

# Fewer leaving urban centers, moving to sunnier places



Las Vegas, known for its warm climate that lured people from all parts of the USA, is attracting fewer people.

By **Haya El Nasser**, USA TODAY

Unemployment and the housing meltdown are triggering an about-face in where Americans choose to live.

Booming Sun Belt cities and exurban counties across the USA are not attracting as many people as they once did while older industrial centers that had lost residents for decades are losing fewer, according to Census population estimates out today.

"This is really a migration about-face." Says William Frey, demographer

at the Brookings Institution. "Places that have relied on migrants for their growth are now just puzzled because not nearly as many people are coming, and places that had been bleeding migrants" are getting a break.

Many of the older areas are still attracting fewer people than they're losing, but the losses are much smaller than in previous years. The July 1, 2008, estimates of population in counties and metropolitan areas show dramatic turnabouts: New York registered the smallest outmigration since at least 1990.

The exodus also slowed in Boston, Chicago and Los Angeles metros. For the first time in at least 18 years, the San Francisco area attracted more people from other parts of the country than it lost. Even perennial population losers such as Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Buffalo and Providence saw their outflows diminish.

At the same time, high-fliers in warm climates that lured people from all parts of the USA — Orlando, Tampa and Las Vegas — are attracting fewer people.

The financial crisis clearly is dampening people's desire to move, says Kenneth Johnson, senior demographer at the University of New Hampshire Carsey Institute. Some can't sell their homes and others may not want to risk a move as jobs dry up, he says. "In the short term, it's a boon to central cities," he says.

The foreclosure crisis has hit new subdivisions in remote suburbs the hardest and real estate values have plummeted more dramatically away from central cities and their nearby suburbs.

Population growth also is affected by jobless rates, says Mark Mather, demographer at the Population Reference Bureau. Population in counties with jobless rates of 6% or higher grew by 0.3% from 2007 to 2008. In places where unemployment was below 4%, population went up 1.2%.

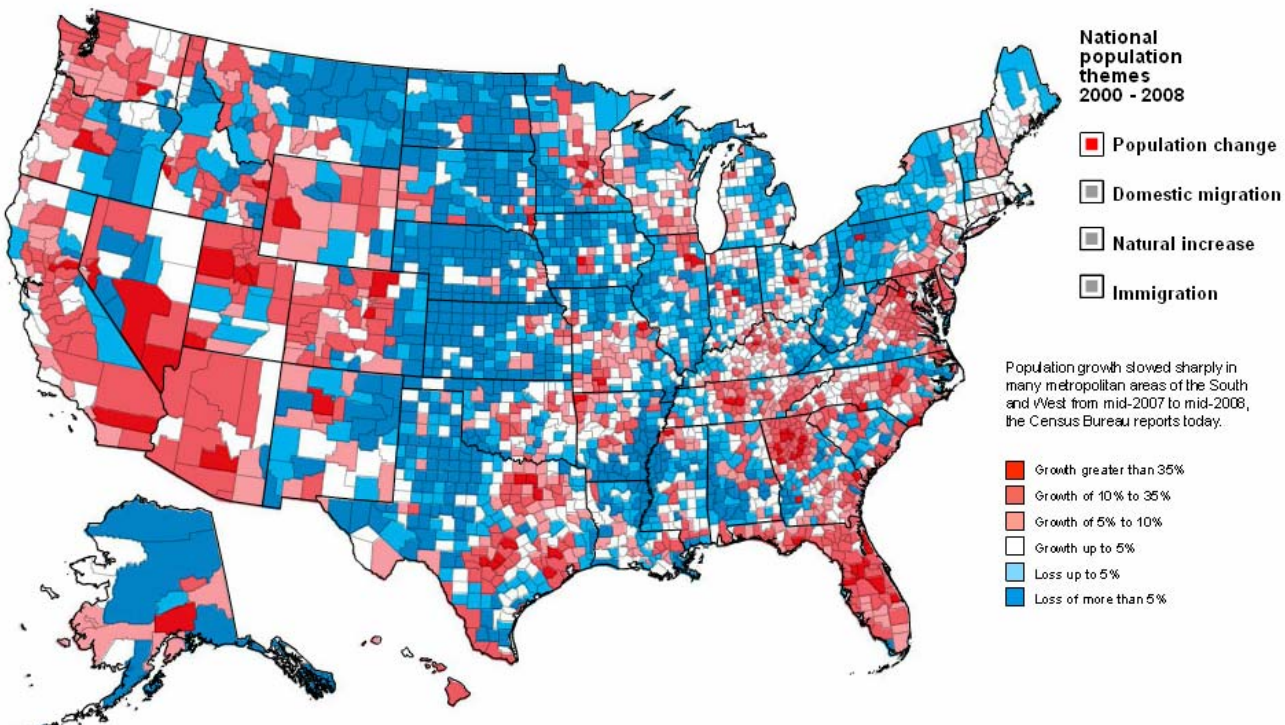
The estimates also show:

- In Michigan, a state devastated by the troubles of the auto industry, 60 of 83 counties lost population from 2007 to 2008.
- Net migration to Las Vegas from around the USA was a third what it was the previous year.

- Fast-growing suburbs on the edge of metro Chicago grew but more slowly than in previous years. Kendall County gained a net 5,100 people from other parts of the USA in 2008, down from 7,500 the year before. Chicago's Cook County, which had lost a net of more than 65,000 in 2007, cut losses to 43,000.

"Things have sort of stalled because people are not able to sell their homes," says Carol Sonnenschein of the Chicago Metropolitan 2020, a non-profit regional planning group. "People are staying in place, waiting this out."

## A county-by-county look at USA's population trends



### Economy spurns 'migration about-face'

Typical migration patterns in the U.S. have changed as the souring economy dampens people's desire and ability to move.

**GRAPHIC:** [A county-by-county look at population trends](#)

*Contributing: Paul Overberg*