

A first look at the 2020 Census

Data show the least amount of growth since statehood

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The 2020 Census results released so far¹ provide a first look at how Alaska's population changed over the past decade. Population growth during the 2010s was the lowest since territorial days. The state added the smallest number of people since the 1930s and grew at the slowest rate since the 1910s.

Between 2010 and 2020, Alaska added a little more than 23,000 people for a total population of 733,391. The overall growth rate of 3.3 percent was far below the previous post-World War II decades.

Growth in the 2010s was a post-statehood low

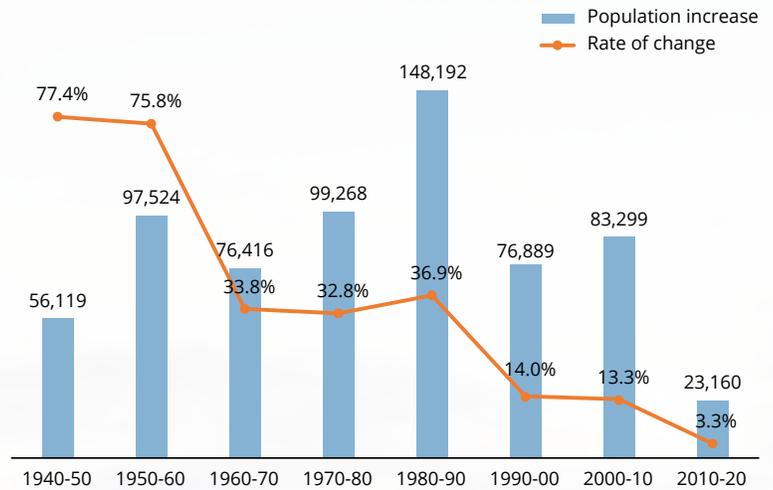
In the 1940s and 1950s, when military build-ups for World War II and the emerging Cold War brought in a flood of servicemen and a building boom, Alaska's population grew by over 75 percent each decade.

In the three decades after statehood, the emerging oil economy kept the state expanding by about a third each decade, even with the increasingly larger population. Decade growth peaked in the 1980s at nearly 150,000 additional people, then moderated after 1990. The state added around 80,000 people in both the 1990s and the 2000s, for growth between 13 and 14 percent.

The 2010s were a turning point. The 1930s were the last time Alaska gained so few people (13,000). In

¹Data released from the new decennial census for redistricting purposes have so far been limited to total population, totals by race, totals for the population 18 and older, and some housing characteristics. More data are expected in mid-2022, including detailed age structure and composition of households. The pandemic and a new process of adding random statistical "noise" for privacy purposes slowed the original release timeline.

A low decade for Alaska population growth



Source: U.S. Census Bureau decennial censuses for Alaska

terms of the rate, the recent decade was a century low. Alaska's population declined by 14 percent in the 1910s with World War I. At that time, the population was transient and male. With the war declared in 1917, most left for the army or war industries and fewer migrated back after the armistice.

