estimated number of children in Indiana totaled almost 1.6 million compared to roughly 1.1 million senior residents.

FIGURE 6. Older-Younger (OY) Ratio

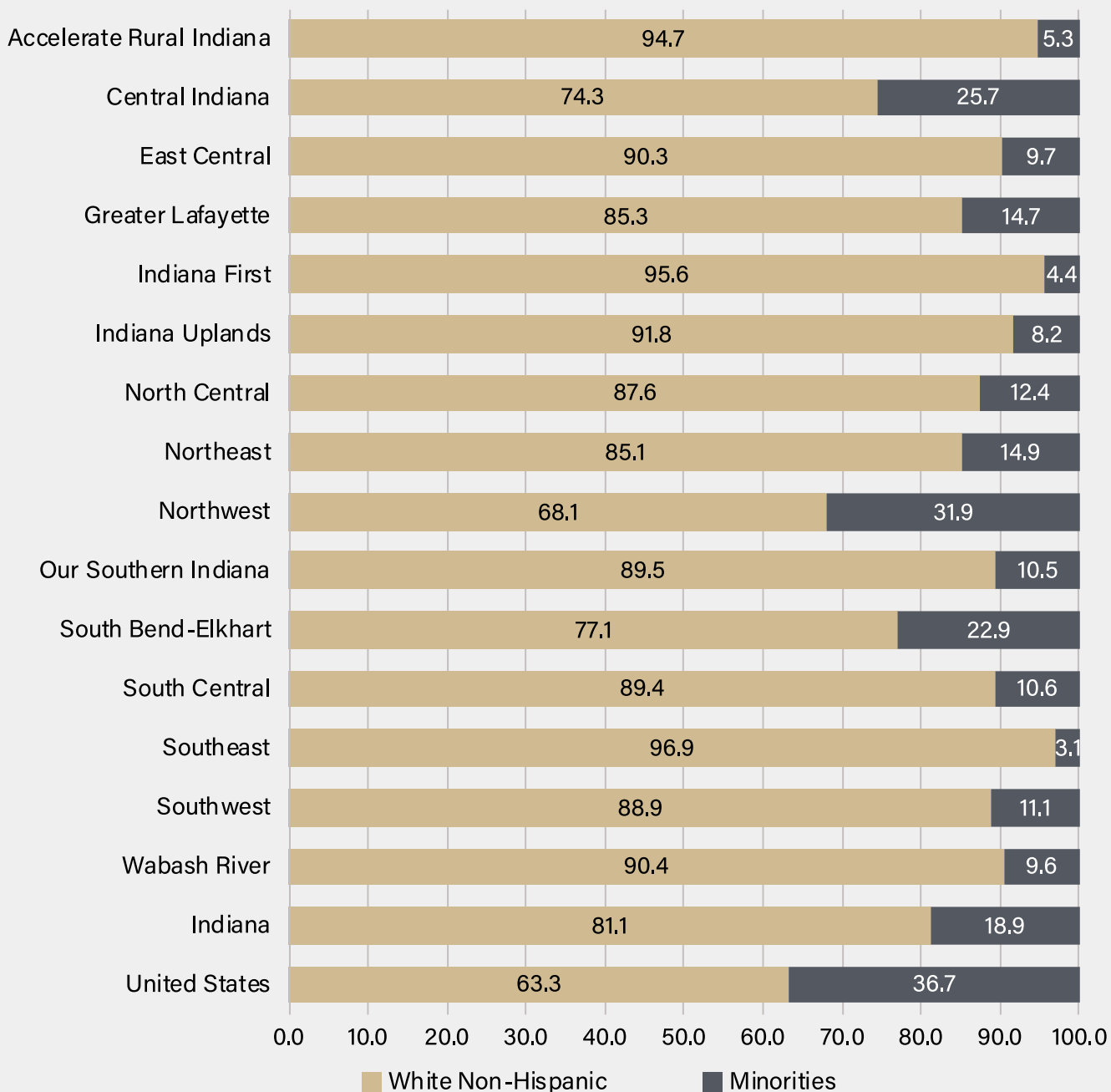


Lastly, we analyzed the race/ethnicity breakdown. The Census Bureau asks respondents to self-identify among eight, mutually exclusive variables. We compared the White non-Hispanic population to a minority group. This minority group includes Black non-Hispanic, American Indian non-Hispanic, Asian non-Hispanic, Native Hawaiian and other Pacific non-Hispanic, some other race non-Hispanic, two or more races non-Hispanic, and Hispanics.

Figures 7 & 8 breakdown the White non-Hispanic and Minority. Even though the share of White non-Hispanic in the state decreased from 81.1 percent in 2013 to 76.1 percent in 2023, it was lower compared to the nation. The share of White non-Hispanic in the nation went from 63.3 percent to 58.2 percent.

