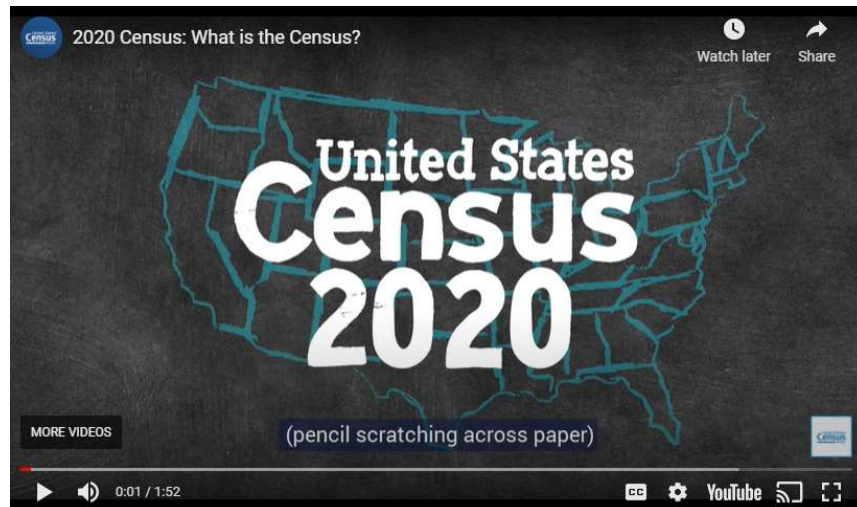


Here's how many people live in Idaho now — and whether it gets another congressional seat

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The 2020 census "will be unlike any other in our nation's history" and save billions of dollars, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The agency says it will use different innovative tools to get the most accurate and cost-effective count. | Courtesy U.S. Census Bureau

BOISE (Idaho Statesman) – Idaho narrowly missed taking the No. 1 spot for state population growth over the last decade, according to U.S. Census Bureau data released Monday.

Though Idaho has been at the top of census estimates for population growth for several years, its 17.3% growth in population over the last decade wasn't enough to take the top spot, results from the 2020 Census showed. Instead, Idaho came in at a close second to Utah's 18.4% population growth since 2010.

Census officials said Idaho added 271,449 residents in the last decade — 52,041 of them in the last year — bringing the state's total population to 1,839,106. In the 2010 Census, the agency counted 1,567,657 Idahoans.

Last year, the Bureau estimated the state's 2019 population was 1,787,065, a 2.1% increase over the previous year. For the last several years, Idaho has hovered around 1.5% to 2% growth each year. Last year's growth rate ramped up to 2.8%.

Idaho's growth rate dwarfed the national average of 7.4%.

Texas (15.9%), North Dakota (15.8%) and Nevada (15%) rounded out the top five states with the most growth in the past decade. Idaho remains one of the least-populated states in the country, with a population larger than 12 other states.

That Idaho is one of the fastest-growing states in the nation comes as no surprise as Idahoans see the effects of growth, including one of the toughest housing markets in the country.

Despite the growth over the last decade, it was not enough to gain another seat in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Population growth in two neighboring states — Oregon and Montana — led to each gaining a congressional district. Census Bureau representatives have yet to answer a Statesman request for the exact number of people Idaho needed to qualify for a third seat. But the margin was extremely close for other states on the list, an example of how razor-thin the counts can be.

Preliminary data listed Idaho eighth out of 10 “runner-up” states that almost gained a seat. Idaho will continue to have only two seats in the U.S. House. Oregon will go from five to six, and Montana will go from one to two.

With only 435 U.S. House seats to go around, adding a seat to one state inevitably removes a seat from another that lost population.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR 2030? OR STATE LEGISLATIVE DISTRICTS?

More detailed demographic data below the state level won't be available until the fall. State redistricting commissions will need this data to redraw and adjust lines for congressional and local legislative districts, and some Idaho lawmakers have floated a plan for the Idaho State Legislature to reconvene in the fall to handle that redistricting.

The state Constitution was amended in 2020 to fix the number of statewide districts at 35, which means the target population for each district would range from just under 50,000 to 55,000.

Matthew May, senior research associate at Boise State University's Idaho Policy Institute, said legislative district lines are likely to be redrawn in the Treasure Valley and other areas of the state that have experienced the most population growth. May said District 14, which covers Star, Eagle and Meridian, will be of particular interest. Growth in Boise has also pushed the dividing lines between the two congressional districts farther west with each successive redistricting, May said.

Idaho won't have another shot at a third congressional seat until after the next census count, in 2030.

Experts had predicted in 2020 that Idaho would fall short of the threshold needed to gain a new voice in Washington, D.C. Kim Brace, president of Election Data Services in Virginia, uses population trends to forecast what that means for states and their number of seats in the House. He told the Statesman in January 2020 that Idaho likely would be about 61,000 people away from qualifying for a third seat.

A lot of factors could affect whether the state hits the right number for a third seat 10 years from now, May said. The data gathered last year, right at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, might not accurately reflect the range of impacts COVID-19 had on communities. The 2020 Census recorded the second-lowest growth rate in U.S. population since the Great Depression, May said.

"I can see Idaho moving up that list of 10 states," May said. "I think a lot of it will depend on how much the net-out migration trends continue in places like California and New York, and how much of that population is coming to Idaho, as opposed to somewhere else."