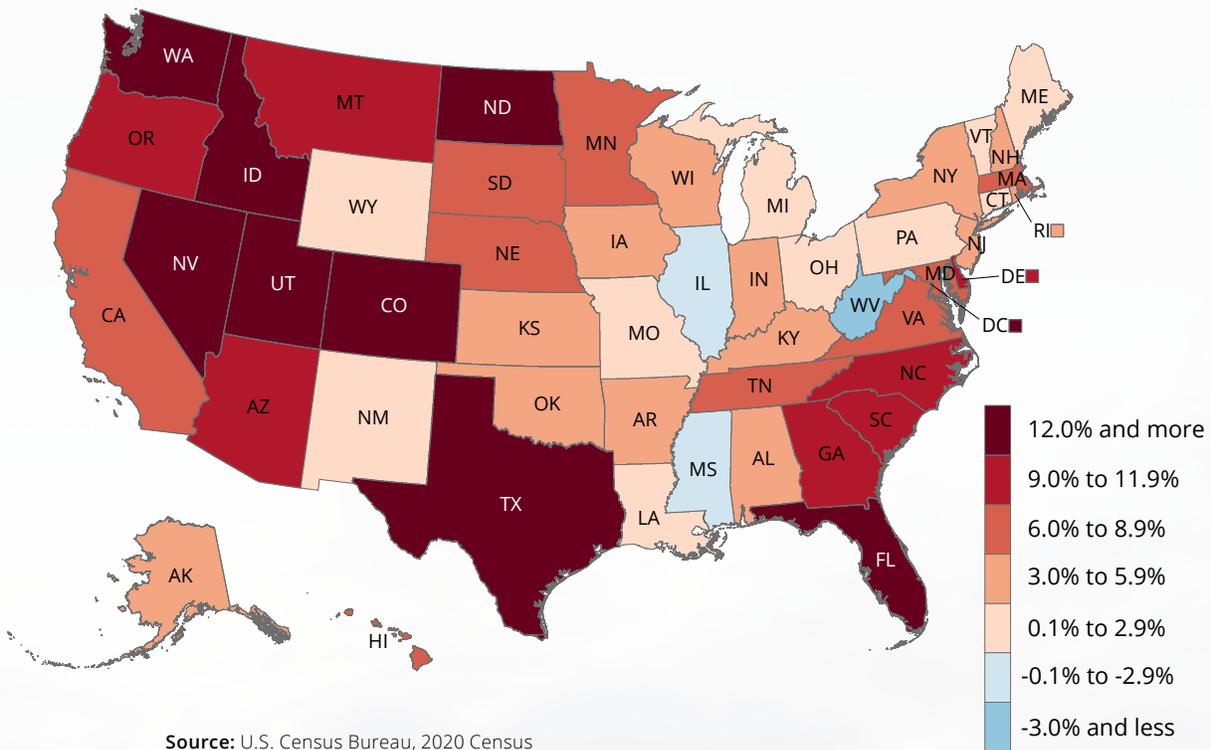
... but still outpaced 14 states

The U.S. population grew 7.4 percent during the 2010s, from 308,700,000 people to 331,400,000. While that was more than twice Alaska's rate, it was also the slowest growth for the nation since the 1930s.

The map on the next page shows growth varied around the country. Alaska's rate, while slow, still outpaced 14 other states. Three states lost population over the decade, with West Virginia coming in last at a 3.2 percent drop. The 11 other states that lagged Alaska were mostly in the Northwest and Midwest.

The fastest-growing states were mainly in the West and South Atlantic Coast. Utah grew 18.4 percent,

Percent population change by state between 2010 and 2020



followed by Idaho (17.3 percent), Texas (15.9 percent), North Dakota (15.8 percent), and Nevada (15 percent). Three other states and the District of Columbia grew at least 14 percent (Colorado, Washington, and Florida).

The U.S. grew at twice Alaska's rate, but that was the nation's slowest growth since the 1930s.

Rates varied widely around Alaska

Within Alaska, 15 areas grew while 14 shrank. One, Yakutat, remained the same. This pattern resembled the 2000s when 16 boroughs and census areas added people and 14 lost them. Only 10 grew during both decades, and six were in Northern or Southwest Alaska. (See the maps on the next page.)

Anchorage and Fairbanks represented over half of the state's growth during the 2000s, when they added 45,000 people, but both got smaller during the 2010s. Their losses were small percent-wise, but the lack of growth in the two most populated areas at the start of the decade hampered the statewide numbers.

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough gained more than 18,000 people to surpass Fairbanks as the second-largest county equivalent after Anchorage.

Mat-Su accounted for 78 percent of the state's

growth, but even Mat-Su grew slower than in past decades. The fastest-growing borough from the 1970s through the 2000s fell into second place behind Skagway during the last decade.

On a regional level, Northern and Southwest grew at the fastest pace. The Northern Region population increased 9 percent, with its North Slope Borough leading at 17 percent. Southwest grew 5 percent, and the Kusilvak and Bethel census areas topped its list at 12 percent and 10 percent.

