

Municipal Population Change in North Carolina

A Summary of Trends from April 1, 2010 through July 1, 2016



North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management

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Introduction

Between April 1, 2010 and July 1, 2016, two-thirds (or 367) of North Carolina's 553 incorporated municipalities gained population, though the extent of that municipal population growth varied. The Piedmont Urban Crescent continues to dominate population growth, although growth has occurred in municipalities throughout the state.

The following document summarizes population trends for municipalities in North Carolina using the standard population estimates produced by the North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM) released in September of 2017. These standard population estimates are as of July 1, 2016 and assume geographic boundaries for municipalities as of that same date.¹ Additional population tables that include statistics for all 553 municipalities can be obtained from <https://www.osbm.nc.gov/demog/municipal-estimates>.²

Highlights:

- Two-thirds of North Carolina municipalities added population between 2010 and 2016;
- Larger cities were more likely to gain population between 2010 and 2016 –
 - Slightly more than half of the smallest municipalities (< 1,000 population in 2010) gained population;
 - All the largest cities (100,000+ population in 2010) gained population;
- Charlotte (830,258), Raleigh (448,699), Greensboro (284,328), Durham (255,042) and Winston-Salem (240,603) remain the largest municipalities in the state;
- Charlotte, Raleigh, Durham and Cary added the most people between 2010 and 2016;
- Fontana Dam, Bermuda Run, and Rolesville increased their population by more than half from 2010 to 2016;
- Among the top 20 fastest growing municipalities, Huntersville, Apex, Holly Springs and Fuquay-Varina had the largest numeric gains in population from 2010 to 2016;
- Charlotte, Raleigh and Apex added the most people through annexation between 2010 and 2016;
- Mecklenburg, Durham, Forsyth and Guilford counties had more than 80% of their population living within incorporated municipalities;
- Currituck, Hyde, Camden, and Gates and Clay counties had more than 95% of their population living in unincorporated (non-municipal) areas.

¹ OSBM also produces certified population estimates that are used for distribution of state revenues. The 2016 certified estimates assume geographic boundaries as of July 1, 2017. In all other ways, the standard and certified municipal population estimates are the same. See the technical documentation for details on the methodologies employed in the population estimates.

² OSBM also prepares county population estimates and projections for North Carolina counties. The data is available on OSBM website (<https://www.osbm.nc.gov/facts-figures/demographics>) or can be obtained by contacting the State Demographer, Mike Cline (Michael.cline@osbm.nc.gov or 919-807-4756).

Population Change by Municipality Size

Between April 1, 2010 and July 1, 2016, two-thirds (or 367) of North Carolina’s 553 incorporated municipalities gained population, though the extent of that municipal population growth varied. The Piedmont Urban Crescent continues to dominate population growth, although growth has occurred in municipalities throughout the state. In general, the larger the municipality was in 2010, the more likely it was to gain population through 2016. Overall, 66 percent of all municipalities remained the same size or experienced growth from 2010 to 2016 (see Table 1). Of the nine municipalities with a population of at least 100,000 in 2010, all gained population between April 1, 2010 and July 1, 2016. These same municipalities had an average numeric change of 26,735 (or 9.0 percent average change). At the other end of the spectrum, 44.5 percent of municipalities with a population less than 1,000 people in 2010 experience population loss during this same period (with an overall average growth rate of just 0.9 percent).

Table 1. Average Population Size and Population Change by Municipality Size in 2010

Municipality Size	Average Population Size		Change		Percent With:		
	April 1, 2010	July 1, 2016	Numeric	Percent	Number	Loss	Growth
100,000+	267,730	294,466	26,735	9.0	9	0.0	100.0
50,000-99,999	69,232	73,247	4,014	5.3	8	12.5	87.5
25,000-49,999	33,970	37,000	3,030	8.8	17	5.9	94.1
15,000-24,999	19,144	20,523	1,379	6.7	25	48.0	52.0
10,000-14,999	12,017	13,219	1,202	9.9	23	17.4	82.6
5,000-9,999	7,032	7,462	430	6.1	50	24.0	76.0
2,500-4,999	3,619	3,830	211	6.0	90	21.1	78.9
1,000-2,499	1,621	1,683	62	3.8	111	35.1	64.9
< 1,000	459	464	5	0.9	220	44.5	55.5
All	9,498	10,285	787	3.9	553	33.6	66.4

Source: North Carolina OSBM, Standard Population Estimates, Vintage 2016.

