

Introduction

In 2023, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania partnered with the Pennsylvania State Data Center to release population projections by county through 2050. In addition to the aggregated total population for each county, the projections contained further details on the distribution of age cohorts. In 2020, 21 percent of Pennsylvania residents were 65 years old or older. By 2040, this number is projected to increase to 24 percent. The opposite effect is happening for the youngest age cohort (19 years old or younger). In 2020, 24 percent of Pennsylvania residents were under the age of 20, but by 2040, 21 percent will be under 20 years of age. One reason behind the smaller numbers of youth is a low fertility rate. Pennsylvania ranks 38th in the United States for total fertility rate, with a rate of 1.61 births per woman. Based on the population projections, Pennsylvania is expected to experience a steady decline in its youth population over the next 30 years, if contributing factors remain unchanged. The purpose of this fact sheet is to examine the current and future population trends of youth (ages 0 to 19) in Pennsylvania. These trends provide valuable insights into the future of Pennsylvania's youth population, helping to inform a wide range of policy considerations.

Key findings include:

- Historically, the Commonwealth has experienced a decline in youth, which is projected to continue. In rural counties, there was a 34-percent decrease in the youth population from 1960 to 2020. In urban counties, there was a 22-percent decrease in the youth population from 1960 to 2020.
- The statewide youth population is expected to decrease further by 6.8 percent from 2020 to 2050.
- The age group that experienced the most notable change in population was the age 10 to 14 group; this cohort is projected to see a substantial decline over the next 30 years. The steepest decline (13.5 percent) will occur from 2020 to 2040.
- In rural counties, the youth population is expected to decline by 7.2 percent from 2020 to 2050.
- In urban areas, the youth population is expected to decline by 6.7 percent from 2020 to 2050. However, certain urban areas, particularly in the southeastern part of Pennsylvania, and around Allegheny County, Erie County, and the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton region, are expected to grow significantly over the next 30 years. This pattern remains consistent across all youth age cohorts.

