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Distinguishing Darwin: Demography of the Capital

KEY FINDINGS

- The population of Darwin has markedly different characteristics to that of the rest of the Northern Territory in terms of age (median age of 32 compared with 28), sex (sex ratio of 1.08 compared with 1.04), proportion of overseas born residents (30% compared with 15%) and proportion of Indigenous residents (10% compared with 50%).
- The populations were similarly mobile (about 46% population turnover between 2001 and 2006), but the non-Indigenous population of Darwin was substantially less mobile than that of the rest of the Territory.
- Darwin had a higher proportion of immigrants motivated by family and social reasons, with work reasons being key migration motivators for non-Darwin residents.
- Policy makers face the challenge of dealing with not only the differences between urban and non-urban populations, but the divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in non-urban regions.

RESEARCH AIM

To examine how the demography of Darwin differs from the rest of the Northern Territory.

This research brief draws on data from the Census of Population and Housing provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, and from the Northern Territory Population Mobility Survey (TMS) conducted by the Population Studies Group in late 2006. The study is part of a program of demographic research funded in part by the Northern Territory Treasury and the Australian Research Council.

The research has been conducted by Associate Professor Dean Carson.

Background

According to the 2006 Census of Population and Housing, more than three quarters of Australians lived in urban areas with populations greater than 100 000. Nearly two thirds (64%) lived in the capital cities of each State and Territory. *Year Book Australia, 2006* (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006) described some important demographic differences between urban and non-urban dwellers. Non-urban dwellers were generally older, and sex ratios were higher. Non-urban populations had been observed as growing much more slowly than urban populations.

The Northern Territory has one urban centre with more than 100 000 population – the capital city of Darwin which, for these purposes, includes the statistical subdivisions of Darwin, Palmerston, and Litchfield Shire. It had an estimated population in June 2007 of 117 400 people, representing 55% of the Northern Territory Population. It had experienced steady annual growth of about 2% for the previous ten years, compared with more volatile growth patterns in non-urban areas, and had increased its share of the population by about 2% over that period of time. The contribution intra-Territory mobility may have made to these patterns of growth was explored in *Research Brief 3: Population Exchange Between Darwin and the Rest of the Northern Territory 2001-2006*. This brief takes a closer look at the population of Darwin and how it compares with the rest of the Northern Territory in terms of basic demographic profile, and aspects of population mobility. The differences in population characteristics have ramifications for the development of policy for which population is central – this includes health, education, economic, and infrastructure policies.

Methods

Data were drawn from the 2006, 2001 and 1996 Census of Population and Housing (Australian Bureau of Statistics) and the Northern Territory Population Mobility Survey (TMS) which was conducted by the Population Studies Group in late 2006. Census variables of interest included age, sex, Indigenous status, country of birth, place of usual residence, place of usual residence one year ago, and place of usual residence five years ago. Data on population change over time were drawn from various estimates provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The TMS was a telephone survey with around 1500 non-Indigenous residents of the Northern Territory. It identified where people lived at the time of the survey, and asked them about their migration histories, and reasons for coming to, staying in, and ultimately leaving the Northern Territory.

The results include calculations of various migration rates. 'Stability rate' is the percentage of people who were resident in the region of concern at the start of the period of interest and at the end of the period of interest. Immigration rate is the percentage of the population who were not in the region at the start of the period of interest, but were in the region at the end. Emigration rate is the percentage of people who were in the region at the start of the period of interest, but not at the end. 'Turnover rate' is the number of moves made (sum of immigration and emigration) during the period expressed as a percentage of the population at the end of the period.

Results

Figure 1 shows the annual rate of population growth recorded for Darwin and the rest of the Northern Territory since 1982. 1991 represented a break in series as a result of a substantial boundary change. Rates of growth for Darwin have generally been around half a percent higher than those for the rest of the Northern Territory, although there was a period in the late 1980s (before the statistical division of Palmerston was included in the capital city boundaries) where the non-urban population grew more rapidly. By 2007, Darwin had 55% of the Northern Territory population, having had about 45% right through the 1970s and 1980s. By way of comparison, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth had about 75% of their state's population in 2007, and Brisbane and Hobart had about 45%.

