

# Tennessee Population Growth 2000-2010

**Tennessee's growth rate during the 10-year period was 11.5%, almost 20% higher than the national growth rate of 9.7%.**

by **H. Ronald Moser and Horace E. Johns\***

### Total Population

At the state level of aggregation, the 2010 Census count showed that Tennessee had a total population of 6,346,105, its highest population ever. This figure represents a growth of 656,822 people or 11.5 percent from the 2000 population of 5,689,283. Tennessee's growth rate during the relevant 10-year period was almost 20 percent higher than the comparable national growth rate of 9.7 percent. Only 18 of the 50 states experienced a larger percentage increase than did Tennessee. Tennessee ranked 17th among the states in total population size in 2010 and 16th in 2000.

Not only did Tennessee's population grow faster than that of the nation during the period from 2000 to 2010, but it also grew faster than the population in many neighboring states. As a group, the 11 southern states experienced a population increase of 15.5 percent from 2000 to 2010. Every state in the region shared in the increase, with Tennessee being in seventh position in terms of relative population growth. Texas and North Carolina led the group with figures of 20.6 percent and 18.5 percent, respectively, while Louisiana was at the bottom with a figure of 1.4 percent. Seven of the 11 southern states recorded a percentage increase greater than the national average.

Another significant fact is that the population in Tennessee has increased at an accelerating rate in every decennial census since 1950 and seems to be continuing to increase somewhat. The state's population growth rate was only 8.4 percent in the 1950s but rose slightly to 10.1 percent in the 1960s before climbing to 16.9 percent in 1970. The growth rate for the 1980s was somewhat lower at 10.4 percent. This rapid growth rate, and the likelihood that it will continue, raises many questions about the state's ability to recruit enough new industries to provide the necessary jobs as well as adequate social services and public welfare programs to sustain its growing number of inhabitants.

### County Growth

Every year, thousands of Tennesseans move to a new location. The perceived advantage of one location over another changes over time. Sometimes the move involves emigration to another county or to another state in the U.S. Frequently, however, it is a movement across town or to another city or county within the same state, most often to a faster-growing adjacent area where employment opportunities are better.

Primarily because of this human ebb and flow, population growth is rarely uniform across areas and regions. In the following analysis, data will be examined to show exactly where population growth has

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occurred by county in Tennessee from 2000 to 2010. A later section will identify factors that appear to be associated with changes in population. For comparative and analytical purposes, counties will be grouped into the three traditional grand divisions: west, middle, and east Tennessee. This grouping provides the basis for the more systematic study of population trends, lends a regional dimension to the study, and provides depth to an understanding of the obvious geographic split in the subarea patterns of growth in the state.

As mentioned above, the state's population grew by 11.5 percent during the period from 2000 to 2010. Population changes in individual counties ranged from a growth of 44.7 percent in Williamson County and 44.3 percent in Rutherford County to a decline of 5.1 percent in Haywood County. Eight counties recorded a decrease in population, 25 grew faster on a proportionate basis than the state as a whole, and other counties grew by less than the state average. The tables accompanying the text for each of the three grand divisions show comparative patterns of growth from 2000 to 2010 for each of the state's 95 counties.

Shelby County (Memphis) was the most populous in the state in 2000, and it continued to hold first place in 2010. The population buildup in this area is due to the fact that Memphis is the most important railroad center in the state, the site of a large health services complex, home to a large regional airport, one of the largest distribution centers in the country, the site of a large university and several smaller institutions of higher learning, the headquarters for a number of very large corporations, and a processing center for soybeans, cotton, rice, and other crops that grow in the Mississippi delta. The second, third, and fourth most populous counties in 2000 were Davidson (Nashville), Knox (Knoxville), and Hamilton (Chattanooga), respectively. This rank order did not change from 2000 to 2010.

