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MAPPING MASS MIGRATION

PIONEER
OPPORTUNITY

NEW ENGLAND STATE AND COUNTY POPULATION CHANGE, 2020 TO 2023

Massachusetts has been losing a significant number of residents in recent years. This is the primary focus of this newsletter and likely why many of you are reading. While we at Pioneer believe this issue is an important one for the state to address, this view is not universally shared. If you've been dialed into the conversation, you might be familiar with an argument that goes something like this: Massachusetts is losing tens of thousands of domestic residents every year, but the state's population hasn't shrunk considerably, therefore we don't need to be that worried about out-migration. I'd like to start by pushing back on that point.

The reality is that it is rather uncommon for a state to lose population over the long run. From 2020 to 2023 15 states lost total population according to Census Bureau state population estimates. Between 2013 and 2023 only six did. Since 2003 only one has—West Virginia. With immigration and natural population growth (births minus deaths), even under circumstances where at times large numbers of domestic residents are leaving, most states still gain population over the long run.

However, it's important to note that even a stagnation in population or slow growth can be exceptionally limiting for a state's economic future. New residents grow the labor pool—which businesses consider in making location decisions—add additional tax revenue into state coffers, start their own businesses, and bring money into the local economy through purchasing services and goods. In the developed world a growing population, especially a growing young and educated population, almost always leads to economic growth and a higher standard of living. States that are unable to bring in new residents handicap themselves, especially if they have high levels of out-migration among wealthier, younger, and highly educated residents while largely replacing them with low-skilled immigrants—as Massachusetts is doing. This is especially problematic as the workforce becomes older and there is more demand for younger workers than at any time in recent history.

Until 2020, Massachusetts was generally gaining population. From 2010 to 2019 the state grew by roughly 347,000 people. Yet from 2020 to 2023 it lost 31,500 people. While 14 other states also lost population, this was a departure for the state from below average growth to the bottom seven of all states in population growth, in the same league as other unaffordable urban states like California, New York, Illinois, and New Jersey, as well as economically struggling southern states like Mississippi and Louisiana.

In New England, Maine (+32,545), New Hampshire (+24,530), Connecticut (+11,264), and Vermont (+4,387) gained population during the 2020 to 2023 period. Rhode Island (-1,409) was the only other state besides Massachusetts to lose residents.

NEW ENGLAND COUNTY POPULATION CHANGE

While state population change can be useful in assessing a state's economic health, county change can be even more informative in pinpointing what type of populations are growing or shrinking.

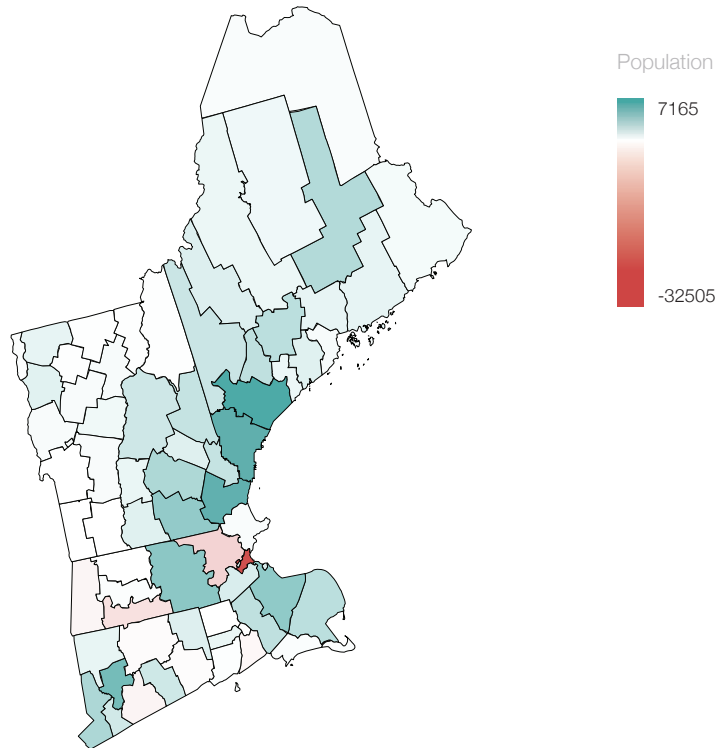
From 2020 to 2023, most counties in New England experienced some level of growth.

