

Projected population through 2050

Predicted growth would be slowest in Alaska's history

By DAVID HOWELL

Alaska's population will increase by a projected 24,800 people from 2021 to 2050 — far less long-term growth than Alaska has seen historically. For context, the state added more than 147,000 people over the past 29 years.

Alaska's long growth streak extended through the early 2010s, but the population shrunk later in the decade for the first time since the oil crash of the 1980s. The late 2010s decrease was mainly a downturn in net migration (in-migrants minus out-migrants), but also less natural increase (births minus deaths).

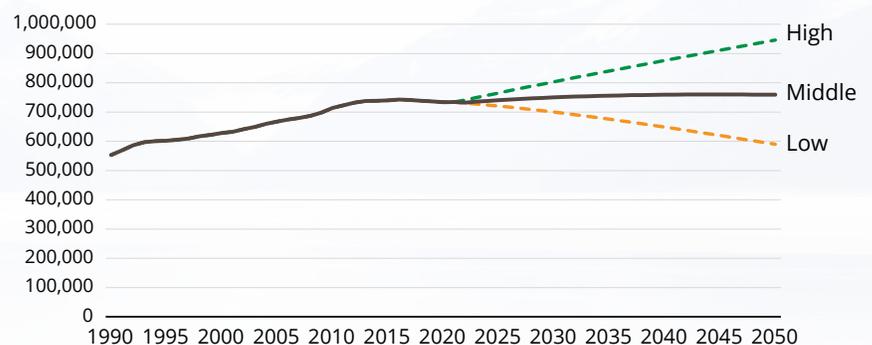
More people have left Alaska than moved in every year since 2012, and nine years of net migration losses have drastically shifted the projected long-term net migration rates. This coupled with birth rates declining since 2015 led to lower population projections.

Birth rates on a long decline

In 2019, Alaska births fell below 10,000 for the first year since 2002 and have continued to decline. While birth rates have been on a steady decline, the drop in annual births is also tied to Alaska's changing age structure. Millennials, the large generation born between 1981 and 1996, are beginning to age out of their most fertile years.

Alaska's total fertility rate — the number of children a woman would have in her lifetime at today's age-specific rates — was 2.2 in 2015. It's now 1.9, which is below the replacement rate, which is the level required to maintain a population over time.

Alaska population scenarios, 1990 to 2050



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

Average yearly births, deaths, net migration

	Births	Deaths	Net migration
1991-2001	10,448	2,591	-1,491
2001-2011	10,800	3,353	1,572
2011-2021	10,658	4,405	-5,111
2021-2030	9,279	5,668	-1,875
2030-2040	9,297	6,873	-1,500
2040-2050	9,217	7,716	-1,509

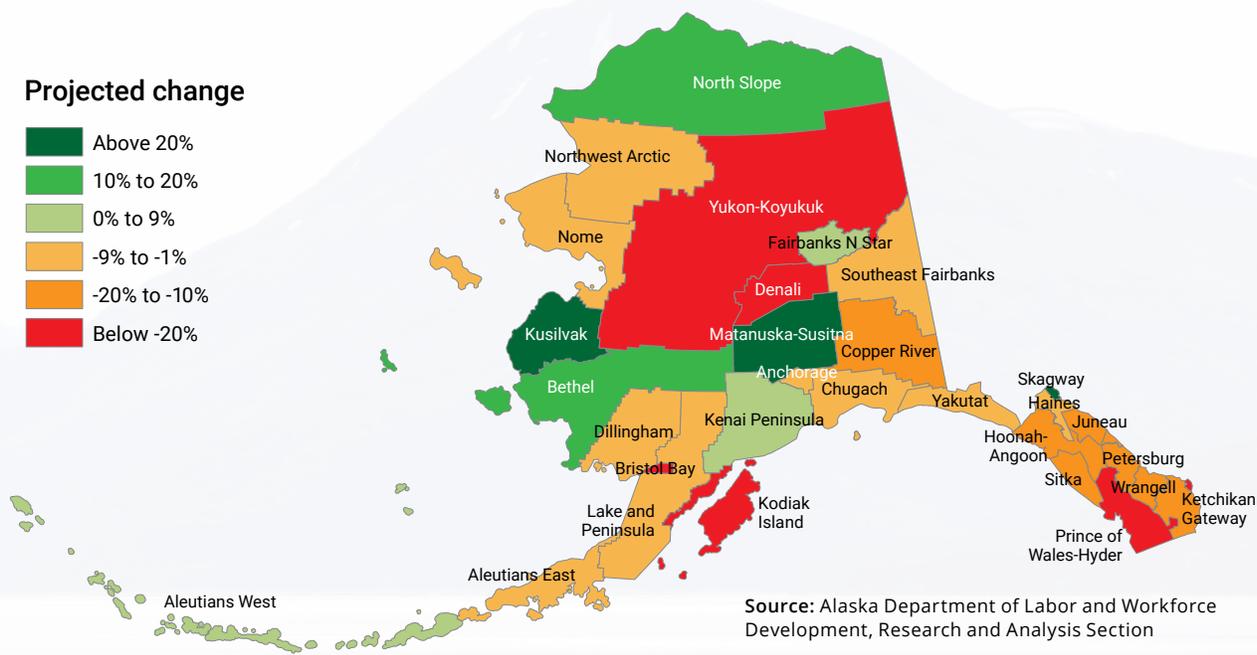
Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

