

Population Dynamics

State Population Continues to Grow

With a population nearing 10.4 million in 2018, North Carolina remains the ninth most populous state in the nation. The state has shown strong growth by adding roughly 848,000 people between 2010 and 2018. During this period, North Carolina experienced the fourth largest numeric growth and added more people than Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, combined. North Carolina’s growth was surpassed by only Texas (+3.6 million), Florida (+2.5 million), and California (+2.3 million).

OSBM projects that the state will grow by a quarter of a million people during the next biennium, from 10.5 million people on July 1, 2019, to 10.8 million people by July 1, 2021. This is equivalent to adding an entire city about the size of Winston-Salem to North Carolina. In other words, the state will be adding a net 334 people every day or about 2,342 people every week.

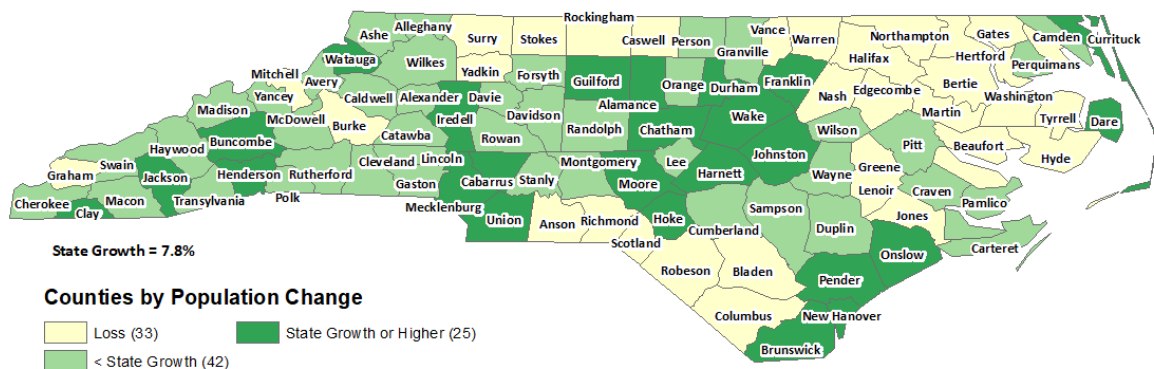
Assuming these growth trends continue, North Carolina’s population will reach 10.6 million people by 2020 – the year in which the next decennial Census is conducted. Given population trends in other states, North Carolina is expected to gain at least one Congressional seat after the 2020 Census enumeration.

Population Growth Has Been Uneven

The state saw robust population growth between 2010 and 2017 in metropolitan counties, with much of that growth occurring in the major metropolitan areas of Charlotte and Raleigh-Durham. While 25 counties grew faster than the state’s population growth of 7.8% (Figure 9), 33 counties lost population – well above the seven counties that lost population in the previous decade. Counties losing population were primarily nonmetropolitan in nature, with the largest concentration of these counties located in the northeastern and southern portion of the Coastal Plain.

Figure 9

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



Source: North Carolina Office of State Budget & Management, Demographic & Economic Analysis Branch, Population Estimates, Vintage 2017.

Growth Slower than Previous Decades

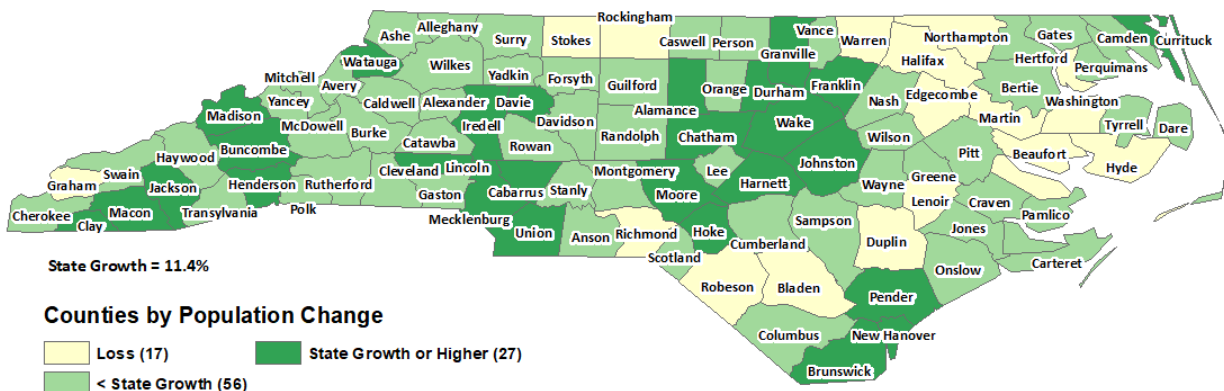
North Carolina is expected to experience slower population growth than what it experienced over the previous two decades. The slower growth is due to population aging, plus a range of other factors.

While the state grew by 21.3% during the 1990s and 18.5% during the 2000s, OSBM projects growth of 11.7% over the current decade. The projected growth resembles that experienced in the 1960s (and slower than any rate of decadal population growth since the 1860s). North Carolina is projected to add just over 1 million people during this decade – about 500,000 people less than what was added over the previous decade.

