

State and County Population Estimates for Utah: 2021

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Overview

Estimates for July 1, 2021 indicate that the state added approximately 71,936 people since the 2020 census, reaching an estimated 3,343,552 Utahns. From July 1, 2020, to July 1, 2021, the population grew by 58,729 people. This annual growth rate of 1.8% is the highest it has been since 2017. The 2021 estimates indicate a resurgence in high growth as the economy and society return to a new normal during the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

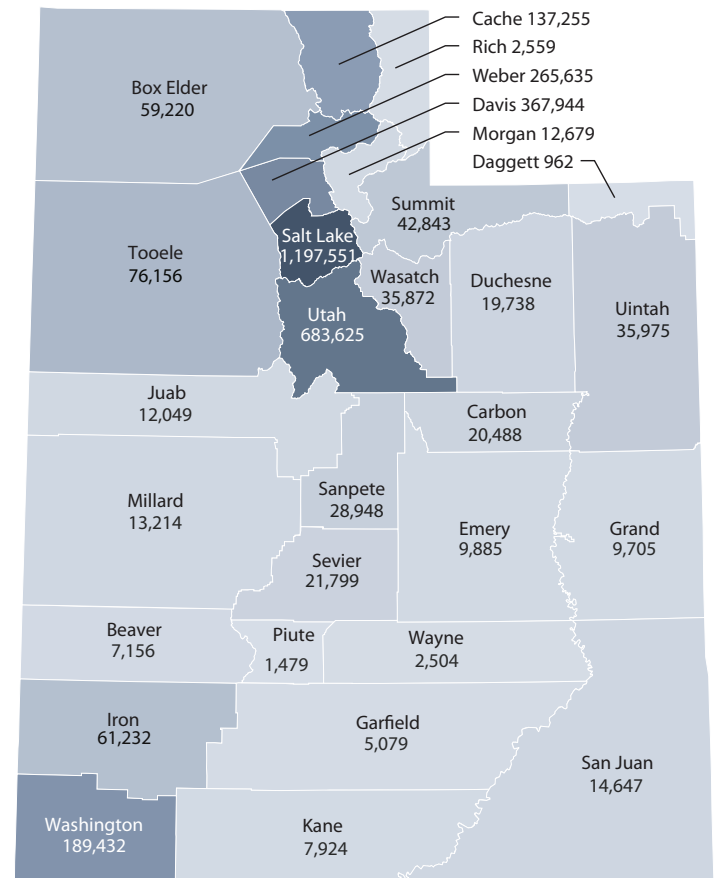
There has been much speculation around COVID-19's impacts on fertility and births, but Utah's birth data does not currently indicate a COVID-19 effect, with only a 1.9% decline. However, deaths increased by approximately 2,800 (or 14.9%), resulting in the lowest natural increase on state record since 1975. Utah's net migration increased to the highest level since 2005, now at 34,858 and almost 10,000 higher than last year. Net migration contributed 59% of Utah's population growth this year.

Several counties are experiencing significant growth. Iron County has the fastest growth at 6.2%, followed by Tooele County (4.1%), Washington County (4.0%), and Utah County (2.9%). Almost all of Iron County's growth is from net migration (90%). Utah County experienced the highest numeric annual increase this year with 19,367 new residents or 2.9% growth, more than half of which came from net migration. Utah County's increase accounts for 33.0% of statewide growth. Figure 1 and Table 1 display the 2021 county population estimates.

State-level Results

Utah experienced strong population growth from 2020 to 2021, though not as high as the percentage growth increases between 2015-2017 (see Figure 2). The 2020 census data indicated Utah was the fastest-growing state in the nation from 2010-2020, increasing by 18.4%.¹ Historically, natural increase dominated the state's total population growth; however, in 2021, positive net migration was the main contributor to Utah's population growth (59%) and the largest annual share of the state's population growth in recent history. This is partially due to natural increase's sharp decline from the wave of COVID-19 related deaths.