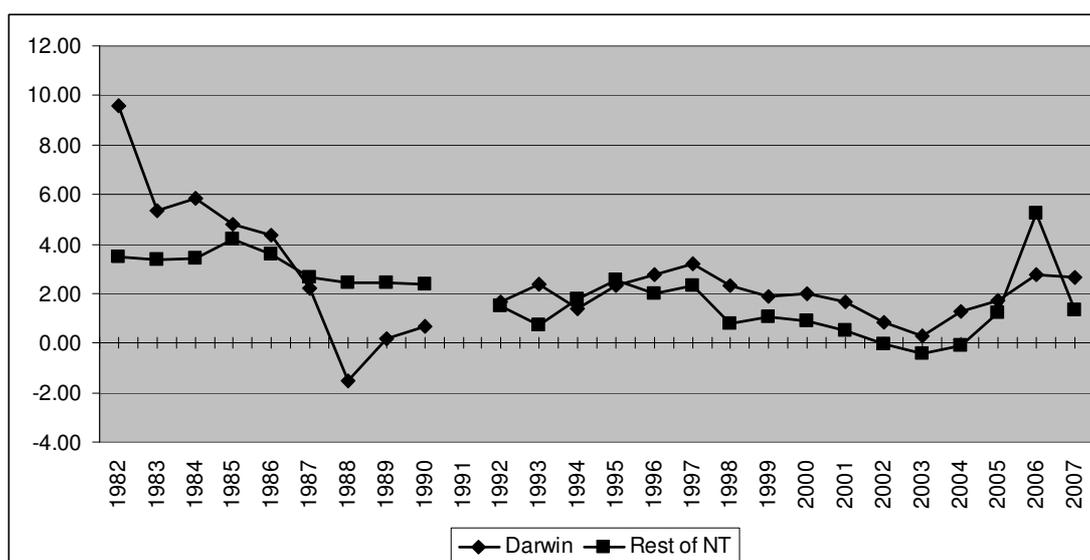


Figure 1. Annual Rate of Population Change Darwin and the rest of the Northern Territory, 1982 – 2007.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics Estimated Resident Population statistics.

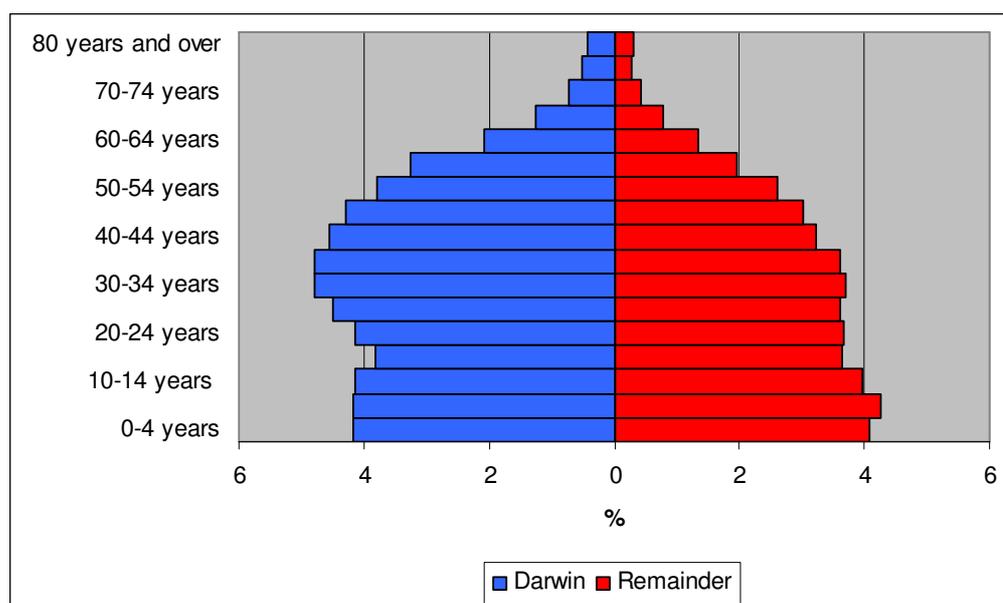


Figure 2. Age Distribution of the Northern Territory Population, 2006.
 Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics Census of Population and Housing.

