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Allegheny County: Relative performance 1993 to 2023

Background: Allegheny County reached its all-time population high in 1960 at 1,628,587 and fell significantly through 1993, reaching 1,338,289. Since 1993, population dipped further to 1,222,825 in 2023. Employment data are available back to 1970 (although revisions have occurred), which show a slow upward trend through the 1990s despite the population decline. No doubt the trend of increasing workforce participation by women played a role in the modest gains.

Note that county employment data are for July, the monthly peak data. In the late 1990s, employment in the county fell consistently through 2005, losing about 40,000 jobs. A brief rebound through 2008 was followed by a sharp drop through 2010. Then steady growth occurred until 2019 when the COVID plague hit, causing a plunge in employment to a low point of 553,000 in early 2020. Since then, a slow rebound has lifted jobs to the 615,000 level, but still well below the readings posted in the 1990s.

Compared to other U.S. counties

In this *Brief*, Allegheny County's population and employment experience since 1993 is compared to several counties around the country. Counties in both Right-to-Work (RTW) states and non-Right-to-Work states (NRTW) are chosen. Selected counties are of roughly the same size as Allegheny County or are among the largest in their state.

The RTW counties, with their principal city, are Ada, Boise, Idaho; Dallas, Texas; Davidson, Nashville, Tenn.; Marion, Indianapolis, Ind.; Hillsborough, Tampa, Fla.; Mecklenburg, Charlotte, N.C.; and Wake, Raleigh, N.C. The counties in NRTW states, with their principal city, are Cuyahoga, Cleveland, Ohio; Hamilton, Cincinnati, Ohio; Hartford, Conn.; Milwaukee, Wisc.; St. Louis, Mo.; and Allegheny.

While Milwaukee is currently in a RTW state, Wisconsin only became a RTW state in 2015, so the benefits of being RTW had not had a meaningful opportunity to change the legacy of being a NRTW state for so long and thus is listed as NRTW for purposes of this study.

As a benchmark, note that the U.S. population rose 28.7 percent between 1993 and 2023. Employment nationally climbed 34 percent over the 30 years.

Population

<i>County</i>	<i>% Change 1993-2023</i>	<i>County</i>	<i>% Change 1993-2023</i>
Wake, N.C.	146.3	Marion, Ind.	16.8
Ada, Idaho	126.9	Hartford, Conn.	5.6
Mecklenburg, N.C.	108.4	St. Louis, Mo.	-2.1
Hillsborough, Fla.	74.7	Milwaukee, Wisc.	-5.0
Davidson, Tenn.	33.6	Hamilton, Ohio	-5.3
Dallas, Texas	32.3	Allegheny, Pa.	-8.5
U.S.	28.7	Cuyahoga, Ohio	-13.6

Ranked by 30-year gains in population, all but one (Marion) of the RTW counties grew faster than the 28.7 percent rise posted nationally. Three counties posted growth of over 100 percent—Wake (146.3), Ada (126.9) and Mecklenburg (108.4). Hillsborough rose nearly 75 percent. Davidson and Dallas populations were up just over 30 percent. Marion saw a population rise of 16.8 percent.

None of the NRTW counties came close to matching the U.S. growth rate. Indeed, only Hartford, with a 5.6 percent gain, had a population increase over the 30-year period. All the other counties had declining populations led by Cuyahoga with a 30-year drop of 13.6 percent followed by Allegheny with a reduction of 8.5 percent. Smaller but significant losses occurred in Hamilton at 5.3 and Milwaukee at 5 percent. St. Louis had a smaller decline at 2.1 percent

Once again, the pattern the Allegheny Institute has noted for many years, RTW states (especially those that have been RTW for decades) have engendered some very strong counties within their borders. While many NRTW states, especially in the industrial Midwest, have had trouble growing at the national, or better, rate. That has been true for Pennsylvania for some time.

Employment

<i>County</i>	<i>% Change 1993-2023</i>	<i>County</i>	<i>% Change 1993-2023</i>
Wake, N.C.	131.6	Marion, Ind.	15.2
Ada, Idaho	118.5	Hartford, Conn.	6.5
Mecklenburg, N.C.	112.9	St. Louis, Mo.	-0.8
Hillsborough, Fla.	78.3	Milwaukee, Wisc.	-1.4
Davidson, Tenn.	49.8	Allegheny, Pa.	-3.1
Dallas, Texas	34.7	Hamilton, Ohio	-3.2
U.S.	34.0	Cuyahoga, Ohio	-8.7

Not surprisingly, the rank in growth to the number of people working (household count) in the selected group of counties tracks closely with population gains. Again, all the counties that had employment growth faster than the national rate were in RTW states. Marion was the only county in a RTW state that failed to surpass the nation's growth performance. NRTW Cuyahoga fell nearly 9 percent. Allegheny County was third worst with a 3.1 percent decline.

Meanwhile, the RTW counties, including Wake, Ada and Mecklenburg, posted 30-year employment gains of over 100 percent and more than three times the national gain.

Remarkably, in 1993, Wake's employment stood at 277,260 and Allegheny was at 635,575. But by 2023, Wake's employment had surged to 642,166 to surpass Allegheny's count of 615,723. Similar changes in employment comparisons occurred between Mecklenburg and Allegheny, as well as Hillsborough and Allegheny, as these two fast-growth counties now have more employment than Allegheny—a dramatic reversal from the situation in 1993.

Income

Also important in the county comparisons is the rate of inflation-adjusted income gains. Local income growth is important in the vitality of the retail sector as well as being an important driver of real estate values. It is also a key element as a source of local taxation.

Note that the fastest employment and population growth counties listed above also recorded by far the most impressive gains in inflation-adjusted income growth over the 30 years. Likewise, the slower employment growth counties registered the weakest income gains.

Allegheny County's total real income rose 34.6 percent over the 30 years. The slowest growth was in Cuyahoga at 15.3 percent with Milwaukee at 29 percent, Hartford at 34 percent and Hamilton at 38 percent. Meanwhile, the fastest growth employment and population counties enjoyed spectacular gains in total real income led by Wake at 269 percent and Mecklenburg at 215 percent. Indeed, both Wake and Mecklenburg, after being far below the Allegheny total income level in 1993, moved ahead of Allegheny's income in 2023.

By and large the county income gains mirrored the growth in population and employment.

Conclusion

The data in this study once again reveal an important truth: Generally speaking, the presence of a Right-to-Work law is a key element in the economic performance of states and counties. There are exceptions, of course, with areas like Silicon Valley having enjoyed strong gains and some counties and areas of some RTW states that have yet to experience the strong gains enjoyed in the counties of Idaho, North Carolina, or Florida examined in this *Policy Brief*.

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