

Populations are booming in Carolinas



Children walk through a sports field in Independence Park under the skyline of Charlotte, N.C., on March 20. MARY CONLON — ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

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ORLANDO, Fla. >> Move over Florida and Texas. The United States has new hot spots for growth, and they both have Carolina in their name.

North Carolina last year attracted more new residents — 84,000 people — from other parts of the country than any other state, a title held by Texas in 2024 and Florida in the two years before that. South Carolina had the highest overall growth rate last year at 1.5%, a distinction held by Florida in 2024, according to U.S. Census Bureau figures released this past week.

Domestic migration — or people moving within the U.S. — slowed in Texas. The 67,300 domestic migrants heading to the second-most-populous state year over year barely squeaked by South Carolina, which had the third-highest number of domestic migrants at 66,600.

The appeal of Florida, the nation's third-most-populous state, dimmed. It dropped to No. 8 for state-to-state migration, as more U.S. residents preferred to move elsewhere, including Alabama.

Sabrina Morley and Steven Devereaux sold their Tampa-area house last year, moved out of Florida and landed outside Valencia, Spain. Growing up in the 1990s, they both enjoyed Florida's diversity and being able to run around freely outdoors. But in recent years, as they planned to have children, they had grown wary of the state's costs, regular threats of mass shootings at schools, the quality of education and political divisiveness. They are expecting a daughter in the spring.

"I had a pretty good childhood, but I don't think we'd be able to give our child the same quality of life because of the cost of living, food quality, and guns have become more prevalent," Devereaux said. "We think where we are now, it's the best decision we could make to give any future children the best quality of life."

North Carolina state demographer Michael Cline credited the state's growth to high-paying jobs in banking and tech, the topographical diversity and having smaller big-cities than Florida and Texas.

"North Carolina is attracting younger folks because we have so many nice areas in North Carolina — the mountains and beaches and lakes in between — that we're benefiting from younger people who decided they can work from anywhere and would rather be in a nice area," Cline said. "One of the things about North Carolina, our cities are not huge, and that may be attractive to folks, too."

Last year's changes among the states were significant because population growth brings more taxpayers, economic dynamism and demand for goods and services. It also signals potential changes in the nation's political landscape after the next census in 2030, with certain states gaining or losing clout in Congress and the Electoral College.

In the next few years, domestic migration is going to play a larger role in states' growth or population decline. That is because the Trump administration's immigration crackdown has contributed to a significant reduction in migration from abroad, which had been the prime driver of growth in most states for the first half of this decade.

Without immigration growth, the U.S. population will start shrinking in five years as deaths outpace births, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

Despite the comparative year-over-year slowdown in domestic migration, Texas' overall growth of 391,000 people and Florida's overall growth of 196,000 people were still the two highest in the U.S. last year.

In Florida, it was driven by international migration, and in Texas by international migration as well as births outpacing deaths. Both states boomed during the early part of the decade, when pandemic-era lockdowns and remote work encouraged residents from other states to move to Florida and Texas, where coronavirus restrictions were more lax.

"The sharp domestic migrations they observed during the pandemic have now petered out, especially for Florida, at the same time that immigration is being diminished," said Brookings demographer William Frey.

Demographers in Florida and Texas said they were not entirely sold on the accuracy of the Census Bureau's migration numbers, which are the hardest variables to pin down because they fluctuate the most year to year, although they did not question the rigor of the bureau's work. The bureau uses data from the IRS and its American Community Survey to calculate migration, although the ACS data lags by a year and requires statisticians to project the data forward.

The Bureau of Economic and Business Research at the University of Florida uses a method different from the Census Bureau's to calculate growth — electrical customer data, said research demographer Richard Doty.

There are no definitive explanations for why domestic migration to Florida went from almost 319,000 people in 2022 to 22,500 people in 2025. Doty said some factors might include the state no longer being the bargain it once was, a series of hurricanes and return-to-office employer mandates.

"The cost of housing, in particular, is driving young people and retirees to other states," he said. "Also, insurance is higher in Florida than most other states."

When asked about the decline, Gov. Ron DeSantis' press secretary, Molly Best, noted in an email that Florida had a significant influx of new residents during the pandemic. It remains a top-ranked place to live, she said.

The Texas economy has been growing, but that is not the only thing that influences the inflow of potential migrants. Conditions outside the state also do, Texas state demographer Lloyd Potter said in an email.

"If jobs are plentiful, living is affordable, and the overall quality of life is good, they will be less likely to move for an opportunity outside that community," Potter said.