Deaths will continue to climb

COVID-19 raised Alaska's death rate over the last two years and will continue to influence death rates in the short term, but not to the same levels as 2020-2021 when the pandemic was at its worst.

Even without the pandemic, deaths would have risen in Alaska with the aging of the baby boom generation. Many baby boomers moved to Alaska

Population projections by borough or census area, 2021 to 2050



Area	Estimate	Projections as of July 1					Change	Pct chg	
	2021	2025	2030	2035	2040	2045	2050	2021-50	2021-50
Alaska	734,323	740,369	749,942	755,972	759,191	759,917	759,111	24,788	3.4%
Anchorage/Mat-Su Region	398,502	405,336	413,778	420,033	424,358	426,680	427,382	28,880	7.2%
Anchorage, Municipality	289,697	290,400	290,948	289,735	287,226	283,749	279,824	-9,873	-3.4%
Matanuska-Susitna Borough	108,805	114,936	122,830	130,298	137,132	142,931	147,558	38,753	35.6%
Gulf Coast Region	81,492	81,322	81,228	80,738	79,952	78,907	77,716	-3,776	-4.6%
Chugach Census Area	7,009	7,001	6,946	6,855	6,758	6,652	6,547	-462	-6.6%
Copper River Census Area	2626	2576	2484	2390	2309	2221	2155	-471	-17.9%
Kenai Peninsula Borough	58,957	59,333	59,927	60,137	60,027	59,676	59,143	186	0.3%
Kodiak Island Borough	12,900	12,412	11,871	11,356	10,858	10,358	9,871	-3,029	-23.5%
Interior Region	111,306	112,108	113,227	113,708	113,786	113,630	113,595	2,289	2.1%
Denali Borough	1,655	1,505	1,420	1,340	1,265	1,200	1,150	-505	-30.5%
Fairbanks North Star Borough	97,515	98,790	100,278	101,136	101,585	101,762	102,013	4,498	4.6%
Southeast Fairbanks Census Area	6,881	6,837	6,763	6,669	6,557	6,453	6,339	-542	-7.9%
Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area	5,255	4,976	4,766	4,563	4,379	4,215	4,093	-1,162	-22.1%
Northern Region	28,261	28,409	28,688	29,011	29,361	29,697	30,027	1,766	6.2%
Nome Census Area	9,691	9,515	9,472	9,446	9,423	9,402	9,388	-303	-3.1%
North Slope Borough	10,995	11,262	11,647	12,056	12,477	12,859	13,211	2,216	20.2%
Northwest Arctic Borough	7,575	7,632	7,569	7,509	7,461	7,436	7,428	-147	-1.9%
Southeast Region	72,494	71,056	70,068	68,679	66,995	65,119	63,099	-9,395	-13.0%
Haines Borough	2,614	2,613	2,600	2,575	2,536	2,483	2,427	-187	-7.2%
Hoonah-Angoon Census Area	2,350	2,250	2,220	2,173	2,112	2,047	2,000	-350	-14.9%
Juneau, City and Borough	32,155	31,502	31,261	30,813	30,229	29,520	28,692	-3,463	-10.8%
Ketchikan Gateway Borough	13,895	13,637	13,476	13,219	12,886	12,497	12,051	-1,844	-13.3%
Petersburg Borough	3,368	3,412	3,360	3,276	3,189	3,096	2,999	-369	-11.0%
Prince of Wales-Hyder Census Area	5,729	5,342	5,033	4,743	4,455	4,186	3,951	-1,778	-31.0%
Sitka, City and Borough	8,387	8,242	8,039	7,794	7,506	7,195	6,871	-1,516	-18.1%
Skagway Borough, Municipality	1,203	1,331	1,441	1,534	1,604	1,682	1,748	545	45.3%
Wrangell, City and Borough	2,096	2,039	1,965	1,893	1,829	1,773	1,724	-372	-17.7%
Yakutat, City and Borough	697	688	673	659	649	640	636	-61	-8.8%
Southwest Region	42,268	42,138	42,953	43,803	44,739	45,884	47,292	5,024	11.9%
Aleutians East Borough	3,583	3,362	3,353	3,343	3,333	3,308	3,292	-291	-8.1%
Aleutians West Census Area	5,169	5,148	5,145	5,168	5,207	5,288	5,316	147	2.8%
Bethel Census Area	18,416	18,349	18,902	19,476	20,070	20,737	21,540	3,124	17.0%
Bristol Bay Borough	822	802	762	717	681	647	615	-207	-25.2%
Dillingham Census Area	4,718	4,534	4,458	4,390	4,343	4,315	4,296	-422	-8.9%
Kusilvak Census Area	8,139	8,620	9,024	9,409	9,808	10,282	10,905	2,766	34.0%
Lake and Peninsula Borough	1,421	1,323	1,309	1,300	1,297	1,307	1,328	-93	-6.5%