The population of children under 18 in Massachusetts was only 18.23 percent in 2023 according to the American Community Survey, the fifth lowest percentage of any state. The lack of young residents was even more acute in the 5-14 age range (10.9 percent), where Massachusetts had the lowest percentage of any state.

FAST FACT

Out of the 68 total counties in the region only 11 lost population, five of which were located in Massachusetts. The places that lost the greatest number of total residents were Suffolk (-32,505), Middlesex (-8,076), and Hampden (-5,548) counties. Much of the decline in total population (-31,500) was concentrated there.

Figure 1: County Population Change, 2020-2023



Note: Analysis of county population change based on Census Bureau [population estimates](#)

However, losses were not uniform. Areas of Massachusetts such as Worcester (+4,750) and Plymouth (+4,489) counties continued to grow.

The largest growing counties in all of New England were Cumberland County, ME (+7,165); York County, ME (+6,617); Rockingham County, NH (+6,509); and Naugatuck Central Planning Region, CT (+5,693).

Figure 2: Population Change by Major Demographics

STATE	TOTAL POPULATION	MALE	FEMALE	UNDER 18	AGE 18-24	AGE 25-44	AGE 45-64	AGE +65
NH	24,530	12,892	11,638	-8,094	-3,480	19,344	-17,890	34,650
% change	1.78%	1.88%	1.68%	-3.11%	-2.82%	5.76%	-4.46%	13.49%
MA	-31,534	-17,413	-14,121	-52,205	-8,195	8,678	-88,160	108,348
% change	-0.45%	-0.51%	-0.39%	-3.74%	-1.19%	0.46%	-4.69%	9.14%
VT	4,387	1,616	2,771	-4,467	-1,244	5,750	-10,015	14,363
% change	0.68%	0.51%	0.86%	-3.75%	-1.92%	3.78%	-5.62%	11.15%
RI	-1,409	-325	-1,084	-8,603	-3,148	7,996	-15,800	18,146
% change	-0.13%	-0.06%	-0.19%	-4.05%	-2.81%	2.81%	-5.36%	9.38%
CT	11,264	3,953	7,311	-19,710	-4,871	27,429	-50,576	58,992
% change	0.31%	0.22%	0.40%	-2.65%	-1.43%	3.08%	-5.05%	9.34%
ME	32,545	15,558	16,987	-5,526	4,011	18,361	-16,791	32,490
% change	2.39%	2.32%	2.46%	-2.17%	3.76%	5.68%	-4.30%	11.27%

Note: Analysis of county population change based on Census Bureau [population estimates](#)

DATA NOTE

New estimates released by the Census Bureau in December 2024 have revised state total population change numbers for 2020-2023, the Bureau has altered its methodology to incorporate administrative data that is more accurate at counting migrants and other immigrants that are difficult to survey. However, for the sake of this newsletter and since 2024 county estimates will not be released until later this year, we will continue to use these numbers (the Vintage 2023 estimates) as directionally informative for this newsletter. Our next newsletter will discuss the Vintage 2024 estimates and new Census methodology.

The average age in Massachusetts was 40.3 years old in 2023. That makes it the youngest on average in New England but the 15th oldest nationwide.

FAST FACT

As seen in Figure 2, population change among the New England states differed by age and sex. Even states that grew in total population declined in the number of young people under the age of 18. Declines ranged from -8,603 in Rhode Island to -1,971 in Connecticut.

Correspondingly, each state got older. New Hampshire led the pack by increasing its 65+ population by 13.49 percent (+34,650). Massachusetts had the smallest percent gain (+9.14 percent) but the largest numerical gain (+108,348).

Growth in prime aged workers also differed. While the largest state, Massachusetts, only gained 8,678 new individuals aged 24 to 44, New Hampshire (+19,344), Maine (+18,361), and Connecticut (+27,429) each added a significantly higher number.

STAY TUNED!

Upcoming issues of Mapping Mass Migration will include analyses of:

- State components of change in 2024 (domestic migration, international migration, and natural population change)
- Change in national migration trends over time
- Migration by educational attainment and income

IF YOU MISSED IT

Previous editions of the newsletter covered:

- [State-to-State Migration Trends 2005-2023](#)
- [International Inflows into Massachusetts](#)
- [Migration trends for remote workers](#)