

POPULATION fundamentals

Growth has been a default for this young, military-dependent state

By **SARA WHITNEY** and **LIZ BROOKS**

Alaska is the third least-populous state in the U.S., with only Vermont and Wyoming having fewer people. The state has grown considerably in a short time, however, from just 55,036 people in the territory in 1920 to 739,828 in 2016.

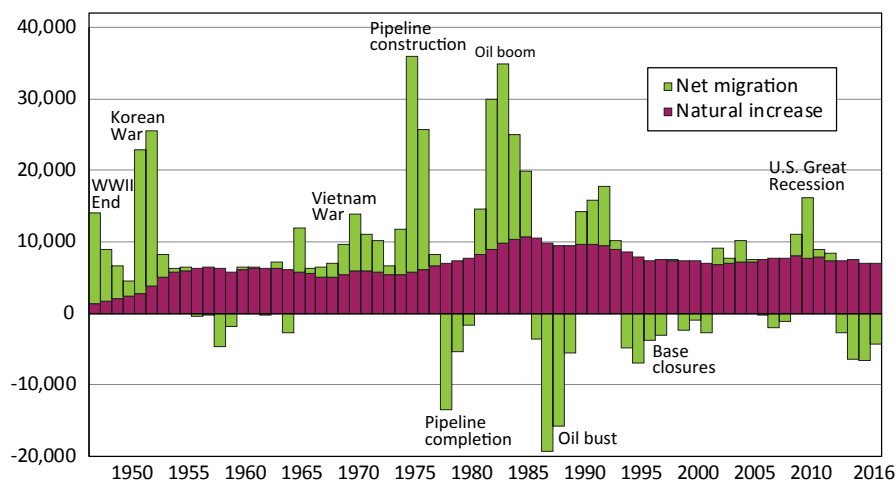
This article is a brief overview of Alaska's population and its patterns, available in detail in our *2016 Population Overview* at <http://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/pop/popestpub.cfm>. New population estimates for 2017 will be available in January 2018.

Alaska grew in all years since statehood except for three

Growth has long been the state's default, and its periods of loss have been brief. Alaska's total population grew in all but three of the 57 years since statehood in 1959: one year of loss came in the late 1970s after the Trans-Alaska Pipeline was completed, and two were in the late 1980s after the crash in oil prices.

Alaska has large yearly migration flows both in and out. Most interstate movers are young adults, which is also true nationally, and about a fifth of movers are tied to

1 Alaska's Historical Population Changes NATURAL INCREASE AND NET MIGRATION, 1946 TO 2016



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

the military. These flows are a constant for Alaska regardless of economic conditions.

But that doesn't mean the number moving in is always greater than the number who leave. In more than a third of the years since statehood — 23 — Alaska lost more people through net migration than it gained. In all but those three years of overall loss, natural increase — births minus deaths — more than made up the difference. Natural increase hit a high of 10,700 in 1985, and has since declined to about 7,000 per year.

Alaska is the third-youngest state

Alaska was the third-youngest state in 2016, with a median age of 34.7. Only Utah and Texas were younger, at 30.8 and 34.5, respectively. For comparison, the national median was 37.9 years.

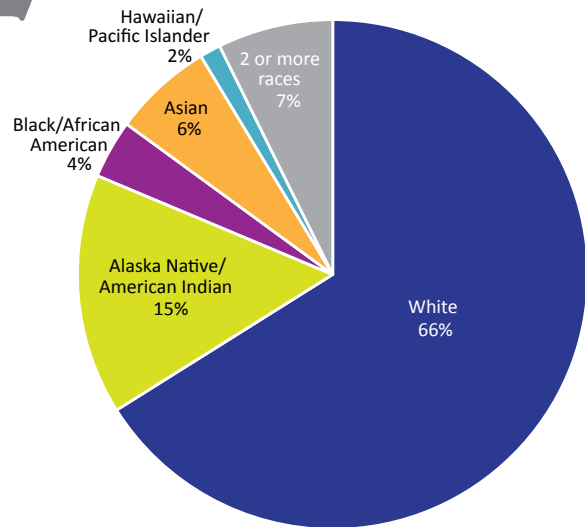
Alaska's age structure is changing rapidly, however. The rate at which the state's senior population is growing is among the fastest in the nation as the state's large cohort of baby boomers ages. The number of Alaskans age 65 or older more than doubled between 2000 and 2016.