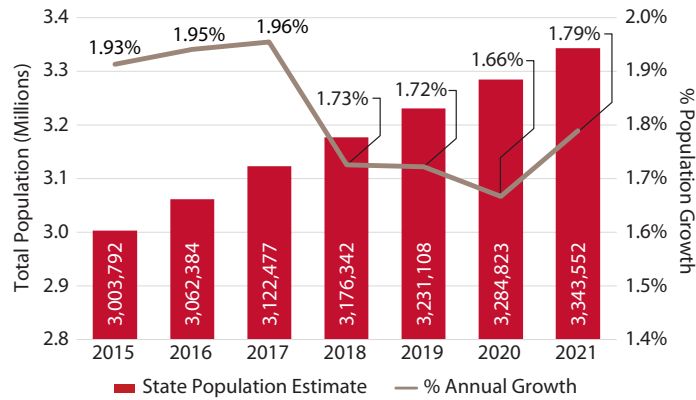
Figure 1: Utah Population Estimates, 2021



Source: Utah Population Committee, Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute

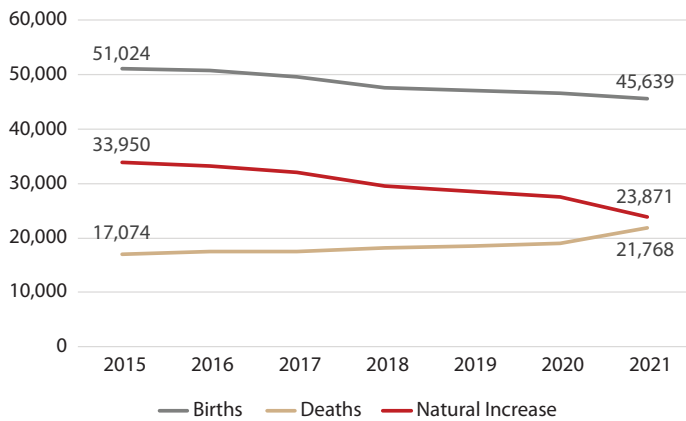
The Utah Population Committee (UPC), chaired and staffed by the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute, produced Utah's state and county population estimates for July 1, 2021. The 2010 Decennial Census provided the baseline for previous estimates. The 2021 estimates incorporate the most recent 2020 Decennial Census data, released in August 2021.² The 2021 series marks the beginning of a new set of postcensal estimates, extending from July 1, 2020, until the next Decennial Census in 2030. The 2010-2020 estimates series have been revised to reflect the two decennial endpoints.³

Figure 2: Utah's Population and Annual Growth Rates, 2015–2021



Source: Utah Population Committee, Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute (2015-2021)

Figure 4: State Vital Records, 2015–2021



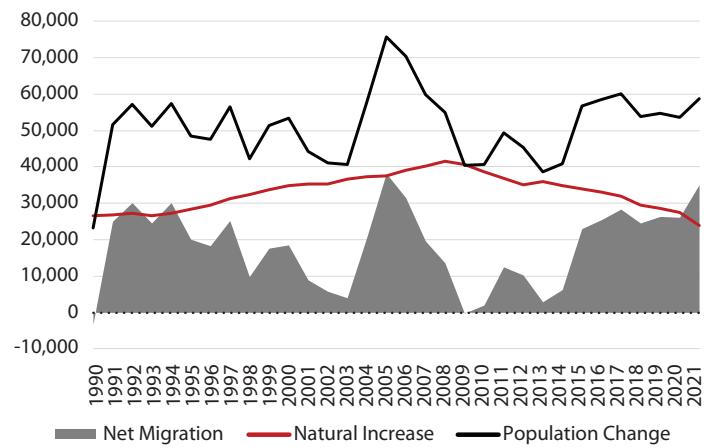
Source: Utah Department of Health

Natural Increase

Natural increase is the number of annual births minus annual deaths. Since July 1, 2010, Utah has experienced an annual decline in natural increase due to annual births decreasing while annual deaths increase. National trends during this same period depict a declining fertility rate significantly impacted by the Great Recession. Utah's total fertility rate (TFR) fell from 2.45 in 2010 to below replacement level (1.99 in 2019), moving from the highest TFR in the nation to the third highest.⁴