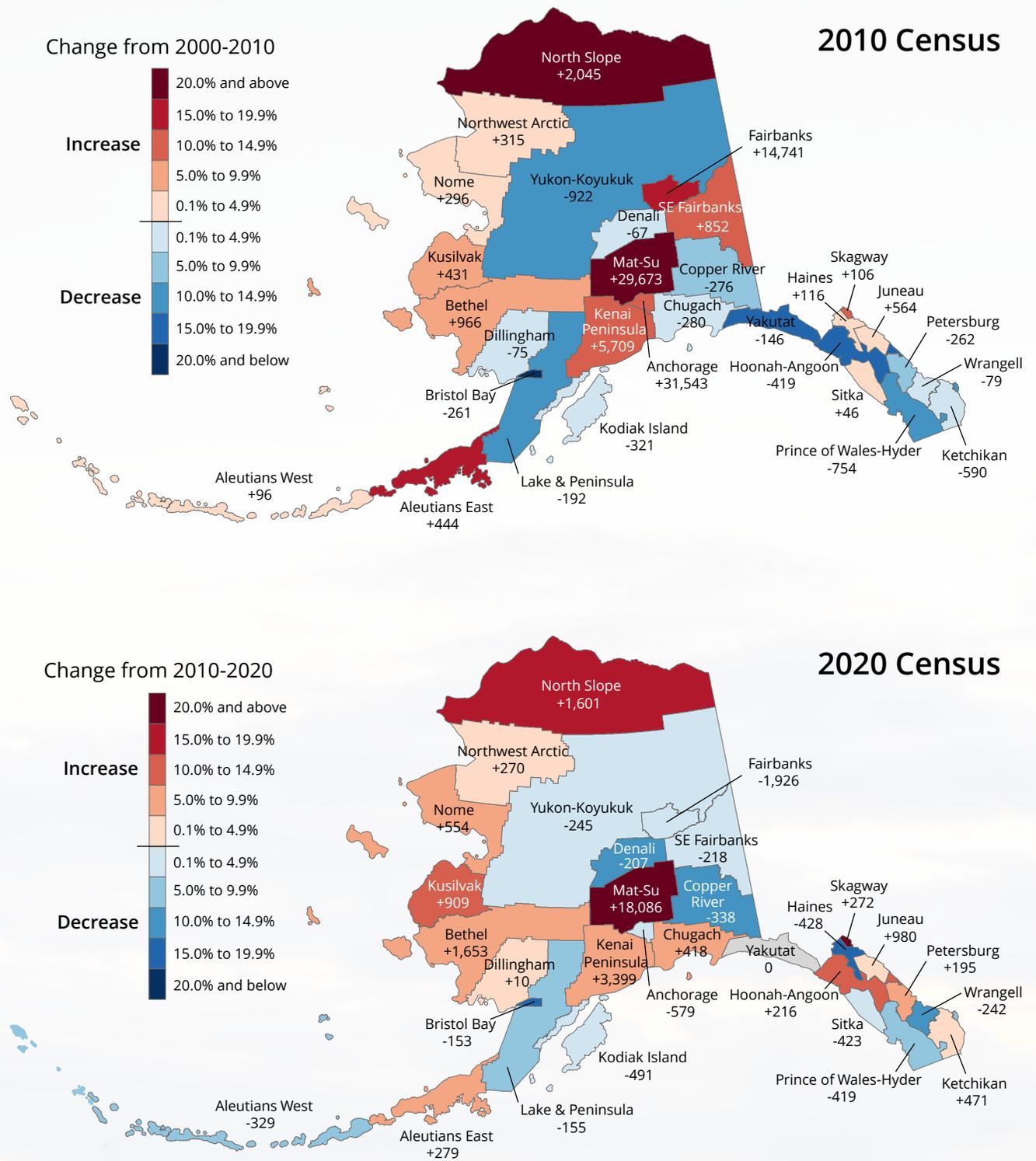
The Interior was the only region to shrink. Every borough and census area, including Fairbanks, lost population.

Change at the community level

The 2020 Census covered 355 communities in Alaska,

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How population change by area differed between 2010 and 2020 censuses



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census and 2020 Census

The 20 most populated places in the state each decade, 1980 to 2020

| 1980 | | | 1990 | | 2000 | |
|------|----------------------------|------------|----------------------------|------------|----------------------------|------------|
| Rank | Place | Population | Place | Population | Place | Population |
| 1 | Anchorage Municipality* | 174,431 | Anchorage Municipality* | 226,338 | Anchorage Municipality* | 260,283 |
| 2 | Fairbanks City | 22,645 | Fairbanks City | 30,843 | Juneau City and Borough* | 30,711 |
| 3 | Juneau City and Borough* | 19,528 | Juneau City and Borough* | 26,751 | Fairbanks City | 30,224 |
| 4 | Sitka City and Borough* | 7,803 | College CDP (UAF area) | 11,249 | College CDP (UAF area) | 11,402 |
| 5 | Ketchikan City | 7,198 | Sitka City and Borough* | 8,588 | Sitka City and Borough* | 8,835 |
| 6 | Eielson Air Force Base CDP | 5,232 | Ketchikan City | 8,263 | Ketchikan City | 7,922 |
| 7 | Kodiak City | 4,756 | Kodiak City | 6,365 | Knik-Fairview CDP | 7,049 |
| 8 | Kenai City | 4,324 | Kenai City | 6,327 | Kenai City | 6,942 |
| 9 | College CDP (UAF area) | 4,043 | Eielson Air Force Base CDP | 5,251 | Lakes CDP | 6,706 |
| 10 | Bethel City | 3,576 | Bethel City | 4,674 | Kodiak City | 6,334 |
| 11 | Adak Station CDP | 3,315 | Adak Station CDP | 4,633 | Kalifornsky CDP | 5,846 |
| 12 | Valdez City | 3,079 | Valdez City | 4,068 | Bethel City | 5,471 |
| 13 | Petersburg City | 2,821 | Wasilla City | 4,028 | Wasilla City | 5,469 |
| 14 | Soldotna City | 2,320 | Sterling CDP | 3,802 | Eielson Air Force Base CDP | 5,400 |
| 15 | Nome City | 2,301 | Homer City | 3,660 | Tanaina CDP | 4,993 |
| 16 | Homer City | 2,209 | Nome City | 3,500 | Meadow Lakes CDP | 4,819 |
| 17 | Barrow City | 2,207 | Soldotna City | 3,482 | Sterling CDP | 4,705 |
| 18 | Wrangell City | 2,184 | Barrow City | 3,469 | Barrow City | 4,581 |
| 19 | Palmer City | 2,141 | Petersburg City | 3,207 | Palmer City | 4,533 |
| 20 | Kotzebue City | 2,054 | Unalaska City | 3,089 | Nikiski CDP | 4,327 |

including 149 incorporated cities, four unified city-boroughs, and 206 unincorporated settlements called census designated places for statistical purposes.