Population Size

The Piedmont Urban Crescent – the region anchored by the three major urban areas of Charlotte, the Triad (Winston-Salem, Greensboro and High Point), and the Research Triangle (Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill) – has dominated population growth in the state since at least the 1850s when the North Carolina Railroad was created to connect these three areas. The three largest cities in North Carolina – Charlotte (830,258), Raleigh (448,699) and Greensboro (284,328) – are located in this region. Thirteen of the largest municipalities in 2016 were located in and around the Piedmont Urban Crescent (see Table 2). Among these municipalities are Durham, which since 2010 surpassed Winston-Salem to become the fourth largest municipality in the state (at 255,042 people), and Apex (at 46,673 people), which now ranks as the twentieth largest municipality (up from a rank of 22 in 2010). Of the top twenty municipalities, only Rocky Mount lost population between April 1, 2010 and July 1, 2016.

Table 2. Twenty Largest Municipalities Ranked by Population Size in 2016

Rank	Municipality	Total Population		Change	
		April 1, 2010	July 1, 2016	Numeric	Percent
1	Charlotte	731,424	830,258	98,834	13.5
2	Raleigh	403,892	448,699	44,807	11.1
3	Greensboro	269,666	284,328	14,662	5.4
4	Durham	228,330	255,042	26,712	11.7
5	Winston-Salem	229,617	240,603	10,986	4.8
6	Fayetteville	200,564	208,729	8,165	4.1
7	Cary	135,234	155,041	19,807	14.6
8	Wilmington	106,476	117,255	10,779	10.1
9	High Point	104,371	110,235	5,864	5.6
10	Asheville	83,393	91,929	8,536	10.2
11	Concord	79,066	88,815	9,749	12.3
12	Greenville	84,554	87,945	3,391	4.0
13	Jacksonville	70,145	75,744	5,599	8.0
14	Gastonia	71,741	74,413	2,672	3.7
15	Chapel Hill	57,233	59,851	2,618	4.6
16	Huntersville	46,773	57,145	10,372	22.2
17	Rocky Mount	57,685	54,849	-2,836	-4.9
18	Burlington	50,042	52,426	2,384	4.8
19	Wilson	49,167	49,400	233	0.5
20	Apex	37,476	46,673	9,197	24.5

Source: North Carolina OSBM, Standard Population Estimates, Vintage 2016.

Numeric Change

The municipalities that experienced the largest numeric gains between 2010 and 2016 include: Charlotte, which added the most population (98,834), followed by Raleigh (44,807), Durham (26,712) and Cary (19,807) (see Table 3). All but four municipalities are located in and around the Piedmont Urban Crescent. Municipalities located outside of the Piedmont Urban Crescent that were ranked among the top twenty municipalities in terms of numeric gain include: Wilmington (which added 10,779 people), Jacksonville (which added 5,599 people) and Fayetteville (which added 8,165 people) in the Coastal Plain region; and Asheville in the mountains (with a numeric gain of 8,536).

Table 3. Top Twenty Municipalities with the Largest Numeric Population Gain, 2010-2016

Rank	Municipality	Total Population		Change	
		April 1, 2010	July 1, 2016	Numeric	Percent
1	Charlotte	731,424	830,258	98,834	13.5
2	Raleigh	403,892	448,699	44,807	11.1
3	Durham	228,330	255,042	26,712	11.7
4	Cary	135,234	155,041	19,807	14.6
5	Greensboro	269,666	284,328	14,662	5.4
6	Winston-Salem	229,617	240,603	10,986	4.8
7	Wilmington	106,476	117,255	10,779	10.1
8	Huntersville	46,773	57,145	10,372	22.2
9	Concord	79,066	88,815	9,749	12.3
10	Apex	37,476	46,673	9,197	24.5
11	Asheville	83,393	91,929	8,536	10.2
12	Fayetteville	200,564	208,729	8,165	4.1
13	Holly Springs	24,661	31,230	6,569	26.6
14	Mooresville	32,711	39,068	6,357	19.4
15	Fuquay-Varina	17,937	24,254	6,317	35.2
16	Morrisville	18,576	24,456	5,880	31.7
17	High Point	104,371	110,235	5,864	5.6
18	Jacksonville	70,145	75,744	5,599	8.0
19	Cornelius	24,866	30,207	5,341	21.5
20	Wake Forest	30,117	35,293	5,176	17.2

Source: North Carolina OSBM, Standard Population Estimates, Vintage 2016.

