

# Suburban boom here may be over

By Dan Horn and Amber Hunt 9:29 a.m. EDT March 27, 2014



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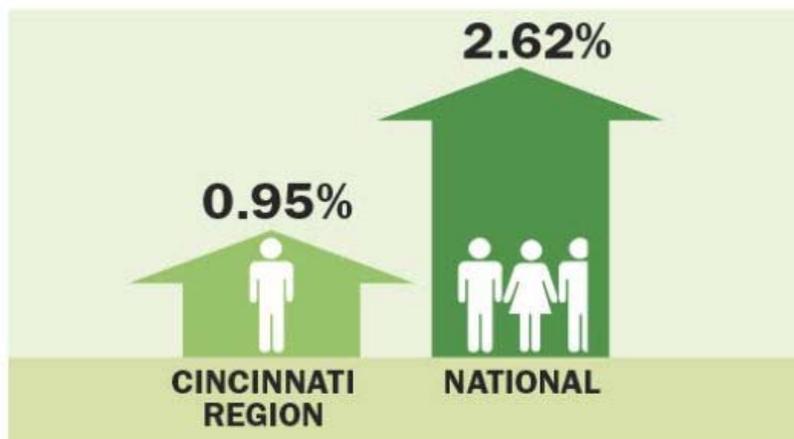
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Cincinnati's suburbs aren't booming like they used to be, but they're still adding population faster than anywhere else in the region.

The population changes revealed in U.S. Census estimates released Thursday are significant, experts say, because they are a good measure of how the region is weathering the post-recession economy and how hard it's been hit by the continuing shift of population from the Rust Belt to southern and western states.

**FACT:** The Cincinnati region lagged the nation in population growth from 2010 to 2013.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau annual resident population estimates

The Enquirer/Bandy Mazzolo, Mark West

(Photo: .)

Those factors help explain why the Cincinnati metropolitan area – 15 counties in Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana – grew by less than 1 percent over the past three years and ranked in the bottom one-third of the nation's major metro areas.

"It would be nice if we'd grow a little bit faster," said Gary Wright, a demographer and the founder of Wright Futures in Cincinnati. "But you have to have realistic expectations. It's just not in the cards for this part of the country to be a fast-growing region again."

The new estimates show healthy growth over the past three years in traditional hot spots surrounding the city, such as Warren and Clermont counties in Ohio and Boone and Kenton counties in Kentucky.

That growth appears to be slowing, however, at least compared to the scorching pace set over the past two decades. Boone County, the region's leader, was up

4.3 percent, while Warren County climbed about 2.8 percent.

**FACT:** The region's population growth lagged eight of 11 "peer" areas identified by a 2010 Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber report.

Metro area	Population change*	Rank*
Austin	8.99%	3
Denver	5.62%	25
Charlotte, N.C.	5.02%	36
Indianapolis	3.26%	86
Columbus	3.19%	93
Minneapolis-St. Paul	3.10%	100
Baltimore	2.04%	168
Louisville	1.97%	173
<b>Cincinnati</b>	<b>0.95%</b>	<b>249</b>
St. Louis	0.40%	281
Pittsburgh	0.18%	292
Cleveland	-0.53%	343

\*Among 382 metros in population change from 2010-13  
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau annual resident population estimates

Source: U.S. Census Bureau annual resident population estimates The Enquirer/Randy Mazzola, Mark Wert

.(Photo: .)

Hamilton County, the region's urban core, continues to lag behind those suburbs. Yet it did register its first population gain in years. The small increase, just under 0.3 percent, suggests the region's largest county may be stabilizing after years of decline.

Despite the economic and demographic headwinds, Cincinnati remains a Top 30 metro area, coming in at No. 28. Among the largest metro areas, though, only Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, St. Louis and Pittsburgh grew more slowly. The Columbus and Indianapolis areas, frequently seen as regional rivals, each posted gains of more than 3 percent.

U.S. metropolitan areas grew an average of 2.6 percent since 2010, which means areas generally added 2.5 people for every one added in Greater Cincinnati.