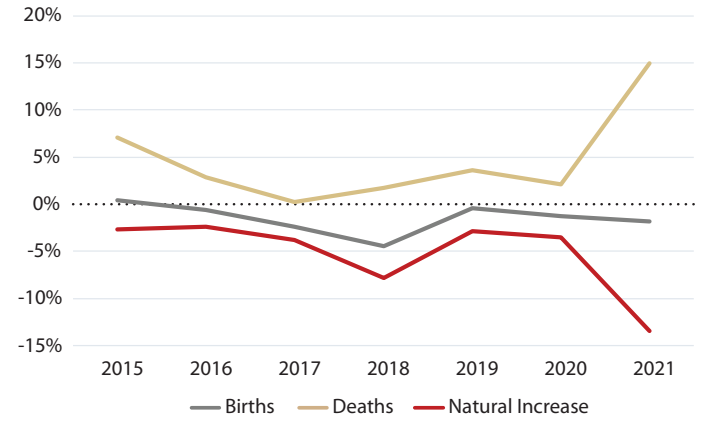
During the early stages of the pandemic, many wondered if COVID-19 would have a positive or negative impact on declining births. The July 1, 2020 estimates could not capture this impact due to the delay between fertility intentions and the outcome of an actual birth (10 months). The 2021 estimates reflect six months of birth data that contain a potential COVID-19 effect. Currently, the data don't indicate much if any difference. Utah's births slightly declined, but not by an unusual amount. With additional data in the future, there could potentially be more evidence of a COVID-19 effect.

Figure 3: State Components of Change, 1990–2021



Source: Utah Population Committee, Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute

Figure 5: State Vital Records Annual Percent Change, 2015–2021



Source: Utah Department of Health

Prior to COVID-19, national and state deaths increased as median ages rose, but deaths in Utah sky-rocketed by 15%, or approximately 2,800 this year. This sharp increase in deaths is not a surprise and provides a stark reminder of the pandemic's toll on Utah over the last year.

Natural increase in 2021 is at its lowest since 1975 when the population was 1,233,900. In 1975, Utah's population was 2.1 million less than today, or a mere 37% of its current size. Natural increase's sharp decline is a direct result of the extra COVID-19 related deaths. This year's very low natural increase is a stark break from long-established patterns. Cumulative natural increase since 1991 accounts for approximately two-thirds of Utah's overall population growth. However, for the last 15 years, natural increase has steadily reduced as a share of population growth. Currently, natural increase accounts for only 41% of annual population growth in Utah (see Figure 6), meaning net migration fueled most of Utah's 2021 population growth.

Net Migration

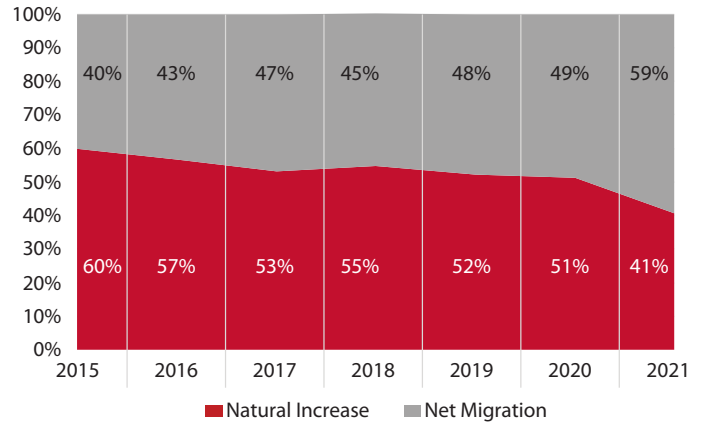
Utah's 2021 net migration is 34,858, almost 10,000 more than last year's estimate. This estimate is the highest net migration since 2005 and is the 7th consecutive year that net migration has been above 20,000. Net migration contributed 59% of Utah's population growth over the past year, up from 49% of state growth the year before (see Figure 6). Net migration's share of population growth is higher than usual this year due to the increase in COVID-19 related deaths, resulting in less natural increase than usual.

