

Majority of North Carolina Cities Have Grown Since 2010

Summary

Most of North Carolina's towns and cities are growing, according to the latest population estimates released by the U.S. Census Bureau on May 24, 2018. Between 2016 and 2017, 60% of North Carolina's 552 municipalities saw population growth, including Charlotte, which experienced the 7th largest numeric gain in the country between 2016 and 2017, adding 15,551 people. Since the last decennial Census in 2010, most North Carolina municipalities (55%) grew (Figure 1).

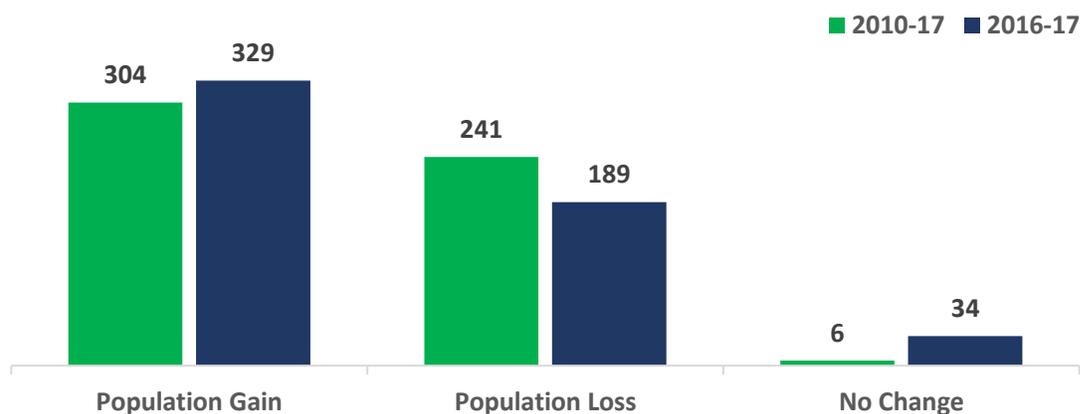
The U.S. Census Bureau population estimates show that most of North Carolina's population live in incorporated cities. According to the Census Bureau, there were an estimated 10.3 million people living in North Carolina on July 1, 2017. Of those, 5.8 million (57%) were living within an incorporated community (compared to 63% nationwide). Like the United States, most of the incorporated places in North Carolina are small – with 75% of North Carolina cities having populations less than 5,000 in 2016 (Table 1). These smaller communities experienced little to no growth, on average, between 2016 and 2017, while those larger than 5,000 in size in 2016 saw average increases of 1.2% or more. In addition to population size, communities within the major metropolitan areas of the state, particularly the Urban Crescent as well as coastal communities near Wilmington, were more likely to have grown during this period, while many communities in the eastern part of the state experienced population declines.

The Census Bureau's subcounty population estimates provide a glimpse at population change since the last decennial census and an opportunity to compare North Carolina communities with incorporated places throughout the country. This report provides a summary of the population changes in incorporated and unincorporated areas as estimated by the U.S. Census Bureau. Links to additional tables – including state rankings for all North Carolina municipalities are provided at the end of this report.

Figure 1.

The Majority of Incorporated Places Gaining Population

Incorporated Places by Population Change, 2016-2017 and 2010-2017*



*Fontana Dam is not included in the 2010-2017 change because it was not incorporated in 2010.



The North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management is a member of the Federal-State Cooperative for Population Estimates (FSCPE) and is the Lead Agency for the North Carolina State Data Center (SDC).

Table 1: Population Change by Size of Incorporated Place in 2016

Population Size in 2016	Number of Places	Percent of All Municipalities	Average Population Change		2017 Population	Percent of Total Municipal Population
			Numeric	Percent		
< 1,000	223	40.4	(0)	-0.1	103,498	1.8
1,000 - 4,999	193	35.0	20	0.7	504,080	8.7
5,000 - 9,999	51	9.2	85	1.3	363,125	6.3
10,000 - 49,999	67	12.1	387	1.7	1,457,052	25.1
50,000+	18	3.3	2,457	1.2	3,381,553	58.2
Total	552	100.0	142	0.6	5,809,308	100.0

