

On The Horizon: Demographics

Major Population Trends Affecting North Carolina in 2020

Excerpted from a paper by
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How we have grown

The population of North Carolina increased by almost 3 million people from 1970 to 2000, but the growth during the 1990s was nearly as much as during the two previous decades combined. During the last decade, net migration into the state more than doubled. *If this level of net migration continues, the state's population will reach 10.895 million by 2020*, a growth of almost 3 million in two decades. Over 2 million of this growth would be due to net migration into the state.

If, however, net migration for the 2000s and the 2010s is lower, as it was in the 1970s or the 1980s, *the state's population could easily grow by only half as much*, not reaching even 10 million until after the year 2020.

What will growth really be like between now and 2020? History alone would say that the growth of the 1990s is unlikely to be repeated. It is possible, however, because it has just happened.

Population growth among whites

The white population of the state grew by roughly the same amounts for both the 1970s and the 1980s, and more whites moved into the state than were born here. In the 1990s, white net migration increased substantially, more than in the two previous decades combined.

Nonwhite population growth shifted during the 1990s

The nonwhite population of the state grew by only about 75% as much during the 1980s as it did during the 1970s, with many more nonwhites being born here than immigrated to the state. However, during the 1990s, tremendous changes occurred in the nonwhite growth, as net migration into the state swelled to over 11 times the amount for the 1980s and over three times the amount for the 1970s. For the 1990s, nonwhite growth, like white growth, was mostly due to the high level of net migration.

Population growth not evenly distributed

This growth was not at all evenly distributed across the state. For each of the three decades from 1970 to 2000, some counties grew very fast, while others lost population. For example, during the 1970s, Wake County grew by over 30%, more than twice the average state growth rate, while three counties, Hertford, Jones and Northampton, lost population. During the 1980s, Wake County grew by more than 41%, more than three times the average state

growth, while 19 counties, most of them in the Coastal Plain, lost population. In the 1990s, Wake County grew by more than 47%, more than twice the average state growth, while three counties, Bertie, Edgecombe and Washington, lost population.

1990s growth more than expected

The growth for the 1990s was 315,000 more than was projected. Almost 70% of these people (220,000) were in the younger working age groups (18-44), where traditionally there has been a large amount of migration. The group 60 years of age and over actually had almost 32,000 fewer people than was expected.

There were 259,000 more Hispanics counted in North Carolina in the 2000 Census than were projected. (379,000 were counted; 120,000 were projected). While no one can know for certain, it is reasonable to assume that most of the additional 259,000 Hispanic immigrants were part of the unexpected 315,000 total population growth during the 1990s.

Birth rates declined and then increased

Birth rates in general declined during the early 1970s from the “baby boom” highs of the mid-to-late 1960s. They stayed the same or dropped slightly from 1975 to 1985, before starting to increase.

One composite measure of changes in birth rates is changes in the total fertility rate. The total fertility rate for a given year is an estimate of the total number of children born to the average woman during her entire life, assuming that age-specific fertility rates throughout her life were the same as those of the given year.

The total fertility rate for white women in North Carolina dropped from 2.2 in 1970 to roughly 1.5 by 1975 and remained at that level until the mid-1980s. Between 1985 and 1990, white total fertility rates rose to over 1.7, and remained at that level until 1996. Between 1996 and 1999 white total fertility rates increase further, reaching more than 2.0 by 1999. In 1970, the nonwhite total fertility rate for North Carolina was almost 3.0. It had dropped to 2.1 by 1975 and to 1.9 by 1980, reaching 1.8 by 1985. It increased to 2.2 by the early 1990s, before slowly dropping below 2.0 by 1999.

Currently, total fertility rates are close to the same for white and nonwhite in North Carolina.

Out of wedlock births

One of the most significant trends in North Carolina between 1970 and 1999 is the dramatic increase in the number of children born out of wedlock. The percent of all children born out of wedlock rose from 12.6 in 1970 to 19.0 in 1980, increased to 29.4 by 1990, and reached 33.2 by 1999. For white mothers, the increase was from 3.8% in 1970 to 6.4% in 1980, rising to 14.2% by 1990, and reaching 21.7% by 1999. For nonwhite mothers, the increase was from 33.9% of all births in 1970 to 45.6% in 1980, continuing upward to 61.9% by 1990, and dropping slightly to 61.7% in 1999.

Life expectancies increase for all sex and race groups

During the last three decades life expectancies increased significantly for all races and both sexes, although racial disparities remain. From 1970 to 2000 the life expectancy at birth of white males increased by 8.1 years, reaching 74.8 by the year 2000. For white females, there was an increase of 4.7 years, reaching 80.4 by 2000. For nonwhite males, the 2000 value of 68.8 represents an increase of 10.0 years. For nonwhite females, life expectancy at birth rose by 9.4 years, reaching 77.2 by the year 2000.

Baby boomers

During these years the “baby boom” population has been aging. This large group of people was born between 1946 and 1964, a result of high birth rates after World War II. In 1970, these people ranged in age from 6-23 years old. By 2000 “baby boomers” were aged 36-53 years, and in 2012 the oldest “baby boomers” will become 65 years old. Due to the sheer size of the group, they will begin to put pressure on retirement and health care systems.

Municipalities' growth patterns

One of the more interesting trends during this period is the pattern of municipal growth. From 1970 to 1990 municipalities grew at about the same rate as the rest of the state. In 1970 the total municipal population was 2.251 million (44.3% of the state). By 1990 it was 3.083 million (46.5% of the state). During the 1990s municipalities grew *faster* than the rest of the state, and by 2000 the total municipal population was 4.054 million (50.4% of the state).

Much of this growth was due to annexation, as cities took in less-dense suburbs. Total municipal land area doubled from 1970 to 2000, finally reaching 3,160 square miles. However, average municipal *density declined* as municipal *land area grew faster* than *population*. In 1970 average municipal density was 1,528 persons per square mile; by 2000 it had reached 1,283. North Carolina increased in population by 58% from 1970 to 2000. And, since municipal density has dropped, the unincorporated areas of the state have absorbed all of the increase in density. The result is to lessen the differences in density between incorporated and unincorporated areas.

Conclusion

There is no guarantee that the amounts or rates of change we have had in the past will continue. We do have many more people than we did have, although growth may slow down. It is too early to tell if Hispanic growth will continue, and we cannot be sure that all of the current new Hispanics are here to stay. While one would expect life expectancies to increase in the next two decades due to improved medical care, they will approach limits. The maximum age at death has not changed significantly in the last 100 years. Concerning the distribution of growth, some municipalities are already approaching their geographic limits. They will not grow from 2000 to 2020 like they did from 1970 to 2000, because many of them do not have the room.