

## [University of Florida News](#)

### UF research: Florida's population growth slows but still remains high

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GAINESVILLE, Fla. — Florida's population growth slowed considerably last year as the housing boom went bust, but it remained relatively strong and likely will stay that way for the next few years, the latest estimates from the [University of Florida](#) show.

"There have been a number of news articles lately focusing on the idea that population growth has fallen off the table top in Florida and practically come to a standstill, and that simply isn't true," said [Stan Smith](#), director of the [UF's Bureau of Economic and Business Research](#), who led the research. "Florida has a strong economy and adds jobs every year. That is a major factor in last year still being a big year for population growth, even though it was less than in the previous three years."

The estimates released this week show the Sunshine State's population grew by 331,000 between 2006 and 2007, compared with 431,000 between 2005 and 2006; 402,000 between 2004 and 2005; and 448,000 between 2003 and 2004, Smith said. Florida's total population was estimated at 18,680,367 as of April 1, 2007.

Based on recent trends, Smith said he expects Florida to add about 300,000 residents a year during the next two to three years unless there is a recession.

"The housing boom certainly contributed to Florida's growth in those earlier years, and the housing bust contributed to the slowdown this last year," he said. "When economic conditions are tough, it's much harder for people to sell their homes in New York, Ohio, Michigan or some other state and move to Florida."

Today's increasing number of foreclosures, large inventories of unsold houses and the decline in housing prices in some cities contrast starkly with the flourishing construction industry, huge numbers of home sales and flurry of people buying homes simply to make a quick profit that characterized the last few years, he said.

But Florida's healthy job market and the continued movement of retirees and foreign immigrants to the state helped bolster population growth last year, he said.

"Job growth has been higher in Florida than the national average," Smith said, adding that the largest increases in jobs during the past year have been in leisure and hospitality services, education and health service. "You also have to factor in Florida's climate, with its relatively warm winters, which continues to attract people from the Northeast and Midwest from one year to the next."

Although less significant than employment, retiree migration stands to become increasingly important in the future, Smith said.

"Over the next 20 years as the baby boomers reach retirement age, the probability is high that many of them will want to move to Florida," he said.

Florida, with its large foreign-born population, also has grown because of the increase in U.S. immigration during the past decade because many newcomers move to places where they already have a network of family and friends, Smith said. Typically, Florida attracts about 8 percent or 9 percent of the nation's immigrants in a year, he said.

"What is considered a slow year for population growth in Florida would be considered a fast year for most states," he said. "Between 1990 and 2000, no county in Florida lost population, which is unusual considering that typically 30 (percent) to 40 percent of the nation's counties lose population during any particular decade."

Flagler, the state's most rapidly growing county, has ballooned by 88 percent since 2000, from 49,832 to 93,568; followed by Sumter, which increased 68 percent from 53,345 to 89,771, and Osceola, up 54 percent from 172,493 to 266,123.

Contributing to Flagler's growth is its location between Jacksonville and Daytona Beach, which is attractive to retirees as well as to commuters, he said. Boosting Sumter County's population gains are spillover from Orlando to the southeast, as well as the booming Villages retirement community, which covers parts of three counties, Smith said. Third-ranked Osceola County has drawn a sizeable population of Puerto Rican immigrants in recent years, he said.

Counties with the biggest increases in absolute numbers were Orange County, which grew by 209,259 between 2000 and 2007, followed by Miami-Dade with an increase of 208,513 and Hillsborough with an increase of 193,913. Monroe was the only county in Florida to lose population between 2000 and 2007, declining by 602, he said.

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### Credits

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