When it comes to population growth, Houston is No. 1 (w/ video)

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New York, Los Angeles and Chicago are still America's largest metropolitan areas, but none of the nation's 366 metropolitan areas added more people during the past decade than Houston. Based on a new extensive analysis of the 2000 and 2010 censuses by Rice University's Kinder Institute for Urban Research, the Greater Houston metropolitan area grew by a whopping 1.2 million people and increased by more than 123,000 per year over the decade.

"Houston's growth represents more people than the population growth in the New York and Chicago metropolitan areas combined during the past decade," said Michael Emerson, co-director of the Kinder Institute. "Houston's growth alone accounts for more people than the nation's 14 smallest metropolitan areas combined. It is more than the number of people who live in the Buffalo metropolitan area, and more than in the New Orleans metropolitan area -- and it is more than the number of people in 322 of the nation's 366 metropolitan areas."

While 42 of the nation's metropolitan areas actually lost population, Emerson said, Houston capitalized on its closeness to Latin America, its emergence as a major destination for immigrants from around the world, the area's pro-business policies, low cost of living, significant job growth and location in the fastest-growing state in the nation.

Following closely behind Houston is another Texas giant, the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area, which grew by just 21,000 fewer people over the decade than Houston. If the growth of two other Texas metropolitan

areas -- Austin and San Antonio – is factored in, only 13 other metropolitan areas in the country have as many people as these four metropolitan areas added to their populations over the decade. Austin grew by almost 467,000 people and San Antonio by about 431,000, which put them both in the top 13 metropolitan areas for population growth.

"As of 2011, the population increases in the Houston and Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan areas have catapulted the two cities into the No. 5 (Houston) and No. 4 (Dallas-Fort Worth) largest metropolitan areas in the United States," Emerson said.

The only other metropolitan area to grow by more than 1 million people over the 2000-2010 decade was Atlanta, which is the nation's ninth largest metro.

The trend of U.S. population growth being concentrated in the South and the Southwest -- which has been true for several decades -- continues and, if anything, is intensifying, Emerson said. Of the 15 metropolitan areas that added the most people, only New York (No. 7) and Seattle (No. 15) are not in the South or the Southwest.

"A significant portion of the population growth in these Southern and Southwestern metropolitan areas is not due to the relocation of Americans from colder climates but to the influx of immigrants moving directly into these Southern and Southwestern metropolitan areas," Emerson said. "This is the secret of Houston's phenomenal growth over the past decade. It comes not primarily from relocating or retiring Americans but from first-generation immigrants and from their children born in Houston."

The researchers' analysis is based on the official Census Bureau definition: "The general concept of a metropolitan area is that of a large

population nucleus, together with adjacent communities having a high degree of social and economic integration with that core. Metropolitan areas comprise one or more entire counties, except in New England, where cities and towns are the basic geographic units."

The 30 U.S. metropolitan areas with the greatest population growth, 2000-2010

1. Houston 1,231,393

2. Dallas-Fort Worth 1,210,229

3. Atlanta 1,020,879

4. Riverside, Calif. 970,030

5. Phoenix 941,011

6. Washington, D.C. 785,987

7. Las Vegas 575,504

8. New York 574,107

9. Miami 557,071

10. Orlando, Fla. 489,850

11. Austin, Texas 466,526

12. Los Angeles 463,210

13. San Antonio 430,805

14. Charlotte, N.C. 427,590

15. Seattle 395,931

16. Tampa/St. Petersburg, Fla. 387,246

17. Denver 364,242

18. Chicago 362,789

19. Sacramento, Calif. 352,270

20. Raleigh/Cary, N.C. 333,419

21. Minneapolis/St. Paul 311,027

22. Portland, Ore. 298,128

23. San Diego 281,480

24. Philadelphia 278,196

25. Nashville, Tenn. 278,145

26. Indianapolis 231,137

27. Columbus, Ohio 224,217

28. Jacksonville, Fla. 222,846

29. San Francisco/Oakland 211,651

30. McAllen, Texas 205,306

Provided by Rice University