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# Demographic Trends in New England at Mid-Decade

by Kenneth M. Johnson  
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With 14.3 million residents, New England is home to just 5 percent of the U.S. population, yet it reflects many of the strands that comprise the country's demographic fabric: densely settled urban cores, expanding suburbs, struggling industrial towns, fast-growing recreational and retirement amenity areas, and isolated rural villages. In recent years New England's population grew thanks to immigration and more births than deaths, but there is a net outflow of existing residents. Therein lies the challenge for policymakers who want to keep the region vibrant and diverse. A closer look at the demographics may help.

## Population Redistribution

New England's population stood at 14,270,000 in July 2006, a gain of 347,000 residents since 2000. This 2.5 percent gain was less than half of the nation's gain and lagged far behind the fast-growing South and West. The Boston metropolitan area included 4,455,000—nearly one-third—of the region's residents, but its growth rate of 1.5 percent between 2000 and 2006 was less than half that of the 1990s. New England's other metropolitan areas grew by 214,000 (2.7 percent) to 8,015,000, a slightly slower pace than seen in the 1990s. In contrast, nonmetropolitan New England grew faster than during the 1990s. With a gain of 70,000 (4 percent), its population reached 1,800,000 in 2006.

Growth spread outward from the

metropolitan core of Boston to the urban periphery and beyond. (See the map, "Population Change in New England 2000 to 2005.") Gains were greatest on the outer edge of the metropolitan area, in adjoining nonmetropolitan areas, and in the amenity areas of northern New England. Slow growth or population losses were evident in Boston and its inner suburbs and in the far north. That was consistent with national trends, which showed a pervasive outward sprawl of the nation's metropolitan population, fast growth in amenity areas, and losses in traditional forest and agricultural areas.

In another difference from the nation as a whole, New England is less racially diverse. Non-Hispanic whites make up 82.1 percent of the region's population compared with 66.3 percent nationwide. Since 2000, minority populations in New England have grown, and the white population has declined. As a result, New England is slightly more diverse, with its minority population increasing from 15.4 percent in 2000 to 17.9 percent in 2006.

In metropolitan areas, a non-Hispanic white population decline was offset by substantial gains in the Hispanic and Asian populations, and modest gains among African-Americans and others. In nonmetropolitan New England, however, population gains occurred in all groups. Numeric gains were greatest for the 95 percent of the population that was non-Hispanic white, whereas percentage gains were greater for the smaller minorities.