Historical vs. Current vs. Projected Youth Population

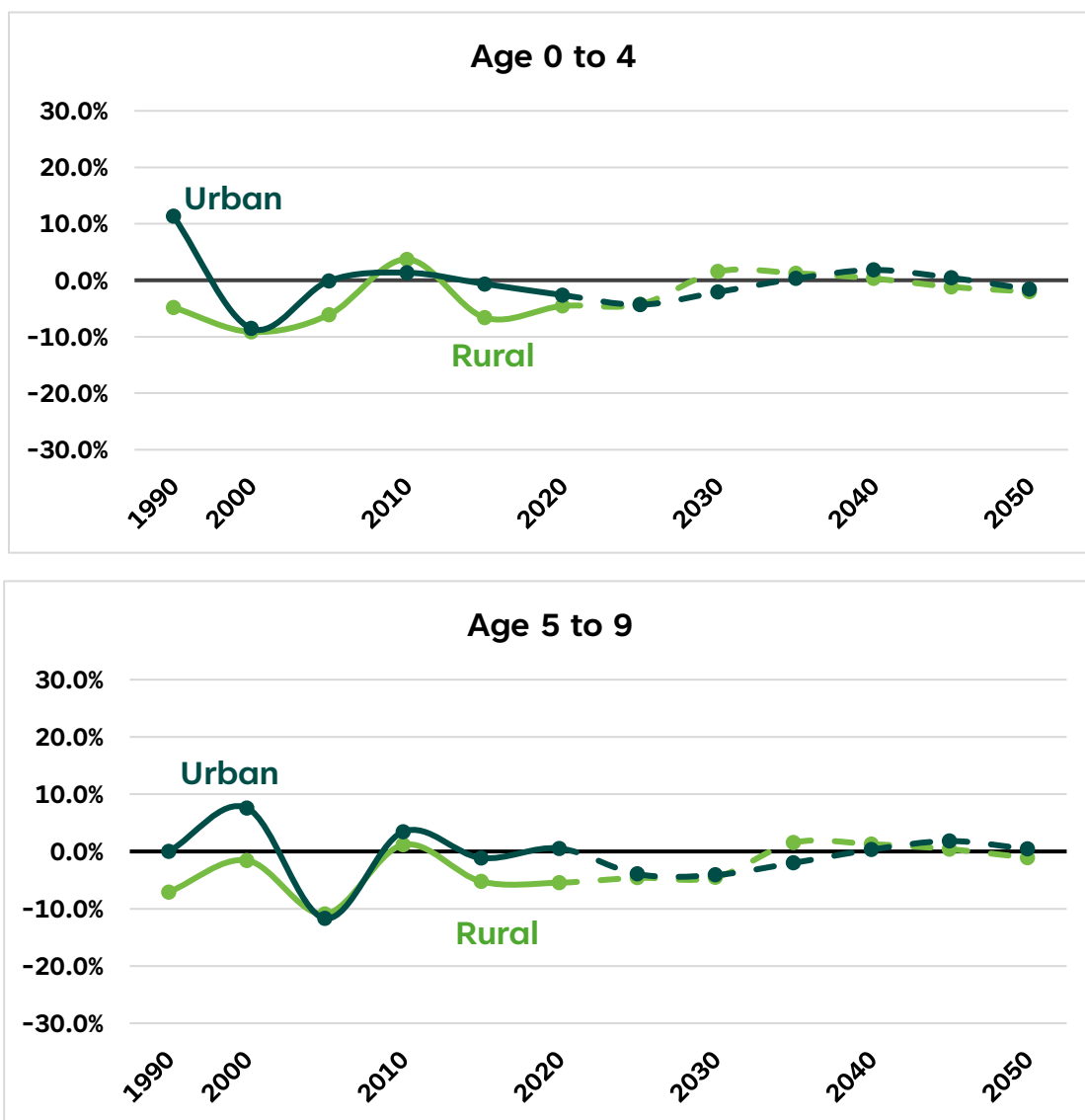
Historical vs. Current Youth Population, 1960 to 2022

Since the end of the Baby Boom in the 1960s, Pennsylvania's youth population has declined by nearly 1.0 million (25.6 percent). This demographic shift affected all counties in the Commonwealth, but rural counties experienced the most pronounced change. Rural

counties in Pennsylvania experienced a 34-percent decrease in youth population from 1960 to 2020, and urban counties experienced a 22-percent decrease in youth population from 1960 to 2020.

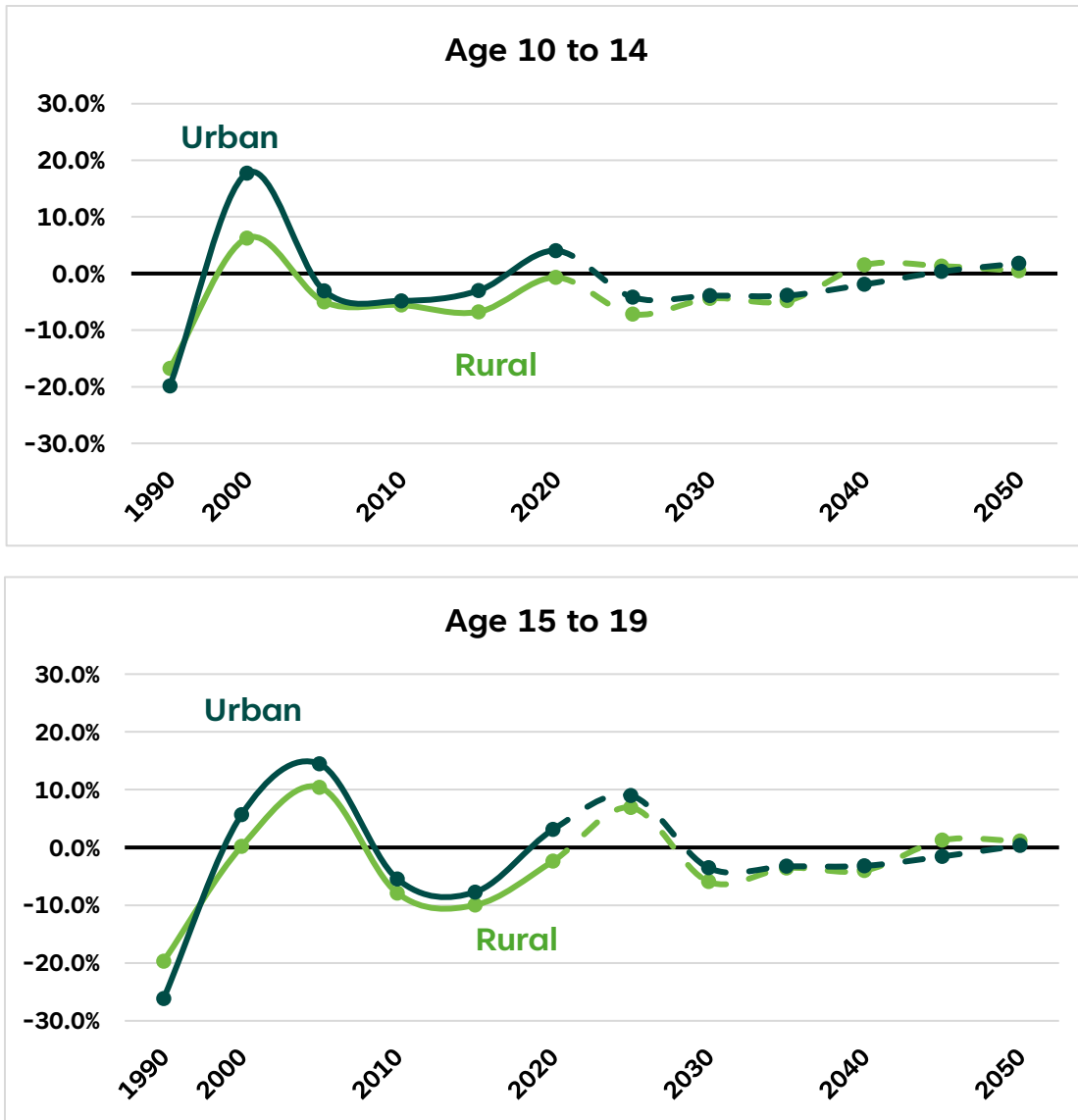
Figure 1 illustrates the actual and projected percent change in youth age cohorts for rural and urban counties from 1990 to 2050. There was a slight increase in the age 5 to 19 population in the early 2000s, which was likely attributable to a rise in immigration in the 1990s.¹ However, this period did not see a corresponding increase in the 0 to 4 age group, indicating a declining birth rate in Pennsylvania.

Figure 1: Historical and Projected Growth in Youth Population by Age Cohort for Rural and Urban Counties, 1990 to 2050



¹ Camarota, S. (2001). *Immigrants in the United States, 2000 A Snapshot of America's Foreign-Born Population*. Center for Immigration Studies.

Figure 1: Historical and Projected Growth in Youth Population by Age Cohort for Rural and Urban Counties, 1990 to 2050 (Cont.)

