



State Population Profile

BAD NEWS: TEXAS IS NOW HOME TO 31 MILLION PEOPLE. GOOD NEWS: POPULATION GROWTH HAS SLOWED (FOR NOW).

An NPG Commentary
by Edwin S. Rubenstein

Texas's population passed 31 million last year, adding more residents – 562,941 – than any other state in the country, between July 1, 2023 and July 1, 2024, according to Census Bureau data. While the state did not add as many people as it did the previous year, its growth rate – 1.8% in 2024 – was still third-highest behind Florida and the District of Columbia.¹

Net international migration was the main driver of population growth. Texas added 319,569 residents from abroad, the most since the COVID-19 pandemic, the third-highest number in the nation behind only Florida and California.

However, net domestic migration – the number of people moving to the state from other states, fell. Since 2020 most of Texas's population growth was driven by domestic migration, so the 2024 decline is undoubtedly troubling to state officials.

“Why domestic migration to Texas slowed isn’t clear,” says Lloyd Potter, the state demographer, “but it’s possible that many of the people most likely to move from other states have simply already done so.”²

Our take: most domestic migrants move in search of more affordable housing. We believe

the state’s rapid population growth in the early 2020s may have diminished its real estate cost advantage. While incomes tend to be higher in states with higher housing costs, they usually do not fully compensate for cost-of-living differences, especially for low wage workers.³

Besides cheap housing, Texas’s relatively early easing of pandemic restrictions on businesses and schools, its lack of a state income tax, and robust economic growth may have attracted people considering an interstate move. These same factors may have caused Texans to stay at home rather than move elsewhere during this time.⁴

RECORD IMMIGRATION: TEXAS MIRRORS THE COUNTRY

The U.S. population grew by about 1% in 2024, its fastest growth in decades, according to the Census Bureau. This surge brought the nation’s population to over 341 million people.

The primary driver of this growth is international migration, which accounted for 84% of the 3.3 million increase in population over the past year. Both legal and undocumented immigrants are included in the Census figures.

“An annual growth rate of 1.0% is higher than what we’ve seen over recent years but well within historical norms,” according to Kristie Wilder, a demographer in the Census Bureau’s Population Division. **“What stands out is the diminished role of natural increase over the past five years, as net international migration has become the primary driver of the nation’s growth.”**⁵

In Texas, international migration accounted for 57% of state population growth last year, 319,569 of the state’s total increase of 562,941.⁶

Texas population growth is concentrated around major cities, while many rural counties are shrinking. Kaufman County, near Dallas, saw a 35% increase in population over the last four years, while Kennedy County, near the Mexican border, lost a whopping 91% of its population over the past eight years.⁷

ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION: WHAT WE KNOW...AND CAN’T KNOW

We know illegal immigrants represent a larger share of Texas’s population than the U.S. population. According to the Pew Research Center, approximately 1.6 million undocumented immigrants live in the state. This represents 5.3% of the state’s population. The Department of Homeland Security reports that as of 2022 undocumented immigrants represented 3.3% of the country’s overall population.⁸

Within a week of taking office, President Trump issued an executive order to **“protect the American people against invasion.”** His administration says aggressive deportation efforts will prioritize **“violent offenders.”**⁹

D-Day (Deportation Day?) in Texas was Sunday, January 26, 2025. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents began enforcement operations in several cities, including Dallas, Arlington, Fort Worth, Austin, Garland, San Antonio, Brownsville, McAllen and Houston.

Early D-Day reports show ICE agents

arrested 84 individuals that day.¹⁰

Only Eighty-four! Even if ICE ramps up its Texas enforcement activities by a factor of 10, it would take more than five years to vet all 1.6 million illegal aliens residing in the state.

But achieving the ultimate goal – Zero Illegal Aliens in Texas – may not require a larger, more aggressive ICE. The mere sight of federal immigration agents searching for undocumented people in Texas cities has struck fear into immigrant communities across the state. Even long-time undocumented residents, here for decades, many of them home and business owners, with U.S.-born children in Texas schools, may consider self-deporting.