Net migration is gross in-migration (people moving into the state or a county) minus gross out-migration (people moving out of the state or a county). Migration is historically more volatile than natural increase and is very sensitive to societal and economic situations. Positive net migration is often an indicator of favorable economic conditions, particularly in the western United States.⁵ Recent data showed that Utah reported its lowest unemployment rate in recorded history, and Utah typically sees higher net in-migration when unemployment rates are low.⁶

Region and County-level Results

Several counties are experiencing significant growth. Iron County had the fastest growth at 6.2%, followed by Tooele County (4.1%), Washington County (4.0%), and Utah County (2.9%). Utah County had the highest natural increase, net migration, and

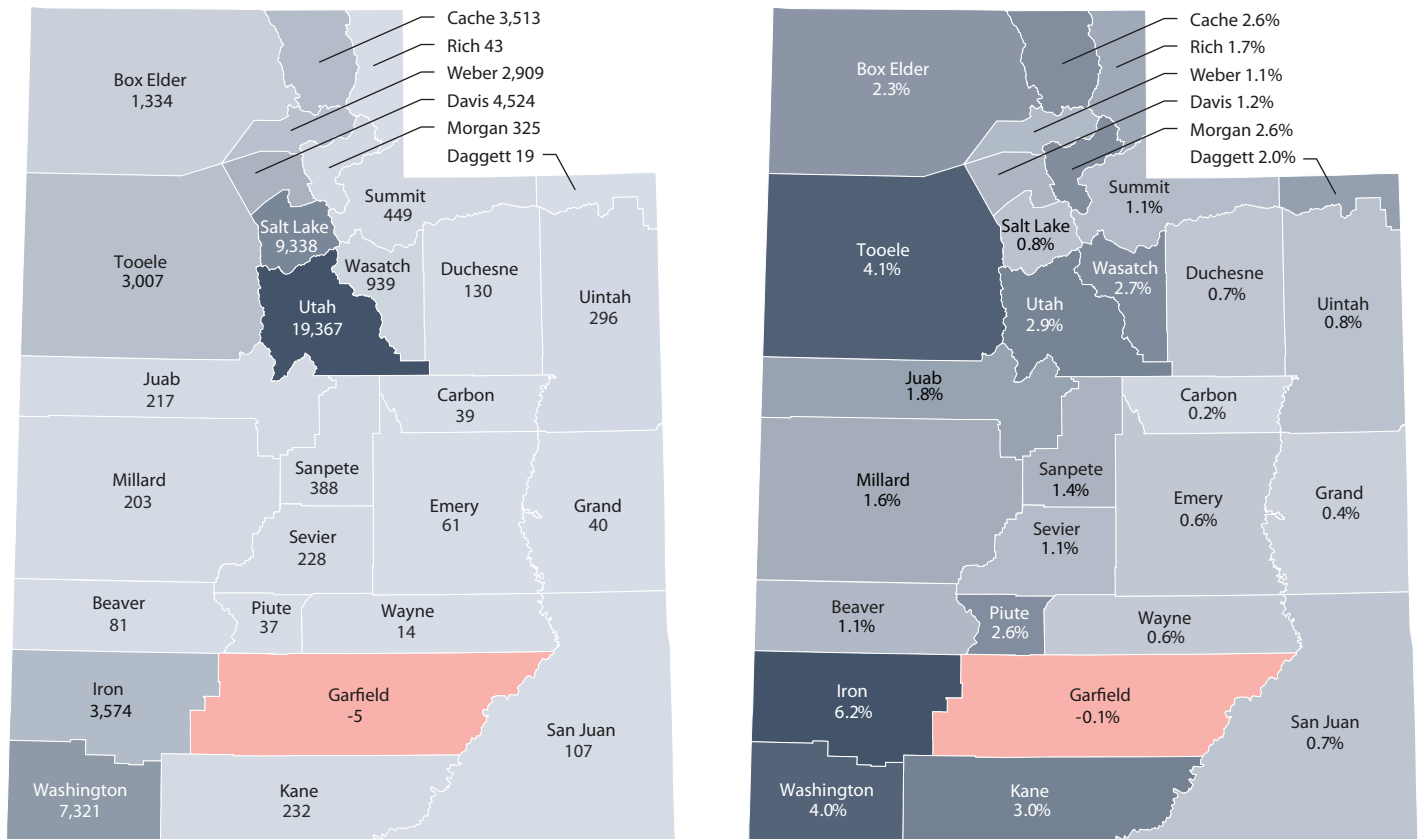
Figure 6: State Net Migration and Natural Increase's Share of Annual Population Growth, 2015-2021



Source: Utah Population Committee, Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute

population growth in the state, far exceeding Salt Lake County's 0.8% growth. One-third of statewide growth between July 1, 2020 and July 1, 2021 came from Utah County residents. Salt Lake County contributed 15.9% of growth and Washington County was responsible for 12.5% of growth (see Figure 8). Davis, Weber, Cache, Iron, and Tooele counties contributed between 7% and 5% each to the state's growth. This continues the decades-long trend of rapid growth in Southwestern Utah, the Wasatch Front, and its neighboring suburban counties.