Although Shelby County was the most populous in 2000 and 2010, it did not gain the most people. The 2010 Census count showed Rutherford County with 80,581 more residents than it had in 2000. In addition to Rutherford, three other counties recorded population gains of 50,000 or more: Davidson with 56,790, Williamson with 56,544, and Knox with 50,194. These counties are among the state's most economically diversified counties. Each is part of a metropolitan statistical area that offers employment opportunities as well as social advantages conducive to population buildup. Also, each is traversed by one or more interstate highways. These factors help explain why counties containing population nodes experienced more growth in 2010.

Size of county was positively related to population growth in Tennessee from 2000 to 2010. Growing counties are among the state's largest, although some of the largest counties experienced relatively slow growth. For example, only one of the four largest counties, Knox, grew as rapidly on a relative basis as the state as a whole. Of the 10 counties in Tennessee with the largest absolute increase in population over the past 10 years, only one, Sevier, had a population of less than 100,000 in 2010.

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## Growth by Grand Division

Population growth was not equally distributed among the grand divisions of the state from 2000 to 2010. The division experiencing the greatest population growth was middle Tennessee with an 18.0 percent increase, somewhat above the statewide growth rate of 11.5 percent and significantly above the national growth rate of 9.7 percent. East Tennessee was second with a 10.4 percent increase, slightly below the statewide growth. West Tennessee grew by only 4.2 percent during the 10-year period. These proportional differences serve as a reminder that individual regions may perform substantially better or worse than the entire state and that simple generalizations about population growth for a state as diverse as Tennessee should be avoided.

Analysis of census data reveals, as might be expected, that population growth measurements for a single grand division are often not representative of all of its counties. In fact, there seems to be almost as much disparity between the counties of each division as there is between divisions. Several counties or areas of population concentration grew much faster or much slower from 2000 to 2010 than did the division of which they are a part. Many reasons can be hypothesized for these growth differentials. Brief analyses of population growth trends in each of the state's major divisions are provided in the following pages.

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# Tennessee Population Growth 2000-2010

## Western Division

As previously noted, the Western Division registered a growth rate significantly below the state and national average from 2000 to 2010. Although Shelby County had a gain of more than 30,000 people for the relevant 10-year period and Tipton county, a bedroom county of Memphis, had a greater than 19 percent increase in population for this period, the total gain in population for west Tennessee was much less than for middle and east Tennessee.

Only three West Tennessee counties, Chester, Fayette, and Tipton, recorded a growth rate of more than 10 percent from 2000 to 2010. One reason that so many Western Division counties lost population or gained very slowly is that many of these counties lie outside the state's major transportation routes, either railroads or highways. Also, many west Tennessee counties rely heavily on agriculture. As agricultural conditions continue to change, with fewer farms and fewer farmers, economic opportunities diminish in these counties, and their residents look outside the area for jobs. Thus, many Western Division counties continue to lose young people through out-migration.

It is interesting to observe that the age structure has changed over time in those Western Division counties that have lost population or grown slowly. For decades, many of these counties have seen young people leave for jobs in urban areas inside or outside Tennessee. As a result, the resident population in West Tennessee is older, with median ages that exceed the state average in over two out of every three counties. Moreover, the over-65 age group constitutes a larger percentage of the total population than the state average. These demographic factors have led to fewer births, declining school enrollments, and in some cases a natural decline in population (i.e., more deaths than births in a year). This, in turn, has led to various forms of economic deterioration, including aging and vacant housing units.

Due to the above factors, the economic structure has changed in these counties. With more people in the retirement-age category, the average income tends to be lower than in counties in which a larger percentage of the population is engaged in economically productive activity. Less income is earned from current labor and more from transfer payments such as Social Security and public assistance, so fewer taxes are generated. Thus, several counties in west Tennessee have faced decades of population loss, culminating in adverse economic and demographic consequences. Further population losses will have even more severe results because the population and economic bases have already eroded over the decades. The future viability of many small communities in these counties is questionable. More than the other divisions, the Western Division needs state assistance in diversifying its economy and developing a stronger economic base.

