

# U.S. South and West show faster rises in their populations than rest

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Traffic related to servicing the oil boom in North Dakota has increased dramatically, taxing roads that were not designed to carry such a heavy load. These trucks were lined up along a road near Watford City, N.D., Dec. 10, 2013. Photo: Jim Gehrz/Minneapolis Star Tribune/MCT

WASHINGTON — Population growth in Southern and Western states accounted for more than 80 percent of new residents nationwide over the last three years. That's according to annual U.S. Census Bureau estimates released Monday.

The census data is based on how many people are born and die. And it takes into consideration how many people leave or enter a state. The complete census happens every 10 years, when the U.S. government takes a count of the population. But every year the Census Bureau does an estimate. It tries to figure out where populations are changing.

The biggest growth was in Texas, California and Florida. This helped push Southern and Western states past the Northeast and Midwest in growth.

Population estimates are watched by state officials because the figures determine how much money the states get from federal programs. And it affects the number of seats each state receives in the House of Representatives, which is one half of Congress. The number of seats gets readjusted each decade, when the big census happens.

## **South Outpaces Northeast And Midwest**

If states continue to grow at the same pace for the rest of the decade, Texas could gain three more congressional seats in 2020, according to an analysis of the Census Bureau figures. Florida, North Carolina, Virginia and Colorado would stand to gain one seat each. Illinois, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Minnesota, West Virginia and Rhode Island would lose a seat each.

The new data reinforced a trend that has seen the South's growth outpace that of the Northeast and Midwest. Texas lagged behind only North Dakota and the District of Columbia in the rate of population growth since the 2010 census. It gained four seats the last time seats in Congress were readjusted.

California, with 38,332,521 residents, and Texas, with 26,448,193, remain the states with the highest populations.

New York narrowly maintained its third-place spot. It has 19,651,127 residents, compared with Florida's 19,552,860 as of July 1. But the Sunshine State will soon surpass New York because its population is growing about three times faster, according to the census estimates.

As a percent of population, California's growth again outpaced the national average over the last year. It rose 0.9 percent, or added 332,643 new residents, compared with 0.7 percent nationwide. But in raw numbers, Texas added the most residents, 387,397.

An improving state economy in the second half of 2013 may spell faster growth in California. But Texas still has an advantage because of its energy-based economy and a population that is getting younger. Texas will keep getting more seats in Congress "until the oil economy turns (down) again," said Dowell Myers, a population expert and professor at the University of Southern California.

"But California's adding jobs more rapidly now than Texas," he said. "So probably next year I would bet that California's share of the growth is up a little bit more."

## **Energy Fuels North Dakota's Growth**

North Dakota is the nation's fastest-growing state, driven by a thriving oil and gas industry. North Dakota's population stood at 723,393 on July 1, according to the census data, a 3.1 percent increase from 2012. Since the 2010 census, North Dakota's population has grown 7.6 percent, far outpacing the national rate of 2.4 percent.

Kevin Iverson is the manager of the North Dakota Census Office. He says the biggest population growth has been among 19- to 34-year-olds, primarily through migration into the state.

“The economic winds have clearly favored North Dakota,” Iverson said, attributing it mainly to the energy boom but also growth in manufacturing and agriculture. “The real question begins to become, to what extent can you continue to grow?”

Population in the District of Columbia also grew at a sustained clip, rising 2.1 percent from 2012 to 2013 to 646,449. Utah grew the next fastest, at a rate of 1.6 percent. It was followed by Colorado and Texas at 1.5 percent and Nevada at 1.3 percent.

West Virginia and Maine saw slight population declines in the last year. Pennsylvania, New Mexico, Vermont and Illinois posted the slowest population growth, all at or near a tenth of 1 percentage point.

The national population stood at 316,128,839 on July 1, an increase of 2.3 million. But the annual growth rate nationally continues to lag behind where it was in the mid-2000s before the economic downturn.