

# Population grew 0.1% last year

## Growth from 2020-2021 was the first gain in 5 years

By DAVID HOWELL

Alaska's population grew by an estimated 932 people, or 0.1 percent, between the 2020 Census and July 2021. Although that gain might seem insignificant, it was the first time the population had grown since 2016.

Alaska continued to lose more people to migration than we gained for the ninth year in a row, but natural increase — births outnumbering deaths — was enough to offset that loss.

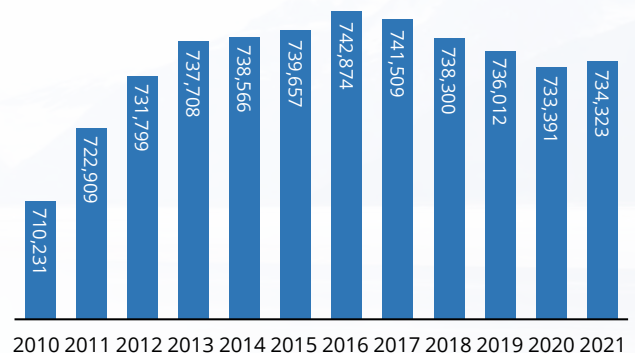
Large flows of people have always moved into and out of Alaska each year, and both of those numbers declined with the pandemic. But last year, the number who left decreased more than the number who arrived, resulting in the smallest net migration loss — in minus out — since 2015 (-3,327 people).

### Fewer people moved in or out

During the last decade, an average of 46,138 people left the state each year, which dropped to 40,544 between 2020 and 2021.

The number who moved to Alaska also fell during the pandemic, but by a smaller amount. The

### Total population up by 932 in 2021



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, decennial censuses for 2010 and 2020; and Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section population estimates for all other years

10-year average for in-migration was about 4,000 higher than the 2021 number (37,217).

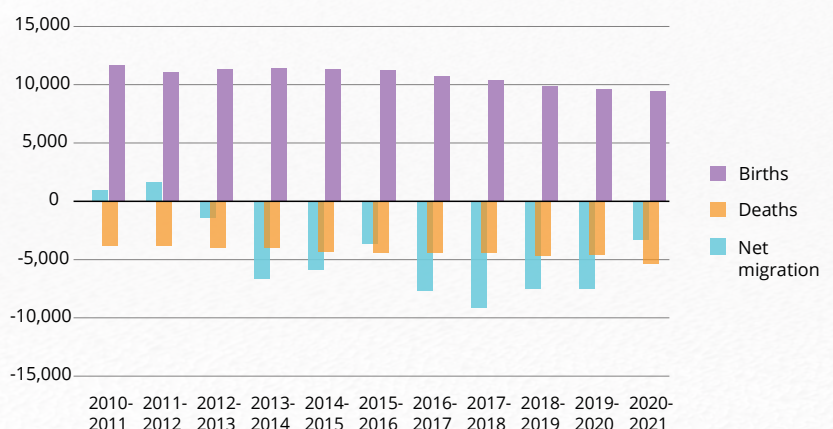
While we can't say for sure the year's shift was a one-off, that's more likely than a true change in migration patterns because the driving factors were temporary. The pandemic slowed people's desire and ability to move, and more people stayed put as

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### Migration loss slows as births drop, deaths rise

Note: Net migration is the number of in-movers in a given year minus the number of out-movers.