Largest percent Native among states

Alaska's rural areas are particularly young overall, with a median age as low as 23.7 in the Kuskilvak Census Area in Western Alaska. Many of these areas' populations are majority Alaska Native; Kuskilvak, for example, is nearly 95 percent Native.

Statewide, two-third of Alaskans are white and 15 percent are Alaska Native (see Exhibit 2), which is the highest proportion Alaska Native/American Indian in

2 Alaskans by Race 2016



Sources: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section; and U.S. Census Bureau

the nation. The share grows to 20 percent when including those who are Native in combination with another race. Historically, though, the territory was entirely Alaska Native and as late as 1929, they made up more than half of the population.

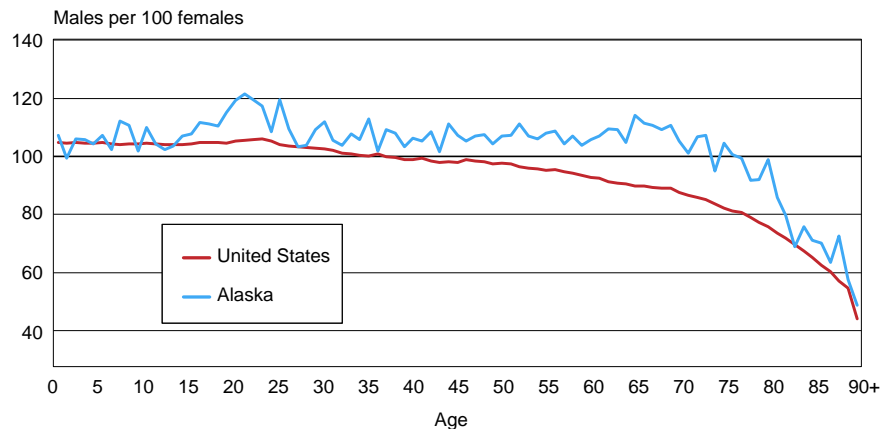
107 males for every 100 females

The long-held perception that Alaska has a higher percentage of men than women is correct, although not

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3 Male-to-Female Ratio by Age

ALASKA AND THE UNITED STATES, 2016



Sources: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section; and U.S. Census Bureau

WAGES INCREASE

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ployment. The North Slope is also an outlier in that most of the oil-related wages paid there go to people who live elsewhere. Unlike income, which is based on where workers live, wages are based on the location of the job, although most places with high average earnings also have high incomes.

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About the data

This data set has a few important limitations. First, while some wage change is a real increase in the amounts paid to workers, a combination of other factors can come into play, such as changes in the overall industry or occupational mix or in hours worked.

This data set also counts jobs, not workers, and it doesn't distinguish between part-time and full-time jobs or include self-employment. And because it's an average and not a median, any extremes would have a disproportionate effect on the average value.

POPULATION

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nearly to the degree people sometimes expect. The gender disparity has narrowed considerably with time, but still, our ratio of 107 males to every 100 females is the highest in the United States.

At one time, the stereotype that Alaska was mostly men was true. In 1900, during the Gold Rush, Alaska had 259 males for every 100 females. That narrowed to about 162 in 1950, at the beginning of the state's military buildup. The ratio was 113 to 100 by 1980 and it's declined gradually since, bringing Alaska closer to national norms.

Alaska's special mix of industries contributes to the state's relatively large share of men; these include oil, construction, fishing, and the military.

Military especially important

The military's outsized role in the state's economy largely began with the state's geographic importance during World War II. Today, the state has more than 20,000 active duty service members and 30,000 dependents: about 55 percent are Army, 35 percent are Air Force, and 9 percent are Coast Guard.

While the military has a presence around the state, it's an especially large part of the populations in Fairbanks and Kodiak at 19 percent and 17 percent of their respective populations. In terms of numbers, though, Anchorage has the most.

Alaska's veteran population also reflects this historical importance. On a per capita basis, Alaska has more than 1.5 times as many veterans as the U.S. overall.

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