National Rankings

Population Size, 2017

Five North Carolina cities rank among the 100 largest cities in the United States:

- 17. Charlotte (859,035)
- 41. Raleigh (464,758)
- 68. Greensboro (290,222)
- 77. Durham (267,743)
- 89. Winston-Salem (244,605)

Numeric Change, 2016 to 2017

Six North Carolina cities were among the 100 cities in the United States with the largest numeric gains between 2016 and 2017:

- 7. Charlotte (15,551)
- 36. Raleigh (5,710)
- 45. Durham (4,605)
- 69. Cary (3,426)
- 81. Greensboro (3,204)
- 93. Apex (3,012)

Percent Change, 2016 to 2017

Two North Carolina towns were among the 100 fastest growing cities from 2016 to 2017:

- 73. Jamestown (10%, 380 people)
- 87. Rolesville (9.3%, 654 people)

Numeric Change, 2010 to 2017

Five North Carolina cities were among the 100 cities in the United States with the largest numeric gains between 2010 and 2017:

- 9. Charlotte (127,611)
- 25. Raleigh (60,866)
- 41. Durham (39,413)
- 52. Cary (30,670)
- 91. Greensboro (20,556)

Percent Change, 2010 to 2017

Three North Carolina towns were among the 100 fastest growing cities from 2010 to 2017:

- 30. Rolesville (102.5%, 3,880 people)
- 44. Holly Ridge (87.5%, 1,109 people)
- 61. St. James (74.2%, 2,349 people)

Population Size

Charlotte remains the largest city in North Carolina at 859,035 people in 2017, almost double the size of Raleigh’s 2017 population of 464,758 (Table 2). There are six cities in North Carolina with estimated populations above 200,000, including Charlotte, Raleigh, Greensboro, Durham, Winston-Salem, and Fayetteville. An additional three cities have estimated populations above 100,000 including Cary, Wilmington, and High Point.

The population of Apex surpassed the 50,000 threshold between 2016 and 2017. The July 1, 2017 population of Apex was estimated to be 50,451, up from 47,439 in 2016 (an increase of 3,012 or 6.3%). By 2017, 3.4 million of the 5.8 million people living in cities and towns lived within one of the 19 largest cities in North Carolina (59% of the municipal population).

Table 2: Twenty Largest Incorporated Places in North Carolina in 2017

Place	Population			Change 2016 - 2017		Change 2010 - 2017*	
	2010	2016	2017	Numeric	Percent	Numeric	Percent
Charlotte	731,424	843,484	859,035	15,551	1.8	127,611	17.4
Raleigh	403,892	459,048	464,758	5,710	1.2	60,866	15.1
Greensboro	269,666	287,018	290,222	3,204	1.1	20,556	7.6
Durham	228,330	263,138	267,743	4,605	1.8	39,413	17.3
Winston-Salem	229,617	241,805	244,605	2,800	1.2	14,988	6.5
Fayetteville	200,564	210,934	209,889	-1,045	-0.5	9,325	4.6
Cary	135,234	162,478	165,904	3,426	2.1	30,670	22.7
Wilmington	106,476	116,985	119,045	2,060	1.8	12,569	11.8
High Point	104,371	111,214	111,513	299	0.3	7,142	6.8
Greenville	84,554	91,196	92,156	960	1.1	7,602	9.0
Concord	79,066	89,720	92,067	2,347	2.6	13,001	16.4
Asheville	83,393	91,190	91,902	712	0.8	8,509	10.2
Gastonia	71,741	75,125	76,593	1,468	2.0	4,852	6.8
Jacksonville	70,145	72,444	72,447	3	0.0	2,302	3.3
Chapel Hill	57,233	59,283	59,862	579	1.0	2,629	4.6
Huntersville	46,773	55,155	56,212	1,057	1.9	9,439	20.2
Rocky Mount	57,477	54,979	54,523	-456	-0.8	-2,954	-5.1
Burlington	49,963	52,123	53,077	954	1.8	3,114	6.2
Apex	37,476	47,439	50,451	3,012	6.3	12,975	34.6
Wilson	49,167	49,260	49,348	88	0.2	181	0.4

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates, Vintage 2017.