Figure 7: Absolute and Percentage Changes in County Population, 2020-2021



Source: Utah Population Committee, Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute

Table 1: Population Estimates and Components of Change, 2020-2021

Economic Region/County	April 1, 2020 Census	2020 Population	2021 Population	July 1, 2020-July 1, 2021		July 1, 2021				
				Absolute Growth	Growth Rate	Births	Deaths	Natural Increase	Net Migration	Net Migration Share of Growth
Greater Salt Lake	2,836,793	2,847,422	2,893,388	45,966	1.61%	40,114	17,537	22,577	23,389	51%
Box Elder	57,666	57,886	59,220	1,334	2.31%	780	481	299	1,035	78%
Cache	133,154	133,743	137,255	3,513	2.63%	2,069	669	1,400	2,113	60%
Davis	362,679	363,419	367,944	4,524	1.24%	4,789	2,216	2,573	1,951	43%
Juab	11,786	11,831	12,049	217	1.84%	212	86	126	91	42%
Morgan	12,295	12,353	12,679	325	2.63%	140	78	62	263	81%
Rich	2,510	2,517	2,559	43	1.70%	32	13	19	24	56%
Salt Lake	1,185,238	1,188,213	1,197,551	9,338	0.79%	14,908	7,918	6,990	2,348	25%
Summit	42,357	42,394	42,843	449	1.06%	412	178	234	215	48%
Tooele	72,698	73,149	76,156	3,007	4.11%	1,057	461	596	2,411	80%
Utah	659,399	664,258	683,625	19,367	2.92%	11,850	3,151	8,699	10,668	55%
Wasatch	34,788	34,933	35,872	939	2.69%	381	192	189	750	80%
Weber	262,223	262,727	265,635	2,909	1.11%	3,484	2,094	1,390	1,519	52%
Uintah Basin	56,151	56,230	56,674	444	0.79%	791	515	276	168	38%
Daggett	935	943	962	19	1.99%	13	6	7	12	63%
Duchesne	19,596	19,608	19,738	130	0.66%	247	166	81	49	38%
Uintah	35,620	35,679	35,975	296	0.83%	531	343	188	108	36%
West Central	66,858	67,073	67,943	870	1.30%	900	707	193	677	78%
Millard	12,975	13,010	13,214	203	1.56%	189	139	50	153	75%
Piute	1,438	1,442	1,479	37	2.58%	19	17	2	35	95%
Sanpete	28,437	28,560	28,948	388	1.36%	369	264	105	283	73%
Sevier	21,522	21,571	21,799	228	1.06%	283	246	37	191	84%
Wayne	2,486	2,490	2,504	14	0.56%	40	41		15	100%
East Central	30,237	30,273	30,373	100	0.33%	339	389	-50	150	100%
Carbon	20,412	20,449	20,488	39	0.19%	232	275	-43	82	100%
Emery	9,825	9,824	9,885	61	0.62%	107	114	-7	68	100%
Southeast	24,187	24,205	24,352	147	0.61%	264	202	62	85	58%
Grand	9,669	9,664	9,705	40	0.41%	95	68	27	13	33%
San Juan	14,518	14,541	14,647	107	0.73%	169	134	35	72	67%
Southwest	257,390	259,621	270,823	11,202	4.31%	3,225	2,415	810	10,392	93%
Beaver	7,072	7,076	7,156	81	1.14%	90	72	18	63	78%
Garfield	5,083	5,084	5,079	-5	-0.09%	56	75	-19	14	100%
Iron	57,289	57,658	61,232	3,574	6.20%	746	398	348	3,226	90%
Kane	7,667	7,692	7,924	232	3.01%	84	87	-3	235	100%
Washington	180,279	182,111	189,432	7,321	4.02%	2,249	1,783	466	6,855	94%
State	3,271,616	3,284,823	3,343,552	58,729	1.79%	45,639	21,768	23,871	34,858	59%

Notes: All UPC data are dated July 1 of the calendar year

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau (April 1, 2020); Utah Population Committee, Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute (2020-2021)

Only one county had estimated population loss: Garfield County. Garfield County had net in-migration but experienced a natural decrease, indicating that their annual population decline is due to more people dying than being born.