About 68 percent of the population lived in a city or city-borough, down from 77 percent in 1980 and 73 percent in 2000. Just 2.6 percent lived in a place with no local government, down from 5 percent in 1980.

The 20 largest communities list included an increasing number of CDPs in the Mat-Su, Fairbanks, and Kenai Peninsula boroughs between 1980 and 2020.

During the 2010s, for the first time, the majority of the 20 largest communities were unincorporated. The outer areas of their boroughs had been growing, and some of these CDP designations didn't exist in past censuses.

Over the years, Anchorage, the City of Fairbanks, and the City

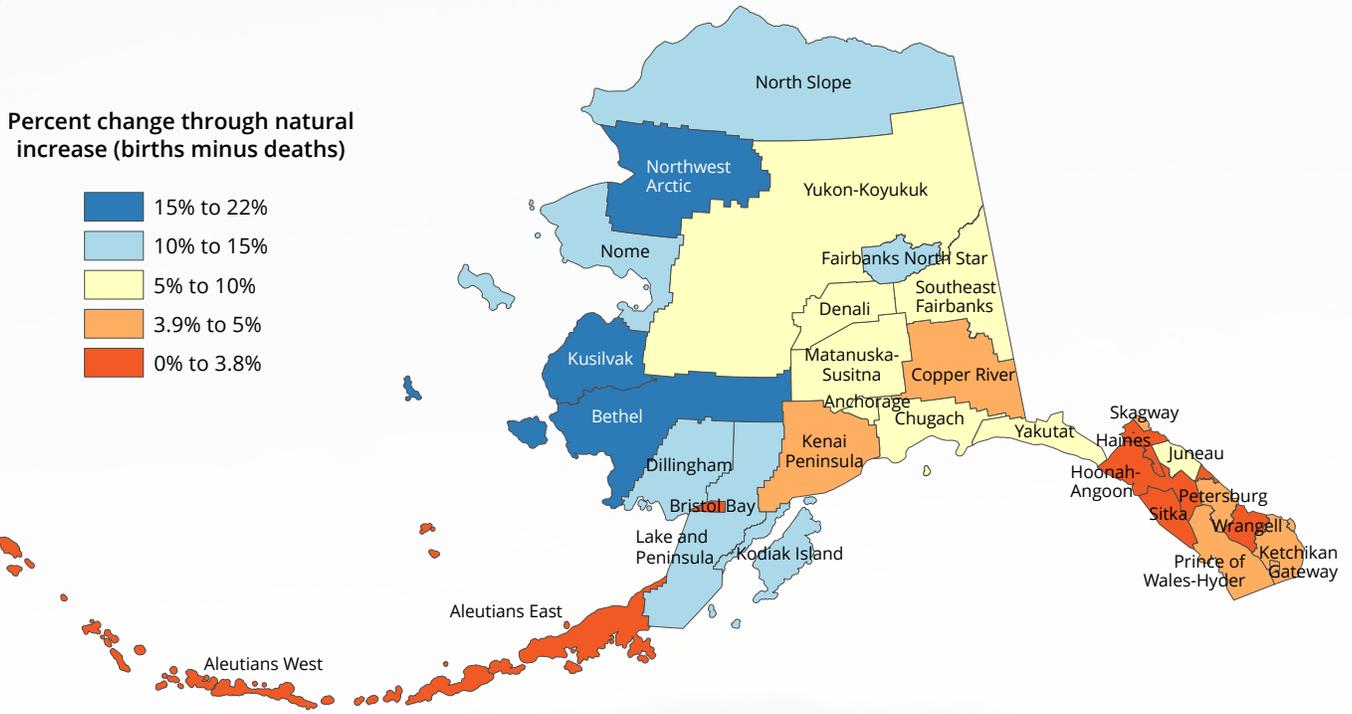
| 2010 | | | 2020 | |
|------|--------------------------|------------|--------------------------|------------|
| Rank | Place | Population | Place | Population |
| 1 | Anchorage Municipality* | 291,826 | Anchorage Municipality* | 291,247 |
| 2 | Fairbanks City | 31,535 | Fairbanks City | 32,515 |
| 3 | Juneau City and Borough* | 31,275 | Juneau City and Borough* | 32,255 |
| 4 | Badger CDP | 19,482 | Knik-Fairview CDP | 19,297 |
| 5 | Knik-Fairview CDP | 14,923 | Badger CDP | 19,031 |
| 6 | College CDP (UAF area) | 12,964 | College CDP (UAF area) | 11,332 |
| 7 | Sitka City and Borough* | 8,881 | North Lakes CDP | 9,450 |
| 8 | Lakes CDP | 8,364 | Meadow Lakes CDP | 9,197 |
| 9 | Tanaina CDP | 8,197 | Wasilla City | 9,054 |
| 10 | Ketchikan City | 8,050 | Tanaina CDP | 8,817 |
| 11 | Kalifornsky CDP | 7,850 | Kalifornsky CDP | 8,487 |
| 12 | Wasilla City | 7,831 | Sitka City and Borough* | 8,458 |
| 13 | Meadow Lakes CDP | 7,570 | Ketchikan City | 8,192 |
| 14 | Kenai City | 7,100 | Kenai City | 7,424 |
| 15 | Steele Creek CDP | 6,662 | Steele Creek CDP | 6,437 |
| 16 | Kodiak City | 6,130 | Bethel City | 6,325 |
| 17 | Bethel City | 6,080 | Chena Ridge CDP | 6,015 |
| 18 | Palmer City | 5,937 | Sterling CDP | 5,918 |
| 19 | Chena Ridge CDP | 5,791 | Palmer City | 5,888 |
| 20 | Sterling CDP | 5,617 | Gateway CDP | 5,748 |

