

Texas Second and Growing, But Not All of its 254 Counties

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Texas is the second most populous state in the U.S. and it's getting bigger, leading the nation in population growth. According to the 2014 estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau, the population of Texas increased from 25.1 million in 2010 to 26.9 million in 2014, which is an increase of 1.8 million or 7.2 percent. This growth leads the nation in numerical increase as shown in Table 1. For perspective, this increase in Texas is slightly less than the combined 2014 total populations of Wyoming (584,153), Vermont (626,562), and the District of Columbia (658,893).

In comparison, California experienced the second highest growth of 1.5 million, followed by Florida (1.1 million) during the same period. In terms of percent population growth, Texas ranked third with an increase of 7.2 percent. North Dakota ranked first with an increase of (9.9 percent), followed by the District of Columbia (9.5 percent).

What really makes this growth pattern remarkable for Texas is the growth due to domestic migration. While most of the states are experiencing domestic net out-migration, a significant portion of the population increase in Texas can be attributed to domestic net in-migration. Texas leads the nation in domestic net in-migration (575,170), followed by Florida (477,047), North Carolina (151,936), and Colorado (145,205). In terms of international migration, Texas ranked third, with an addition of 343,093 migrants. California ranked first with an addition of 648,856 migrants, followed by New York (485,224). Natural increase is still the most significant component of population growth in Texas, amounting to almost 50 percent of the increase since 2010. However, domestic migration is the next highest contributor at 31.8 percent, followed by international migration at 18.9 percent. The rate of domestic migration into Texas does not appear to be subsiding anytime soon. Why then are large numbers of people coming from other regions of the country and looking to Texas as a destination of choice? The primary reason may simply be the growing economy coupled with a stable and reasonably priced real estate market in comparison to other regions of the country.

[Table 1: Total Population and Components of Population Change from 2010-2014 for U.S. States and the District of Columbia](#)

Although Texas leads the nation in population increase, the increase in population during 2010-2014 has not been distributed evenly throughout Texas. In fact, some parts of the State have grown rapidly, some have grown slowly and others have declined. In the following sections we examine the patterns of population change for the counties, and places in Texas.

Population Change in Counties in Texas, 2010-2014

There are 254 counties in Texas and it is not feasible to describe patterns of population change for individual counties. In this section, we summarize general patterns of population change evident across counties during the period of 2010-2014. Detailed data for all counties can be obtained from the webpage of the Hobby Center for Public Policy or from the authors.

[Table 2: 2010 Census Population and Estimated Population for Counties in Texas, 2011 - 2014](#)

[Table 3: 2010 Census Population and 2014 Estimated Population and Population Change for Counties in Texas from 2010 to 2014](#)

[Table 4: Total Population and Components of Population Change for the State of Texas and Counties in Texas, 2010 -2014](#)

In 2014, Texas' seven most populous counties combined to account for more than 50 percent of Texas' total population. These seven counties are Harris, Dallas, Tarrant, Bexar, Travis, Collin and El Paso. Harris County remains the most populous county with 4.4 million people, accounting for 16.5 percent of the state's population. Dallas, with 2.5 million people, was the second most populous county, accounting for 9.3 percent of the state's total population. Tarrant was the third largest county with 1.9 million population, or 7.2 percent of the total population. The two hundred least populous counties account for less than 13.0 percent of Texas' total population.

The largest numerical increases in population from 2010 to 2014 were in the counties with the largest populations including:

- Harris County with an increase of 348,911
- Dallas County with an increase of 150,499
- Tarrant County with an increase of 136,326
- Bexar County with an increase of 141,093
- Travis County with an increase of 126,879
- Collin with an increase of 102,900
- El Paso with an increase of 32,840

More than one hundred counties lost population during the period 2010-2014. The largest numerical decreases in populations were in the following counties:

- Hale County (1,553)
- Houston County (991)
- Falls County (877)
- Presidio County (842)
- Anderson County (831).

More than 20 counties gained at least 10 percent of their population since 2010. The largest percentage increases were in:

- Andrews County with an increase of 18.2 percent
- Hays County with a 17.8 percent increase
- Sterling County with 17.1 percent
- Fort Bend County with 17.1 percent
- Kendall County with an increase of 16.4 percent

- Williamson County with 15.7 percent
- Comal County 14.0 percent

As mentioned, more than 100 counties lost population during the period of 2010-2014. In terms of percent decline, the largest percentage declines were in the following counties

- Presidio County (10.8 percent)
- Dickens County (9.2 percent)
- Schleicher County (8.6 percent)
- King River County (8.4 percent)
- San Saba County (8.3 percent)

International migration is an important factor in population growth and presents challenges for a population because of assimilation processes as opposed to natural increases. The following counties experienced the largest numerical increases due to international migration:

- Harris County (100,542)
- Dallas County (46,949)
- Tarrant County (23,676)
- Travis County (20,698)
- Bexar County (19,152)
- Fort Bend County (16,646)

In terms of percent population growth due to international migration, Coryell County gained the most followed by Val Verde County.

