

Austin area population increases by nearly half million, 2010 census data show

Increases in minority population drive growth in Central Texas, state's biggest metro areas.

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Friday, Feb. 18, 2011

Mirroring statewide trends among metropolitan areas, Central Texas grew larger and more diverse over the past decade, increases driven by spectacular growth in Hispanic and minority populations.

In Austin, Hispanics and Asians combined to account for 71 percent of the city's population increase, according to new U.S. census figures released Thursday, the first complete count update of the state since 2000. Austin grew by 20.4 percent over the past decade to 790,390 to remain the state's fourth-largest city.

Austin's Asian population of 49,864 ranked second among the state's largest 20 cities, behind only Houston. Its Latino population of 277,707 ranked fifth.

The city's non-Hispanic white population accounted for 28.1 percent of the city's total population increase during the past decade.

"The decennial figures bear out the fact there was even more growth than we expected," City of Austin demographer Ryan Robinson said. "We have grown and diversified significantly."

Travis County grew by 26.1 percent, officially eclipsing the 1 million mark to 1,024,266, making it the fastest-growing county among the five most populous counties in Texas.

Travis also had healthy increases in Latino and Asian populations, which now account for 33.5 and 5.7 percent, respectively, of the county's total population. Non-Hispanic whites make up just over half the county's population and African Americans make up 8.1 percent.

Austin's suburbs grew at even faster rates.

Williamson County's population increased by 69 percent, and Hays County grew by 61 percent. They were among the five fastest growing counties in the state.

Perhaps no place illustrated that rapid growth in Williamson County more than Hutto. It was the second-fastest growing city in the state, exploding from 1,250 in 2000 to 14,698 in 2010 — more than a tenfold increase. Round Rock grew by nearly 31,000. The city's 2010 population was just shy of 100,000, more than three times the population in 1990. Williamson County now ranks as the state's 12th most populous county, up from 16th in 2000.

Growth among all racial and ethnic categories fueled a nearly half-million population increase in the Austin metro area of Travis, Williamson, Hays, Bastrop and Caldwell counties, said demographer John Logan, director of the U.S. 2010 Census Project at Brown University. But growth among African Americans, in particular, was surprising, said Logan, who analyzed census figures for the five-county metro area.

Though the black population in Austin fell, both in absolute numbers and percentage, the African American population in the five-county region grew by about 24,000 to 120,510. "That's a big movement," Logan said. "We're used to seeing a pretty stable population there."

In the Austin metro area, only Caldwell County did not have growth of 25 percent or more; it grew by 18.2 percent over the past decade.

Over the past decade, Texas led the nation in population growth, increasing 20.6 percent — more than twice as fast as that of the nation as a whole — to 25.1 million, an increase of about 4.3 million. Growth was centered around four areas: Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston-Galveston, San Antonio-Austin and the predominantly Hispanic Rio Grande Valley. Much of West Texas lost population, continuing a decades-long trend.

"We went through an exercise of going down Interstate 35 and all the counties that intersect it and all those to the east of it and found that that's where 85 percent of the state lives," Texas State Demographer Lloyd Potter said. "And only 15 percent live west of the Interstate 35 corridor."

The new census figures are used to redraw congressional and state legislative districts based on population and racial and ethnic makeup. Texas will gain four congressional seats, more than any other state.

Statewide, Latinos accounted for two-thirds of Texas' growth over the past decade and now make up 37.6 percent of the state's total population — up from 32 percent in 2000. Non-Hispanic whites dropped to 45.3 percent, and blacks make up 11.5 percent, according to the data.

Demographer Steve Murdock of Rice University, a former U.S. Census Bureau director, noted that Texas accounted for nearly 25 percent of the nation's total population growth of 17 million. (The national population grew 9.7 percent, to 308.7 million.)

"It has been a phenomenal run for Texas," Murdock said.

In Austin, the Hispanic population grew by more than 77,000. With the increase, Hispanics make up 35 percent of the city's population, Robinson said. The African American share of the total

population, however, dropped to 7.7 percent (60,760, down from 64,259). Asians make up 6.3 percent of Austin's total population.

Non-Hispanic whites still make up the largest share of the city population, at 48.7 percent.

Robinson said the non-Hispanic white share dropped below 50 percent in 2005, making Austin a majority-minority city. In 1950 the non-Hispanic white population accounted for 75 percent of the city's total population; it has declined ever since.

Austin's growth among racial and ethnic minorities mirrored national trends. Minorities accounted for about 85 percent of the nation's population growth during the past decade. In four of the eight states gaining House seats, Hispanics accounted for half or more of the population gains.

Additional material from The Associated Press, Fort Worth Star-Telegram staff writer Steve Campbell and Dallas Morning News staff writer Michael E. Young.

Top Texas cities by population: 2000, 2010

Houston 2000: 1,953,631; 2010: 2,099,451

San Antonio 2000: 1,144,646; 2010: 1,327,407

Dallas 2000: 1,188,580; 2010: 1,197,816

Austin 2000: 656,562; 2010: 790,390

Fort Worth 2000: 534,694; 2010: 741,206