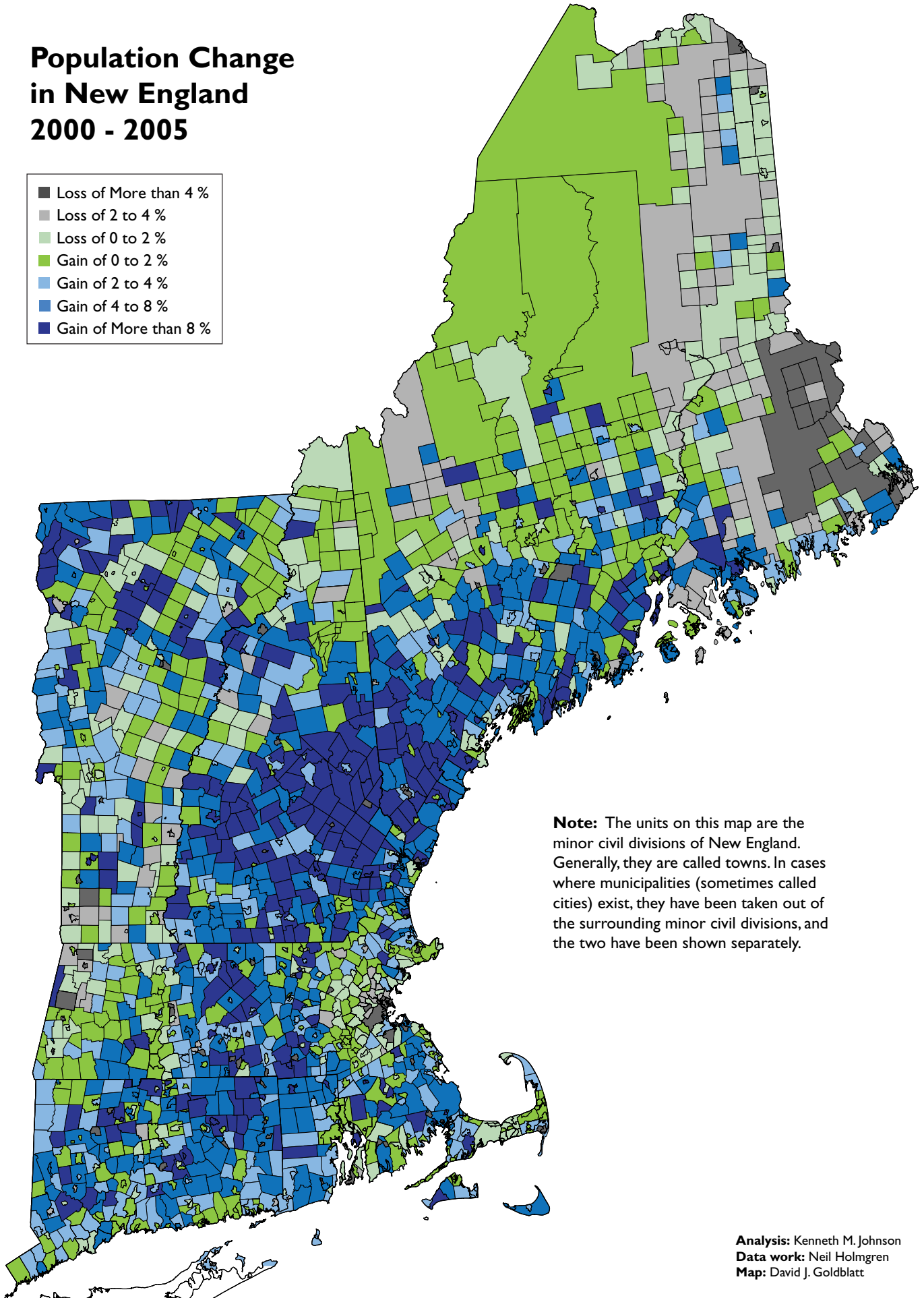
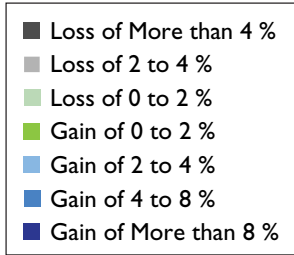
## Unpacking the Changes

New England's population grew because gains from immigration and from natural increase (births) were sufficient to offset a significant net domestic outmigration. Population gains were greatest in nonmetropolitan New England, where U.S. internal migration fueled most of the growth—supplemented by modest immigration and enough births to offset deaths. In all, some 53,000 domestic migrants (3.1 percent) and 9,000 immigrants (0.5 percent) moved to rural New England. There were 7,000 more births than deaths (0.4 percent). Migrants were attracted by recreational and scenic amenities or were city dwellers seeking less expensive communities.

Metropolitan areas did less well. In Boston, for example, immigration and natural increase barely covered the loss of domestic migrants. Between 2000 and 2006, natural increase contributed 130,000 (3.0 percent) new residents to the Boston metropolitan area. (See "New England Components of Demographic Change.") This natural increase offset net outmigration of 66,000 (-1.5 percent), which occurred because the influx of 164,000 (3.7 percent) immigrants was not sufficient to offset a net domestic migration loss of 229,000 (-5.2 percent).

In metropolitan areas outside of Boston, gains from natural increase and immigrants made up for losses from domestic outmigration. Natural increase in non-Boston metro areas was 147,000 (1.9 percent), and

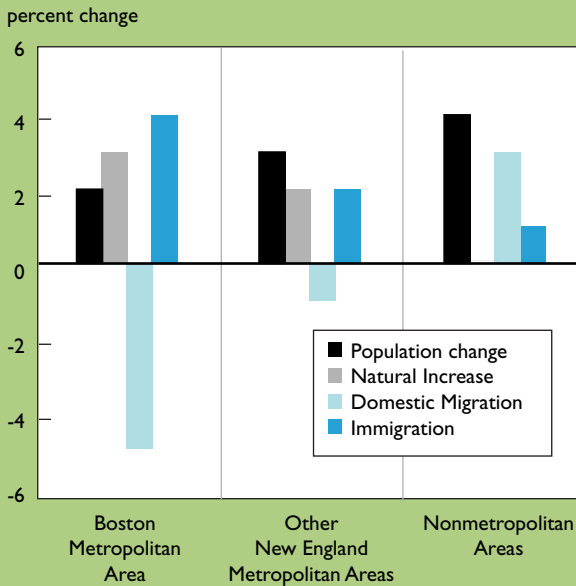
# Population Change in New England 2000 - 2005



**Note:** The units on this map are the minor civil divisions of New England. Generally, they are called towns. In cases where municipalities (sometimes called cities) exist, they have been taken out of the surrounding minor civil divisions, and the two have been shown separately.

**Analysis:** Kenneth M. Johnson  
**Data work:** Neil Holmgren  
**Map:** David J. Goldblatt

## New England Components of Demographic Change, 2000-2006



Source: U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates, March 2007

the influx of 168,000 immigrants (2.1 percent) exceeded the loss of 101,000 domestic migrants (-1.3 percent).

There were interesting regional differences in the contribution of migration and natural increase. A net influx of migrants from elsewhere in the U.S. (including southern New England)—together with modest natural increases and immigration—was the primary cause of growth in northern New England. The southern tier (Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island) grew more slowly and only because immigration and births offset domestic losses. The domestic migration loss from Massachusetts was so large that it negated a net gain elsewhere in New England, producing a substantial nationwide domestic migration loss.

## Age-Specific Migration Patterns

Migration trends also vary by age.<sup>1</sup> Between 1990 and 2000, New England had a net migration gain of 181,000 people under the age of 30 but a loss of 164,000 among people over 30. The Boston metropolitan

region had a substantial influx of 20-to-29-year-olds, which resulted in a young adult population 22 percent larger than it would otherwise have been. Boston lost migrants at almost every other age, however, except for a modest gain among those aged 10 to 19. (See “Net Migration by Age, 1990 - 2000.”) Other New England metropolitan areas saw net age-specific outmigration, too. But except in the case of 20-to-29-year-olds, age-specific outmigration was at a lower rate than Boston’s.

Nonmetropolitan New England saw a net inflow of migrants at almost every age except young adults, a persistent concern for the region. The nonmetropolitan migrants were mostly in their 50s and 60s, though there were also significant inflows of

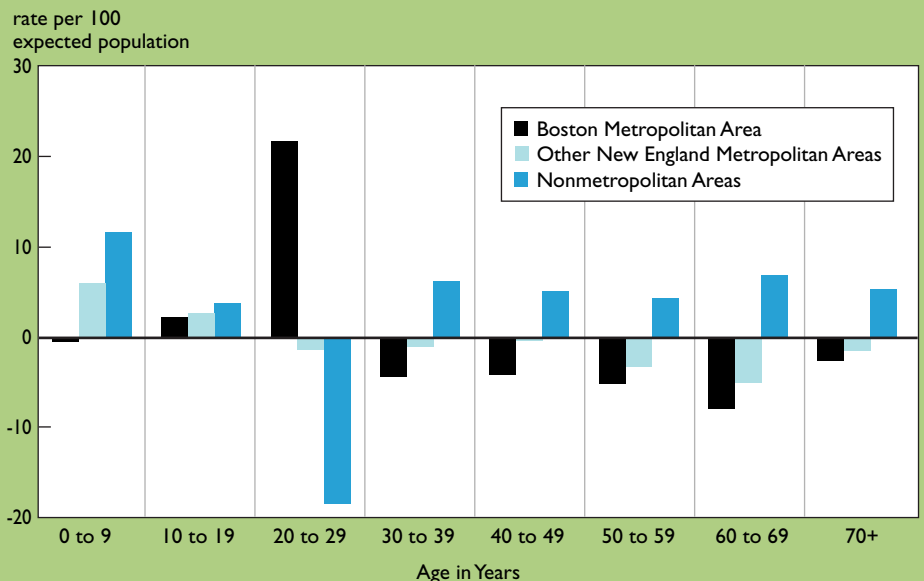
30-to-49-year-olds with children. In contrast, metro areas lost retirement-age migrants and families.

## What the Future Holds

With only modest natural increase and an aging population, future growth in New England depends on net migration inflow. Consider this Internal Revenue Service data. From the beginning of 2001 to the end of 2005, 251,000 more people left New England for other areas of the United States than came to it. The sheer volume of migration that produced this net change is stunning: More than 2,275,000 people moved in and out of the region in that period.

Only the Mid-Atlantic states gave a significant number of migrants to New England. Although 293,000 New Englanders moved to the Mid-Atlantic region, nearly 348,000 people migrated here, resulting in a net gain of 55,000. (See “Regional Migration Flows To and From New England, 2000 - 2005.”) However, in migration exchanges with the Midwest, New England barely held its own. It lost 243,000 people to the South and a more modest number to the West (38,000).<sup>2</sup>

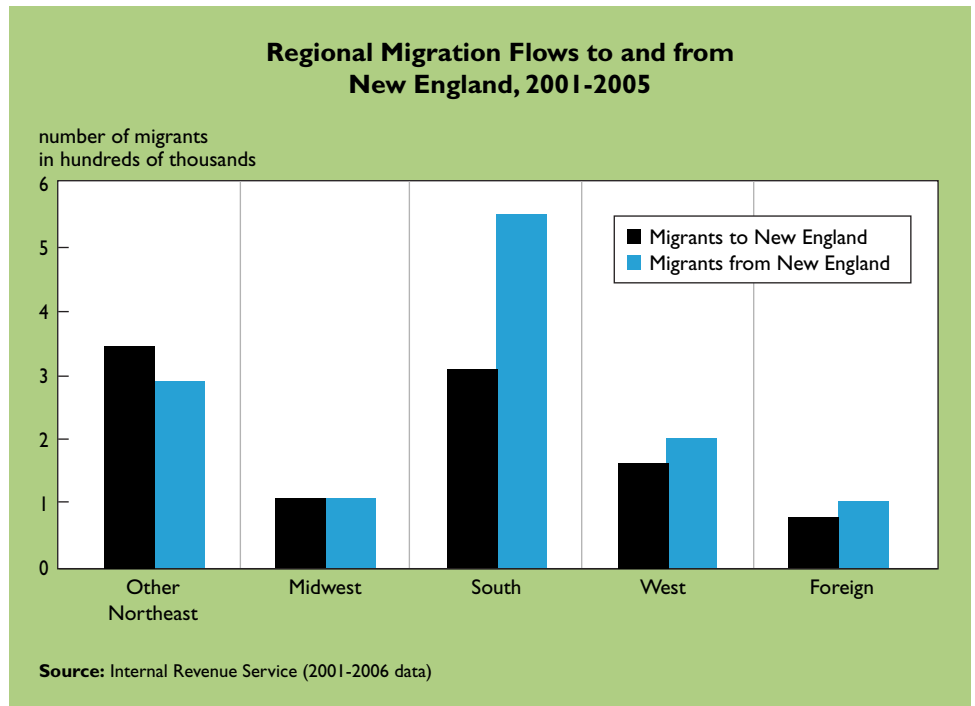
## Net Migration in New England, by Age 1990-2000



Source: Johnson, et al., 2005

Demographic trends have implications that reach beyond population redistribution. Households leaving New England had an aggregate income of roughly \$39.6 billion in the year they migrated, whereas those moving in earned \$33.7 billion. (See “Regional Migrant Income Flows To and From New England, 2000 - 2005.”) Despite significant income gains (\$3.5 billion) from migration exchanges with the rest of the Northeast, New England lost in exchanges with the South (\$8.2 billion) and with the West (\$1.5 billion). So, in addition to losing 251,000 people, New England lost nearly \$6 billion of income in migration exchanges with other regions. Because migrants moving to New England generally earn more than those leaving, that income loss was entirely due to the net outflow of people.

In sum, the demographic changes underway have important implications for the future size, composition, and distribution of the region’s population. For New England to continue to be a vibrant and diverse region, planners and policymakers need to consider how these demographic trends are likely to impact the future needs of its 14.3 million people and the



numerous institutions, organizations, and companies that serve them. First on their policy agenda should be a plan to stem the outflow of domestic migrants. The loss of so many New Englanders diminishes the region’s economic and social capital at a time when they are critically important to the region’s future.

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#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Because the data and computational demands required to produce such estimates are substantial, they can be produced only with data from the decennial census. For a detailed discussion of the methods used, see K.M. Johnson, P.R. Voss, R.B. Hammer, G.V. Fuguitt, and S. McNiven, “Temporal and Spatial Variation in Age-Specific Net Migration in the United States,” *Demography* 42, no. 4 (2005): 791-812.

<sup>2</sup>Migrants from foreign areas include U.S. residents returning from overseas assignments. However, very few immigrants are included in this group because only people who filed income tax returns in two successive years are included in IRS records.

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