*Unified city-boroughs

Note: CDP stands for census-designated place. The Census Bureau creates these designations for unincorporated communities for statistical purposes.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau decennial censuses for Alaska

Natural increase by Alaska area from 2010 to 2020



Sources: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section; and U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Census

and Borough of Juneau have remained in the top three spots. Seven of the next eight are now unincorporated places, with Mat-Su's Knik-Fairview in fourth with a population of more than 19,000.

The next two CDPs, Badger and College, are part of the Fairbanks North Star Borough. While they remain high on the list for total population, they both shrank during the last decade.

The rankings become more static when we only look at cities. Just 22 cities have cracked the top 20 at some point since 1980.

While the top three cities remain the same, Wasilla became the fourth-largest in 2020. Wasilla, formed in the mid-1970s and not among the top 20 in the 1980s, passed the long-time fourth-largest city Sitka, which lost population during the 2010s.

Following Ketchikan, Kenai, and Bethel were Palmer and Kodiak, both of which lost people during the 2010s. Kodiak's population declined about 9 percent and ended up 12 percent smaller than its 1990 peak.

The second half of the top 20 shows similar cities to previous decades, most with small gains or losses in the 2010s. Overall, the top 20 cities were more widely spread around the state than the list that includes

unincorporated places. Seven of the largest 20 cities were in the Gulf Coast Region. The Anchorage/Mat-Su, Southeast, Southwest, and Northern regions each had three, and the Interior had one.

The last decade marked by significant net migration losses

Large numbers of people migrating into and out of Alaska have been the yearly norm since statehood. Every year since 1990, 41,189 people have moved to the state on average while 42,701 have left. That was about 1,500 more movers lost than gained each year for 31 years.

Between 1990 and 2000, Alaska lost just under 5,000 people to net migration, mostly through military base closures and realignments. The loss during the most recent decade was starker. Alaska lost nearly 44,000 people to migration between 2010 and 2020, an average of 4,400 annually.

Unlike the '90s, the losses in the 2010s didn't stem from a single source.

The aging of the large baby boom generation was one factor. Alaska has historically lost population starting

around age 50 and continuing into the 70s, but these age groups were a small share of Alaska’s population in the past. That changed over the last couple of decades as boomers — born between 1946 and 1964 — reached retirement age and left the state in large numbers.

The other reason is the number of people who move here each year has dropped significantly.

The net migration losses during the 2010s add up to a 6.6 percent drop. To give some national context to that number, at -6.6 percent, Alaska had the lowest net migration rate of any state. Illinois followed at -5.7 percent, then New York at -4.4 percent. States with the highest net migration rates were retiree destinations: Florida (13.1 percent), Nevada (10.5 percent), and Arizona (10.5 percent).

Births increased in the last decade, and so did deaths

Natural increase buffered most net migration loss during the past decade. More Alaskans were born between 2010 and 2020 than during either of the two preceding decades.

The jump in births was largely due to the population’s age structure.

In the 1990s, most baby boomers surpassed their 20s and early 30s, which are the highest-fertility ages. Generation X followed them into the child-bearing years, but X was a much smaller generation. Fewer women meant fewer babies born in the 1990s and 2000s.

By 2010, most of the baby boomers’ children — the millennials — had reached the high-fertility age range. The millennial generation is bigger, so despite millennials having relatively fewer children, births increased during the 2010s.

Deaths also track with age structure. Older baby boomers entered the higher-mortality age groups during the 2010s, so that decade had 10,000 more deaths in Alaska than the 2000s and 15,000-plus over the 1990s level.

Despite more deaths, Alaska’s natural increase — births outnumbering deaths — was strong between 2010 and 2020. Alaska gained 67,000 people through natural increase, which offset the decade loss of 43,840 people to net migration for a total population gain of 23,160.