Shelby County accounted for significantly more of the population increase in the Western Division from 2000 to 2010 than any other county, almost as much as all other counties in that division combined. Although Shelby County grew very slowly, almost four times as slowly as the state average, several factors may have contributed to this slow growth rate. One reason is that in recent years its growth rate of the earlier part of the 20th Century could not

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## Tennessee Population Growth 2000-2010

### Western Division Counties: Population Change and Rank, 2000-2010

County	Census				Change			
	2000		2010		2000		2010	
	Number	Rank	Number	Rank	Number	Rank	%	Rank
Benton	16,537	74	16,489	76	-48	88	-0.3	88
Carroll	29,475	47	28,522	51	-953	94	-3.2	93
Chester	15,540	76	17,131	73	1,591	60	10.2	29
Crockett	14,532	77	14,586	77	54	83	0.4	84
Decatur	11,731	82	11,757	84	26	87	0.2	86
Dyer	37,279	39	38,335	41	1,056	60	2.8	73
Fayette	28,806	48	38,413	40	9,607	18	33.4	3
Gibson	48,152	27	49,683	30	1,531	52	3.2	72
Hardeman	28,105	51	27,253	55	-852	93	-3.0	92
Hardin	25,578	55	26,026	57	448	77	1.8	78
Haywood	19,798	64	18,787	67	-1,010	95	-5.1	95
Henderson	25,522	56	27,760	54	2,238	41	8.8	38
Henry	31,115	45	32,330	45	1,215	58	3.9	67
Lake	7,954	89	7,832	91	-122	90	-1.5	90
Lauderdale	27,101	53	27,815	53	714	67	2.6	75
Madison	91,837	12	98,294	14	6,457	24	7.0	48
McNairy	24,653	57	26,075	56	1,422	54	5.8	56
Obion	32,450	43	31,807	48	-643	92	-2.0	90
Shelby	897,472	1	927,644	1	30,172	7	3.4	71
Tipton	51,271	25	61,081	22	9,810	17	19.1	13
Weakley	34,895	41	35,021	43	126	82	0.4	85
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,499,803</b>		<b>1,562,641</b>		<b>62,838</b>		<b>4.0</b>	
<b>Tennessee</b>	<b>5,689,283</b>		<b>6,346,105</b>					

be sustained and supported by the existing economic (agricultural) base. Of more immediate impact is the loss of several large manufacturing and financial-service establishments in the past several years, including the relocation out of state of regional offices of major insurance carriers as well as International Harvester and Firestone.

Counties contiguous to Shelby County did not experience the sharp population surge in the 2000-2010 period that those adjacent to Nashville and Knoxville enjoyed. One reason is that the primary beneficiaries of the population spillover from the Memphis metropolitan areas were neighboring counties in northern Mississippi. Given current growth trends, the Nashville MSA will have more inhabitants than the Memphis MSA in the near future.

# Tennessee Population Growth 2000-2010

## Middle Division

The population buildup around Nashville helps explain the large number of counties experiencing growth in middle Tennessee. Though Davidson County (Nashville) had a smaller growth rate than the state average, four suburban counties in the Nashville MSA were among the top 10 counties in the state in terms of relative numbers of people added since 2000. Each of these counties experienced growth rates of more than 20 percent during this 10-year period. They are a part of what has become one of the most economically vibrant and dynamically growing areas in the country. Nashville is characterized by a highly diversified economy, a broadening skyline, entrepreneurial successes, many visitors, and lots of publicity.

The centrality associated with the city — it is a transportation and commercial hub, the seat of state government, the center of the country-music industry, the home of professional football and hockey teams, and the home of many profitable financial institutions — has enabled it to dominate and overwhelm the smaller towns and cities in the area.

Several other factors have encouraged growth in the Nashville metropolitan area. The acquisition of manufacturing facilities like the Nissan plant near Smyrna, a Dell plant near Lebanon, a large DuPont plant in the Old Hickory area, and the north-south American Airlines hub at the Nashville Metropolitan Airport have created new jobs and accelerated population growth. The Nashville MSA is expected to have close to 1,400,000 people by 2020, up from 1,357,105 in 2010. The prospects are bright for even more economic growth and commercial success. The rapid growth of the Nashville metropolitan area raises many questions about urban sprawl over Davidson County and its contiguous counties and mushrooming subdivisions throughout the area. High ranking in population, income, and employment growth often leads to high expectations for public services and to financial stress in providing those services.

