

# RECENT TRENDS IN NORTH DAKOTA'S POPULATION

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North Dakota's population has reached its highest level in 50 years. Data collected from the most recent Census (1980) indicates that there were 652,717 persons residing in North Dakota as of April 1980. More important, the current residential growth pattern indicates a reversal in the state's previous trend of population loss. Since 1930, the state's highest population count (680,845), the number of residents in North Dakota consistently declined except for a modest growth during the 1960s (see Table 1). This resulted in a 50-year population low being recorded in 1970. However, the recent resurgence in population growth has boosted the number of residents in the state to its second highest level in history.

**Table 1. Total population and population change in North Dakota, 1870 to 1980.**

Year	Total Population	Change from Preceding Census	
	number	number	percent
1980	652,717	34,925	5.7
1970	617,792	-14,654	-2.3
1960	632,446	12,810	2.1
1950	619,636	-22,299	-3.5
1940	641,935	-38,910	-5.7
1930	680,845	33,973	5.3
1920	646,872	69,816	12.1
1910	577,056	257,910	80.8
1900	319,146	128,163	67.1
1890	190,983	154,074	417.4
1880	36,909	34,504	1,434.7
1870	2,405	--	--

SOURCE: U.S. Census, **Number of Inhabitants, North Dakota**, PC80-1-A36. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, December 1981.

The rate of population expansion in North Dakota during the past decade is impressive when compared to other states in the North Central Region. The state's 5.7 percent growth is the third highest among the dozen states in the region. This ranking places it behind Minnesota and Wisconsin, in a tie with Indiana and

Nebraska and ahead of seven other regional states (see Table 2). Nonetheless, residential growth in our state remains significantly below the national average of 11.4 percent in 1980. Similarly, population growth in the North Central Region (4.0) lags behind the Western (23.9) and Southern (20.0) regions of the nation but ahead of the Northeast (0.2 percent).

**Table 2. Total population and percent change for states in the north central region, 1970 to 1980.**

State	Population		Change
	1980	1970	1970-1980
	number	number	percent
Illinois	11,426,518	11,110,285	2.9
Indiana	5,490,224	5,195,392	5.7
Iowa	2,913,808	2,825,368	3.2
Kansas	2,363,679	2,249,071	5.1
Michigan	9,262,078	8,881,826	4.3
Minnesota	4,075,970	3,806,103	7.1
Missouri	4,916,686	4,677,623	5.1
Nebraska	1,569,825	1,485,333	5.7
North Dakota	652,717	617,792	5.7
Ohio	10,797,630	10,657,423	1.3
South Dakota	690,768	666,257	3.8
Wisconsin	4,705,767	4,417,821	6.5

SOURCE: U.S. Census, **Number of Inhabitants, United States Summary**, PC80-1-A1, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983.

## Some Reasons Behind North Dakota's New Growth

The change from a pattern of population decline to population growth appears to be largely due to a dramatic reduction in outmigration. In the 1960s, nearly one out of seven departed the state (-15.0 percent). However, in the 1970s net outmigration changed to one of 30 (-3 percent). This represents nearly a fivefold reduction in the rate of outmigration (see Table 3). With such a reduction, the state's own natural increase (births minus deaths) exceeded losses due to outmigration and resulted in net population growth. However, this change in migration patterns was not evenly spread across the state (see Figure 1).

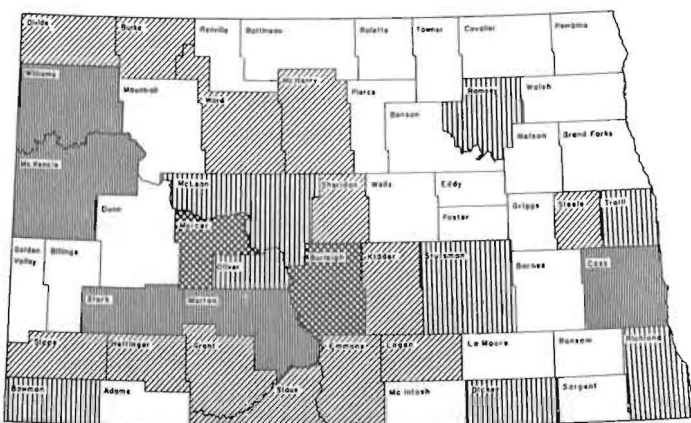
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**Table 3. Population change and net migration in North Dakota, 1950 to 1980.**

Decade	Popu- lation at Begin- ning of Decade	Popu- lation at End of Decade	Population Change		Net Migration*	
	number	number	number	percent	number	percent*
1950-1960	619,636	632,446	12,810	2.1	-105,087	-17.0
1960-1970	632,446	617,792	-14,654	-2.3	-94,871	15.0
1970-1980	617,792	652,717	34,925	5.7	-17,675	-2.9

\*Net migration is calculated by subtracting natural increase (births minus deaths) over the decade from the difference in population (i.e., population change) from 1970 to 1980.