Alaska represents both extremes for concentrations of children, 2020

The 20 U.S. counties with the fewest children

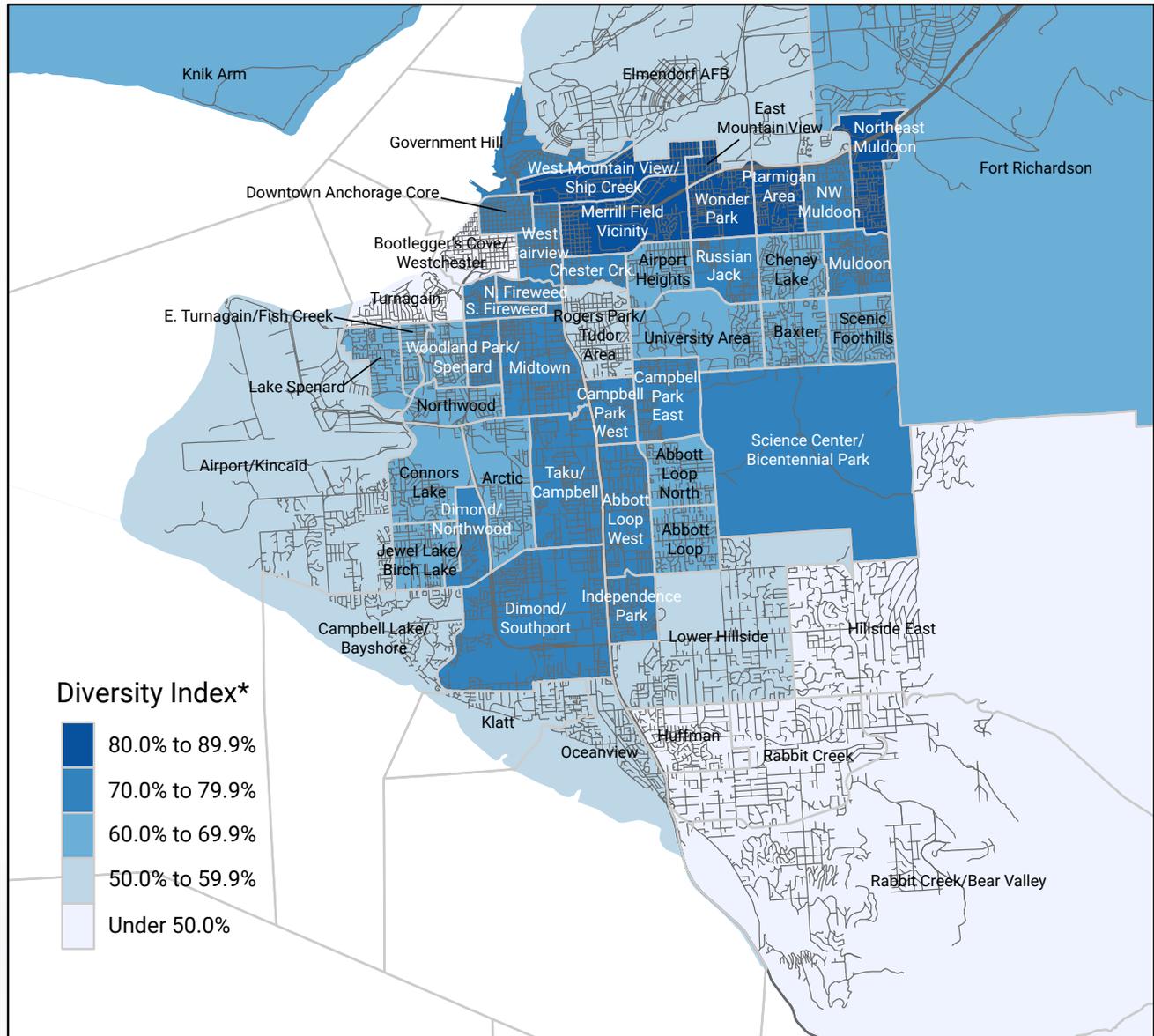
| Area | Total Population | Population 17 and under | Percent 17 and under |
|---|------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| Sumter County, Florida | 129,752 | 9,056 | 7.0% |
| Aleutians East Borough, Alaska | 3,420 | 300 | 8.8% |
| Forest County, Pennsylvania | 6,973 | 650 | 9.3% |
| Williamsburg City, Virginia | 15,425 | 1,515 | 9.8% |
| Catron County, New Mexico | 3,579 | 363 | 10.1% |
| Mineral County, Colorado | 865 | 92 | 10.6% |
| Crowley County, Colorado | 5,922 | 638 | 10.8% |
| Lexington City, Virginia | 7,320 | 831 | 11.4% |
| McCormick County, South Carolina | 9,526 | 1,084 | 11.4% |
| Ontonagon County, Michigan | 5,816 | 669 | 11.5% |
| Charlotte County, Florida | 186,847 | 22,607 | 12.1% |
| Kalawao County, Hawaii | 82 | 10 | 12.2% |
| Jefferson County, Washington | 32,977 | 4,026 | 12.2% |
| Aleutians West Census Area, Alaska | 5,232 | 653 | 12.5% |
| Towns County, Georgia | 12,493 | 1,570 | 12.6% |
| San Francisco County, California | 873,965 | 113,227 | 13.0% |
| Hamilton County, New York | 5,107 | 666 | 13.0% |
| Stewart County, Georgia | 5,314 | 697 | 13.1% |
| Alcona County, Michigan | 10,167 | 1,346 | 13.2% |
| Lyon County, Kentucky | 8,680 | 1,163 | 13.4% |