*87 months change from April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2017.

Fastest Growing Cities

Between 2016 and 2017, 18 cities experienced percentage gains of 5% or more (Table 3). Of the top 20 fastest growing cities in North Carolina, most were within the major growing metropolitan areas. Eight of the twenty were located completely or partially within Wake County, including Rolesville, Wendell, Fuquay-Varina, Knightdale, Morrisville, Apex, Holly Springs, and Wake Forest. There were five cities located in Brunswick County that were among the top twenty fastest growing, including Navassa, St. James, Carolina Shores, Leland, and Shallotte.

Table 3: Population and Population Change for the Twenty Fastest Growing Incorporated Places in North Carolina from 2016-2017

Place	Population			Change 2016 - 2017		Change 2010 - 2017*	
	2010	2016	2017	Numeric	Percent	Numeric	Percent
Jamestown	3,382	3,787	4,167	380	10.0	785	23.2
Rolesville	3,786	7,012	7,666	654	9.3	3,880	102.5
Wendell	5,845	6,735	7,261	526	7.8	1,416	24.2
Fuquay-Varina	17,937	25,949	27,906	1,957	7.5	9,969	55.6
Knightdale	11,401	14,763	15,849	1,086	7.4	4,448	39.0
Morrisville	18,576	24,728	26,461	1,733	7.0	7,885	42.4
Waxhaw	9,859	14,164	15,147	983	6.9	5,288	53.6
Mebane	11,393	14,015	14,973	958	6.8	3,580	31.4
Clayton	16,116	20,063	21,405	1,342	6.7	5,289	32.8
Apex	37,476	47,439	50,451	3,012	6.3	12,975	34.6
Navassa	1,505	1,782	1,895	113	6.3	390	25.9
St. James	3,165	5,196	5,514	318	6.1	2,349	74.2
Carolina Shores	3,048	3,908	4,146	238	6.1	1,098	36.0
Holly Ridge	1,268	2,246	2,377	131	5.8	1,109	87.5
Leland	13,527	18,904	19,976	1,072	5.7	6,449	47.7
Holly Springs	24,661	33,344	35,223	1,879	5.6	10,562	42.8
Shallotte	3,675	3,894	4,092	198	5.1	417	11.3
Wake Forest	30,117	40,239	42,269	2,030	5.0	12,152	40.3
Atkinson	299	332	345	13	3.9	46	15.4
Surf City	1,853	2,256	2,342	86	3.8	489	26.4

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates, Vintage 2017.

*87 months change from April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2017.

Between 2010 and 2017, 19 cities experienced percentage gains of 30% or more (Table 4). Most of these municipalities were in the same areas as those experiencing rapid gains between 2016 and 2017. Eight of the twenty towns were located wholly or partially within Wake County, including Rolesville, Fuquay-Varina, Holly Springs, Morrisville, Wake Forest, Knightdale, and Apex.

Table 4: Population and Population Change for the Twenty Fastest Growing Incorporated Places in North Carolina from 2010-2017

Place	Population			Change 2016 - 2017		Change 2010 - 2017*	
	2010	2016	2017	Numeric	Percent	Numeric	Percent
Rolesville	3,786	7,012	7,666	654	9.3	3,880	102.5
Holly Ridge	1,268	2,246	2,377	131	5.8	1,109	87.5
St. James	3,165	5,196	5,514	318	6.1	2,349	74.2
Tabor City	2,511	3,935	3,922	-13	-0.3	1,411	56.2
Fuquay-Varina	17,937	25,949	27,906	1,957	7.5	9,969	55.6
Waxhaw	9,859	14,164	15,147	983	6.9	5,288	53.6
Bermuda Run	1,725	2,563	2,593	30	1.2	868	50.3
Leland	13,527	18,904	19,976	1,072	5.7	6,449	47.7
Holly Springs	24,661	33,344	35,223	1,879	5.6	10,562	42.8
Morrisville	18,576	24,728	26,461	1,733	7.0	7,885	42.4
Wake Forest	30,117	40,239	42,269	2,030	5.0	12,152	40.3
Knightdale	11,401	14,763	15,849	1,086	7.4	4,448	39.0
Hayesville	311	425	432	7	1.6	121	38.9
Harrisburg	11,526	15,316	15,728	412	2.7	4,202	36.5
Carolina Shores	3,048	3,908	4,146	238	6.1	1,098	36.0
Apex	37,476	47,439	50,451	3,012	6.3	12,975	34.6
Clayton	16,116	20,063	21,405	1,342	6.7	5,289	32.8
Southport	2,833	3,623	3,725	102	2.8	892	31.5
Mebane	11,393	14,015	14,973	958	6.8	3,580	31.4
Surf City	1,853	2,256	2,342	86	3.8	489	26.4