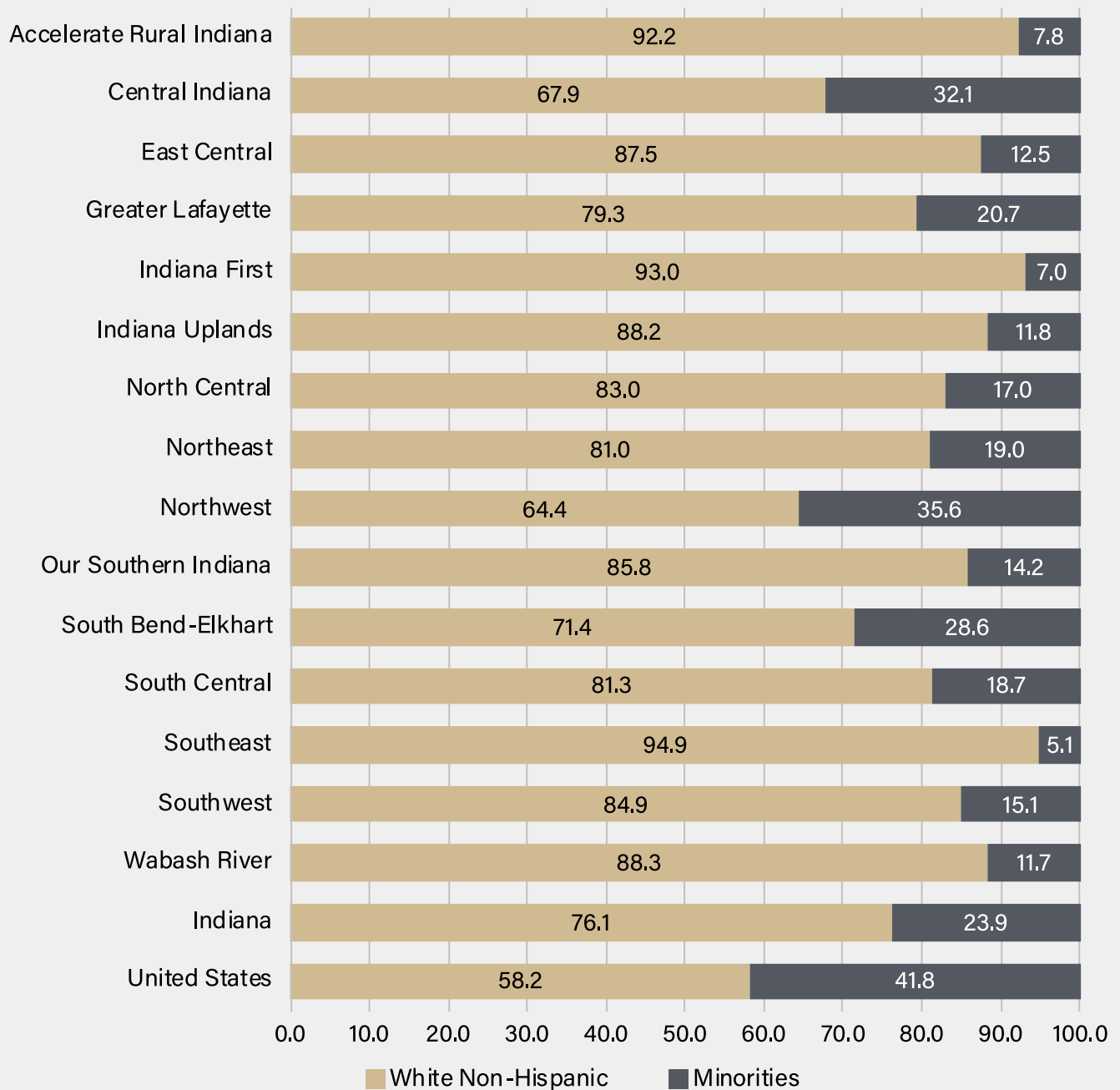
Among Indiana regions, the average share of White non-Hispanic decreased from 87 percent in 2013 to almost 83 percent in 2023. The regions with the highest share of minorities as of 2023 were Northwest with 35.6 percent followed by Central Indiana with 32.1 percent. Southeast Indiana had the lowest share of minorities with 3.1 percent followed by Accelerate Rural Indiana with 5.3 percent.

FIGURE 7. Older-Younger (OY) Ratio



Source: 5-Year ACS

FIGURE 8. 2023 Racial/Ethnic Breakdown



Source: 5-Year ACS

CONCLUSIONS

Demographically speaking, Indiana regions are diverse. Some regions had most of their population living in rural areas while others were mostly urban. Some regions gained population while others lost population. Natural increase and domestic migration contributed to population decline among some regions while all experienced population growth due to international migration. Other regions had a higher share of children compared to senior residents while other regions had a higher share of minorities compared to their peers.

Our hope is that this report helps inform regional leaders, stakeholders, and the public about the demographic opportunities and challenges in their regions. Some regions will have to work on providing or maintaining resources for aging populations while other regions need to focus on adequate planning as their population increases. Yet other regions need to creatively think about how to maintain their quality of life amid population decline and aging.

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