The 20 U.S. counties with the most children

| Area | Total Population | Population 17 and under | Percent 17 and under |
|---|------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| Kusilvak Census Area, Alaska | 8,368 | 3,421 | 40.9% |
| Todd County, South Dakota | 9,319 | 3,704 | 39.7% |
| Buffalo County, South Dakota | 1,948 | 752 | 38.6% |
| Loving County, Texas | 64 | 24 | 37.5% |
| Oglala Lakota County, South Dakota | 13,672 | 5,067 | 37.1% |
| Northwest Arctic Borough, Alaska | 7,793 | 2,807 | 36.0% |
| Bethel Census Area, Alaska | 18,666 | 6,536 | 35.0% |
| Morgan County, Utah | 12,295 | 4,299 | 35.0% |
| Ziebach County, South Dakota | 2,413 | 843 | 34.9% |
| Sioux County, North Dakota | 3,898 | 1,354 | 34.7% |
| Corson County, South Dakota | 3,902 | 1,351 | 34.6% |
| Gaines County, Texas | 21,598 | 7,463 | 34.6% |
| Juab County, Utah | 11,786 | 4,030 | 34.2% |
| Benson County, North Dakota | 5,964 | 2,038 | 34.2% |
| Jefferson County, Idaho | 30,891 | 10,519 | 34.1% |
| Adams County, Washington | 20,613 | 6,983 | 33.9% |
| Thurston County, Nebraska | 6,773 | 2,263 | 33.4% |
| Big Horn County, Montana | 13,124 | 4,377 | 33.4% |
| LaGrange County, Indiana | 40,446 | 13,426 | 33.2% |
| Uintah County, Utah | 35,620 | 11,774 | 33.1% |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Census

Anchorage has some of the country's most diverse neighborhoods, 2020



*The diversity index shows the percent chance that two people selected randomly from a given area will be from different racial or ethnic groups.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Census

That was Alaska's lowest natural increase since the 1970s, but at 9.4 percent, it still ranked second among states. Utah was highest at 11.2 percent over the last decade, and Texas followed Alaska at 7.4 percent.

At the low end, West Virginia and Maine sustained natural *decrease* — more deaths than births — losing an estimated 1.7 percent and 1.1 percent, respectively.

While no borough or census area in Alaska had natural decrease between 2010 and 2020, Wrangell

came close with only 20 more births than deaths, and Haines had just 30 more births. Southeast tends to grow less through natural increase than the rest of the state because its older population means a lower birth rate.

The much-younger western and northern parts of the state grew most through natural increase because of their higher birth rates. Overall, 23 of Alaska's 30 boroughs and census areas had higher rates of natural increase than the U.S. average of 3.8 percent for the last decade.

1 million fewer children in U.S., 8,000 fewer in Alaska

The 2020 Census counted 8,000 fewer children in Alaska — a 4 percent drop — and a million fewer nationwide than in 2010. Twenty-seven states and Puerto Rico had fewer children in 2020.

Puerto Rico's drop was steepest at -38 percent. The territory's total population also fell 12 percent after a series of hurricanes destroyed infrastructure and accelerated a decades-long trend of migration losses.

Alaska areas stand out for high and low concentrations of children

Alaska is unique in that it represents both extremes. The state has areas that rank among the nation's highest for concentrations of children *and* areas that rank among the lowest — and all are in the west.

At the high end, 40 percent of the Kuskilvak Census Area was 17 or younger in 2020, the highest proportion of any U.S. county equivalent. Western Alaska is young and mostly Alaska Native, and it has high birth rates. Kuskilvak grew over the decade despite net migration losses because so many babies were born there: three births per 100 people on average, or twice the statewide rate.

Aleutians East Borough had the second-lowest share of children in the nation because of its large seafood processing facilities. Nearly two-thirds of the 3,420 people counted in Aleutians East Borough were adults living in employee housing for processing plants. They also skewed male and were more racially diverse than Alaska overall.

Only Sumter County, Florida, had a lower concentration of children than Aleutians East. Sumter County is home to the booming retirement community The Villages, and half its residents were 69 or older in 2019.

Sumter County is unique in several ways. Despite being old, it was also among the fastest-growing places in the country, thanks to in-movers. That's unusual because the likelihood of moving declines after

Race and diversity became more complex with the 2020 Census

Decennial censuses have recorded the racial and ethnic identities of Americans since the first census in 1790. But concepts of race have shifted over time and so have the Census Bureau's questions.

