Florida population soars in century's first decade, but rate is slowing

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Florida was again one of the country's leaders in population growth in the last decade, but the growth rates over the past few years have been among the lowest in the state's history, according to a new study by the University of Florida.

Florida's permanent resident population increased by more than 2.8 million between 2000 and 2010 — an increase of 17.6 percent to 18,801,310. That mark was the third-largest numeric increase and the eighth-largest percentage increase in the country. However, the growth rate lagged behind previous periods for the state, and projections are the growth rate will steadily decline through 2040.

"Growth rates varied considerably during the decade, not only from county to county but also from year to year," said Stan Smith, director of the Bureau of Economic and Business Research at UF's Warrington College of Business Administration.

"Fueled by an expanding economy and a booming housing market, population increases from 2003 to 2006 were among the largest in Florida's history," he said. "As economic growth slowed and the housing market cooled later in the decade, population growth declined as well, reaching its lowest levels in more than 60 years."

In the decades from 1970 to 2010, Florida saw annual population increases that averaged between 280,000 and 320,000. The projected annual growth is 252,000 for 2010 to 2020 and 255,000 for 2020 to

2030. The projection drops considerably for 2030 to 2040 with an annual growth of 220,000.

Smith said the slow economic recovery and a dismal job market have hampered population growth.

"Jobs are a major reason people come to Florida," Smith said. "But Florida lost about 1 million jobs from 2007 to 2010. As the economy recovers, population growth will increase as well."

Sixty-five of Florida's 67 counties gained population during this past decade. Four counties grew by more than 50 percent, and 20 grew by more than 20 percent. The largest numerical increases over the past decade occurred in Orange County (up 249,612 to 1,145,956), Miami-Dade County (up 242,656 to 2,496,435) and Hillsborough County (up 230,278 to 1,229,226). Smith attributed this increase to those counties' long history of growth and that each is home to a major metropolitan city.

Flagler and Sumter counties experienced the fastest growth in the state. In 2000, Flagler County's population was 49,832. According to 2010 Census data, that number had grown to 95,696. Sumter County's population in 2000 was 53,345 and had risen to 93,420 by 2010. Smith attributed Flagler's growth to the popularity of the area's Palm Coast development and Sumter's growth to the establishment of The Villages, a popular and growing retirement community.

The only two counties to lose population were Monroe (down 6,499 to 73,090) and Pinellas (down 4,953 to 916,542). Smith said a large portion of Monroe County is not developable because of marsh lands while Pinellas County is already densely populated and has little room to grow.

"The collapse of the [housing market](#) and the lingering effects of the

worst economic crisis since the 1930s are likely to keep the state's [population](#) growth at relatively low levels for another year or two," Smith said. "We expect growth to increase thereafter, reaching levels more in line with historical patterns by the middle of the decade. For many counties, however, future increases are likely to be smaller than those occurring during the last several decades."

Provided by University of Florida

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