

# Utah is fastest-growing state as West bucks sluggish trend

December 20 2016, by Lindsay Whitehurst

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Utah is the fastest-growing state in the country, leading a cluster of Western states with populations on the upswing despite sluggish national growth, according to new numbers released by the U.S. Census Bureau Tuesday.

The state that's long had the country's highest birth rate grew just over 2 percent from July 2015 to July 2016, followed closely by Nevada, Idaho and Florida. Washington, Oregon and Colorado also took top percentage-[growth](#) spots.

The U.S. [population](#), meanwhile, posted one of its lowest growth rates since the late 1930s, shortly after the Great Depression, said Brookings Institution demographer William Frey. That's largely because baby-boomer generation population declines haven't been fully replaced by new births or immigration.

Several Western [states](#) are bucking that trend as [people](#) are attracted by recovering economies and affordable housing, he said.

"As things start to inch up, people are finding good home values in central California, and that's spilling out into other mountain West states," he said, though in most places the growth doesn't yet match pre-recession levels.

Other states that have been recent growth powerhouses also flagged this year. North Dakota, for example, led the country for the past four years

during an oil boom that started around 2004, but its growth slowed amid 2016's weak crude prices.

Eight states had population losses this year, including three—Pennsylvania, New York and Wyoming—that posted gains last year, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Illinois had the biggest drop, losing more than 37,000 people.

In Utah, the growth was split nearly evenly between new births and immigration of people attracted by the strong tech and financial industries, said Pam Perlich with the University of Utah's Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute. The state is also home base for the growing Mormon church.

Utah's population passed the 3 million mark this year, a milestone for the state that's nevertheless a far cry from the country's most-populous states. No. 1 was California with more than 39 million, followed by Texas, with nearly 28 million people.

Still, Utah's raw-number population growth ranked No. 11 in the country as the state added more than 60,000 people, Perlich said.

In Nevada, gaming-sector growth Las Vegas has paired with gains associated with a Tesla battery manufacturing plant in the north, pushing the overall population to just under 3 million people, said state demographer Jeff Hardcastle.

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