Chicago is still losing population

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So who's winning? The fastest-growing metropolitan statistical areas were Austin, Texas; Orlando, Fla.; Las Vegas; Raleigh, N.C.; and Phoenix—which grew between 2 and 2.5 percent. The fastest growth among all metro areas was in the oil patch of Texas: Midland grew 4.3 percent. Odessa, Texas, was fifth-fastest at 3.2 percent. The fastest-growing county of more than 20,000 was Williams County, N.D., another hot spot for oil exploration, where the population grew 5.9 percent last year to 35,350.

In Illinois, Danville, which has struggled with a steady decline in manufacturing and population for more than a generation, registered the fourth-worst decline among the nation's metro areas, losing 1.2 percent. Peoria also was hard-hit, which lost 0.9 percent. The sharpest decline in Illinois was in Alexander County, at the southern tip of the state, which lost 3.8 percent of its residents. Its population is down 26 percent since 2010 to just 6,060 people.

RACIAL FACTORS

The population decline in Chicago and the state, which started shrinking a year earlier than the metro area, has provided a gloomy backdrop to an already-contentious climate in which political leaders are wrestling with tax increases and service cuts to deal with a fiscal mess caused by pension obligations that have been neglected for nearly a generation.
City-level estimates aren’t yet available. But, based on recent trends, demographers suspect that Chicago continues to suffer from a declining African-American population in the city and an exodus of older, white residents in Cook County suburbs. “If there was a stable black population, the city and the county would be growing,” Paral says.

A CITY OF IMMIGRANTS?

While the debate over immigration rages in Washington, it’s hitting home in Chicago and other large cities. Since 2010, international immigration to Chicago has dropped by more than half, to roughly 200,000, estimates the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. Between 2000 and 2010, it was about 440,000.

That’s a big deal to a region where 1 in 5 workers are foreign-born.

“Chicago has the lowest international immigration rate among its peer metropolitan areas, albeit international immigration to these now-shrinking regions has generally stagnated in more recent years,” the agency says. Two exceptions are Boston and Philadelphia, both of which showed overall growth last year, and have since recovered and surpassed their pre-recession immigration rates.

“Chicago has returned to pre-recession domestic outmigration rates. Our peers haven’t,” said Aseal Tineh, an associate policy analyst for CMAP.

Last year, CMAP estimates 25,000 international migrants came to Chicago, compared with 38,000 international migrants in 2005. When it comes to immigration, each city is unique. Chicago has felt the impact of a decline in the U.S.-Mexico relationship and an improved economy in Eastern Europe.

Mexican immigrants made up 41 percent of Chicago’s foreign-born population. By 2017, they were 37 percent, according to CMAP.

In 2017, the Chicago region was home to 630,000 Mexican-born residents, 40,000 fewer than in 2005, CMAP says. “The decline in Mexican immigration has contributed to the overall stagnation in international immigration to the region.”

That impacts Chicago in another key way, says Johnson. “Birth rates are down 10 percent from a decade ago, even though there are more women of childbearing age. Among Hispanic women in their early 20s, birth rates are down 40 percent.”

The Asian-born population in Chicago is up to 29 percent from 23.4 percent in 2005. But the European-born segment has dropped from 24.6 percent to 21.4 percent. Paral estimates the number of Polish immigrants to Illinois has fallen by half since 2000. “During the '80s and '90s, the city and state had huge immigration, so there was overall growth,” he says. “That's changed.”
This story has been corrected to show the population of 14-county metropolitan area, not Cook County, fell below 9.5 million for the first time.