\*\*Percent net migration is the number of net migrants for the decade divided by the total population at the beginning of the decade.



PERCENT CHANGE:

Moderate Loss	-5 to -14.9%	High Loss	-15% & Lower
Stable	-4.9 to 4.9%		
Moderate Gain	5 to 14.9%	High Gain	15%+

Note: Negative values indicate out-migration.

SOURCE: North Dakota Census STF1A, 1980 and Division of Vital Statistics, North Dakota State Department of Health, 1980.

**Figure 1. Net Migration in North Dakota, by Counties, 1970-1980.**

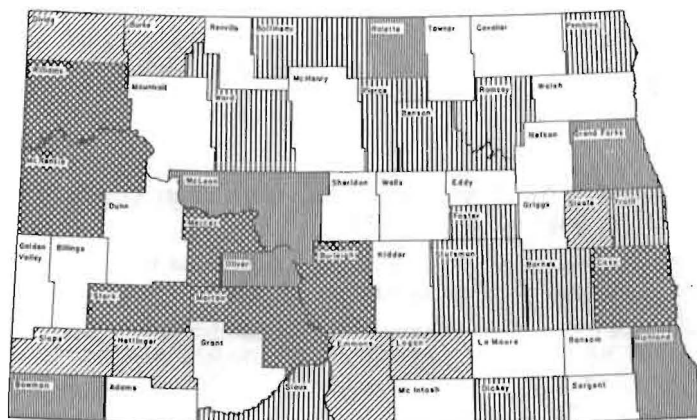
For instance, several western counties have experienced a net influx of residents (8,635 in Burleigh; 2,780 in Mercer; 2,510 in Morton; 2,200 in Stark; 1,311 in Williams). As might be expected, these counties are associated with recent energy development.

Mercer County led this western gain with an immigration rate of 45 percent (see Table 4). This represented a net influx of 2,780 residents and comprises 86 percent of the county's total population change since 1970. Burleigh County was second with a rate of 21.2 percent or 8,635 more people. Williams, McKenzie, Stark, and Morton counties also seemingly benefited from coal, oil, and power plant development by attracting new residents during the 1970s amounting to over 5 percent of their county's total population. On the other hand, 10 of the 13 counties with the highest

rates of outmigration are also in the western part of the state.

Eastern North Dakota primarily exhibited reduced losses in population. Cass was the only eastern county which grew by over 5 percent (7,508) due to migration. Five additional eastern counties (Dickey, Ramsey, Richland, Stutsman, and Traill) exhibited stable (plus or minus 5 percent) migration patterns during the 1970s (see Figure 1). The remaining eastern counties lost population, due to migration, at rates above 5 percent.

These uneven patterns of migration significantly contributed to diversity in population growth. Many counties in North Dakota experienced a moderate population loss during the last decade. Twenty-one of the state's 53 counties lost 5 to almost 15 percent of their residents between 1970 and 1980 (see Figure 2). An additional 12 counties remained relatively stable with a fluctuation in their population between -4.9 and 4.9 percent. In contrast, seven counties exhibited substantial population growth of 15 percent or more.



PERCENT CHANGE:

Moderate Loss	-5 to -14.9%	High Loss	-15% & Lower
Stable	-4.9 to 4.9%		
Moderate Gain	5 to 14.9%	High Gain	15%+

Note: Negative values indicate population decrease.

SOURCE: North Dakota Census STF1A, 1980 and Division of Vital Statistics, North Dakota State Department of Health, 1980.

**Figure 2. Population Change in North Dakota, by Counties, 1970-1980.**

The irregular patterns of growth appear to be related to two processes. The first is energy development in the western part of the state. The Arab oil embargo of 1973-74 made petroleum exploration in the western part of the state economically attractive; crude oil prices quadrupled during this period. Concurrently, efforts increased to extract coal reserves in western North Dakota counties for fuel to be used in neighboring electric power plants. These activities significantly contributed to the movement of people into western North Dakota.

Table 4. Total population and components of change for North Dakota, 1970-1980.

