

8-1-2018

Notes regarding Nebraska Population Change from the Tuesday December 20, 2016 U.S. Census Bureau release of State Population Estimates as of July 1, 2016

David Drozd

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/cparpublications>

 Part of the [Public Affairs Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Drozd, David, "Notes regarding Nebraska Population Change from the Tuesday December 20, 2016 U.S. Census Bureau release of State Population Estimates as of July 1, 2016" (2018). *Publications since 2000*. 174.
<https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/cparpublications/174>

This Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for Public Affairs Research at DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Publications since 2000 by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu.



Notes regarding Nebraska Population Change from the Tuesday December 20, 2016 U.S. Census Bureau release of State Population Estimates as of July 1, 2016

By David Drozd, Research Coordinator
Center for Public Affairs Research, University of Nebraska at Omaha
402-554-2132; ddrozd@unomaha.edu

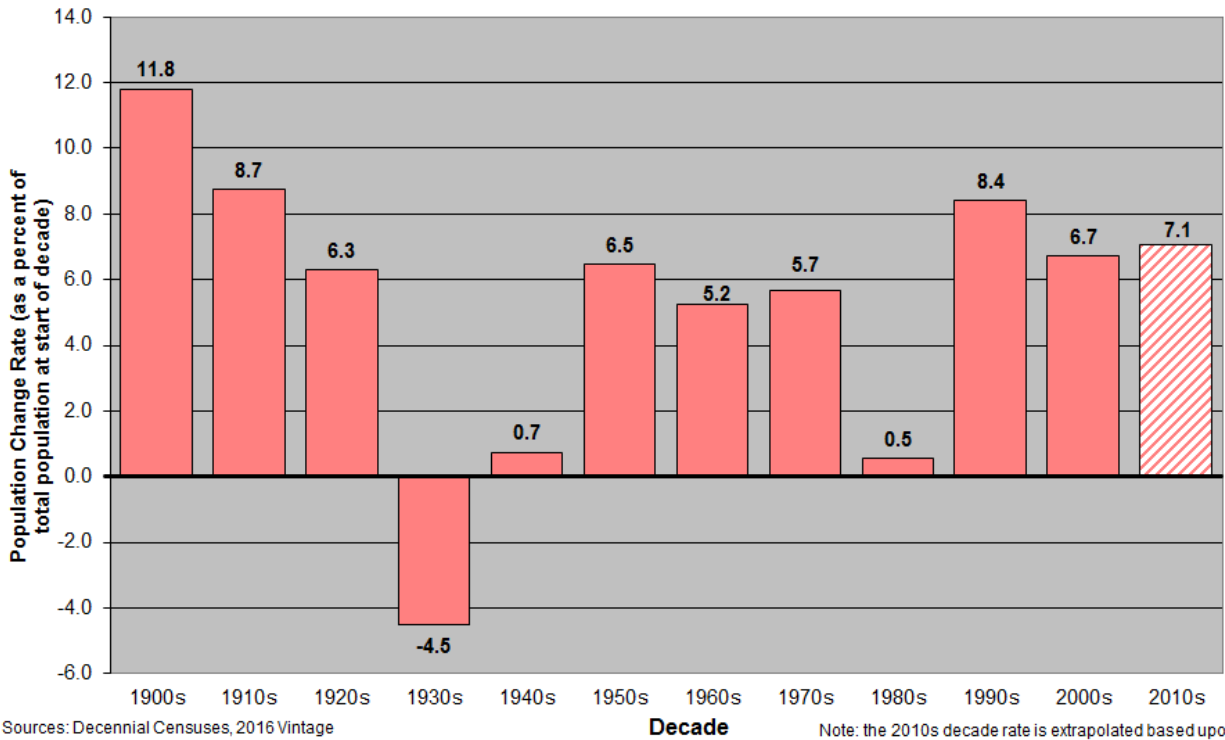
1. The Census Bureau estimates the July 1, 2016 population of Nebraska to be 1,907,116. **The state hit a new population milestone, exceeding the 1.9 million mark for the first time.** Seven years passed between exceeding 1.8 million for the first time in 2009 and this new milestone in 2016. This 7-year timespan ties for the shortest such duration to gain 100,000 persons with the 7-year period from 1992 to 1999, when the state rose from 1.6 million to 1.7 million residents. See table below. Projections by our office in 2013 suggest it will take 9 years to move from 1.9 to 2.0 million residents, making 2025 the expected year to hit the 2 million person milestone (it will likely take a longer period of time to gain the next 100,000 as deaths will increase in the years ahead as the large baby boomer segment of the population ages into age groups with higher mortality).