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates, Vintage 2017.

*87 months change from April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2017.

Largest Numeric Population Gains

According to the Census Bureau's population estimates, 19 cities added at least 1,000 people between July 1, 2016 and July 1, 2017 (Table 5). Charlotte experienced the 7th largest gain of any city in the nation – adding 43 people a day during this period. Other cities adding more than 4,000 people between 2016 and 2017 included Raleigh and Durham.

Table 5: Twenty Incorporated Places in North Carolina with the Largest Population Gains from 2016-2017

Place	Population			Change 2016 - 2017		Change 2010 - 2017*	
	2010	2016	2017	Numeric	Percent	Numeric	Percent
Charlotte	731,424	843,484	859,035	15,551	1.8	127,611	17.4
Raleigh	403,892	459,048	464,758	5,710	1.2	60,866	15.1
Durham	228,330	263,138	267,743	4,605	1.8	39,413	17.3
Cary	135,234	162,478	165,904	3,426	2.1	30,670	22.7
Greensboro	269,666	287,018	290,222	3,204	1.1	20,556	7.6
Apex	37,476	47,439	50,451	3,012	6.3	12,975	34.6
Winston-Salem	229,617	241,805	244,605	2,800	1.2	14,988	6.5
Concord	79,066	89,720	92,067	2,347	2.6	13,001	16.4
Wilmington	106,476	116,985	119,045	2,060	1.8	12,569	11.8
Wake Forest	30,117	40,239	42,269	2,030	5.0	12,152	40.3
Fuquay-Varina	17,937	25,949	27,906	1,957	7.5	9,969	55.6
Holly Springs	24,661	33,344	35,223	1,879	5.6	10,562	42.8
Morrisville	18,576	24,728	26,461	1,733	7.0	7,885	42.4
Gastonia	71,741	75,125	76,593	1,468	2.0	4,852	6.8
Clayton	16,116	20,063	21,405	1,342	6.7	5,289	32.8
Kannapolis	42,625	47,609	48,806	1,197	2.5	6,181	14.5
Knightdale	11,401	14,763	15,849	1,086	7.4	4,448	39.0
Leland	13,527	18,904	19,976	1,072	5.7	6,449	47.7
Huntersville	46,773	55,155	56,212	1,057	1.9	9,439	20.2
Waxhaw	9,859	14,164	15,147	983	6.9	5,288	53.6

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates, Vintage 2017.

*87 months change from April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2017.

According to the Census Bureau population estimates, 11 cities added at least 10,000 people between April 1, 2010 and July 1, 2017 (Table 6). Charlotte’s growth – at 127,611 - surpassed growth in all other North Carolina cities and was more than double the gain of North Carolina’s second largest city – Raleigh, which added 60,866 people. Durham, Cary, and Greensboro added more than 20,000 people each.