	Total Population			Total Births 1970 number	Total Deaths 1980 number	Natural Increase		Net Migration	
	1970 number	1980 number	change percent			As Part of 1970 Population		As Part of 1970 Population	
						number	percent	number	percent
State Total	617,761	652,717	5.7	107,948	55,339	52,609	8.5	- 17,675	- 2.9
Adams	3,832	3,584	- 6.5	503	400	103	2.7	- 351	- 9.2
Barnes	14,669	13,960	- 4.8	2,017	1,615	402	2.7	- 1,111	- 7.6
Benson	8,245	7,944	- 3.7	1,612	968	644	7.8	- 945	- 11.5
Billings	1,198	1,138	- 5.0	164	68	96	8.0	- 156	- 13.0
Bottineau	9,496	9,239	- 2.7	1,348	1,058	290	3.1	- 547	- 5.8
Bowman	3,901	4,229	8.4	724	437	287	7.4	41	1.1
Burke	4,739	3,822	- 19.4	568	497	71	1.5	- 988	- 20.8
Burleigh	40,714	54,811	34.6	8,244	2,782	5,462	13.4	8,635	21.2
Cass	73,653	88,247	19.8	12,938	5,852	7,086	9.6	7,508	10.2
Cavalier	8,213	7,636	- 7.0	1,472	897	575	7.0	- 1,152	- 14.0
Dickey	6,976	7,207	3.3	1,100	846	254	3.6	23	- 0.3
Divide	4,564	3,494	- 23.4	559	509	50	1.1	- 1,120	- 24.5
Dunn	4,895	4,627	- 5.5	681	389	292	6.0	- 560	- 11.4
Eddy	4,103	3,544	- 13.6	509	472	37	.9	- 596	- 14.5
Emmons	7,200	5,877	- 18.4	866	542	324	4.5	- 1,647	- 22.9
Foster	4,832	4,611	- 4.6	773	497	276	5.7	- 497	- 10.3
Golden Valley	2,611	2,391	- 8.4	406	271	135	5.2	- 355	- 13.6
Grand Forks	61,102	66,100	8.2	13,590	3,926	9,664	15.8	4,666	7.6
Grant	5,009	4,274	- 14.7	660	448	212	4.2	- 947	- 18.9
Griggs	4,184	3,714	- 11.2	550	511	39	0.9	- 509	- 12.2
Hettinger	5,075	4,275	- 15.8	638	440	198	3.9	- 998	- 19.7
Kidder	4,362	3,833	- 12.1	663	415	248	5.7	- 777	- 17.8
LaMoure	7,117	6,473	- 9.1	946	773	173	2.4	- 817	- 11.5
Logan	4,245	3,493	- 17.7	500	344	156	3.7	- 908	- 21.3
McHenry	8,977	7,858	- 12.5	1,192	876	316	3.5	- 1,435	- 16.0
McIntosh	5,545	4,800	- 13.4	517	566	49	- 0.9	696	- 12.6
McKenzie	6,127	7,132	16.4	1,049	573	476	7.8	529	8.6
McLean	11,251	12,383	10.1	1,863	1,215	648	5.8	484	4.3
Mercer	6,175	9,404	52.3	1,085	636	449	7.3	2,780	45.0
Morton	20,310	25,177	24.0	3,991	1,634	2,357	11.6	2,510	12.4
Mountrail	8,437	7,679	- 9.0	1,347	989	358	4.2	- 1,116	- 13.2
Nelson	5,807	5,233	- 9.9	649	892	243	- 4.2	331	- 5.7
Oliver	2,322	2,495	7.5	371	171	200	8.6	27	- 1.2
Pembina	10,728	10,399	- 3.1	1,769	1,312	457	4.3	- 786	- 7.3
Pierce	6,323	6,166	- 2.5	965	612	353	5.6	- 510	- 8.0
Ramsey	12,915	13,048	1.0	1,977	1,330	647	5.0	- 498	- 3.9
Ransom	7,102	6,698	- 5.7	954	940	14	0.2	- 418	- 5.9
Renville	3,828	3,608	- 5.8	552	380	172	4.5	- 392	- 10.2
Richland	18,089	19,207	6.2	2,860	1,873	987	5.5	131	.7
Rolette	11,549	12,177	5.4	3,201	1,042	2,159	18.7	1,531	13.3
Sargent	5,937	5,512	- 7.2	929	737	192	3.2	- 614	- 10.3
Sheridan	3,232	2,819	- 12.8	410	274	136	4.2	- 549	- 17.0
Sioux	3,632	3,620	- 0.3	995	358	637	17.5	- 649	- 17.9
Slope	1,484	1,157	- 22.0	211	81	130	8.8	- 457	- 30.8
Stark	19,613	23,697	20.8	3,500	1,616	1,884	9.6	2,200	11.2
Steele	3,749	3,106	- 17.2	445	360	85	2.3	- 728	- 19.4
Stutsman	23,550	24,154	2.6	3,548	2,179	1,369	5.8	- 765	- 3.2
Towner	4,645	4,052	- 12.8	587	502	85	1.8	- 678	- 14.6
Traill	9,571	9,624	0.6	1,281	1,140	141	1.5	88	- 0.9
Walsh	16,251	15,371	- 5.4	2,407	1,790	617	3.8	- 1,497	- 9.2
Ward	58,560	58,392	- 0.3	12,920	3,712	9,208	15.7	9,376	16.0
Wells	7,847	6,979	- 11.1	983	858	125	1.5	- 993	- 12.7
Williams	19,301	22,237	15.2	3,359	1,734	1,625	8.4	1,311	6.8