Figure 2 compares the age distribution of the Darwin and rest of Northern Territory populations recorded at the 2006 Census. Darwin's median age was 32, compared with 28 for the rest of the Northern Territory. This difference could be ascribed to an apparent age 'bubble' of people aged between 30 and 50 years in Darwin, and a far less pronounced bubble for the rest of the Northern Territory. Both regions had similar proportions of the very young (aged under 15 years), but Darwin had three times as many people aged over 60 years. Darwin's median age rose from 30 years at the 1996 Census, while the median age for the rest of the Northern Territory fell slightly from 29 years. A substantial contribution to the differing age profile was the proportion of Indigenous people in each population. About 10% of the Darwin resident population in 2006 were Indigenous, compared with 51% of the population of the rest of the Northern Territory. The median age for Indigenous people in the Northern Territory in 2006 was 22 years compared with 34 years for the non-Indigenous population. The median age for Indigenous people in Darwin was slightly lower (21 years), while the non-Indigenous median was the same at 34 years.

About 30% of the Darwin population was born overseas, compared with just 15% of the population of the rest of the Northern Territory. Nearly two thirds of Darwin's overseas born population had arrived in Australia before 1991, compared with just over half of the overseas born population of the rest of the Northern Territory. Major countries of origin for Darwin residents were the United Kingdom (22% of those born overseas), New Zealand (11%), and the Philippines (8%). These countries provided similar proportions of the overseas born population of the rest of the Northern Territory, but the United States also provided 11%.

The sex ratio for the Darwin population (1.08) was much higher than that for the rest of the Northern Territory (1.04) in 2006. This represented a change from the previous two Census where sex ratios had been quite similar, and even a little higher (1.10 compared with 1.09) outside of Darwin. The relative growth of the Indigenous

population (which had a sex ratio of 0.97 in 2006) outside of Darwin explains this change. Of interest, the sex ratios for people aged between 15 and 25 years were much higher in Darwin (1.13) than in the rest of the Northern Territory (1.00). There are some data quality issues which may account for this discrepancy, but they are likely to be around under-enumeration of young males in remote areas rather than over-enumeration of males or under-enumeration of females in Darwin.

Analysis of mobility data from the 2006 Census suggests a more volatile population in Darwin compared to the Rest of the Northern Territory. 56% of Darwin residents had also been in Darwin in 2001. About 60% of the population of the rest of the Northern Territory had stayed in the same place. The population turnover rate for both populations was 46%, representing higher rates of intra-Territory immigration and emigration relating to non-urban Northern Territory (discussed below).

The relatively high percentage of non-movers in the population of the rest of the Northern Territory may again reflect the high proportion of Indigenous people living there. The stability and turnover rates for non-Indigenous people in the rest of the Northern Territory (49% and 90%) implied much more mobility than those for Darwin (62% and 53%). Interestingly, Indigenous people in Darwin (57% stability and 32% turnover) were less stable than Indigenous people elsewhere (76% and 14%). Mobility of the Indigenous population of Darwin could be accounted for equally by interstate and intra-territory migration (immigration rates of about 10%), while the mobility of the Indigenous population outside of Darwin involved twice as many intra-territory (4% of the population moved within the Territory) as interstate moves.

The Northern Territory Population Mobility Survey (TMS) asked non-Indigenous residents why they had come to the Northern Territory, why they had chosen to stay, and when and why they were considering leaving (see Table One). Darwin residents planned to stay longer, and were less likely to be considering leaving the Territory in the next two or three years. However, there was no difference between the populations in terms of whether they stayed longer or shorter in the Territory than they had originally planned. Darwin residents were more likely to cite family reasons for moving to the Northern Territory (18% compared with 12%) and less likely to cite their own work as the reason for their move (28% compared with 36%). The weather was both a strong attractor for Darwin residents (41% 'most liked' the weather) and a strong repellent (35% 'least liked' the weather). Non-Darwin residents were more likely to be concerned about the related concepts of social behaviour, crime and safety, and issues with the Aboriginal population (drunkenness, violence, anti-social behaviour etc).

