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Accessing Community Data with the ARDA, an Introduction

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In lieu of a standard blog post this week, I thought I would do something a little different: introduce readers to a favorite data tool of mine. The community profile builder is a data access tool operated by the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA), the largest publicly available collection of religious data and a hub for up-to-date research on US and World religion. In contrast to many data resources, however, the ARDA has made detailed information relatively easy for the non-specialist to access. The profile builder is a great example of this. Simply type in a zip code and select a map location/search radius, and one can access a host of data useful for church planning or simply learning more about your neighborhood. Yet it isn't something that those outside the world of church data would necessarily hear about (though longtime readers may recall a [post](#) on the ARDA's maps from way back in 2013).

The profile builder draws primarily on the US Census American Communities Survey and the US Religion Census, a once-per-decade census conducted by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (an organization whose sitting president happens to be CARD's director Erica Dolhopf). The data primarily fall into the following categories:

- Congregations Listed in the Selected Region
- The 5 Largest Religious Groups in the County
- The 5 Biggest Religious Group Changes in the County
- Housing, Income, and Employment trends
- Gender and Age Demographics
- Educational Attainment and School Enrollment
- Family Structure and Marital Status Data
- Information on Race/Ethnicity, Languages, and National Origin

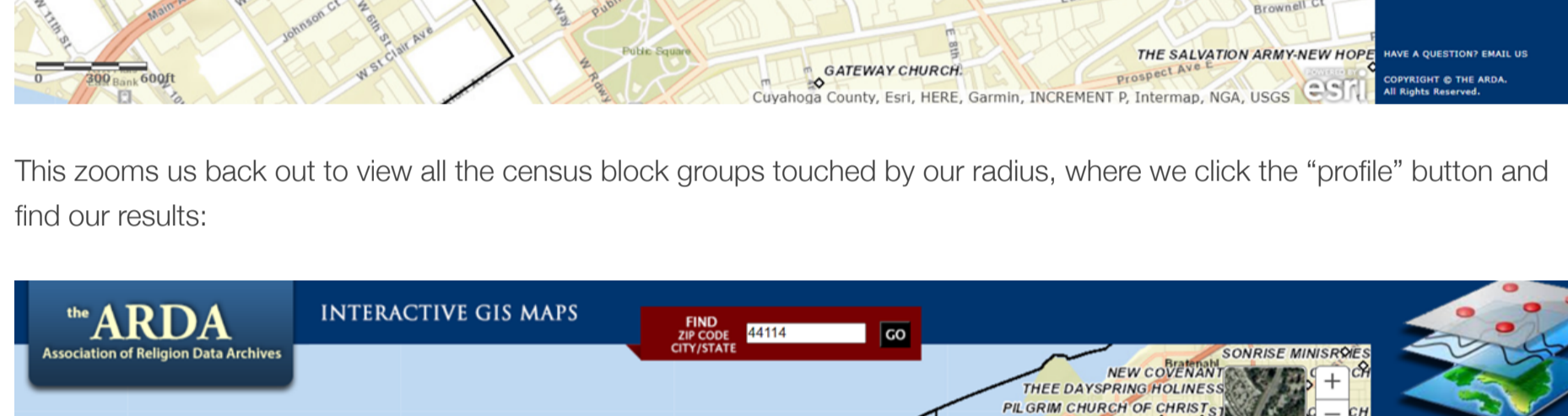
To illustrate, let's take a look at the neighborhoods immediately surrounding the UCC national offices in Cleveland. We start by going to the landing page and inputting the zip code for downtown Cleveland, 44114.