In the next ten years (2019-29), OSBM projects that the population of 17 counties will decline while 27 will experience growth faster than the State of North Carolina (Figure 10). As with the growth seen so far, the counties projected to grow faster are mostly located within the major metropolitan areas of the state. Those likely to lose population during this period are mostly non-metropolitan (or rural).

Figure 10

Projected Percentage Population Change in North Carolina Counties, 2019 - 2029



Source: North Carolina Office of State Budget & Management, Demographic & Economic Analysis Branch, Population Projections, Vintage 2018.

Migration Continues to Influence Growth

During the 1950s and 1960s, more people left North Carolina than moved to the state. Beginning in the 1970s, more people started moving into the state than were leaving; and from the 1980s until today, the majority of North Carolina’s growth has been from net migration, while natural population increase (births minus deaths) has taken a secondary role.

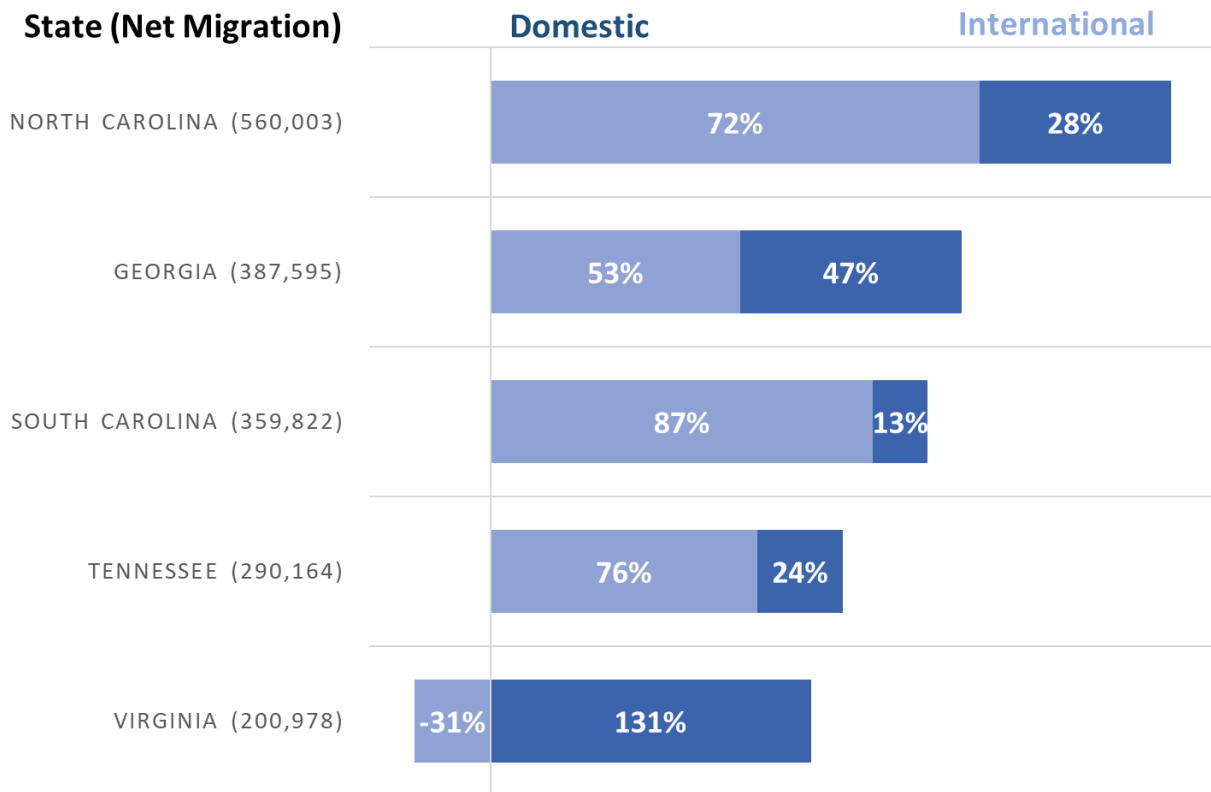
Between April 1, 2010 and July 1, 2018, 560,000 more people moved to North Carolina than left and these net migrants accounted for 66.0% of total population growth. During this same period, there were 282,000 more births than deaths. Of the 560,000 net migrants the Census Bureau estimated, the majority came from other states (72.0%), but at least 158,000 people migrated from abroad (Figure 11). Since 2010, North Carolina has added more net migrants than any of its neighbors, and it was one of only 22 states with more domestic migrants moving into the state than leaving (at 402,000 net domestic migrants) – ranked behind Florida (+1.2 million net domestic migrants) and Texas (+1.0 million net domestic migrants).

The importance of net migration for population growth is projected to continue due to population aging and long-term declines in fertility rates. Between 2020 and 2030, 82% of the state’s growth is projected to be derived from net migration.

Figure 11

More Migration to North Carolina vs Neighbors in Recent Years

Net Domestic and International Migration, April 2010 to July 2018



Source: US Census Bureau, State Population Estimates, Vintage 2018.