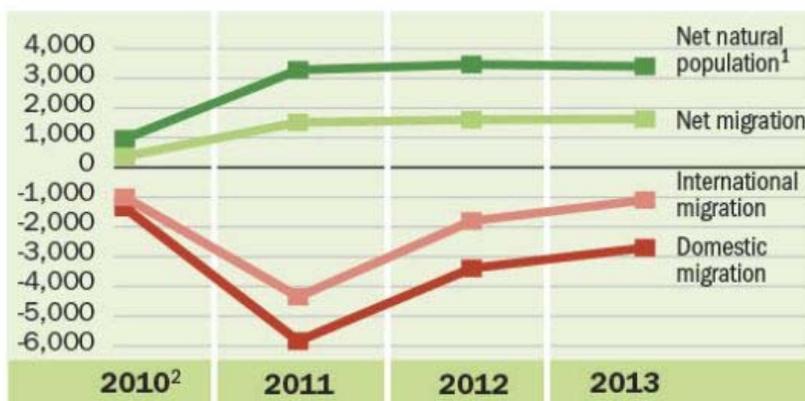
"This is a long-term trend, and I don't think that's going to change in the near future," said Janet Harrah, director of the Center for Economic Analysis and Development at Northern Kentucky University.

She and others say the biggest drags on the region haven't changed: Traditional manufacturing here can't sustain as large a population as it once did, emerging industries are growing faster elsewhere and a more mobile population continues to choose to live in other places, mainly in the south and west.

"It's critical for us to stem the tide of people moving to Florida and to keep our young people here," said Hamilton County Commissioner Greg Hartmann.

Yet economic growth remains a challenge, and that's a huge driver of population growth. Even the Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber predicts economic growth of only about 2 percent this year, a half-percentage point lower than national projections.

**FACT:** Fewer people moving elsewhere in the U.S. stabilized Hamilton County's population.



<sup>1</sup>Births minus deaths <sup>2</sup>Data is for April-June

Source: U.S. Census Bureau annual resident population estimates

The Enquirer/Randy Mazzola, Mark Wert

.(Photo: .)

John Boyd of the Boyd Co., a location consulting company based in New Jersey, said other metro areas in the region look better to him from an economic development standpoint. He cited Columbus for wisely leveraging assets like Ohio State University to boost industries such as retail, medical devices and financial services.

Local economic development officials say they're working to change the dynamic here by adopting more business-friendly tax policies and by taking a more aggressive approach to development in Hamilton County and the urban core, most notably in Over-the-Rhine and on the Downtown riverfront.

"Are we satisfied? No," said Matt Davis, interim executive director of the Regional Economic Development Initiative. "We want robust growth. The last decade was a lot of contraction, and we're moving in a positive direction."

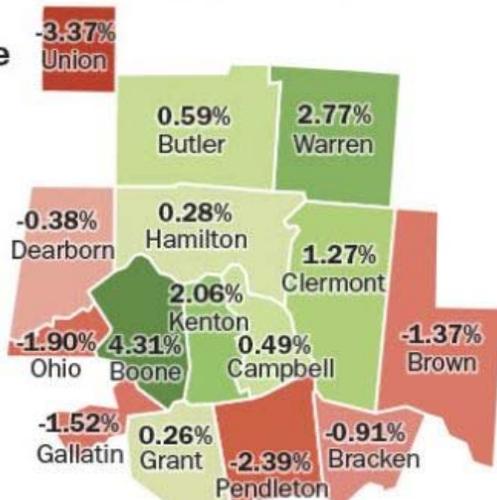
### Suburbs don't mind slower growth rate

The suburbs, meanwhile, have had different worries about population growth in the past few decades. Namely, too much of it, too fast.

The boom led to packed schools, stressed infrastructure and higher costs to local governments struggling to pay for improvements needed to support all those people. Some suburban counties tried to tackle the problem with tighter zoning laws and other measures restricting where new homes are built, which, in turn, may have helped slow population growth.

"It doesn't surprise me that the growth rate has slowed, and I think that's a good thing," said Warren County Commissioner David Young. "For awhile, it was too fast. A more moderate, predictable, long-term growth rate is probably more desirable."

### **FACT:** Outlying counties lost population, while Hamilton County was stable and most of its immediate neighbors grew.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau annual resident population estimates

The Enquirer/Randy Mazzola, Mark Wert

.(Photo: .)

The same is true for some pockets of Northern Kentucky, which still saw significant population increases from 2010 to 2013.

Adam Caswell, spokesman for the Northern Kentucky Chamber, said the 4.3 percent increase in Boone County and the 2 percent increase in Kenton County are a testament to Northern Kentucky's economic strength, despite the recession and the loss of the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport's Delta hub.

Cincinnati's closest suburbs in Ohio and Kentucky also may have benefited from a population shift away from rural areas, possibly brought about by higher transportation costs and a desire to be closer to workplaces. The Census estimate shows seven counties in the Cincinnati region lost population – all of them on the area's rural outskirts.

Those that gained population were in the heart of the area and were home to the region's biggest employers.

"The counties that grew all are job centers," Harrah said. "You can see that trend across the country." ■

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