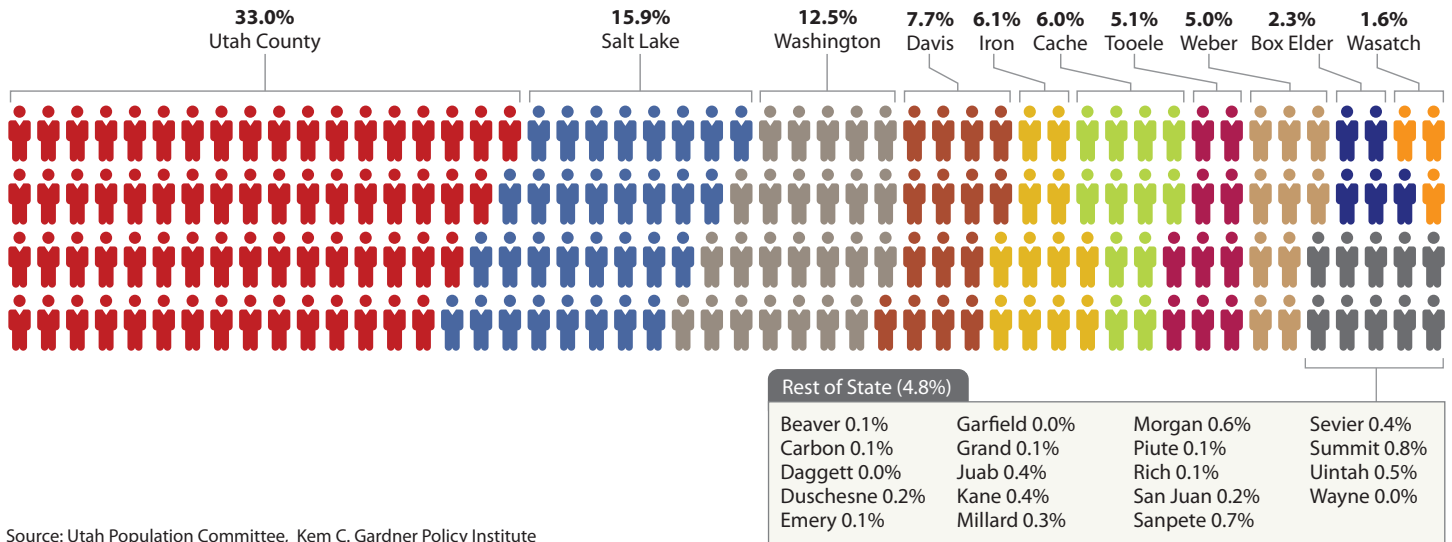
Natural Increase and Net Migration

Natural increase and net migration have had a fairly stable relationship at the state level, but there is more variation at the county level. Typically, slower-growing counties are fueled by natural increase, with less or negative net migration and faster-

growing counties are fueled more by net migration. However, as births have continued to decline and deaths sharply increased this year, net migration has become a larger share of population growth for more than just the fast-growing urban counties. Last year, eight counties experienced net out-migration, whereas no counties experienced net out-migration this year.