Table 6: Twenty Incorporated Places in North Carolina with the Largest Population Gains from 2010-2017

Place	Population			Change 2016 - 2017		Change 2010 - 2017*	
	2010	2016	2017	Numeric	Percent	Numeric	Percent
Charlotte	731,424	843,484	859,035	15,551	1.8	127,611	17.4
Raleigh	403,892	459,048	464,758	5,710	1.2	60,866	15.1
Durham	228,330	263,138	267,743	4,605	1.8	39,413	17.3
Cary	135,234	162,478	165,904	3,426	2.1	30,670	22.7
Greensboro	269,666	287,018	290,222	3,204	1.1	20,556	7.6
Winston-Salem	229,617	241,805	244,605	2,800	1.2	14,988	6.5
Concord	79,066	89,720	92,067	2,347	2.6	13,001	16.4
Apex	37,476	47,439	50,451	3,012	6.3	12,975	34.6
Wilmington	106,476	116,985	119,045	2,060	1.8	12,569	11.8
Wake Forest	30,117	40,239	42,269	2,030	5.0	12,152	40.3
Holly Springs	24,661	33,344	35,223	1,879	5.6	10,562	42.8
Fuquay-Varina	17,937	25,949	27,906	1,957	7.5	9,969	55.6
Huntersville	46,773	55,155	56,212	1,057	1.9	9,439	20.2
Fayetteville	200,564	210,934	209,889	-1,045	-0.5	9,325	4.6
Asheville	83,393	91,190	91,902	712	0.8	8,509	10.2
Morrisville	18,576	24,728	26,461	1,733	7.0	7,885	42.4
Greenville	84,554	91,196	92,156	960	1.1	7,602	9.0
High Point	104,371	111,214	111,513	299	0.3	7,142	6.8
Leland	13,527	18,904	19,976	1,072	5.7	6,449	47.7
Kannapolis	42,625	47,609	48,806	1,197	2.5	6,181	14.5

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates, Vintage 2017.

*87 months change from April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2017.

Population Loss

Between April 1, 2010 and July 1, 2017, 241 cities lost population. When added together, the losses among these 241 communities totaled 24,479 people. Table 7 shows the 13 cities that lost at least 500 people between April 1, 2010 and July 1, 2017. Most of these cities are located within the eastern part of the state – an area that has been slow to recover from the Great Recession and devastated by Hurricane Matthew in 2016.

Table 7: Incorporated Places in North Carolina with the Population Losses of 500 or More from 2010-2017

Place	Population			Change 2016 - 2017		Change 2010 - 2017*	
	2010	2016	2017	Numeric	Percent	Numeric	Percent
Rocky Mount	57,477	54,979	54,523	-456	-0.8	-2,954	-5.1
Goldsboro	36,437	35,422	35,197	-225	-0.6	-1,240	-3.4
Kinston	21,677	20,707	20,509	-198	-1.0	-1,168	-5.4
Roanoke Rapids	15,754	14,986	14,787	-199	-1.3	-967	-6.1
Elizabeth City	18,683	17,723	17,756	33	0.2	-927	-5.0
Laurinburg	15,962	15,239	15,156	-83	-0.5	-806	-5.0
Havelock	20,735	20,112	20,008	-104	-0.5	-727	-3.5
Rockingham	9,558	8,980	8,846	-134	-1.5	-712	-7.4
Reidsville	14,520	13,843	13,857	14	0.1	-663	-4.6
Tarboro	11,415	10,852	10,856	4	0.0	-559	-4.9
Wadesboro	5,813	5,309	5,276	-33	-0.6	-537	-9.2
Henderson	15,368	14,949	14,852	-97	-0.6	-516	-3.4
Lumberton	21,542	21,212	21,040	-172	-0.8	-502	-2.3

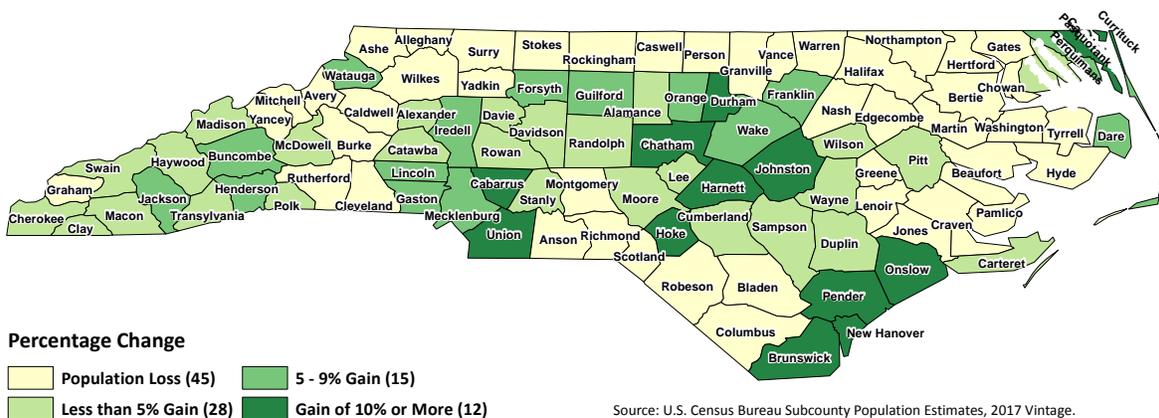
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates, Vintage 2017.