Table One: Attitudes to the Northern Territory Held by Residents of Darwin and the Rest of the Northern Territory.

Factor	Darwin	Rest
Planning to stay for ten years or more	74%	59%
Leaving within the next two or three years	16%	26%
Moved to NT for work	28%	36%
Moved to NT for family or social reasons	12%	18%

Most like about the NT – the weather	41%	22%
Satisfied with social behaviour	71%	37%
Least like about the NT – the weather	35%	14%
Least like about the NT – crime and safety	8%	20%
Least like about the NT – issues with the Aboriginal population	7%	27%

Source: Northern Territory Population Mobility Survey, 2006.

Research Brief 3: Population Exchange Between Darwin and the Rest of the Northern Territory 2001-2006 provided some information about population exchange between Darwin and the rest of the Northern Territory. The statistics here represent any intra-Territory movement, not only exchange between Darwin and the rest. Just 2% of people who had been resident in Darwin in 2001 had moved to elsewhere in the Northern Territory by 2006, while 10% of those who had been resident elsewhere moved around the Territory. In contrast, 24% of Darwin residents in 2001 had moved interstate by 2006, compared with 16% of non-Darwin residents. The rate of intra-Territory emigration for non-Indigenous residents was about the same as for the total population out of Darwin (2%), but higher (14%) out of the rest of the Northern Territory.

Summarising mobility patterns, then, net population changes in Darwin between 2001 and 2006 (leaving aside births and deaths) resulted from 2% more people from elsewhere in the Northern Territory moving in to Darwin than Darwin residents moving out to the rest of the Northern Territory, and a deficit of 3% in terms of interstate migration was compensated by 3% immigration from overseas. The remainder of the Northern Territory experienced net loss from intra-Territory migration of about 5% of the population, and similar net loss from interstate migration with only 2% immigration from overseas.

Table Two: Summary of Migration Patterns 2001-2006

	Darwin (%)	Rest of the Northern Territory (%)
Did not move	56.2	59.9
Immigrated from another part of the Northern Territory	3.6	4.7
Emigrated to another part of the Northern Territory	1.7	9.1
Immigrated from interstate	17.4	12.8
Emigrated interstate	20.3	17.2
Immigrated from overseas	3.3	2.4
Turnover rate*	46.4	46.3

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics Census of Population and Housing, 2006.

*Excludes emigration overseas

Discussion

This top line analysis begins to tease out some of the key demographic differences between the populations of Darwin and the rest of the Northern Territory. Many of the differences observed here can be partially explained by the relatively higher

proportion of Indigenous people living in non-urban Northern Territory. There were also some differences, at least as far as mobility was concerned, between urban and non-urban Indigenous dwellers which warrant further investigation. The mobility analysis in particular reveals the dualistic nature of the populations, with the apparent high stability of the non-urban population concealing a very mobile non-Indigenous segment (more mobile than the non-Indigenous population of Darwin). The significance of other places in the Northern Territory as sources and destinations for migrating residents was also much greater for non-urban regions than for Darwin. Emigration from Darwin almost always meant emigration from the Northern Territory, whereas nearly 10% of emigrants from other regions stayed in the Northern Territory. Population mobility was inspired by different factors for urban and non-urban populations, a significant issue for the Territory's population policies.

A number of issues emerge from this analysis which require further research –

- How might the different mobility patterns of Indigenous and non-Indigenous and urban and non-urban people affect the provision of services? How do service needs differ between populations with different sorts of mobility?
- What does the relationship between Darwin and the rest of the Northern Territory say about strategies for recruiting immigrants to the Northern Territory as a whole? In particular, how persistent is the pattern of limited migration from Darwin out to the regions, and what does this mean for population policy?
- How does catering for an increasingly mobile population affect social, political and cultural capital? What strategies can be used to manage capital in the face of seemingly inevitable high rates of population turnover?
- There is some evidence that mobility patterns among Indigenous people are changing, including increasing rates of interstate migration among urban Indigenous populations. If this is the case, what policies or policy changes might be required to manage this process?