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## Middle Division Counties: Population Change and Rank, 2000-2010

County	Census				Change			
	2000		2010		2000		2010	
	Number	Rank	Number	Rank	Number	Rank	%	Rank
Bedford	37,586	38	45,058	33	7,472	21	19.9	11
Cannon	12,826	79	13,801	79	975	61	7.6	44
Cheatham	35,912	40	39,105	39	3,193	35	8.9	37
Clay	7,976	88	7,861	90	-115	89	-1.4	89
Coffee	48,014	28	52,796	27	4,782	27	10.0	30
Davidson	569,891	2	626,681	2	56,790	2	10.0	30
Dekalb	17,423	71	18,723	68	1,300	57	7.5	46
Dickson	43,156	31	49,666	31	6,510	23	15.1	18
Fentress	16,625	73	17,959	72	1,334	55	8	41
Franklin	39,270	34	41,052	36	1,782	49	4.5	61
Giles	29,447	48	29,485	50	38	85	0.1	87
Gundy	14,332	78	13,703	80	-629	91	-4.4	94
Hickman	22,295	59	24,690	59	2,395	38	10.7	28
Houston	8,088	87	8,426	87	338	78	4.2	64
Humphreys	17,929	66	18,538	69	609	74	3.4	70
Jackson	10,984	86	11,638	86	654	70	6.0	54
Lawrence	39,926	32	41,869	35	1,943	47	4.9	59
Lewis	11,367	84	12,161	83	794	64	7.0	48
Lincoln	31,340	44	33,361	44	2,021	44	6.4	51
Macon	20,386	62	22,248	61	1,862	48	9.1	36
Marshall	26,767	54	30,617	49	3,850	29	14.4	20
Maury	69,498	17	80,956	16	11,458	14	16.5	14
Montgomery	134,768	7	172,331	7	37,563	5	27.9	5
Moore	5,740	93	6,362	93	622	72	10.8	27
Overton	20,118	63	22,083	63	1,965	46	9.8	32
Perry	7,631	90	7,915	88	284	79	3.7	68
Pickett	4,945	95	5,077	95	132	81	2.7	74
Putman	62,315	19	72,321	18	10,006	16	16.1	16
Robertson	54,433	22	66,283	20	11,850	13	21.8	10
Rutherford	182,023	5	262,604	5	80,581	1	44.3	2
Sequatchie	11,370	83	14,112	78	2,742	36	24.1	8
Smith	17,712	68	19,166	65	1,454	63	8.2	40
Stewart	12,370	80	13,324	81	954	62	7.7	43
Sumner	130,449	8	160,645	8	30,196	6	23.1	9
Trousdale	7,259	91	7,870	89	611	73	8.4	39
Van Buren	5,508	94	5,548	94	40	84	0.7	82
Warren	38,276	37	39,839	38	1,563	51	4.1	65
Wayne	16,842	72	17,021	74	179	80	1.1	81
White	23,102	58	25,841	58	2,739	37	11.9	25
Williamson	126,638	9	183,182	6	56,544	3	44.7	1
Wilson	88,809	13	113,993	12	25,184	9	28.4	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,081,346</b>		<b>2,455,911</b>		<b>374,565</b>		<b>18.0</b>	
<b>Tennessee</b>	<b>5,689,283</b>		<b>6,346,105</b>					

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## Eastern Division

The Eastern Division grew less rapidly than the Middle Division but also showed widely differing growth among counties. Five east Tennessee counties experienced population growth of more than 15 percent: Blount, Cumberland, Jefferson, Loudon, and Sevier counties. No Eastern Division counties lost population (see table).

Rapid growth was experienced in Knox County and the suburban counties in the Knoxville MSA. The World's Fair in 1982 bolstered growth in this area, which has also received national attention on lists of the best places to retire. Production and research activities related to the technology corridor as well as the presence of many TVA facilities and the state's largest university provide the Knoxville MSA with the foundation for a strong and stable economy.