Percentage Change

In percentage terms, many of the fastest growing municipalities are suburban and exurban communities proximate to the largest municipalities in the state or within recreational and tourist areas along the coast or in the mountains (see Table 4). Municipalities ranked in the top twenty of the fastest growing municipalities located in the mountains include Fontana Dam (an increase of 53.3 percent or 8 people) and Weaverville (an increase of 23.7 percent or 738 people). Those municipalities ranked among the twenty fastest growing since 2010 located along the coast include: Holly Ridge (an increase of 24.1 percent or 305 people) and St. James (an increase of 44.7 percent or 1,415 people). Among the twenty municipalities with the largest percentage gains, Huntersville near Charlotte (an increase of 22.2 percent or 10,372 people); and Apex (an increase of 24.5 percent or 9,197 people), Holly Springs (an increase of 26.6 percent or 6,569 people) and Fuquay-Varina (an increase of 35.2 percent or 6,317 people) near Raleigh had the largest numeric gains.

Table 4. Top Twenty Fastest Growing Municipalities, 2010-2016

Rank	Municipality	Total Population		Change	
		April 1, 2010	July 1, 2016	Numeric	Percent
1	Fontana Dam	15	23	8	53.3
2	Bermuda Run	1,725	2,610	885	51.3
3	Rolesville	3,786	5,723	1,937	51.2
4	St. James	3,165	4,580	1,415	44.7
5	Harrisburg	11,526	16,176	4,650	40.3
6	Fuquay-Varina	17,937	24,254	6,317	35.2
7	Leland	13,527	17,956	4,429	32.7
8	Waxhaw	9,859	13,035	3,176	32.2
9	Morrisville	18,576	24,456	5,880	31.7
10	Stem	463	588	125	27.0
11	Holly Springs	24,661	31,230	6,569	26.6
12	Pinehurst	13,124	16,452	3,328	25.4
13	Apex	37,476	46,673	9,197	24.5
14	Falcon	258	321	63	24.4
15	Holly Ridge	1,268	1,573	305	24.1
16	Weaverville	3,120	3,858	738	23.7
17	Midland	3,073	3,760	687	22.4
18	Pittsboro	3,743	4,577	834	22.3
19	Huntersville	46,773	57,145	10,372	22.2
20	Cornelius	24,866	30,207	5,341	21.5

Source: North Carolina OSBM, Standard Population Estimates, Vintage 2016.

Population Change and Annexation

Municipalities may grow in population size as a result of population gains within historical municipal boundaries and they may also add population by annexing land outside historical boundary. In most cases, land is annexed that may have no existing residential structures and associated population. These areas may be annexed in anticipation for and as a long-term plan for residential development. In other cases, land that includes existing residential properties and population may be annexed into a municipality. Finally, municipalities may annex commercial or industrial land with no plan to ever include residential development within the newly annexed areas. OSBM maintains a database of municipal annexations as reported by municipalities through the North Carolina Demographic Information Survey. These data are collected in order to estimate population change within all municipalities.

Table 5 shows the top twenty municipalities with the largest population gains in annexed areas. These changes are a result of municipalities annexing existing population living in annexed areas or areas where residential development occurred after the annexation or, in some cases, a combination of both of these two factors. Charlotte (5,364) and Raleigh (3,996) added the most people as a result of municipal annexations, but the population growth in these annexations only accounted for about 5 percent and 9 percent of the total population change in these cities, respectively. In contrast, Apex added 3,747 people in areas annexed since January 1, 2010. This added population accounted for close to 41 percent of the total population growth in Apex between April 1, 2010 and July 1, 2016.