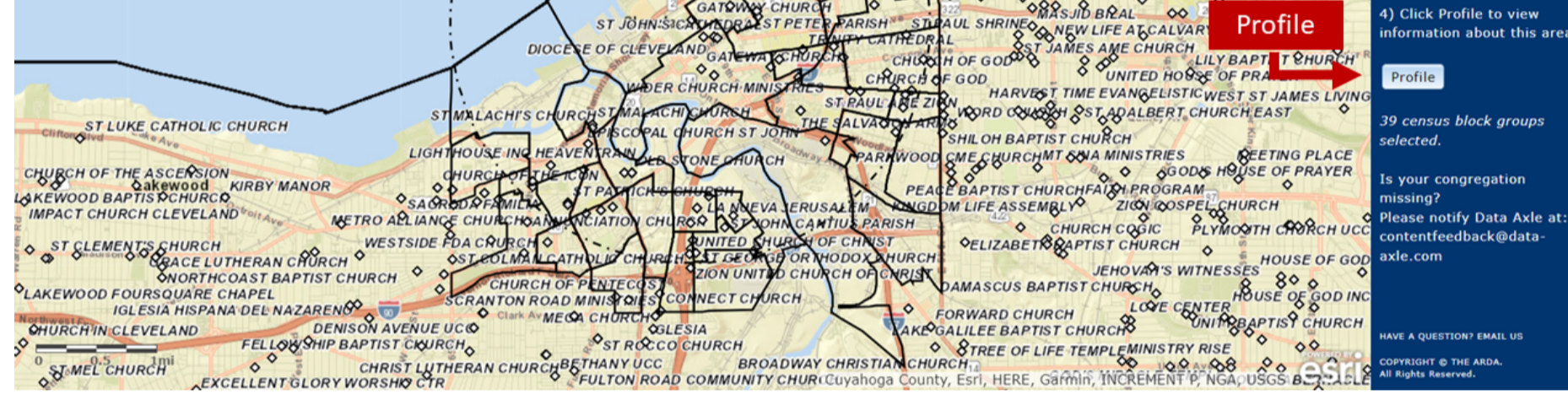
Hitting "enter" takes us to a page like this:



At this point, things look pretty cluttered—there are a lot of churches in the area! Zooming in, though, we can make out the office's 9th street location. From here, we simply input the mile radius we'd like (the default is 2) and click the precise location we want to center on in the map.



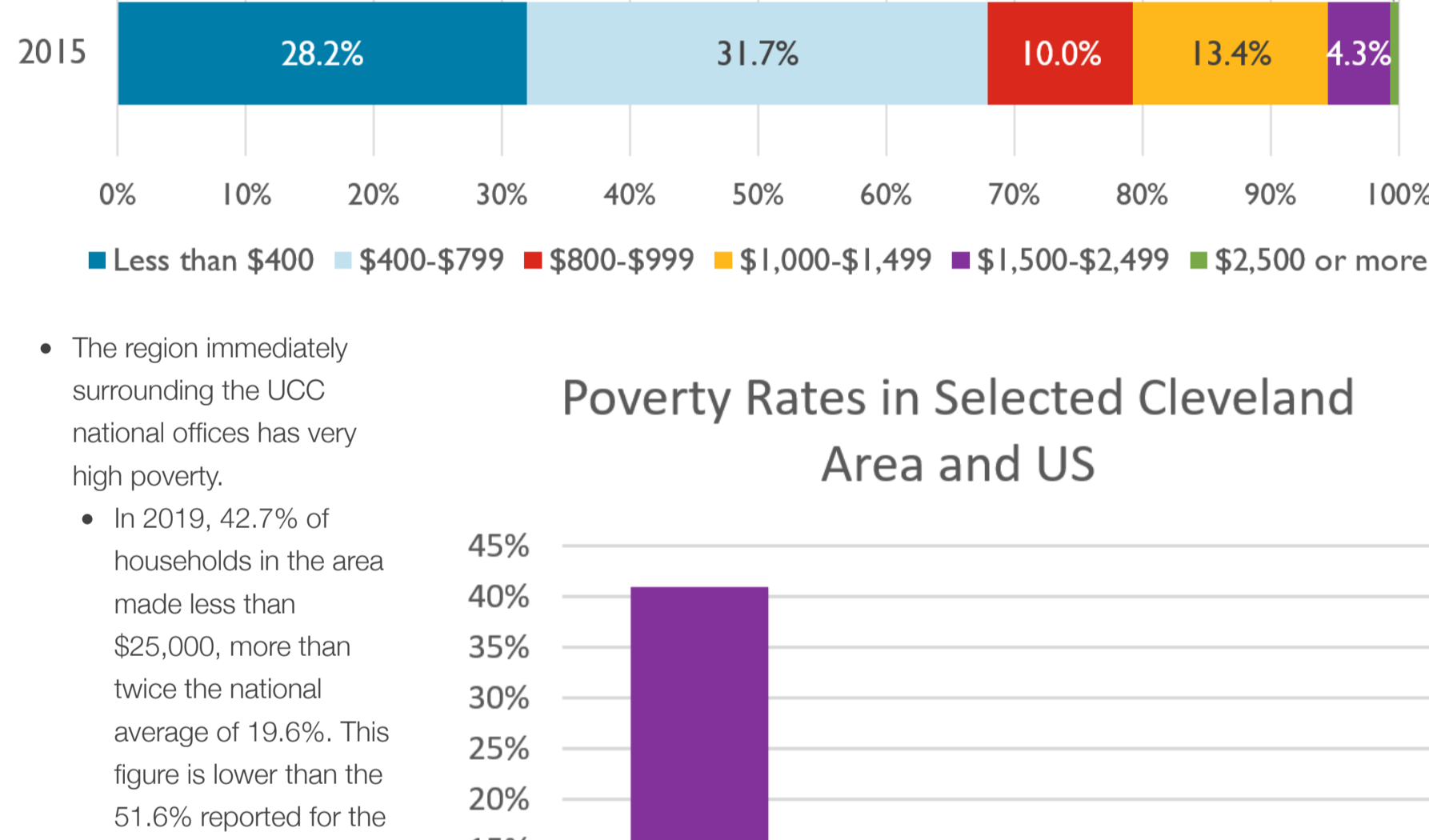
This zooms us back out to view all the census block groups touched by our radius, where we click the "profile" button and find our results:



So, what are the characteristics of the area? You can go [here](#) and follow the steps to see the full profile, but here are some of the more striking data that I noticed (the charts below are my own, but others can be accessed directly on the ARDA page by clicking on the links provided with each sub-report).

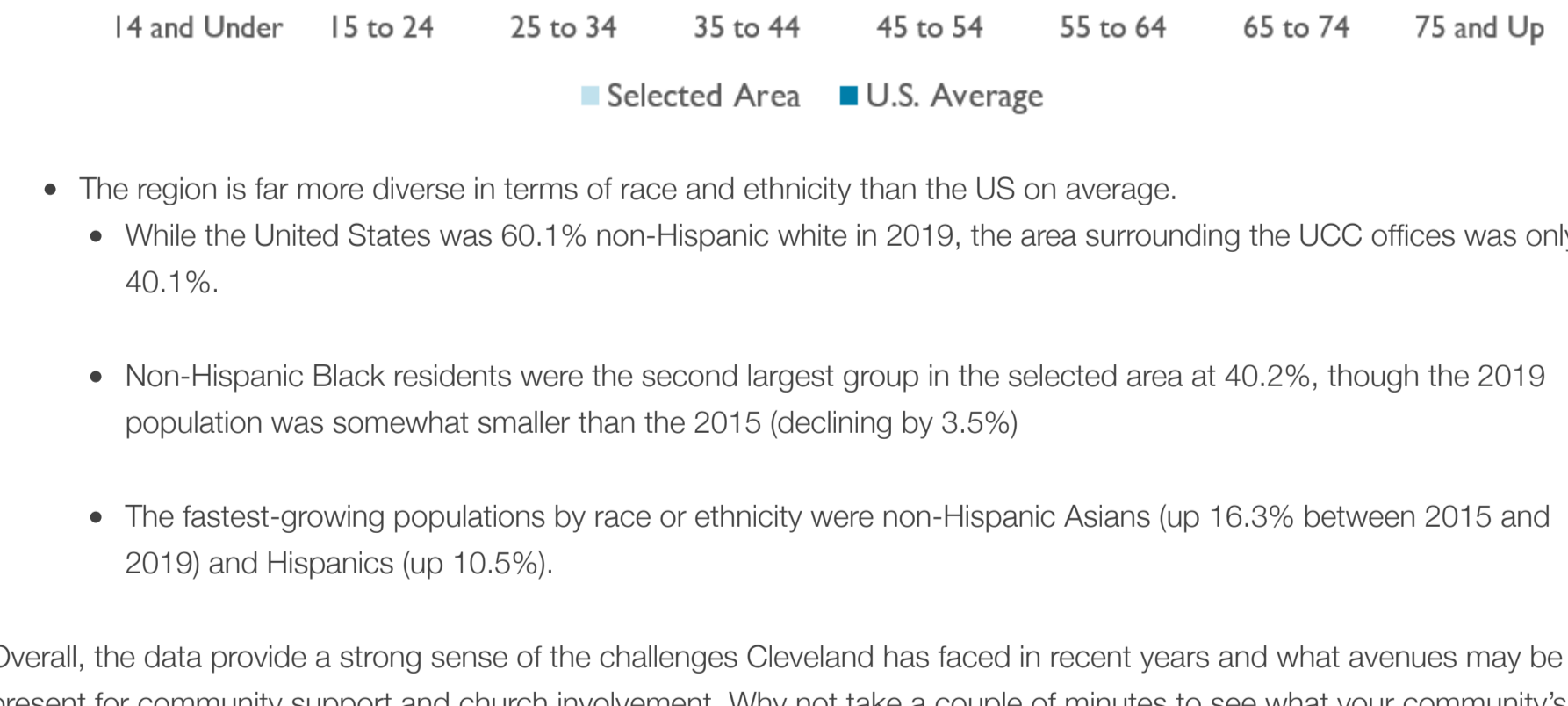
- As of 2020, the Catholic Church is the largest religious tradition in Cuyahoga County, both in terms of congregations and adherents.
- The number of Catholic adherents was 339,163, more than twice that of the next-largest group (Non-denominational Christian Churches at 149,150) and around 45% more than the next four combined (221,599).
- The adherence rate for Catholics in the county is 268.15 per 1000, or 27% of the general population.
- Non-denominational Christian, Black Protestant, and Islamic congregations are the fastest growing in terms of adherents.
- By absolute values, the fastest-growing religious group in the area is the Non-Denominational Christian Church, which the ARDA classifies as an Evangelical Protestant tradition.
- In relative terms, the fastest growing was the National Missionary Baptist Convention of America (NMBCA), a prominent African American Protestant convention. The NMBCA had a remarkable 1,243.7% growth between 2010 and 2020. [2025 Update: Joshua Lindsey at Ready to Harvest has noted that the overall 2020 US Religion Census figures for the NMBCA seem to have been impacted by a processing error of some kind, leading to large overestimates. This appears to have impacted the Cleveland data discussed here, as well, serving as a useful reminder to take care when dealing with outliers, even in the best of datasets.]
- Downtown Cleveland and the surrounding 2-mile radius have witnessed substantial increases in housing costs.
- Housing in the region is relatively dense (49.1% of addresses having 10 or more units) and is principally rental-based, with 67.9% of units being renter-occupied.
- Of rentals in the area, the fastest growing were those in the \$1,500 to \$2,499 and \$2,500+ ranges, with the former going from 682 to 1,738 units (a 154.8% increase) and the latter going from 87 to 209 (a 140.2% increase). Rentals under \$800 declined by 1,034 units in the same period (8,426 to 8,392), an 11.0% decline.
- Though the cost of homes in the region is well-below the national average, the number of homes under \$150,000 declined by 8.4% between 2015 and 2019, with a slim majority of homes in the area (50.8%) falling in the \$150,000+ range in 2019.