Elon Musk, and his cronies at the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), will cheer them on.

TEXAS: THE KING OF GREENHOUSE EMISSIONS

Texas emits more greenhouse gas than any other state, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. It accounts for 14% of the nation’s global warming emissions – more than twice the total emissions of California, the next largest emitter. Texas is also the nation’s largest oil and gas producer, accounting for more than 40% of oil produced in the U.S.¹¹

TEXAS: THE KING OF CLIMATE DISASTERS

In 2023 – the hottest year on record in Texas – residents of Austin suffered through 45 consecutive days with temperatures over 100 degrees, another record. According to State Climatologist John Nielsen-Gammon, eight of the 10 hottest years on record in Corpus Christi have occurred since 2011. The heat spawned tropical storms, 100 mph winds, wildfires, severe flooding, and a hurricane that killed 26 people and left 500,000 without electricity.¹²

The onslaught was so relentless that by July Governor Greg Abbott issued a disaster declaration for 125 counties, stretching from Houston north to the Oklahoma border and south to the Gulf coast.¹³

Severe weather does not respect state boundaries, and Texas is not the only state to have climate-related disasters. But according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Texas beats every other state in “**billion-dollar weather events.**”

And the problem is getting worse. The frequency of billion-dollar climate disasters in Texas has spiked from fewer than four per year in the 1980s to about 11 each year from 2019 to 2023.

“Texas leads the nation in both the most frequent severe weather events and the most expensive, accounting for 15% of all U.S. billion-dollar disasters,” according to a review of NOAA data by the nonprofit Texas 2036 Project.¹⁴

The financial loss extends well beyond businesses and large corporations. All homeowners in the state, even those living in homes undamaged by climate-related problems, suffer financially. One major reason: homeowner’s insurance premiums. They have skyrocketed, rising 22% last year versus 11% nationally.¹⁵

“The insurance industry is the canary in the coal mine for the climate crisis we’re facing,” says Steven Rothstein, the managing director of Ceres Accelerator for Sustainable Capital Markets, a nonprofit that advocates for sustainable investment practices in the finance industry.

Rothstein thinks the single biggest cause for increasing insurance costs in Texas is the impact of climate change.

TEXAS: THE KING OF URBAN SPRAWL?

Texas is at a unique point in history, where a rapidly increasing population may send it down the

same road as California. A new analysis by moveBuddha (a tech company that builds tools to help people relocate) foresees Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington as being the most populous metro area in the U.S. by the year 2100 with a projected population of 33.9 million, followed by the Houston metro (31.4 million), and Austin (22.3 million).¹⁶

“It is clear that D-FW will replace NYC as the country’s biggest urban area.”¹⁷

Wei Liu, Ph.D, an urbanist and scholar currently residing in Dallas, warns that **“With significant growth in suburban areas and available land for future development, the prospect of sprawl in D-FW metro is stronger than ever. However, sprawl alone does not mean Texas will become the next California. The key is how future developments are managed.”¹⁸**

Liu advocates for what he calls a **“15-minute city”** where compact neighborhoods enable residents to meet most daily needs within a 15-minute timespan via any mode of transportation, thereby reducing traffic congestion, improving public health, and fostering social interaction.

“More such mixed-use developments need to come to the region, especially for areas reliant on automobiles,” Liu says.¹⁹

SUMMARY

Population-population-population. That is the metric by which the state and many of its large cities gauge economic success. But in recent years the downside of population growth on the quality of life of ordinary Texans has become painfully apparent. All of the mega problems facing state residents – housing affordability, excessive heat, traffic congestion, overcrowded schools, etc., etc., – are exacerbated by population growth.

Most politicians still don’t get it. They are mired in a growth-is-always-good rut. But young influencers and non-traditional media types – podcasters, for example – are making inroads.

Which side will prevail? Stay tuned.

NOTES:

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6. Fechter, op. cit.
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9. Alexis Simmerman, How many immigrants have been arrested?, USA Today Network, January 27 2025.
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18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.

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