*87 months change from April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2017.

Unincorporated Areas Near Largest Cities Growing Fastest

Population change among unincorporated areas of North Carolina follow the same patterns as those for incorporated areas – with growth occurring primarily in the Urban Crescent and along the coast. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there were 12 counties that experienced growth in unincorporated areas of 10% or more between April 1, 2010 and July 1, 2017. The largest numeric population gains in unincorporated areas during this period included: Johnston County (18,437 or 15.4%), Harnett County (15,734 or 17.2%), Wake County (13,197 or 7.1%), Onslow County (11,983 or 11.8%), and New Hanover County (11,234 or 13.1%)

Percentage Population Change in Unincorporated Areas of North Carolina Counties, April 1, 2010 - July 1, 2017



The Impact of Military Deployments

In April of 2010, several thousand soldiers and marines were temporarily deployed to Haiti assisting in earthquake recovery. Unfortunately, this deployment coincided with April 1st which is designated as “Census Day.” Due to residency rules in place for the 2010 decennial census, these temporarily deployed soldiers and marines were, in many cases, counted in their home state of record and not in North Carolina. Since the Census Bureau uses the decennial census as a starting point for all subsequent population estimates, post-2010 Census Bureau population estimates have likely under-estimated the population of Fayetteville and Jacksonville as well as Cumberland and Onslow counties. Following the release of the 2016 population estimates, the City of Fayetteville challenged the Census Bureau’s estimate of their city’s population. In response to this challenge, and with information supplied by the North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management, the City of Fayetteville, the City of Jacksonville, Fort Bragg and Camp Lejeune, the Census Bureau revised its post-2010 population estimates to account for a portion of the population not counted in 2010 – those soldiers and marines living in military barracks. As a result, the historical population estimates for Fayetteville and Jacksonville have been revised and are significantly higher than the population estimates reported in prior years.¹

¹ The municipal and county population estimates prepared by the North Carolina State Demographer have always included these military barracks populations.

The Census Bureau has changed the residency rules for the 2020 decennial census so that military personnel on temporary deployment will be counted in their usual place of residence – in one of our many military communities in North Carolina.

Data Access

Summary tables showing population and population change (including state rankings) for all municipalities in North Carolina can be accessed at: <https://www.osbm.nc.gov/facts-figures/state-data-center/statistical-publications>. The complete population estimates dataset can be accessed on census.gov through the American Factfinder, Quickfacts and the population estimates program webpage.

About These Estimates

The Census Bureau uses updated housing unit estimates to distribute county population estimates to subcounty areas based on housing unit change. County population estimates are produced using administrative records of births, deaths and indicators of domestic and international migration. For more detail regarding the methodology, see www.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest/technical-documentation/methodology.html. These estimates differ from the population estimates produced by the North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management (NC OSBM) due to differences in methods employed and the reference date of municipal boundaries. The NC OSBM July 1, 2017 municipal population estimates will be available in September 2018. For information about the NC OSBM municipal population estimates, see <<https://www.osbm.nc.gov/demog/municipal-estimates>>.

For More Information Contact:

Dr. Michael (Mike) Cline
State Demographer
(919)807-4756
State.demographer@osbm.nc.gov

Bob Coats
North Carolina State Data Center, Coordinator
& Governor's Census Liaison
(919)807-4781
sdc@osbm.nc.gov