Table 5. Largest Municipal Population Gains from Annexations, 2010 - 2016

Municipality	Total Population		Annexed Areas			
	April 1, 2010	July 1, 2016	Total	% of Total Change	Change in 2010 Limits	Total Change
Charlotte	731,424	830,258	5,364	5.4	93,470	98,834
Raleigh	403,892	448,699	3,996	8.9	40,811	44,807
Apex	37,476	46,673	3,747	40.7	5,450	9,197
Jacksonville	70,145	75,744	2,794	49.9	2,805	5,599
Harrisburg	11,526	16,176	2,644	56.9	2,006	4,650
Pinehurst	13,124	16,452	1,789	53.8	1,539	3,328
Durham	228,330	255,042	1,763	6.6	24,949	26,712
Fayetteville	200,564	208,729	1,713	21.0	6,452	8,165
Wilmington	106,476	117,255	1,555	14.4	9,224	10,779
Cary	135,234	155,041	1,530	7.7	18,277	19,807
Fuquay-Varina	17,937	24,254	1,352	21.4	4,965	6,317
Garner	25,745	28,999	1,011	31.1	2,243	3,254
Burlington	50,042	52,426	1,009	42.3	1,375	2,384
Cornelius	24,866	30,207	929	17.4	4,412	5,341
Kernersville	23,123	24,730	821	51.1	786	1,607
Hope Mills	15,176	16,523	794	58.9	553	1,347
Bermuda Run	1,725	2,610	726	82.0	159	885
Clayton	16,116	19,427	671	20.3	2,640	3,311
Asheville	83,393	91,929	597	7.0	7,939	8,536
Weaverville	3,120	3,858	587	79.5	151	738

Source: North Carolina OSBM, Standard Population Estimates, Vintage 2016.

Urban and Rural Population

There are several different ways to characterize urban and rural areas, but no matter the measure, North Carolina, despite having several large cities, maintains a significant rural population. If measured in the amount of population not living in incorporated communities, then 4.5 million people (or 44%) of the North Carolina population were living in rural areas in 2016. This means that 5.7 million people (or 56%) were living in incorporated municipalities in 2016. Table 6 shows the 21 counties where at least 50 percent of the population was living in an incorporated municipality on July 1, 2016. The most populated county in the state is also the most urban, with 95 percent of the population of Mecklenburg County living within an incorporated municipality.

Table 6. Counties in North Carolina with at Least 50 Percent of the Population Living in Municipalities by Percent Municipal

County	Total 2016 Population	Non-Municipal Population	Municipal Population	Percent Municipal
North Carolina	10,155,942	4,468,092	5,687,850	56.0
Mecklenburg	1,053,545	56,434	997,111	94.6
Durham	301,520	42,218	259,302	86.0
Forsyth	369,144	59,767	309,377	83.8
Guilford	520,230	92,947	427,283	82.1
Wake	1,026,748	205,666	821,082	80.0
Cumberland	329,824	86,861	242,963	73.7
Cabarrus	200,663	53,059	147,604	73.6
Union	223,915	72,382	151,533	67.7
Wilson	81,758	26,963	54,795	67.0
Pitt	175,885	63,521	112,364	63.9
Gaston	215,489	80,408	135,081	62.7
Alamance	159,054	60,214	98,840	62.1
Orange	140,853	54,883	85,970	61.0
Edgecombe	53,502	21,663	31,839	59.5
Craven	103,737	44,316	59,421	57.3
New Hanover	223,608	95,636	127,972	57.2
Nash	94,421	41,244	53,177	56.3
Lee	59,244	28,749	30,495	51.5
Dare	36,387	17,788	18,599	51.1
Moore	96,102	47,142	48,960	50.9

Source: North Carolina OSBM, Standard Population Estimates, Vintage 2016.

Figure 1 is a map of North Carolina counties showing the percentage of the population living in municipalities (incorporated areas). This map highlights the Piedmont Urban Crescent (from the Triangle through the Triad and down to Charlotte) but also shows other areas to the east – partly reflective of population size as well as historical settlement patterns. The most rural (as measured by the percent of the population living in unincorporated areas) remain in the areas along the northern coast in the Outer Banks, and in the mountains in the far west.