in the 1980s and '90s and stayed. The oldest are now in their mid-70s and the youngest will turn 65 this decade.

Deaths will continue to increase, especially because Alaska historically hasn't had many residents in the older age groups.

More deaths plus fewer births means much lower levels of natural increase. Alaska will gain a projected 4,300 people through natural increase from 2022 to 2023, which will fall to 1,300 a year by 2050.

Looking at different possibilities for migration through 2050

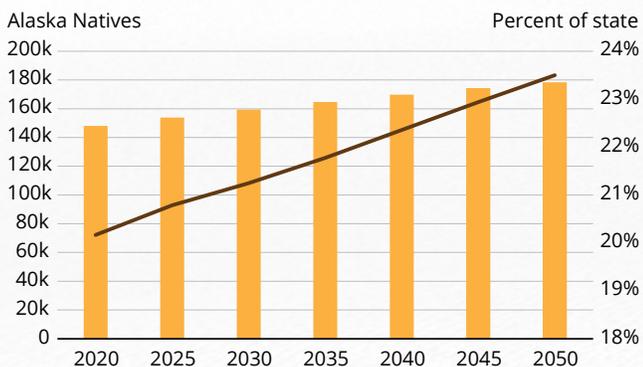
The projected net migration loss from 2021 to 2022 is similar to the previous five years, leading to a small decrease in population. Beyond 2022, the projections use the long-term average from the past 30 years, which results in a projected net migration rate of -0.2 percent.

Natural increase will probably mitigate the migration losses until 2044, but after that, natural increase is projected to be smaller than net migration losses.

Because migration is so uncertain, we project Alaska's population using middle, low, and high scenarios. The middle scenario is most likely and is built on historical rates, as mentioned above. Adding other scenarios allows us to see what would happen if migration trends continue or change.