For certain counties (Harris in particular), international migration contributed more to the increase in population than did domestic migration during the period of 2010 - 2014. For other counties, domestic migration was the primary contributor to the population increase.

When just accounting for domestic migration, the following counties experienced the largest numerical increase in populations:

- Harris County (60,727)
- Bexar County (60,627)
- Travis County (59,967)
- Fort Bend County (59,667)
- Collin County (57,885)
- Denton County (54,297)

In total, 126 Counties lost population due to net out-migration during the period of 2010-2014. The following counties experienced the largest numerical decrease in population due net out-migration:

- El Paso County (14,391)

- Cameron County (10,126)
- Jefferson County (6,800)
- Bell County (6,063)

Nevertheless, population growth from 2010 to 2014 has slowed compared to the 1990s and 2000 - 2010 when one examines the number of counties in Texas that have shown growth and decline in population. For example, during the period of 1990-2000, 68 counties experienced population decline and 89 counties experienced net outmigration. During the period of 2000 to 2010, the number of counties with population decline was 88 and the number of counties with net outmigration was 119. During the 2010-2014, 102 counties lost population and the number of counties with net outmigration was 126.

Population Change in Places in Texas, 2010-2014

Population change has also impacted the places and cities of Texas during 2010-2014. Given that there are more than 2,000 places in Texas, population change for individual places cannot be discussed in detail; therefore, only general population patterns for Texas cities and places will be described. Detailed data on population change for places can be obtained from the University of Houston Hobby Center for Public Policy website or the authors of this report. It may be mentioned here that these estimated data are from the Census Bureau. In examining these data, it is important to note that some places may have shown growth or decline through boundary changes (i.e., annexation, deannexation) and/or changes in institutional population (i.e., college dormitories, prisons, nursing homes etc.) from 2010 to 2014.

For the period of 2010 -2014, 824 places added at least 1 residence population, while 367 places lost population, and the population for 25 places remained the same. The following cities experienced an increase in their population:

- Houston (140,107)
- Austin (122,401)
- San Antonio (109,290)
- Dallas (83,231)
- Fort Worth (71,032)
- El Paso (29,915)
- Frisco (28,046)

The following cities experienced a decrease in population during the period 2010 - 2014

- Mineral Wells (1,426)
- Plainview (1,028)
- Cross Roads (722)
- Beaumont (711)
- Presidio (474).

[Table 5: 2010 Census Population and Estimated Population for Places in Texas, 2011 - 2014](#)

[Table 6: 2010 Census Population and Estimated Population for Places in Texas for 2014 and Change in Population, 2011 – 2014](#)

Conclusions

During 2010-2014, Texas led the nation in population increase. Texas' population has reached almost 27 million. However, not every county grew between 2010 - 2014. Out of 254 counties, 102 counties lost population and 126 counties experienced net out migration.

The steady population growth experienced in larger counties can be partly attributed to what is typically considered urbanization and the prevalence of resources in larger counties when compared to smaller more rural counties. What also may be contributing to this shrinking of smaller counties is an aging rural population, low fertility rates, and out migration due to younger residents choosing the larger cities not only for employment opportunities, but also pace of lifestyle, and recreational benefits. The annual rate of population growth in Texas has slowed during the post-2010 period (1.7 percent) compared with 2.1 percent during 2000-2010, but is still higher than the national rate of growth rate of 0.7 percent. One must be careful to note that patterns based on only a few years may change quickly. The patterns of 2010-2014, however, suggest that Texas' population is growing at a level that is substantially higher than the potential rate of growth for the nation and all but a handful of other states. All of these changes have significant implications for education, the labor force, health services, and the polity.

One may ask whether such growth will continue in the future. It is impossible to predict future patterns with absolute accuracy, but the fact that such a large part of Texas' population growth is due to natural increase (which tends to change relatively slowly) suggests that population growth will likely continue, even if the rate of growth slows from that observed in the past. Texas may thus be expected to remain among those states with the largest numerical increase in population and to continue to be among the nation's fastest growing states in the coming years.

The real challenge however, is the ability of Texas to provide the resources necessary to accommodate the growth in population and also stabilize the population for losing counties. Additionally, Texas must consider the demographic changes that come with a growing and declining population. As age, sex, race/ethnicity and other demographic characteristics change, other socioeconomic characteristics associated with them also change, and so far, this change has predictably led to an increase and/or decrease in demand for housing, healthcare, transportation infrastructure, and educational resources.

The trend of population growth leads us to predict that Texas will continue to experience an increase in domestic migration and population growth in general as long as the economy remains relatively stable. The real challenge will be how to provide the resources necessary to accommodate this growth over the long run.