Population change so far in the 2020s

Relative to the decade before, change has been muted

By DAVID HOWELL

Our latest population estimates show Alaska grew by about 0.2 percent from 2024 to 2025, reaching 738,737. That slow growth was in line with the very minor population changes we've seen each year so far this decade.

When it comes to population change, the 2020s in Alaska have been much calmer so far than the 2010s.

Migration and two very different decades

When the previous decade began, the U.S. was still recovering from the Great Recession of the late 2000s, and Alaska saw large migration flows both into and out of the state.

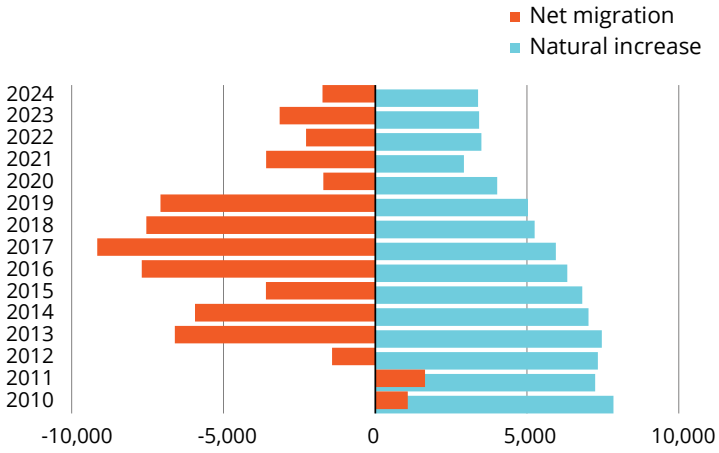
Historically, it's been typical for tens of thousands of people to move into and out of Alaska each year. But for a short period, as the national economy struggled more than the state, Alaska got a net migration bump as additional people from the Lower 48 sought opportunities north. (See the exhibit on the right.)

As the national economy improved, the number of people moving to Alaska each year began to decline while the number who left remained relatively high. That marked the start of our current 13-year negative net migration streak — more people leaving the state each year than arriving.

By 2016, Alaska was losing around 1 percent of its population to net migration each year, leading to overall population declines for the first time since the 1980s.

While net migration has remained negative for 13 straight years, the losses have eased in the 2020s, with only one of those years (2022) causing population decrease. Unlike the 2010s, though, that year appears to have been a one-off linked to the jump in deaths during the pandemic.

Natural increase has mostly offset losses from net migration this decade



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

The year before was also an outlier for migration because pandemic restrictions stifled most moves in either direction, plus Alaska received an influx of military personnel to Eielson Air Force Base near Fairbanks with the new F-35s.

The net outflows have continued during the 2020s, but at much lower levels — below half a percent a year. Last year, net migration losses were the smallest they've been since the first year of the loss streak. These milder net losses have allowed Alaska's population to start growing again this decade, albeit slowly.

Recent trends in births and deaths

Natural increase, or births minus deaths, has offset the losses and allowed Alaska's population to keep growing over the last five years. (Last month's issue of *Trends* covered historical and global natural increase extensively.)

Since the 2020 Census, Alaska has added just over

5,000 more residents from natural increase than it has lost to net migration.

While natural increase will remain a source of population growth for a while, it has decreased considerably over the last 10 years and will continue to shrink. Last year, natural increase added just 3,400 people to the state, less than half of the annual gain 10 years ago.

The reason is twofold. First, deaths have increased as Alaska has gotten older. Ten years ago, Alaska recorded about 4,300 yearly deaths, and it's now 5,500.

The decline in births, however, is the bigger reason natural increase has slowed. A decade ago, more than 11,000 babies were born in Alaska every year, and now it's fewer than 9,000.

Although Alaska's rate of natural increase has slowed considerably, it's still high among states, ranking second this decade after Utah. Seventeen states recorded natural *decrease* last year, with more deaths than births, and 20 have had natural decrease since 2020.

The effects of population aging

One driver of less natural increase is the size of Alaska's senior population, which has grown by thousands since 2010, when the first baby boomers turned 65. Alaska's over-65 group increased by about 3,600 last year and has risen by 23,100 people since the 2020 Census.