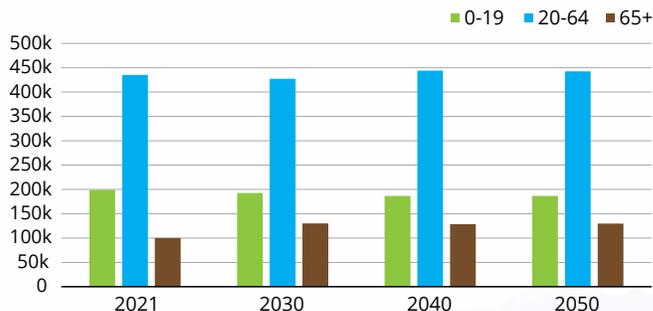
The low scenario uses a net migration rate of -1

Alaska Natives to increase



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

Projected change in Alaska's age structure, 2021 to 2050



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

percent, which is close to Alaska's rate since 2016. If this were to continue, the population would dwindle to 589,800 by 2050.

The high scenario uses a net migration rate of 0.5 percent. A net inflow at that rate would allow Alaska's population to grow rapidly, reaching 946,300 in 2050.

Long-term patterns by age group

Ages 0-19

Alaska's projected number of children declines steadily over most of the projections period. Because births have fallen below replacement level, they can no longer offset the numbers aging out of childhood.

The projected declines in the 0-19 age group are slow between now and 2025 but reach -6 percent by 2035 before leveling off through 2050. This age group may decline even more than we've projected because these projections hold fertility rates constant despite birth rates decreasing steadily.

Ages 20-64

The working-age group has been shrinking for much of the last decade, mainly as baby boomers aged out but also because of migration-related losses.

We project the population ages 20-64 will decline by 10,000 between 2021 and 2025, then resume growing once all of the boomers have reached retirement age. We project the working-age population will then increase from the low of 425,500 in 2025 to 442,500 in 2050.

Ages 65+

Alaska's senior population topped 100,000 for the first time in 2021, and this age group will grow the fastest over the projections period.

Projected growth in the senior population peaks in 2035 when the oldest baby boomers reach 90. The senior population will begin to grow again after 2045 as millennials start turning 65.

Alaska Natives' growth pattern differs from rest of the state

The Alaska Native population hasn't seen the same changes as the rest of the state. Native birth rates remain well above replacement level, and while their net migration is also negative, natural increase easily makes up for the losses.

We project an increase of 30,000 in the Alaska Native population from 2021 to 2050 (to 178,367). Because the Native population will grow faster than the state as a whole, Natives will also grow as a percentage of the total population, from 20 percent in 2021 to 23 percent in 2050.

While birth rates have been on a steady decline, the drop in births is also tied to Alaska's changing age structure.

The population outlook by region

Anchorage/Matanuska-Susitna

The Anchorage/Matanuska-Susitna Region's projected growth is entirely in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Mat-Su is projected to grow the most numerically of any borough or census area, but its expansion is tied to the Anchorage economy and job market because there's so much migration between the two. Anchorage's population will change little before 2030, but natural increase will no longer offset the city's net migration losses after that.

Gulf Coast

We project the Gulf Coast Region will lose about 3,800 people between 2021 and 2050 through a combination of migration losses and broad natural decrease. Natural decrease, or deaths outnumbering births, has been rare in Alaska but will become more common with an older population.

Interior

The Interior is shaped by the Fairbanks North Star Borough, which is the only area in the region projected to grow but is large enough to boost the region's total population modestly.

The Interior's population turnover is high because of its large military and university presence. These groups also keep the population fairly young, though, so natural increase will make up for projected migration losses.

Northern

The Northern Region's birth rates declined in recent years but because the population is young, births are still twice as high as deaths. The region will grow through projected natural increase despite net migration losses. Exceptions are the Nome Census Area and the Northwest Arctic Borough, whose populations are projected to decline slightly over the period.

Southeast

Skagway is projected to grow more in percentage terms than any other area in the state. It's also the only borough or census area in Southeast likely to grow over the next 29 years. Overall, we project Southeast will lose more people than any other region, at -13 percent (a loss of 9,400).

Southeast has the oldest population in the state and low birth rates, so every part of the region aside from Skagway is expected to lose population through natural decrease by 2050.

Southwest

The Southwest Region's birth rates are Alaska's highest, and it's also the youngest region, leading to strong projected growth through natural increase. Southwest does lose people to migration, but natural increase will be strong enough to make Southwest the fastest-growing region through the projections period.

For the complete data set, visit: live.laborstats.alaska.gov/pop/projections.html

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