Housing Units in Selected Area by Rent



- The region immediately surrounding the UCC national offices has very high poverty.
- In 2019, 42.7% of households in the area made less than \$25,000, more than twice the national average of 19.6%. This figure is lower than the 51.6% reported for the same bracket in 2015, however.
- The percentage of households below the poverty level (which factors in family size) was 40.9% in 2019, down from 47.7% in 2015 but nearly 3 times the national average of 13.7% at that time.
- Though the older population is growing, the region surrounding the UCC national offices skews younger than the US as a whole.
- 58.8% of residents in the selected region were under 35 in 2019 compared to a national average of 46.0%.
- As might be expected from its proximity to downtown, young to middle aged adults comprise the largest share of residents. 25- to 34-year-olds alone accounted for 27.9% of the selected population in 2019 vs. 13.9% for the country as a whole.

Age Distribution Near Downtown Cleveland



- The region is far more diverse in terms of race and ethnicity than the US on average.
- While the United States was 60.1% non-Hispanic white in 2019, the area surrounding the UCC offices was only 40.1%.
- Non-Hispanic Black residents were the second largest group in the selected area at 40.2%, though the 2019 population was somewhat smaller than the 2015 (declining by 3.5%)
- The fastest-growing populations by race or ethnicity were non-Hispanic Asians (up 16.3% between 2015 and 2019) and Hispanics (up 10.5%).

Overall, the data provide a strong sense of the challenges Cleveland has faced in recent years and what avenues may be present for community support and church involvement. Why not take a couple of minutes to see what your community's profile says about it?

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14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

« Jul Sep »

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