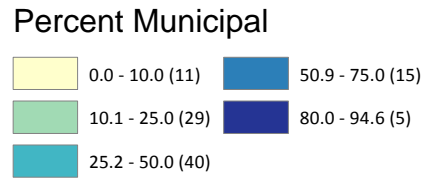
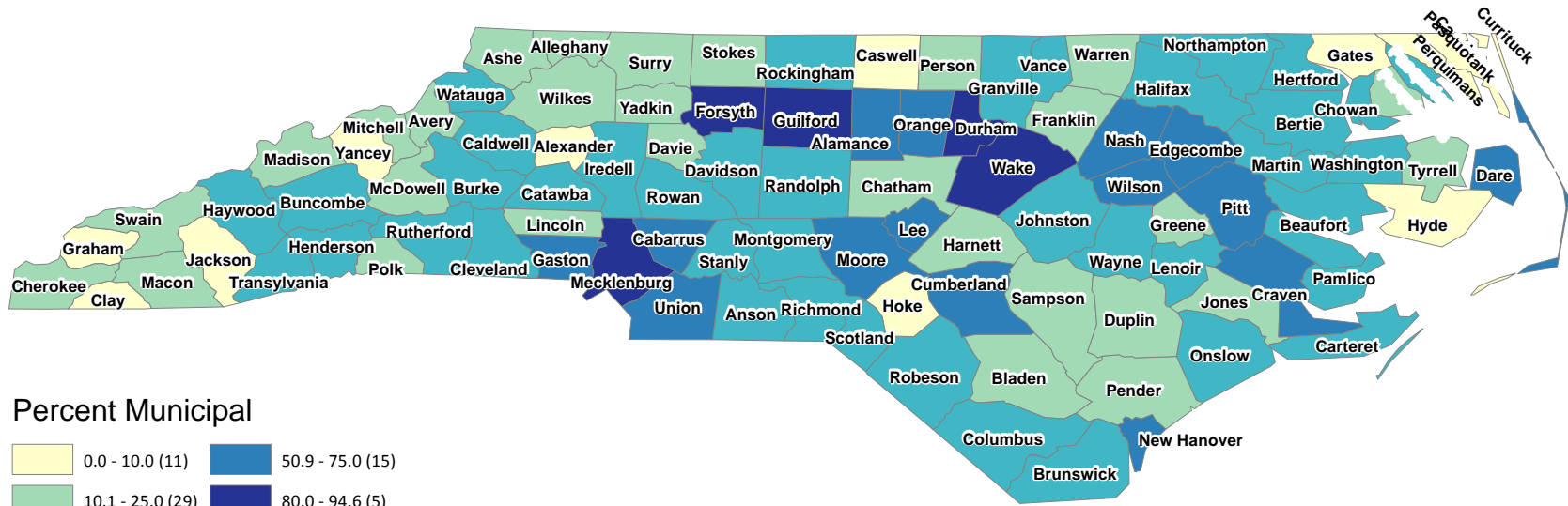
Table 7 shows the top twenty counties with the largest percentage of the population living in unincorporated (non-municipal) areas. The counties with the largest population living in unincorporated areas in 2016 included Currituck County (100 percent or 26,101 people living in unincorporated areas), Hyde County (100 percent or 5,621 people) and Camden County (99.6 percent or 10,242 people).

Table 7. Top Twenty Rural Counties in North Carolina

County	Total 2016 Population	Non-Municipal Population	Municipal Population	Percent Non-Municipal
North Carolina	10,155,942	4,468,092	5,687,850	44.0
Currituck	26,101	26,101	-	100.0
Hyde	5,621	5,621	-	100.0
Camden	10,287	10,242	45	99.6
Gates	11,891	11,574	317	97.3
Clay	11,320	10,989	331	97.1
Alexander	38,284	36,019	2,265	94.1
Graham	8,835	8,167	668	92.4
Jackson	42,574	38,840	3,734	91.2
Caswell	23,689	21,471	2,218	90.6
Yancey	18,142	16,438	1,704	90.6
Hoke	52,214	47,279	4,935	90.5
Warren	20,121	18,088	2,033	89.9
Swain	14,852	13,325	1,527	89.7
Greene	21,421	19,142	2,279	89.4
Ashe	27,344	24,340	3,004	89.0
Cherokee	28,591	25,100	3,491	87.8
Pender	59,459	52,155	7,304	87.7
Wilkes	70,027	61,295	8,732	87.5
Franklin	65,445	57,189	8,256	87.4
Lincoln	82,033	71,393	10,640	87.0

Source: North Carolina OSBM, Standard Population Estimates, Vintage 2016.
Rural as defined by percent of the population living in unincorporated or non-municipal areas.

North Carolina Counties by Percent Municipal Population, July 1, 2016



Source: North Carolina Office of State Budget & Management; Demographic & Economic Analysis Branch, Standard Population Estimates, 2016 Vintage.