Nebraska Population Milestones since 1900 with Number of Years to Gain 100,000 Persons			
Sources: 2016 Vintage Population Estimates, Annual Historical Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau			
Compiled and Prepared by: David Drozd, UNO Center for Public Affairs Research on 12-20-2016			
Milestone Achieved	Year	Estimated Population	Years to Increase by 100,000 People
1.1 million population	1903	1,104,000	unknown
1.2 million population	1911	1,216,000	8
1.3 million population	1920	1,300,000	9
1.4 million population	1960	1,417,000	40
1.5 million population	1971	1,504,208	11
1.6 million population	1992	1,611,687	21
1.7 million population	1999	1,704,764	7
1.8 million population	2009	1,812,683	10
1.9 million population	2016	1,907,116	7

Note: Nebraska's population is estimated to have increased each year between 1920 and 1932, when it set a temporary high of 1,386,000. It then declined for 13 straight years during the Depression and World War II, bottoming at 1,210,000 in 1945. The population then trended higher, hitting 1.4 million in 1960, taking a total of 40 years to increase from 1.3 million to 1.4 million.

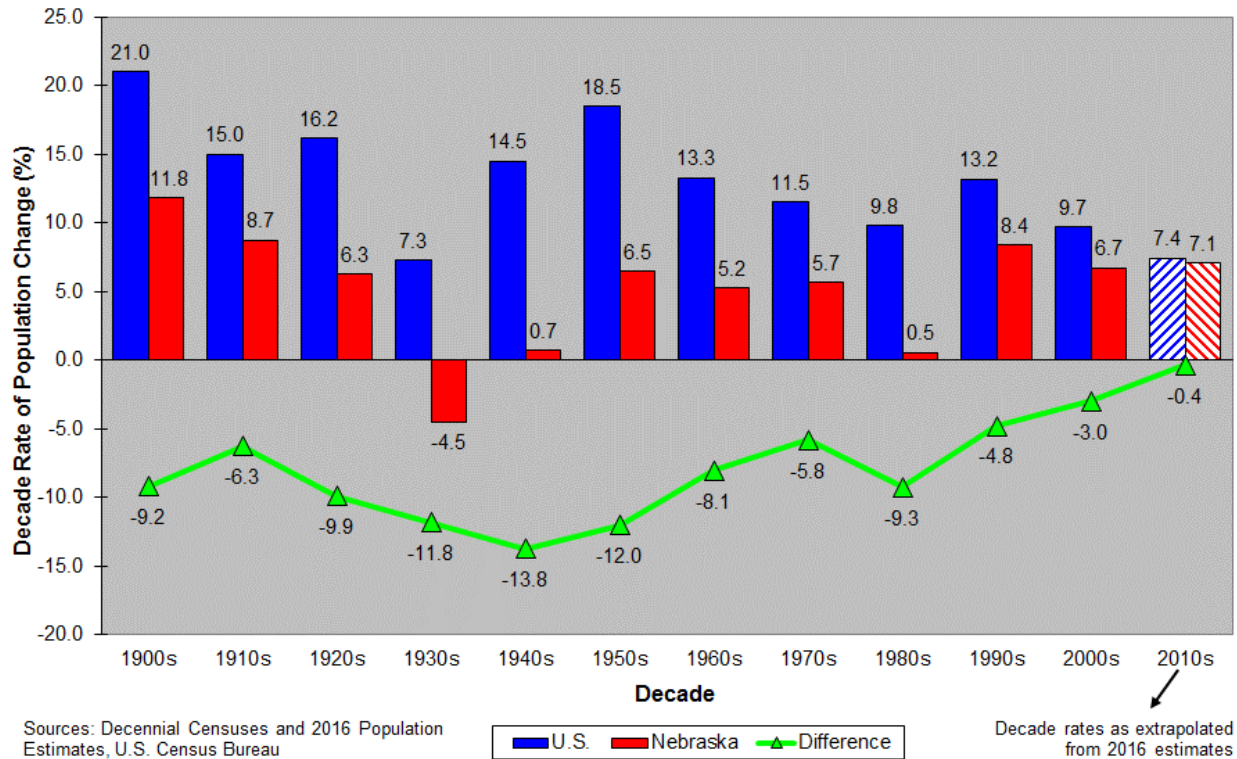
2. The new July 1, 2016 population shows an increase of 13,351 in the one-year period from the July 1, 2015 estimate, a rise of 0.70 percent. Nebraska's most current annual growth is very similar to gains seen in the past several years – for example, the increase in the prior year from 2014-15 was 12,620 persons or 0.67 percent. **Nebraska has now gained population for 29 straight years**, with the last annual population loss occurring in 1987, amid the “farm crisis”. {Note: the national press release indicated that 8 states lost population from 2015 to 2016 – see here: <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2016/cb16-214.html>}
3. For comparison, Iowa increased by a 12,696 or 0.41 percent in the last year to now stand at 3,134,693. Kansas increased by a meager 568 persons or 0.02 percent to have 2,907,289 persons as of July 1, 2016. The U.S. now has 323 million people (323,127,513) as of July 1, 2016, an increase of 2.2 million since July 1, 2015, or 0.70 percent. **Thus, in the latest year, Nebraska exceeded the numeric population growth and the population growth rate in our best comparison states of Iowa and Kansas, while also equaling the U.S. growth rate. Typically Nebraska trails the U.S. growth rate.**
