
Pandemic Population Change Across Metro America: Accelerated Migration, Less Immigration, Fewer Births and More Deaths

There has been much speculation about the impact that COVID-19 has had on population changes across the country since the pandemic began in the early part of 2020. Most of this discussion has been focused on the ways COVID-19 has affected moves across the US—from large metropolitan areas to smaller ones, and from cities to suburbs—largely reflecting a "flight from density" and greater capabilities to telecommute.

Yet, there are other demographic components that have been impacted by the pandemic and hold important consequences for these shifts—a marked downturn in immigration to the U.S. from abroad, along with well documented reductions in the number of births and rising number of deaths. Changes in each of these components since the pandemic began have affected population growth in much of the U.S., especially in large metropolitan areas and their urban core areas.

The analysis below examines annual population changes for metropolitan area and core counties resulting from each of these demographic components based on recently released Census Bureau data showing annual population changes from July 1, 2019 to July 1, 2020.[1] As such, it provides the first comprehensive assessment of how domestic migration, international migration, and natural increase (the excess of births over deaths) impacted area population change during the year that the pandemic hit.

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