North Carolina’s Population Is Aging

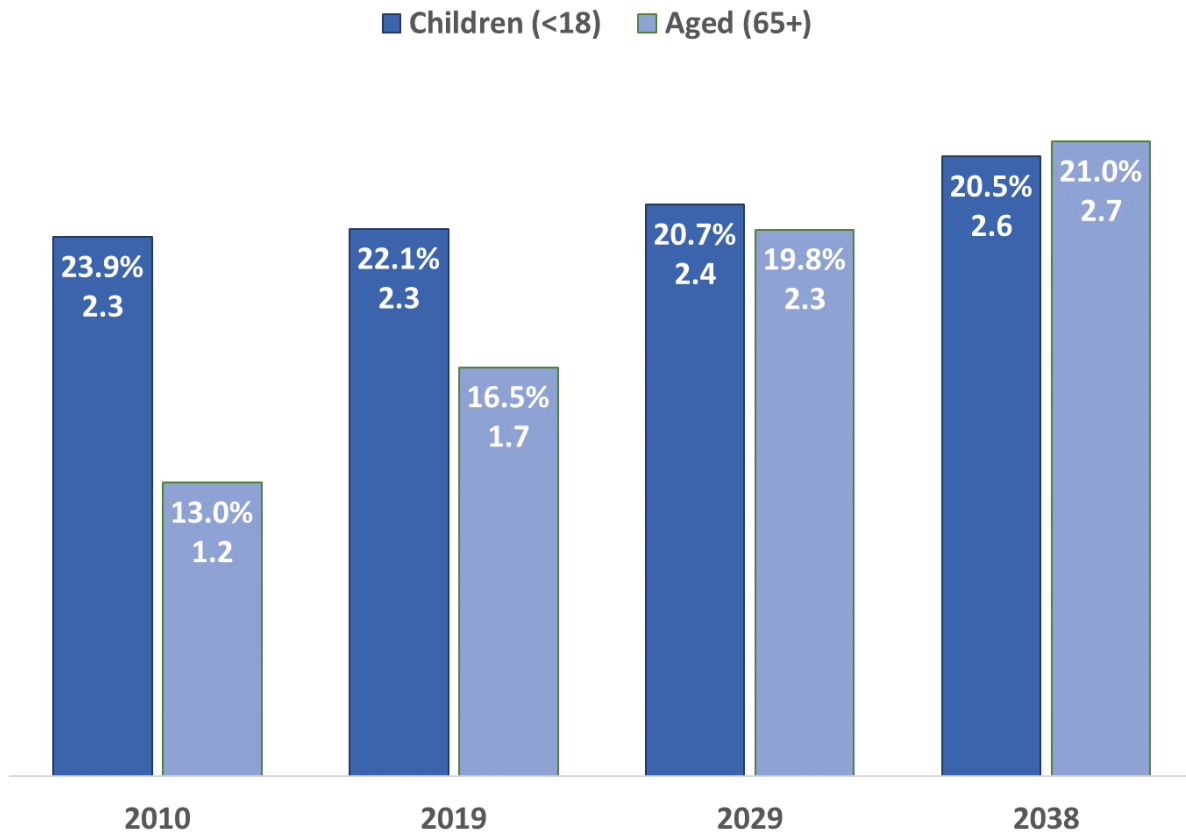
By 2030, OSBM projects that one in five North Carolinians will be at least 65 years old, and by 2035 there will be more older adults (ages 65+) than children (ages less than 18 – Figure 12). OSBM projects that between 2019 and 2029, the older adult population will increase by 584,000 people (33.7%) to 2.3 million in 2029 (from 1.7 million in 2019), and the oldest adults (ages 85+) will increase from 188,000 in 2019 to 265,000 by 2029.

In addition to its impacts on migration, the Great Recession impacted births in North Carolina above and beyond long term downward trends in fertility. As a result, the childhood population in North Carolina has grown much slower than it did prior to the Great Recession. Between 2010 and 2018, this population grew an average of 3,725 people per year. OSBM projects that between 2019 and 2029 this population will grow by 103,000 people (4.4%).

Figure 12

More North Carolinians Age 65 and Older than Children by 2035

Percent of Total Population and Millions of People for Selected Age Groups



Source: North Carolina Office of State Budget & Management, Demographic & Economic Analysis Branch, Population Projections, Vintage 2018.

Census 2020

The next decennial census is only one year away. It is crucial that all North Carolinian households complete a census form. In preparation, Governor Cooper established the State Complete Count Commission in October 2018 through Executive Order No. 79. The chief objective of the State Complete Count Commission is to encourage full participation in the 2020 Census. The website for North Carolina Census 2020 promotion is: census.nc.gov. Leading up to April 1, 2020 (Census Day), communities are also encouraged to develop Complete Count Committees that will partner with the US Census Bureau to promote participation in the 2020 Census.

These state and local investments of time and resources for 2020 Census preparation and promotion will play an important role in ensuring every North Carolinian is counted in 2020. Having full census participation in the state is crucial as the census number affects the lives of North Carolinians in three vital ways. First, the census number is at the core of determining political representation in Congress. Second, the census provides complete data for state and local government to plan services and business to make decisions that spur economic development. Third, the census count is directly or indirectly responsible for the share of