4. Nebraska's percentage change in population in the latest year ranked 18th best among all states. Nebraska even grew at a faster clip than nearby North Dakota, which increased by only 0.15 percent in the latest year, ranking 37th highest, after leading the nation in growth the past 4 years. Note: This 18th best growth rate ranking is the best one that I can remember in my 13 years of working with such data – I don't ever remember being better than 20th best, as we were from 2014-15. I can't quickly verify the last time our ranking would have been this high, but **an 18th best growth rate is really good for Nebraska** – we are often in the low to mid 30s.)
5. Looking beyond just what has occurred in the latest year to compare all changes since the April 1, 2010 census, Nebraska has grown by 80,782 people or 4.4 percent. This percentage ranks 24th best among all states, trailing the U.S. growth rate since 2010 slightly (4.7percent). Iowa has grown by 2.9 percent, ranking 30th, while Kansas has increased 1.9 percent, ranking 34th best.
6. We are now more than “halfway through” the 2010s decade, so we have a fairly good sense of how this decade's population growth will compare to other decades. Nebraska is on pace to increase by 7.1 percent during the 2010s, which would exceed the 6.7 percent growth rate during the 2000s. Besides the 1990s when the state experienced an especially high level of immigration, this rate for the 2010s would be the highest going back 100 years, to an 8.7 percent increase during the 1910s, when the state had a much smaller population. See graph below. Nebraska's only decade with population loss was the 1930s during the Great Depression.

**Nebraska Population Change Rate by Decade: 1900s to 2000s
with 2010s Extrapolated from 2016**



7. Nebraska is also achieving a relatively high level of population growth compared to the U.S. average. Nebraska has historically trailed the U.S. growth rate, and while these estimates still suggest it will in the 2010s as well, the gap between the U.S. growth rate and that in Nebraska of only 0.4 percentage points would be the smallest gap going all the way back to the 1900s (note that there is a rounding effect between the U.S. extrapolated growth rate of 7.4 percent versus 7.1 percent for Nebraska). Nebraska trailed the U.S. growth rate by 3.0 percentage points in the 2000s. The figure below shows that the gap by which Nebraska has trailed the U.S. average has tended to decrease over time.