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



# Alaska's population by region and area for 2010, 2020, and 2020-2021

Area	Census April 2010	Census April 2020	Estimate July 2021	Natural increase		Net migration		Pop change		Avg ann growth	
				2010- 2020	2020- 2021	2010- 2020	2020- 2021	2010- 2020	2020- 2021	2010- 2020	2020- 2021
Alaska	710,231	733,391	734,323	66,975	5,330	-43,815	-4,398	23,160	932	0.32%	0.10%
Anchorage/Mat-Su Region	380,821	398,328	398,502	36,345	2,755	-18,838	-2,581	17,507	174	0.45%	0.03%
Anchorage, Municipality	291,826	291,247	289,697	28,113	2,084	-28,692	-3,634	-579	-1,550	-0.02%	-0.43%
Matanuska-Susitna Borough	88,995	107,081	108,805	8,232	671	9,854	1,053	18,086	1,724	1.84%	1.28%
Gulf Coast Region	78,631	81,619	81,492	4,817	394	-1,829	-521	2,988	-127	0.37%	-0.12%
Chugach Census Area	6,684	7,102	7,009	495	61	-77	-154	418	-93	0.61%	-1.05%
Copper River Census Area	2,955	2,617	2,626	125	-2	-463	11	-338	9	-1.21%	0.27%
Kenai Peninsula Borough	55,400	58,799	58,957	2,832	254	567	-96	3,399	158	0.60%	0.21%
Kodiak Island Borough	13,592	13,101	12,900	1,365	81	-1,856	-282	-491	-201	-0.37%	-1.24%
Interior Region	112,021	109,425	111,306	12,638	1,083	-15,234	798	-2,596	1,881	-0.23%	1.36%
Denali Borough	1,826	1,619	1,655	101	14	-308	22	-207	36	-1.20%	1.76%
Fairbanks North Star Borough	97,581	95,655	97,515	11,650	1,006	-13,576	854	-1,926	1,860	-0.20%	1.54%
Southeast Fairbanks Census Area	7,026	6,808	6,881	609	51	-827	22	-218	73	-0.32%	0.85%
Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area	5,588	5,343	5,255	278	12	-523	-100	-245	-88	-0.45%	-1.33%
Northern Region	26,445	28,870	28,261	3,826	354	-1,401	-963	2,425	-609	0.88%	-1.71%
Nome Census Area	9,492	10,046	9,691	1,417	126	-863	-481	554	-355	0.57%	-2.88%
North Slope Borough	9,430	11,031	10,995	1,160	91	441	-127	1,601	-36	1.56%	-0.26%
Northwest Arctic Borough	7,523	7,793	7,575	1,249	137	-979	-355	270	-218	0.35%	-2.27%
Southeast Region	71,664	72,286	72,494	3,385	129	-2,763	79	622	208	0.09%	0.23%
Haines Borough*	2,508	2,080	2,614	30	-4	-458	538	-428	534	-1.87%	18.20%
Hoonah-Angoon Census Area	2,149	2,365	2,350	48	-3	168	-12	216	-15	0.96%	-0.51%
Juneau, City and Borough	31,275	32,255	32,155	1,857	91	-877	-191	980	-100	0.31%	-0.25%
Ketchikan Gateway Borough	13,477	13,948	13,895	659	46	-188	-99	471	-53	0.34%	-0.30%
Petersburg Borough	3,203	3,398	3,368	133	3	62	-33	195	-30	0.59%	-0.71%
Prince of Wales-Hyder Census Area	6,172	5,753	5,729	257	-12	-676	-12	-419	-24	-0.70%	-0.33%
Sitka, City and Borough	8,881	8,458	8,387	287	5	-710	-76	-423	-71	-0.49%	-0.67%
Skagway Borough, Municipality	968	1,240	1,203	55	0	217	-37	272	-37	2.46%	-2.42%
Wrangell, City and Borough	2,369	2,127	2,096	19	-5	-261	-26	-242	-31	-1.08%	-1.17%
Yakutat, City and Borough	662	662	697	40	8	-40	27	0	35	0%	4.12%
Southwest Region	40,649	42,863	42,268	5,964	615	-3,750	-1,210	2,214	-595	0.53%	-1.12%
Aleutians East Borough	3,141	3,420	3,583	68	-1	211	164	279	163	0.85%	3.72%
Aleutians West Census Area	5,561	5,232	5,169	192	19	-521	-82	-329	-63	-0.61%	-0.97%
Bethel Census Area	17,013	18,666	18,416	3,146	319	-1,493	-569	1,653	-250	0.93%	-1.08%
Bristol Bay Borough	997	844	822	27	-2	-180	-20	-153	-22	-1.66%	-2.11%
Dillingham Census Area	4,847	4,857	4,718	615	59	-605	-198	10	-139	0.02%	-2.32%
Kusilvak Census Area	7,459	8,368	8,139	1,736	207	-827	-436	909	-229	1.15%	-2.22%
Lake and Peninsula Borough	1,631	1,476	1,421	180	14	-335	-69	-155	-55	-1.00%	-3.04%

\*The 2020 decrease in the Haines Borough's population was caused by a large drop in housing units enumerated in the 2020 Census. The 2019 and 2021 population estimates for the borough are more accurate.

**Notes:** Vintage 2021. All numbers are based on 2020 geography.

**Sources:** U.S. Census Bureau, decennial censuses for 2010 and 2020; and Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section population estimates for all other years

university classes went online, people teleworked, and service industries shut down.

The influx of civilian and military personnel to Eielson Air Force Base near Fairbanks also provided a temporary boost to annual in-migration. The transfer of two F-35A squadrons picked up steam in the summer of 2020 and continued last year. Eielson's population will keep growing until project completion this spring, but no more large military moves are on the near horizon.

## Fewer births and an unusually large jump in deaths in 2021

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Alaska has long gained residents through natural increase, and while 2020-2021 was no exception, the growth was smaller. Births minus deaths equaled 4,072 additional residents: 1,000 fewer than we added from 2019 to 2020.

Births have declined steadily since the middle of the last decade, and 2021's drop in births from the year before was in line with that trend. Deaths, on the other hand, jumped by more than 700 from the previous year: from 4,613 to 5,373.

While births didn't begin falling until recent years, deaths have been rising for decades. Aside from the most recent year, deaths have increased by about 100 per year since 2010, and that rise will continue as Alaska's large baby boomer cohort, born between 1946 and 1964, gets older.

The jump in deaths from 2020 to 2021 was more than double that of any other year since statehood, though. COVID-19 increased the state's mortality rate, although the scope of the pandemic's role in deaths isn't clear.

Between July 1, 2020, and June 30, 2021, 380 people died from COVID-19. That number accounts for just over half of the jump in deaths from the year before. We don't know how many other deaths were indirectly linked to COVID, though, or whether the pandemic-related decline in movers was a factor.