Changes to the way the Census Bureau collected race and ethnicity information in 2020 were subtle, but comparing the sizes of racial and ethnic groups between decades requires at least a cursory understanding of what has changed.

More — not fewer — identified as White in 2020

August headlines said the 2020 Census showed a decline in U.S. residents who identified as White but missed important nuance by solely considering the U.S. population who identified as White alone. In fact, 4.4 million *more* Americans identified as White in 2020 than in 2010 because many more identified as White in combination with another race.

The 2020 Census questionnaire included more write-in boxes for race and ethnicity and nudged respondents to add write-in detail for the first time, which likely led to more people being counted in more than one group. For example, respondents who selected only the Black checkbox and wrote in "Egyptian" would be counted as both White and Black because people of Middle Eastern or North African origin are part of the White racial category.

Similarly, Alaska counted 1,400 fewer people who identified as Black alone in 2020 but 2,300 more people who identified as Black alone or in combination with another race than in 2010. Five percent of Alaskans were Black alone or in combination with another race in 2020.

The Census Bureau also expanded the write-in spaces from 30 characters max to 200 and coded up to six identities for each space, up from two in 2010.

Hispanics often categorized as 'some other race'

A growing number of people don't identify with any of the official U.S. Office of Management and Budget race categories, which the Census Bureau is required to use, so an increasing number of respondents specify "Some Other Race."

SOR was intended as a small catch-all category for people who didn't identify with the other options. But in 2020, SOR alone or in combination with another race was the second-largest race group in the nation, having more than doubled over the decade. Hispanics make up 90 percent of this category, as Hispanic or Latino is considered an ethnicity rather than a race.

young adulthood. Further reducing Sumter County's share under 17 is its mostly male prison population of 8,100.

Most movers between states are young adults, who are also the most likely to have children. That's why net migration is a determinant of an area's child population. Areas with more people moving in than out tend to see their child populations grow — North Dakota was an example during the last decade — while areas with net out-migration lose a disproportionate number of children. Examples include Puerto Rico, Alaska (especially Anchorage), Illinois, and California.

North Dakota led the nation for growth in its 17-and-younger population for this census, up 22 percent since 2010, followed by D.C., up 13 percent. Four western states were next: Utah (9 percent), Idaho (8 percent), South Dakota (7 percent), and Washington (6 percent).

Increasing diversity nationwide, but some due to process changes

Another trend the 2020 Census revealed was increasing diversity nationwide. Two Alaskans picked at random had a 63 percent chance of being from different race and ethnicity groups, which was close to the national index of 61 percent. Hawaii, California, and Nevada were the most diverse states in 2020.

In Alaska, 70 percent identified as White in 2020, and 22 percent said they were Alaska Native. Asian is the third-largest racial group at 8 percent.

Since 2000, the Census Bureau has allowed people to select more than one race on their census forms. Most people identify as only one race, but multi-race has grown threefold nationally since 2010. Some of the increase came from the way the Census Bureau tabulated responses on the 2020 Census questionnaire, though, rather than true demographic change. (See the sidebar on the previous page.)

Twelve percent of Alaskans selected more than one race in 2020, and 40 percent of them were Alaska Native and White.

Alaskan children are more diverse than adults. Two children picked at random have a 72 percent chance of being from different race or ethnic groups compared to 59 percent for any two adults. Alaskans 17 and younger were twice as likely as adults to be multiracial in 2020, at 20 percent and 10 percent.

Aleutians more diverse than any other county-equivalent in the country

The Aleutians also stood out nationally in 2020 for their diversity. The Aleutians East Borough and Aleutians West Census Area were the most diverse county equivalents in the U.S. Two people selected at random had an 80 percent chance of being from different racial or ethnic groups.

Because seafood processors recruit internationally and workers live at the job site, the Census Bureau counted nearly 5,000 people living in worker dorms in the Aleutians, which was a little over half of the area's population. This trend goes back decades.

In contrast to Alaska overall, 33 percent of Aleutians residents were White in 2020, 28 percent were Asian, and 21 percent were Alaska Native. Sixteen percent were Hispanic or Latino.

Kusilvak was the least diverse area in the state. Almost everyone in Kusilvak is Alaska Native; two people picked at random had only a 10 percent chance of being from different racial or ethnic groups.

Nationally, 120 counties were less diverse than Kusilvak. The lowest was Starr County, Texas. Almost all 66,000 people living there in 2020 identified as Hispanic. The 19 least-diverse counties that followed were majority White.

Anchorage has some of the nation's most diverse neighborhoods

Anchorage had some of the most diverse neighborhoods in the country, especially in the Mountain View area and near Merrill Field. (See the map on page 10.)

The four most diverse tracts in the nation are East Mountain View, West Mountain View/Ship Creek, Merrill Field Vicinity, and Wonder Park. Two random people in those areas had an 82 to 85 percent chance of being from different racial or ethnic groups in 2020.

The next four neighborhoods on the diversity list were all in Queens, New York.

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