

Dallas-Fort Worth area population growth cools a bit but still steady

Kaufman County outpaces Collin for the first time this decade, according to census

10:34 AM CDT on Thursday, March 20, 2008

By JIM GETZ / The Dallas Morning News
jgetz@dallasnews.com

North Texas' population grew at a solid clip in 2006-07 but at a slower pace than the year before, according to new U.S. Census Bureau estimates.

The estimates, to be released Thursday, show the rate of population growth in the region easing slightly after two years of increases, including an influx of Hurricane Katrina evacuees in 2005.

The figures also represent the continuation of a trend: Rockwall County leads a pack that includes Collin, Kaufman, Denton and Ellis counties among the 100 fastest-growing in the U.S.

Kaufman County was the only local county that grew at a faster rate than the year before, helping it zoom past Collin County on the top 100 list.

Experts say the country's current economic woes are too recent to have shown up in these census figures, but if they continue, they could lead to further dips in population growth.

"Fewer people are going to move out, as well as fewer moving in – I know both of those are going to go down," said Daniel Hamermesh, an economics professor at the University of Texas at Austin. "I just don't know which is going to go down more than the other."

Nationally, meanwhile, about 29,000 people moved into Orleans Parish, La., and about 6,000 more into neighboring St. Bernard Parish last year, giving them the highest growth rates in the nation. In the previous year, those counties were among the biggest losers.

Before housing crisis

The census figures are county estimates only and cover July 2006 to July 2007, meaning the data end just before the effects of the housing crisis and credit crunch began to be felt in the second half of the year.

But Mr. Hamermesh and state demographer Karl Eschbach said the country's economic problems may be helping Texas because other parts of the United States have been hit harder.

"You see a serious in-migration to Texas that we hadn't been seeing earlier in the decade," Mr. Eschbach said. "I would say for this year, and in part the previous year, what's been driving our numbers is the sad shape of the rest of the country."

Among the fastest-growing areas was Rockwall County, which slipped one spot to fifth among the top 100 of more than 3,100 counties nationwide. Rockwall's population grew by 8.2 percent, compared with 9.9 percent the previous year.

"The only place where there's not a recession is Texas," Rockwall County Judge Chris Florance said. "What that really means on the ground level is that a lot of people are moving here. Even in recession, because of our economy, people are still going to want to move here."

In Collin County, where the estimated growth rate dipped from 5.7 percent in 2005-06 to 4.9 percent last year – when it was 31st among the fastest-growing counties in the U.S. – County Judge Keith Self said he's taking the long view. Since 2001-02, annual population growth has ranged from 4.9 percent to 5.8 percent, which he sees as steady.

"I don't know that we're going to get a breather," Mr. Self said. "The migration from cold states to warm states, from high-tax states to low-tax states, is going to continue. It may cool a little bit, but I don't expect it to be much."

Meanwhile, growth in Kaufman County has continued unabated at 5.1 percent in the most recent year, placing it 23rd among the fastest-growing counties. That represented a spike of 39 places and was second only to Rockwall County in the region.

Other counties in North Texas continued growing, just at a slightly lower rate, including Ellis and Denton. Denton ranked 53rd among the fastest-growing counties, while Ellis ranked 74th.

Dallas and Tarrant counties grew at even lower rates, at 1.2 percent and 2.9 percent, respectively.

Moving in, moving out

Outside the suburbs, the largest demographic change locally was the continuation of residents moving out of Dallas County and international residents moving in.

In 2006-07, the difference was a wash: about 24,000 immigrants moved in, while there was a net loss of about 24,000 residents who moved out of Dallas County to other counties.

The trend has been consistent throughout the decade: Each year, anywhere from an estimated 25,000 to 32,000 immigrants have moved in, while the net loss of non-immigrants has ranged from 21,000 to 52,000 in any given year. Most Dallas County residents probably moved to surrounding counties, Mr. Eschbach said.

The year before, the net loss was estimated at 19,000 natives – the lowest in the decade – because an influx of about 20,000 Katrina evacuees masked the true number of residents who left.

Mr. Eschbach said he believes that Dallas is going through changes seen by many larger immigrant gateways throughout the country. It will become greatly Hispanic and greatly minority, with the white population concentrated in suburban counties.

"It's happening like it has in other cities, like New York, Miami and Los Angeles," he said. "It's a pattern that, once it starts, we really haven't seen it reverse itself anywhere."

WHAT THE DATA SAW

The region still grew in 2006-07, but the rate of growth slowed from the previous year, according to new census data.

County	2005-06 growth	2006-07 growth
Collin	5.7%	4.9%
Dallas	1.5%	1.2%
Denton	5.4%	4.4%
Ellis	4.4%	4.0%
Kaufman	4.6%	5.1%
Rockwall	9.9%	8.2%
Tarrant	3.1%	2.9%

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau

LOCAL HIGHLIGHTS

New U.S. Census Bureau estimates show how growth has continued in North Texas, albeit more slowly than the year before:

Dallas County

- Almost all of its overall increase in 2006-07 came from natural growth – births minus deaths.

- It posted a net gain of only 190 from immigration: 24,591 international immigrants moved in while there was a net loss of 24,401 people to other U.S. counties.

Rockwall County

•The fourth-fastest-growing county in the U.S. the previous two years was the fifth-fastest-growing in 2006-07.

•It was the third-fastest-growing county in the U.S. from 2000-07.

Collin County

•In 2006-07, it had the eighth-largest increase in people of all counties in the U.S.

•In 2005-06, it was the 28th-fastest-growing county in the U.S.; in 2006-07, it slipped to 31st place.

Kaufman County

•It was the only county in the area whose growth rate increased in each of the past four years.

•In 2006-07, its growth rate surpassed that of Collin County for the first time this decade.

U.S. CENSUS POPULATION ESTIMATES

County	2006 population	2007 population	Percent change
Dallas	2,337,956	2,366,511	1.2
Collin	696,383	730,690	4.9
Denton	586,582	612,357	4.4
Rockwall	68,195	73,810	8.2
Tarrant	1,668,541	1,717,435	2.9
Ellis	137,892	143,468	4.0
Kaufman	91,689	96,373	5.1

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau