

Rural Oklahoma's population is continuing to shrink. That was the headline news in a key U.S. Census Bureau report released last week. The census numbers are what will be used to put the final touches on legislative redistricting and congressional redistricting later this year. Overall, Oklahoma's population grew by 208,000 from 2010 to just under 4 million people. As Tulsa World reporter Randy Krehbiel pointed out, two-thirds of Oklahoma's 77 counties lost population over the past decade while the Oklahoma City metropolitan statistical area added almost 170,000 residents, taking it to more than 1.4 million, roughly 35% of the state's population. The Tulsa MSA grew by a little over 60,000 to about 1 million, roughly another quarter of the state's population. The report reflects what everyone already had sensed for some time: Oklahoma is increasingly a suburban state. Tulsa and Oklahoma City are the critical core of the state's economy and population, but the people are living in places like Edmond, Norman, Broken Arrow and Owasso. Meanwhile, rural Oklahoma continues the long-term process of shrinking. Young people move to cities for better jobs, better schools and better prospects. The most extreme expression of this is Cimarron County, in the farthest reach of the Panhandle, which has only 2,296 people, according to the report. We found a 2017 U.S. Department of Agriculture report that showed the county had 121,000 cattle, a ratio of more than 52-to-1. While the state's population has shifted to suburban and urban communities, you might not be able to tell it from observing the Oklahoma Legislature, where rural voices and policies are still overrepresented, as they have been since 1907. The political, social and economic implications, though, are fairly evident. From property tax policy to education funding to attitudes toward crime and punishment, the Oklahoma Legislature is a generation behind the state population. Current redistricting plans modestly address that issue but maintain the potential for a continued disproportionate rural flavor to state government. In the long term, though, failing an unlikely reversal of state population trends, political power must eventually follow the people into the cities and suburbs. Featured video: [Subscribe to Daily Headlines](#) Sign up! * I understand and agree

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