Rapid growth among seniors will continue through 2029, when the youngest baby boomers turn 65.

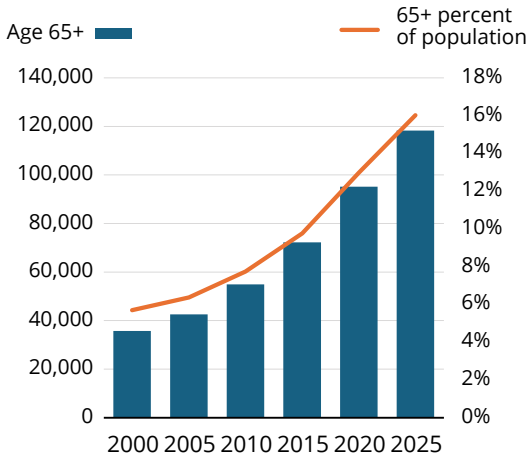
A compounding factor is the youth population decreasing steadily over the past decade in tandem with the growth in seniors. The number of Alaskans under 18 fell by 5,000 over the first five years of the 2020s, primarily in the youngest age groups. Since 2020, the number of kids in Alaska from birth to age 4 has decreased from 48,100 to 43,300.

Although the school-age population grew in the early years of this decade, since 2022, it has also been declining. With fewer births over the years, Alaska now has 1,400 more 17-year-olds than 4-year-olds. Without a shift in migration patterns, the school-age population will continue to get smaller.

Patterns in Alaska in the 2020s

Recent growth around the state has been concentrated in just a few areas. Matanuska-Susitna is the fastest-growing borough by far, accounting for all the

Alaska's 65-plus population has risen sharply this century



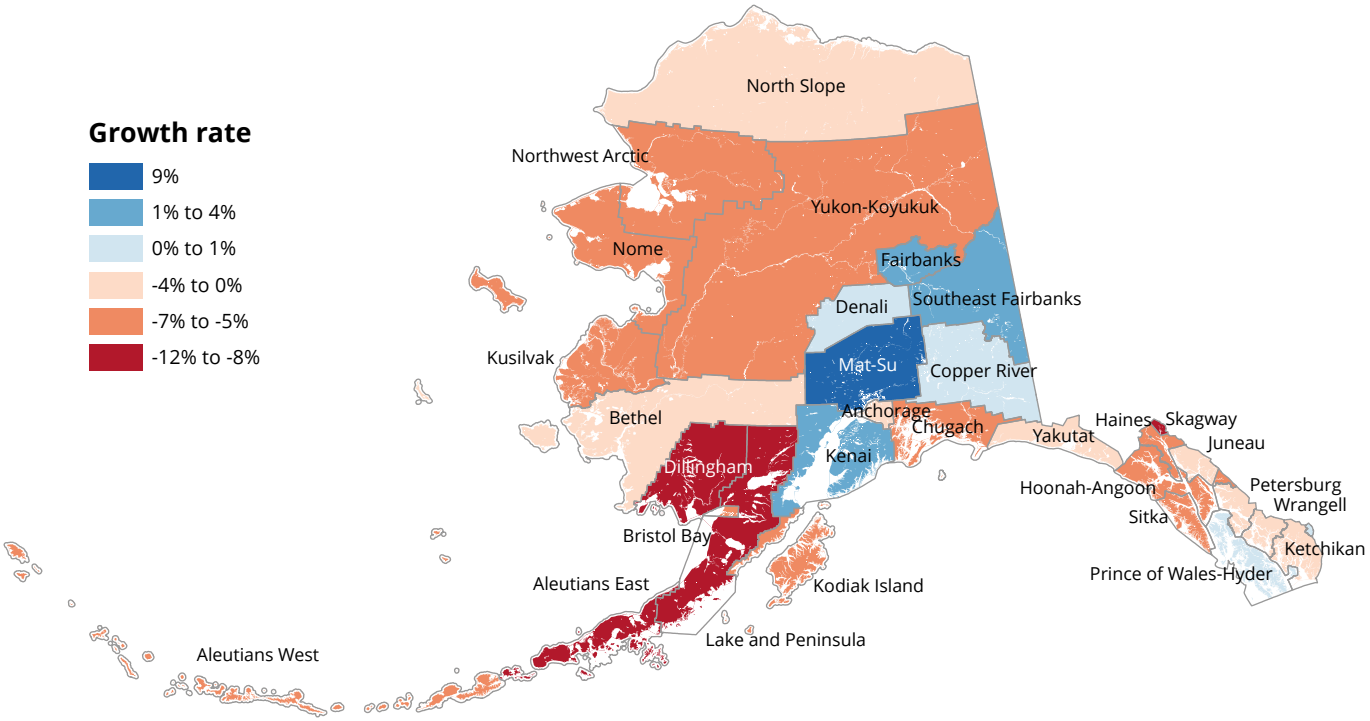
Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