## Some Alaska areas had more deaths than births last year

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While Alaska's natural increase has been steady, that wasn't the case for every part of the state last

## Alaska's senior population recently topped 100,000 people for the first time.

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year. Seven boroughs and census areas recorded natural decrease, or more deaths than births: Prince of Wales-Hyder, Wrangell, Haines, Hoonah-Angoon, Bristol Bay, Copper River, and Aleutians East.

These areas are either older with low birth rates, including those in Southeast, or have transient populations who live in group quarters, such as seafood processing plants in the Aleutians. One thing they all have in common, though, is a median age over 40. Alaska's median age is 36.

## 25 states saw natural decrease, but it remains unlikely for Alaska

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Natural decrease is a relatively new phenomenon for Alaska, but not for the Lower 48. A handful of states have had more deaths than births for years, and according to the U.S. Census Bureau's recent estimates, 25 states recorded natural decrease in 2020-2021. Florida lost the most people to natural decrease by far (-45,248), and COVID deaths were the primary reason.

Natural decrease will become more common in the Lower 48 as birth rates remain low and baby boomers age, but Alaska probably won't see natural decrease for a long time, if ever. People tend to leave Alaska around retirement age, when mortality rates start to increase, and Alaska gains in-movers at the younger working ages when birth rates are at their highest.

Still, Alaska's population of senior citizens continues to grow, with the number 65 and older topping 100,000 for the first time recently. That was 6,000 more than the year before and more than 45,000 above 2010.

The rise will continue because the youngest baby boomers won't turn 65 until 2029, and Alaska's boomer population skews young. Many in that generation moved here in the mid-1970s and 1980s, when they were in their 20s and 30s, during the pipeline construction and oil boom.

## Loss in the younger groups

As the number of Alaskans over 65 grows, the youngest age groups continue to shrink.

The decline in births since the middle of the last decade caused a sharp drop in the 0-4 age group. Alaska had 53,996 children in this range in 2010, which fell to 48,972 in 2020 and 46,707 in 2021.

The school-age population, ages 5-17, grew for much of the last decade before beginning to decline. Alaska had 135,154 school-age kids in 2021, which was 200 fewer than 2020 but still higher than the 2010 count of 133,382.

This age group will likely shrink steadily in the coming years as the number aging out of the school years will soon top the number aging in.

The working-age population, ages 18-64, peaked early in the last decade. This highly mobile age group started to decrease as Alaska's net migration turned negative, declining by 1 percent since the 2010 Census. Baby boomers aging out of this group is another reason it has become smaller.

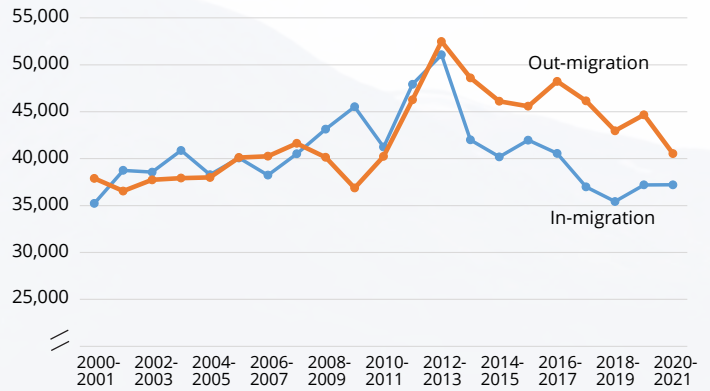
## Overview of growth or loss by area

Because of the growth at Eielson Air Force Base, the Fairbanks North Star Borough became Alaska's fastest-growing area. Fairbanks gained 1,860 people between 2020 and 2021.

COVID-19 threw off Fairbanks' numbers, though, as the University of Alaska Fairbanks dorm population appeared larger in 2021 than the year before. The 2020 Census counted the dorms after UAF sent students home for online classes, leading to an undercount. In 2021, the dorm count jumped by 500.

The only other borough to gain large numbers of people over the year was the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, which is typically the state's fastest-growing area. Mat-Su added 1,700, which was the highest

## Alaska's migration patterns since 2000



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

number since 2017 but below its early-2010s gains.

The Kenai Peninsula has grown steadily since the last decade, and it added 158 people in 2021.

Anchorage's 2020 Census population count came in just below 2010 because of losses in the latter half of the decade. Those losses continued into 2021, with the city losing another 1,550 people after the 2020 Census. However, that half-a-percentage-point decrease was the smallest for Anchorage since 2017.

Juneau's population decreased by 100 people between the 2020 Census and summer 2021, to 32,155, marking the capital's sixth year of modest loss. Like much of the state, Juneau's population peaked mid-decade, then began a slow decline.

The Northern and Southwest regions grew the fastest between 2010 and 2020, but both lost population over the past year. Natural increase is typically the main source of growth for rural areas, but in some years, net migration losses are large enough to cancel out that growth.

[Click here for complete 2021 population estimates.](#)

David Howell is the state demographer. Reach him in Juneau at (907) 465-6029 or david.howell@alaska.gov.