



Oklahoma City, suburbs see 'significant growth'

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By **Dennis Cauchon**, USA TODAY

Oklahoma's big metropolitan areas — especially Oklahoma City, the capital — are attracting new residents from across the nation and the state's rural areas.

Census data released this week show that the state's biggest cities and counties enjoyed robust growth from 2000 to 2010.

The big winner was Oklahoma City. It added 73,867 residents over the decade — a 15% increase — to a population of 579,999. It remains the state's largest city. Suburban counties just outside the city grew, too, pushing the metro area to 1,252,987.

"People are moving to the metro areas," says Steven Barker, a senior researcher for the Oklahoma Commerce Department. "We're looking at very significant growth."

OKLAHOMA: County, city stats
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The state's total population grew 8.7% to 3,751,351.

Newcomers are being lured by the state's relatively strong economy, he says. College graduates are staying and arriving to work in the oil and gas business, aerospace and other industries.

The state's unemployment rate in December

was 6.6%, far below the national average. It's even lower in the Oklahoma City area, thanks to government and university jobs.

All six of the fastest-growing counties were in the suburbs of Oklahoma City and [Tulsa](#), Barker says. The state's fastest-growing big county, Canadian, grew 32% during the decade to 115,541 residents. It's on Oklahoma City's west side.

Eric Long, economic researcher at the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, says his area has prospered because it has 18 universities, including the University of Oklahoma. It also avoided the housing boom and the economic fallout from its collapse, he says.

Tulsa recorded a slight population drop — 0.3% — since 2000, but the loss was offset by big gains in its suburban counties.

The move to the cities left 23 of Oklahoma's 77 counties in population decline. Cimarron County — in cowboy country, the far west of the Oklahoma Panhandle — suffered the biggest drop among rural counties. The

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county declined 21% to 2,475.

Other Census findings:

- **The Hispanic population** soared 85% to 332,007. That increased the share of Hispanics in this largely white state from 5.2% in 2000 to 8.9% in 2010.

- **Diversity.** Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Lawton and Muskogee had the most diverse populations.

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