Growth by Alaska area, 2020-25

Area	Growth rate, 24-25	Total growth rate 20-25
Alaska	0.22%	0.73%
Aleutians East Borough	-1.25%	-12.32%
Aleutians West Census Area	0.65%	-5.28%
Anchorage Municipality	-0.04%	-0.70%
Bethel Census Area	0.08%	-2.59%
Bristol Bay Borough	1.67%	-6.99%
Chugach Census Area	-2.07%	-7.42%
Copper River Census Area	-0.57%	0.42%
Denali Borough	1.54%	0.74%
Dillingham Census Area	-0.29%	-8.32%
Fairbanks N Star Borough	0.18%	1.48%
Haines Borough	-3.10%	-6.87%
Hoonah-Angoon CA	-0.31%	-5.97%
Juneau City and Borough	-0.32%	-3.38%
Kenai Peninsula Borough	0.47%	4.21%
Ketchikan Gateway Borough	0.20%	-4.18%
Kodiak Island Borough	-0.66%	-5.26%
Kusilvak Census Area	-1.06%	-4.83%
Lake and Peninsula Borough	3.46%	-8.77%
Matanuska-Susitna Borough	1.45%	9.20%
Nome Census Area	-0.03%	-4.56%
North Slope Borough	0.10%	-4.41%
Northwest Arctic Borough	-1.35%	-7.48%
Petersburg Borough	0.98%	-0.09%
Prince of Wales-Hyder CA	1.03%	0.26%
Sitka City and Borough	0.12%	-5.17%
Skagway Municipality	1.60%	-8.93%
Southeast Fairbanks CA	0.09%	3.51%
Wrangell City and Borough	0.89%	-4.32%
Yakutat City and Borough	-0.16%	-4.48%
Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area	-0.76%	-6.87%

Note: Haines growth is for 2021 to 2025.
Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

Cumulative growth by Alaska area from 2020 to 2025



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growth in the Anchorage/Mat-Su Region.

Anchorage has lost population in recent years, although in very small amounts. (See the table on the previous page and the map above.)

Mat-Su's expansion slowed during the 2010s but sped up again in the 2020s, adding 2,000 people a year on average, for a five-year growth rate of 9.2 percent.

Similarly, the Kenai Peninsula Borough has kept the Gulf Coast Region's population from declining. Kenai is the second-fastest-growing borough, gaining nearly 500 people a year on average since the 2020 Census for a 4.2 percent growth rate.

In the Interior Region, the Fairbanks North Star Borough and the adjacent Southeast Fairbanks Census Area have grown steadily. Other than Mat-Su and Kenai, these two were the only borough equivalents to add more than 1 percent to their population totals this decade, at 1.5 percent and 3.6 percent, respectively.

The more remote and rural parts of the state have seen steady population losses during the 2020s. While the Northern and Southwest regions have historically grown slowly, natural increase during the first half of this decade hasn't been high enough to make up for net migration losses.

Southeast, one of the oldest parts of the state, has also lost population over the last five years through low natural increase and negative net migration. Seven of its 10 boroughs and census areas had no natural increase last year or showed natural decrease.

Thirteen areas' populations have fallen by at least 5 percent since 2020, and ten of those are in the Northern, Southwest, or Southeast regions. Some declines are linked to specific events; for example, the Aleutians East Borough has been hit especially hard by seafood processing closures, and Skagway is still recovering from population losses caused by the pandemic's damper on cruise ship tourism.

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