SOURCE: Division of Vital Statistics, North Dakota State Department of Health, and North Dakota STF 1A, 1980.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF POPULATION CHANGE IN NORTH DAKOTA

The second process is a trend toward urbanization. This movement is of special interest in a traditionally agricultural state. The U.S. Bureau of Census defines urban areas as those cities or other population centers with 2,500 residents or more. The move to cities has been evident in North Dakota since the first half of the century (see Table 5). Less than 17 percent of the state's population resided in urban centers in 1930. This proportion rose steadily to 44 percent in 1970 and almost 49 percent in 1980. A total of 318,310 people made up this growing proportion of the state's population in 1980. Cities of 10,000 and more inhabitants have grown by more than 21,000 people since 1970. Similarly, over 21,000 more individuals reside in cities of 2,500 to 10,000 inhabitants since 1970.

The move toward urban areas resulted in a population loss in North Dakota's rural areas containing primarily farms and towns of less than 2,500 people. The rural population in North Dakota fell from 344,319 in 1970 to 334,407 in 1980. The exodus from rural areas is depicted in the continued losses in countryside and farm populations (see Table 5). Notably, the predominantly rural counties of Divide, Burke, Hettinger, Slope, Emmons, and Logan had population losses of 15 percent or more during the past two decades, with the exception of Emmons County which lost 13 percent of its population during the 1960s.

1. North Dakota grew by nearly 35,000 inhabitants between 1970 and 1980. The state's population as of April 1, 1980 was 652,717.
2. This growth reflects a change in migration patterns which occurred during the decade. After two decades of significant outmigration in the 50s and 60s, a loss of 17 percent and 15 percent, respectively, outmigration in the 1970s fell to a loss of 2.9 percent. With this reduced rate of outmigration, the natural increase (births minus deaths) exceeded losses due to outmigration. Whether this change is the sign of a new trend remains to be seen.
3. The changes in migration and growth patterns were not evenly spread across the state. The counties with greatest growth in the 1970s were Cass and Burleigh. Their net population increases were 14,549 and 14,097, respectively. Mercer County had the greatest percentage population increase: 52.3 percent.
4. The uneven pattern of population growth appears to be largely related to two processes, an influx of residents in certain western counties due to energy development, and a continued pattern of urbanization, particularly in certain eastern counties.

**Table 5. Urban and rural population in North Dakota, 1930-1980.**

Population	1980		1970		1950		1930	
	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent
<b>Urban</b>	318,310	48.8	273,442	44.3	164,817	26.6	113,306	16.6
Places of 2,500 or more	316,711	48.5	273,387	44.3	164,817	26.6	113,306	16.6
1,000,000 or more	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
500,000 to 1,000,000	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
250,000 to 500,000	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
100,000 to 250,000	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
50,000 to 100,000	61,383	9.4	53,365	8.6	--	--	--	--
25,000 to 50,000	121,093	18.6	106,001	17.2	65,092	10.5	28,619	4.2
10,000 to 25,000	71,152	10.9	72,714	11.8	51,369	8.3	44,301	6.5
5,000 to 10,000	48,843	7.5	33,104	5.4	40,548	6.5	34,074	5.0
2,500 to 5,000	14,240	2.2	8,203	1.3	7,808	1.3	6,312	0.9
Places of less than 2,500	465	0.1	--	--	--	--	--	--
Other urban	1,134	0.2	55	--	--	--	--	--
<b>Rural</b>	334,407	51.2	344,319	55.7	454,819	73.4	567,539	83.4
Places of 1,000 to 2,500	70,531	10.8	65,434	10.6	69,670	11.2	39,232	5.8
Places of less than 1,000	76,067	11.7	75,735	12.3	89,723	14.5	98,709	14.5
Other rural	187,809	28.8	203,150	32.9	295,426	47.7	429,598	63.1

SOURCE: U.S. Census, **Number of Inhabitants**, PC80-1-A36. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, December 1982.