The Chattanooga area did not fare as well as the Knoxville area. Unlike Knoxville, where service-related businesses tend to dominate, Chattanooga depends more on industrial-type businesses. Industrial business operation is typically more cyclical in nature than service-oriented enterprises, and this may help explain the more sluggish performance of the economy and the concomitant lack of rapid population buildup in Chattanooga since the 1990s.

Several of the counties in the Eastern Division that experienced slow population growth border Kentucky and stretch along a line from Macon County in middle Tennessee to Hancock County in east Tennessee. Other counties experiencing little or no growth lie deep in Appalachia along the North Carolina border and between the three metropolitan statistical areas located in the Eastern Division of the state. These counties are among the most culturally and economically deprived and most isolated counties in the state, and they have a large percentage of illiterate or poorly educated adults. Census records reveal that 25 percent or more of the population of some of these counties has less than a high school education. Some of the population has a per capita income of less than \$25,000, compared to a state average of more than \$42,000.

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## Reference

Population estimates in this report are taken from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Local Population Estimates, Current Population Reports*, June 3, 2011.

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## Tennessee Population Growth 2000-2010

### Eastern Division Counties: Population Change and Rank, 2000-2010

County	Census				Change			
	2000		2010		2000		2010	
	Number	Rank	Number	Rank	Number	Rank	%	Rank
Anderson	71,330	15	75,129	17	3,799	30	5.3	57
Bledsoe	12,367	81	12,876	82	509	75	4.1	65
Blount	105,823	11	123,010	10	17,187	11	16.2	15
Bradley	87,965	14	98,963	13	10,998	15	12.5	23
Campbell	39,854	33	40,716	37	862	63	2.2	77
Carter	56,741	21	57,424	23	683	68	1.2	80
Claiborne	29,862	46	32,213	46	2,351	39	7.9	42
Cocke	33,565	42	35,662	42	2,097	43	6.2	52
Cumberland	46,802	29	56,053	25	9,251	20	19.8	12
Grainger	20,659	61	22,657	60	1,998	45	9.7	33
Green	62,909	18	68,831	19	5,922	25	9.4	34
Hamblen	58,128	20	62,544	21	4,416	28	7.6	45
Hamilton	307,896	4	336,463	4	28,567	8	9.3	35
Hancock	6,786	92	6,819	92	33	86	0.5	83
Hawkins	53,563	23	56,833	24	3,270	33	6.1	53
Jefferson	44,294	30	51,407	29	7,113	22	16.1	16
Johnson	17,499	70	18,244	71	745	66	4.3	63
Knox	382,032	3	432,226	3	50,194	4	13.1	22
Loudon	39,085	35	48,556	32	9,471	19	24.2	7
McMinn	49,015	26	52,266	28	3,251	34	6.6	50
Marion	27,776	52	28,237	52	461	76	1.7	79
Meigs	11,086	85	11,753	85	667	69	6.0	55
Monroe	38,961	36	44,519	34	5,558	26	14.3	21
Morgan	19,757	65	21,987	64	2,230	42	11.3	26
Polk	16,050	75	16,825	75	775	65	4.8	60
Rhea	28,400	50	31,809	47	3,409	32	12.0	24
Roane	51,910	24	54,181	26	2,271	40	4.4	62
Scott	21,127	60	22,228	62	1,101	59	5.2	58
Sevier	71,170	16	89,889	15	18,719	10	26.3	6
Sullivan	153,048	6	156,823	9	3,775	31	2.5	76
Unicoi	17,667	69	18,313	70	646	71	3.7	68
Union	17,808	67	19,109	66	1,301	56	7.3	47
Washington	107,198	10	122,979	11	15,781	12	14.7	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,108,133</b>		<b>2,327,544</b>		<b>219,411</b>		<b>10.0</b>	
<b>Tennessee</b>	<b>5,689,283</b>		<b>6,346,105</b>					