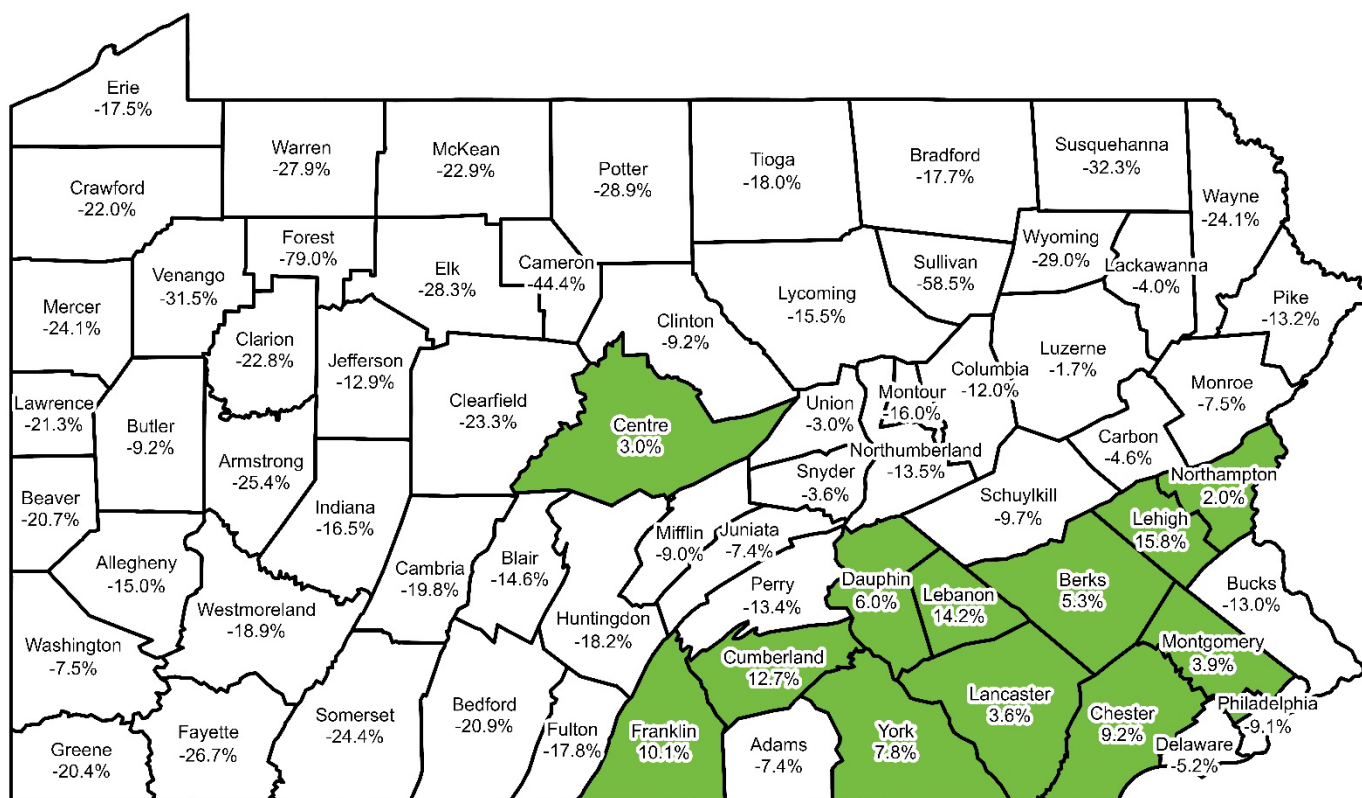


Data source: U.S. Census Bureau and the Pennsylvania State Data Center.

Figure 2 illustrates the change in youth population across Pennsylvania by county from 2000 to 2020. During this period, the total statewide youth population decreased by 6.9 percent. While most of the western region experienced a decline, the southeastern part of the state experienced an increase in its youth population. Despite this uptick in the southeast, Pennsylvania statewide has reverted to a pattern of a slowly declining youth population. According to the 2020 Decennial Census, there were 3.0 million youth in Pennsylvania. Estimates for 2022, the latest year of available data, indicate a slight decrease in the number of youth to 2.9 million.

However, the decline in youth population is not evenly distributed across the state. Projections indicate a potential increase in youth population by 2050 in the southcentral counties of the state. This trend could be attributed to the fact that these counties had more births than deaths in the past decade (see the fact sheet [Natural Population Change in Rural Pennsylvania, 2010 to 2020](#)).

Figure 2: Change in Youth Population (Ages 0 to 19), 2000 to 2020



Statewide = 6.9% Decrease in Youth Population

□ Population Decrease or No Change ■ Population Increase

Data source: U.S. Census Bureau.

