

## New Orleans' official 2010 census population is 343,829, agency reports

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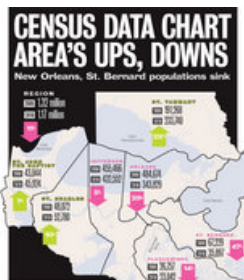
Five years after [Hurricane Katrina](#) emptied New Orleans and prompted the largest mass migration in modern American history, the [2010 Census](#) counted 343,829 people living in the still-recovering city, a 29 percent drop since the last head count a decade ago, according to data released today.



NASA and its international partnersNew Orleans was photographed last week from the International Space Station.

The latest decennial tally counted about 11,000 fewer residents than the latest [annual population estimate](#) that the Census Bureau issued in 2009. Though the difference amounts to only 3 percent, it's likely to prompt questions about whether the city's recovery has been less robust than portrayed.

A month before Katrina, about 455,000 people called New Orleans home, according to census estimates. That figure plummeted to about 210,000 residents the following year and had rebounded to just fewer than 355,000 people by mid-2009, according to the estimates.

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As a region, the New Orleans area largely held its ground during the first decade of the 21st century, despite the historic diaspora, [the new data](#) show. About 1.17 million residents were counted in 2010 in the seven-parish metropolitan area, compared with 1.32 million people counted in 2000, a drop of 11 percent.

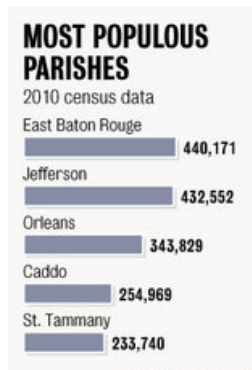
[Jefferson Parish](#) ranked as Louisiana's second-most populous parish in 2010 with 432,552 residents, though it too lost ground compared with its 2000 total of 455,000 people, the data show. The most populous parish was East Baton Rouge, home of the capital city, with 440,171 people.

St. Tammany Parish, which drew hordes of coastal residents after the storm, saw its population surge in 2010 to 233,740 residents, 22 percent more than 191,000 people who lived on the north shore in 2000.

Hard-hit St. Bernard saw the most dramatic population decline, losing 47 percent of its population compared with 2000. Plaquemines Parish's population also fell, though only by 14 percent.

Meanwhile the River Parishes showed steady growth. St. John the Baptist Parish experienced a 7 percent population jump, and St. Charles Parish grew by almost 10 percent.

The latest data, released to state officials, finally lay to rest perhaps the most fundamental question hanging over the region since the recovery began: How many people live here?



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The new numbers will be key to determining how large a slice of \$400 billion in federal money local parishes will receive in coming years for programs ranging from subsidized school lunches to Medicaid, as well as how political power will shift in the the state Legislature and locally elected bodies.

Thursday's release also included data about race and ethnicity.

New Orleans' racial composition also shifted somewhat as a result of the outmigration after Katrina.

Black residents comprised 60 percent of city residents last year, compared with 67 percent in 2000, the data show. Meanwhile, the proportion of white residents grew from 28 percent to 33 percent.

The city's proportion of Hispanic residents, who can be black or white, inched upward, from 3 percent in 2000 to 5.2 percent last year.

In Jefferson Parish, an opposite change took place. The proportion of African-American residents grew from 23 percent in 2000 to 26 percent last year, while the makeup of white residents dropped from nearly 70 percent a decade ago to 63 percent in 2010, the data show.

Jefferson Parish's Hispanic population also ballooned, from 7 percent in 2000 to 12 percent last year.

In coming days, census data will be available at the block level, offering a definitive picture of how the region has changed since Katrina. Demographers and others also are likely to use the numbers to gauge social characteristics, from crime rates to the prevalence of uninhabited properties.

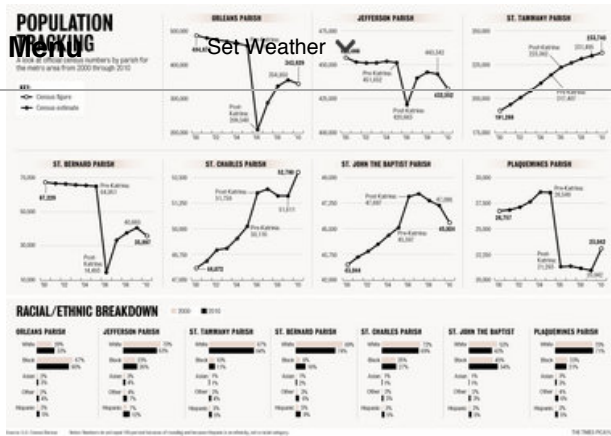
Details about property vacancies also are due to roll out this week, while data on household size and the relationships among people who live under the same roof will be available in coming months.