**Comparison of Population Change Rates in Nebraska and the U.S.:
1900s to 2010s decades**



8. The vast majority of Nebraska’s rises in population since 2010 stem from natural population change, whereby births exceed deaths. There have been approximately 164,000 births to Nebraska residents since 2010, compared to 97,000 deaths, a natural increase of about 67,000.
9. The other population change factor, net migration, has also been positive. Nebraska’s net migration since 2010 is estimated to be about 14,600 persons. Nebraska does lose people to other U.S. states (about -9,700 since 2010) but this is offset by increases of residents from foreign countries (about 24,300 since 2010).
10. Net domestic migration for Nebraska has been negative (an outmigration) in each annual period since 2010. However, the loss in 2015-16 (-2,144) was not worse than in earlier periods (-2,920 in 2014-15 or -2,204 in 2013-14). Migration data, largely based upon where people file their tax returns in one year versus the next, can be delayed in showing changes, so we will continue to wait and see the full effect from location decisions of major employers and other changes in the years ahead.
11. In an analysis to evaluate the likelihood for Nebraska to hold or lose one of its current 3 congressional seats, it appears Nebraska is in a good position to keep all 3 in the 2020 census. I applied 7 different sets of growth rates to the 2016 population estimates to

come up with populations in 2020 for all states. I then ran these figures through the “apportionment calculator” which replicates the way the apportionment has been done the last several decades. {This calculation is subject to Congressional oversight and approval and could be changed.}

In none of these 7 scenarios does Nebraska’s 3rd seat rank worse than the 428th position, with the last seat overall being number 435 (and the seat “first out” or missing the cutoff being number 436). So Nebraska likely has some room to spare for population growth to slow before it would lose a seat in the 2020 calculation. A summary of the growth rates applied and Nebraska’s seat number and distance to seat number 436 is provided below.

Note that these are simply applications of various growth rates and are not actual population projections. True projections would factor in items such as the baby-boomer population cohort aging into age groups that have higher mortality. Thus, these growth rate applications are simpler than the dynamic nature of how the population actually changes. In addition, local, national, and world events could lead to various population changes and impact the figures. For example, Hurricane Katrina had a great impact on Louisiana’s population and contributed greatly to its loss of a congressional seat in the 2010 apportionment. Domestic and international migration are always wildcards and there has been much discussion of the impact of the recent level of immigration, including refugees, and how that might possibly change with a new Presidential administration. Further changes regarding the immigration issue will continue to impact the total populations in each state, and no one can predict the full impact of the recent and other possible future changes.

The bottomline is that based upon these 2016 population estimates and various growth assumptions going forward to 2020, Nebraska has some concerns but is not in much danger of losing a Congressional seat. However, it would be foolish to get lulled into a false sense of security and think there is no danger, as the possibility to lose a seat still exists. This year’s relatively good population growth near the U.S. average keeps Nebraska in a good position to keep all 3 seats, and moves us a step closer to 2020, reducing the amount of time over which large shifts in population trends might occur. It is likely that Nebraska’s growth relative to the U.S. average will weaken as the economy continues to recover and domestic migration normalizes to typical past trends. Migration is likely to soften in the years ahead given the company location decision of ConAgra, the sale of Cabela’s, and the closing of the Fort Calhoun nuclear plant, each major employers in the state.

Summary of growth rates applied to the 2016 estimated state populations:

1. Annual growth rate between 2010 and 2016 applied to 2016 population: seat #416, 19 seats to spare

2. 2015-16 growth rate applied to 2016 population: seat #416, 19 seats to spare
3. 2015-16 growth rate averaged with 2010-16 and 2000s growth rates: seat #418, 17 to spare
4. 2015-16 growth rate averaged with 2010-16, 2000s, and 1990s growth rates: seat #420, 15 to spare
5. Growth rates of 1990s, 2000s and 2010s (per 2010 to 2016) averaged: seat #422, 13 to spare
6. 1990s growth rate applied (high U.S. immigration timeframe): seat #428, 7 to spare
7. Nebraska with no/zero population growth from 2016 to 2020, all other states using 2010s rates of growth: seat #428, 7 to spare

{Note: per #6 above, the 1990s growth rate, if applied to the 2010 Census counts, would have Nebraska's 3rd seat as being the "second one out" or number 437. However, since time has passed between 2010 and 2016, this shortens the timeframe of the applied growth rate (where NE was trailing the U.S. growth rate during the 1990s) and thus would suggest ranking as seat 428. This example illustrates why Nebraska is considered to be close to the cut line, or in possible danger of losing a Congressional seat in 2020.}