Projected Youth Population, 2020 to 2050

For Pennsylvania to maintain its current workforce and economic vitality, fostering a thriving youth population is essential. If Pennsylvania’s current population trends continue, the statewide youth population will decline over the next 30 years (see Figure 1). By 2050, the total youth population (ages 0 to 19) will decrease by 6.8 percent statewide. This decline will occur in both rural and urban counties. By 2050, the youth population in rural counties is projected to decline 7.2 percent, while the youth population in urban counties is projected to decline 6.7 percent.

Conclusion

Pennsylvania is Aging and the Number of Births is Declining

Since the end of the Baby Boom in the 1960s, there has been a steady decline in births in Pennsylvania, resulting in a steady decline in youth population overall. Between 1960 and 1970, Pennsylvania experienced a 22.0 percent decrease in the population ages 0 to 4. If in-migration from other states and countries did not occur, especially in the late 1990s to early 2000s, Pennsylvania would have seen a steeper decline in its population over the past 50 years (see the fact sheets [Rural Pennsylvania is Experiencing Positive Net Migration](#), [Rural Pennsylvania's Aging Population](#), and [Natural Population Change in Rural Pennsylvania, 2010 to 2020](#) for more information on migration, natural births, and an aging population).

Urban and Rural Counties are Declining at Nearly the Same Rate

The decline in youth population is not just a rural or urban problem; it is a statewide problem. From 1960 to 2020, the total youth population statewide decreased by 25.6 percent. In rural counties, the youth population declined by 34.4 percent over the same period, while in urban counties it also decreased by 22.2 percent.

Many Factors Influence Family Growth Decisions

Numerous factors can affect household expansion and youth population within Pennsylvania. Maternal care, child care, workforce opportunities, and family-oriented activities can all influence a family's decision to live in a certain area. Other factors that can influence a family's decision are housing availability and affordability, overall cost-of-living (see the fact sheet [Analysis of Cost-of-Living Data for Pennsylvania Counties](#)), education, proximity to family, and various other considerations.

Methodology

Data Sources:

Data were analyzed using the U.S. Census Bureau's Decennial Population 1960 to 2020, U.S. Census Bureau's 2021 and 2022 ACS 5-year Estimates, and the Pennsylvania State Data Center's Population Projections for 2020 to 2050 where the base distribution is the U.S. Census Bureau's population estimate for July 1, 2020 and from the Vintage 2022 Population Estimates.

Definitions:

Rural and Urban: Rural was defined as a county as having a population density below the statewide rate of 291 persons per square mile. Urban counties were identified as having a population density at or above the statewide rate.

Youth Population: Persons 0 to 19 years of age.

Appendix

Figure 3: Total Youth Population, 1960 to 2022

Age Cohort	1960 Total	1970 Total	1980 Total	1990 Total	2000 Total	2010 (Decennial Census) Total	2020 (Decennial Census) Total	2021 (Est.) Total	2022 (Est.) Total
Ages 0 to 19	4,094,626	<u>4,252,926</u>	3,565,110	3,158,578	<u>3,270,584</u>	3,179,390	3,045,796	3,017,424	2,983,663
Ages 0 to 4	<u>1,187,954</u>	926,187	747,458	797,058	727,804	729,538	691,901	678,277	671,205
Ages 5 to 9	<u>1,101,757</u>	1,082,755	805,151	788,301	<u>827,945</u>	753,635	729,956	726,888	722,469
Ages 10 to 14	1,005,379	<u>1,168,554</u>	931,891	755,161	<u>863,849</u>	791,151	780,906	769,568	756,526
Ages 15 to 19	799,536	1,075,430	<u>1,080,610</u>	818,058	850,986	<u>905,066</u>	843,033	842,691	833,463

Note: The bolded and underlined total signifies the first highest total population. The underlined total signifies the next highest spike in total population. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau.

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