Louisiana is among the first four states in the nation to receive limited 2010 Census results this week, along with Mississippi, New Jersey and Virginia. The data are rolled out based on state election schedules; because Louisiana holds statewide elections this fall, its data arrived earlier to give officials as much time as possible to redraw district lines.

The Legislature is set to convene March 20 for a special redistricting session.

Anticipating difficulty counting residents in places destroyed by Katrina and other recent hurricanes, the Census Bureau took extraordinary measures last year to ensure an accurate count, including hand-delivering questionnaires and allowing new addresses to be added to canvassing lists long after the roster typically closes.

But some local officials, including former Mayor Ray Nagin and St. Bernard Parish President Craig Taffaro, remained leery of the process. Both encouraged residents who intended to return to the flood-ravaged communities -- but had not yet done so -- to say they lived there on the official census day, April 1, 2010. It's not clear how many followed the advice.



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Some experts also warned that even with the special steps taken by the census, the final 2010 tallies could end up far out of line with recent annual population estimates.

Officials in Orleans, Jefferson and St. Bernard parishes managed to convince federal officials in 2007 and 2008 to boost the initial estimates, in some cases significantly, by providing postal activity and electricity usage rates tabulated by local consultants.

The decennial enumeration -- a person-by-person tally mandated by the Constitution -- is far tougher to manipulate.

Mark VanLandingham, a Tulane University demographer and public health professor, long predicted that New Orleans' 2010 census result would fall short of recent estimates.

"We as a city really kind of need to face up to the fact that we are going to be substantially smaller than we used to be," he said last week. "We need to have the best count that science can give us, and we need to stop pretending that we're a bigger city than we are."

Tulane geographer Richard Campanella offered a similar caution.

"I think we should brace ourselves for potentially sobering news," he said. "Here, we've been pumping up expectations. Falling short of expectations could produce a national news narrative that maybe won't be deserved, or at least could have been avoided."

New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu on Thursday tried to downplay the numbers, pointing instead to hard evidence of the city's recovery, from the transformation of the city's public school landscape to the redesign of its health care and criminal justice systems.

A top aide to the mayor said last week that the city would not appeal the 2010 tally because the decennial challenge process "doesn't yield results."

Landrieu added Thursday that he'll rely on the accuracy of annual estimates in future years to "ensure that city government and local non-profit organizations will have the federal funds necessary to provide our growing population with important services."

Taffaro said he and other St. Bernard officials believe the parish's population is between 43,000 and 45,000, based on sources including utility usage, the school population and active postal addresses. The 2009 estimate pegged the population at 40,665 people.

The 2010 head count puts it at 35,897.

"My initial reaction supports our need to challenge the number to bring to light the fact that it's inconceivable to have lost numbers from '09 to 2010," Taffaro said.

Taffaro said the decennial census tally will mean significantly less federal funding for the parish, adding that he will consult with his colleagues in neighboring parishes about a possible challenge.

"Even if you only looked at the traffic in St. Bernard, you could tell there is more than 35,000 people living here," Councilman Wayne Landry said.

While the census results released this week are likely to become a key indicator of the region's rebound more than five years after Katrina, they probably are not the full picture.

Those who were overlooked tended to be minorities, children and low-income residents who didn't participate because of privacy concerns, homelessness or low literacy levels, the [Greater New Orleans Community Data Center's](#) Allison Plyer [wrote in 2001](#) citing data compiled the same year by the bipartisan [U.S. Census Monitoring Board](#).

About 10,300 New Orleans residents were skipped by the 2000 count, or about 17 percent of the nearly 60,000 Louisiana residents who got left out that year, wrote Plyer, whose organization has tracked New Orleans' repopulation using postal records and helped the city prepare its challenges of annual estimates.

The undercount statewide likely cost Louisiana between \$4 million and \$6 million in federal money annually over the past decade, she wrote.

"Although this is the gold standard, it's not perfectly accurate," Plyer said of the decennial census.

*Capital Bureau reporter Jan Moller contributed to this story.*

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