Census: U.S. population growth is flat

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USA TODAY

The nation's population growth remains near historic lows as it struggles to recover from the Great Recession, new Census estimates show.

The U.S. population reached 313.9 million on July 1, a 0.75% increase or 2.3 million gain in one year.

"Pretty anemic," says Robert Lang, urban affairs professor at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas. "You see the impact of the recession and reduced immigration into the U.S. We're not on pace to grow even 10% over the decade."

The population numbers also show that the oil boom in North Dakota has sparked a population boom that has made the state the fastest-growing since 2011 — 2.2%, or three times the national rate.

Former boom states such as Nevada and Arizona continue to grow but at a much slower pace than before the 2007-09 recession.

The estimates show the effects of an aging population, as the oldest Baby Boomers turned 66 this year and birth rates and immigration continue to decline.

Two states — Rhode Island and Vermont — lost population, largely because young people are leaving and few immigrants are arriving.



MATTHEW STAVER, BLOOMBERG NEWS

A crew constructs a gas pipeline outside Watford City, N.D., last year. The state's oil boom has led to a 2.2% rise in population.

Maine became the second state after West Virginia to experience more deaths than birth. Both states have aging populations and low birth rates.

Florida continues to recover from a bad period when more people were leaving than moving in. Since July 1, 2011, the state has attracted a net 200,000 people from other states and abroad.

"It looks like some of the Sun Belt boom-then-bust states are coming back," says William Frey, demographer at the Brookings Institution. "Florida continues its in-migration. ... Arizona is showing increased in-migration, and Nevada is showing a flip from out to in."

Many states with strong diversified economies, including North Carolina and Colorado, are showing new strength. Texas gained the largest number of people: 427,400.

"There is some evidence of a national recovery," Lang says. "Despite the recession, we're seeing the same patterns as the last decade, albeit slower growth across the board. The South and the West are growing the fastest."

High-fliers such as Nevada and Arizona are no longer leading the Western boom, and the growth is more equally spread across the region, he says.

The numbers also show:

▶ Northeastern and Midwestern states where population losses slowed when the recession kept people from moving are seeing their losses grow again. Among them: Illinois, Ohio, New York, Michigan, Missouri and Indiana.

▶ California, which remains the most populous at 38 million, lost 45,000 people to other states but saw nearly three times as many immigrants arrive.

▶ Georgia moved into eighth largest by bumping Michigan. And Arizona pushed past Indiana into 15th. Georgia and Arizona have grown by more than 20% since 2000; Indiana gained only 8% and Michigan declined.

▶ West Virginia and Vermont slipped a notch: Nebraska topped West Virginia for 37th, and the District of Columbia, counted as a state, topped Vermont for 49th place.