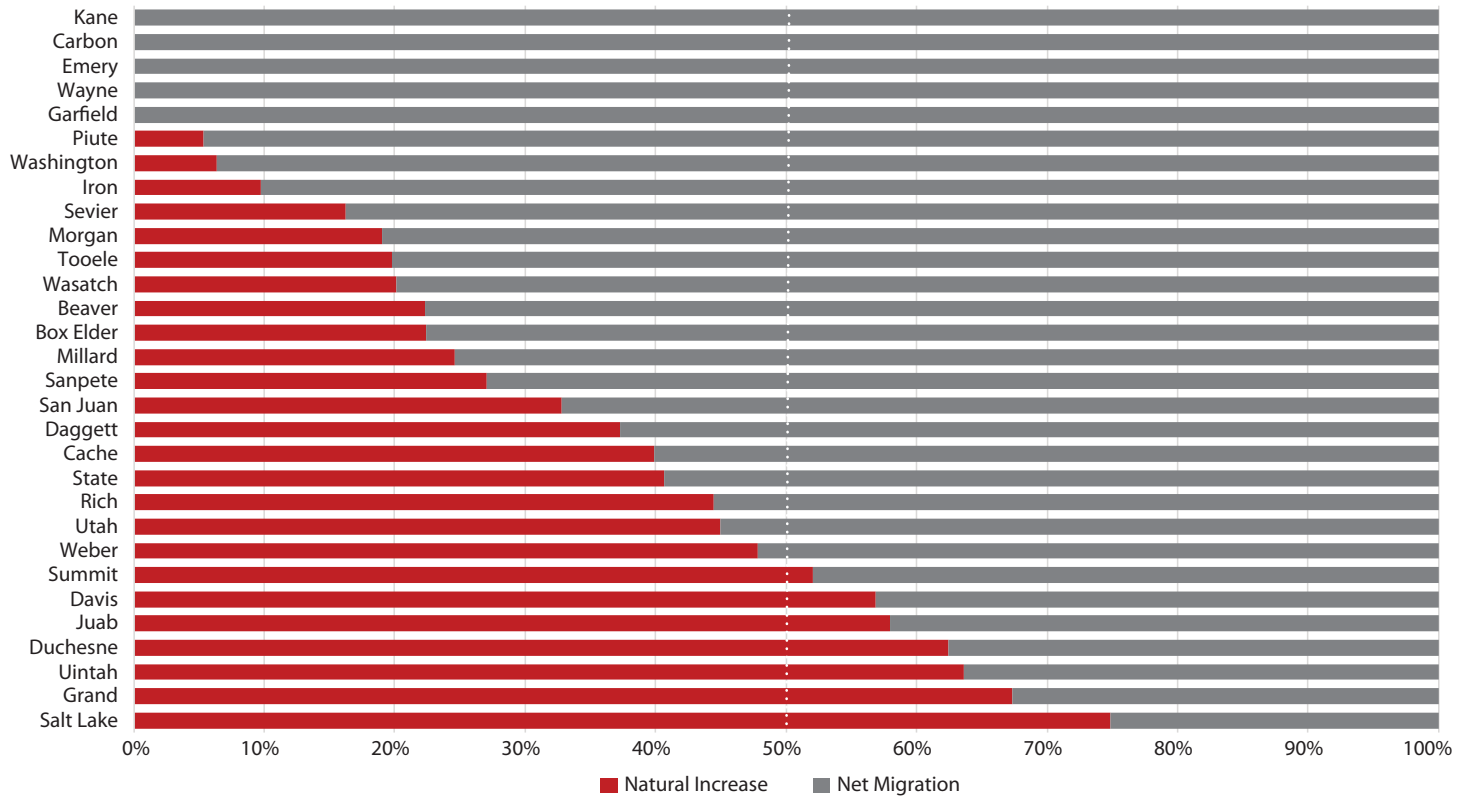
Net migration contributed the majority of population growth for 75% of Utah's counties this year, up from 60% last year. For example, Beaver, Cache, Millard, Sanpete, Sevier, and Weber counties had natural increase as their main population driver

Figure 8: County Share of State Population Growth, 2020-2021



Source: Utah Population Committee, Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute

Figure 9: County Net Migration and Natural Increase's Share of Annual Population Growth, 2021



Source: Utah Population Committee, Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute

last year, and this year had more net migration than natural increase. COVID-19 deaths play a role in this development, and it will take more time to learn if this is the start of a new trend or just a temporary pandemic effect.

The Greater Salt Lake and Southwestern regions continue to expand and attract migrants from inside and outside Utah, fueling 97.3% of the state's growth.⁷

The Southwestern economic region is the fastest growing region in the state. A mixture of rapid development, higher

education institutions, and tourism contributes to the high and fast growth in Iron and Washington counties. It accounts for 8.1% percent of the state's population, but 19.1% of statewide growth. Net migration is the main source of growth in this region, accounting for 93% of the population growth.

The Greater Salt Lake economic region accounts for 86.5% of the state's population, and 78.3% of growth. Some of the core and more established counties (Salt Lake, Davis, Summit) rely more heavily on natural increase for population growth, while

the ring and suburban counties such as Morgan, Tooele, and Wasatch are experiencing more net migration than natural increase. Utah County used to fit into the core counties with high natural increase and a well-established population base, but it has become an exception to this trend. This is the third year in a row that net migration, not natural increase, has been its major source of population growth, outpacing Salt Lake County (almost twice its size) in natural increase, net migration, and total population growth. Statewide, total net in-migration is greatest in Utah County (10,668), with its highest recorded net in-migration in history.

Conclusion

Utah began the decade with a year of robust population growth, the second-highest recorded net migration, and the lowest natural increase since 1975. Utah's population growth started to moderate in 2018, but this year's estimates indicate a rebound as Utahns move through a global pandemic and start a new economic cycle. The Greater Salt Lake and Southwestern regions continue to expand and attract migrants from inside and outside Utah, fueling 97.3% of the state's growth.

Although the anticipated impacts of COVID-19 on births were not apparent in the data, the significant increase in deaths changed how the state and many counties grew. Net migration became the driver of growth statewide, and drove growth in three-quarters of counties. While net migration varies annually in Utah, natural increase (outside of a global pandemic) typically does not. Once COVID-19 related deaths subside, there is an expectation that natural increase will stabilize. Natural increase will likely continue the trend of gradual decline experienced before the pandemic as the population continues to age and fertility rates decrease.

The July 1, 2021 estimates mark the newest postcensal estimate series, benchmarked off the 2020 Decennial census. These are the first estimates to incorporate a full year of the COVID-19 pandemic's effects, which impacted data, methods, and assumptions.⁸ The UPC has continued to modify the data and estimates process to attempt to accurately reflect the period between July 1, 2020, and July 1, 2021. The UPC will continue to monitor the state's data and conditions into the future.

About the Utah Population Committee (UPC)

The Utah Population Committee (UPC) prepares state and county-level estimates of the usual, resident population for the state of Utah. The U.S. Census Bureau produces national, state, and county-level estimates annually, but their methods lack a contextual understanding of each state. This motivates many states, including Utah, to calculate their own set of estimates in order to create a more precise view and explanation of population change each year. State statute determines UPC membership composition and utilization of the committee produced population estimates. The Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute chairs and provides technical staff for the committee.

Utah Population Committee (UPC) Members:

Pamela Perlich, UPC Chair, Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute
Aaron Brough, Utah State Board of Education
Laura Hanson, Governor's Office of Planning and Budget
David Landward, Dominion Energy
Jacoba Larsen, Utah State Tax Commission
Sojung Lim, Utah State University
Carrie Mayne, Utah System of Higher Education
Collin Peterson, Department of Workforce Services
John Sagers, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
Andrea Wilko, Office of the Legislative Fiscal Analyst
Linda Wininger, Utah Department of Health

Endnotes

1. Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute. (2021). Utah's 2020 Census Apportionment, Resident, and Overseas Population. <https://gardner.utah.edu/wp-content/uploads/C2020-Apportion-FS-Apr2021.pdf?x71849>
2. For more information about Utah Census results, visit <https://gardner.utah.edu/2020-census/>
3. Intercensal estimates revisions for 2010-2019 can be found here: <https://gardner.utah.edu/demographics/state-and-county-level-population-estimates/>
4. Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute. (2021). Fertility in Utah: Recent Changes. <https://gardner.utah.edu/wp-content/uploads/Fertility-FS-June2021.pdf?x71849>
5. Li, W.L. 1976. A Note on Migration and Employment. *Demography* 13(4): 565-570.
6. Harris, E. (2021). Moving Past Net Migration: Demographic Characteristics of Utah's Recent Migrants. <https://gardner.utah.edu/wp-content/uploads/Migrant-Demographic-Characteristics-June2021-Final.pdf>
7. Hogue, M. (2020). Utah's Economic Regions. <https://gardner.utah.edu/wp-content/uploads/EconRegions-Nov2020.pdf?x71849&x71849>
8. Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute. (2016). Utah Population Committee Methodology: <http://gardner.utah.edu/wp-content/uploads/UPC-Methodology.pdf>