

Young Vermonters Left the State at a Faster Pace 1990 to 2010

Young Vermonters left the state at a faster pace from 1990 to 2010 than they did from 1980 to 2000, according to our analysis of recently released 2010 Census data. This finding comes from our update of an analysis published in the December 2006 issue of *VEN*.

Young Vermonters Leave the State

The decennial census is the best data source to get an estimate of the migration patterns of an age group over time. We do this by comparing the number of Vermonters aged 5 to 9 in 1990 to the number of residents aged 15 to 19 in 2000 (who are roughly the same people just ten years later) and to the number of 25 to 29 year-olds in 2010 (again, the same people but twenty years later). This is done for seven age groups in the table below.

One needs to be careful about comparisons that span the years of college attendance. Vermont's population in the 15 to 19 and 20 to 24 age cohorts swells as more students come to Vermont for a college experience than leave the state for the same elsewhere. But after graduation, most out-of-state students leave Vermont.

The table below can be interpreted as follows: In 1990, there were 41,789 children in Vermont aged 5 to 9. Ten years later in 2000 these children would have been 15 to 19 years-old. There were 45,770 people in this age group, a significant increase. However, this was due mostly, if not entirely, to the influx of college students into Vermont.

Then twenty years after 1990, this same group would be 25 to 29 years-old. The recent U.S. Census tells us there were only 35,441 Vermonters in that age group. What happened here? The major trend was that the out-of-state college students returned home from Vermont. What is more interesting is when we

compare the 2010 number (35,441) to the count from twenty years earlier (41,789), we see a decline of 6,348 people, or a drop of 15%. Our previously published analysis for the period 1980 to 2000 showed a smaller loss of 9%.

We get similar results when we follow the age group of 10 to 14 year-olds over the period 1990 to 2010. The number of people in this cohort declined from 37,990 in 1990 to 34,181 in 2010, a decline of 3,809 or 10%. Our analysis of the 1980 to 2000 period showed a loss of just 5% for this age group.

This is good evidence to support the claim that Vermont is losing its young people. This was true over the period 1980 to 2000 which we analyzed in our 2006 *VEN* article and now is true over the period 1990 to 2010. And the percentage decrease in young Vermonters was larger over the 1990 to 2010 period compared to 1980 to 2000.

We ignore the trend with the next two age groups, 15 to 19 and 20 to 24 year-olds in 1990. In 1990 many of those in this age cohort were already college students, so the decline in subsequent years is likely just due to the students returning home after graduation.

Do Middle-Aged People Move to Vermont?

To answer this question, consider the 25 to 29 age group in 1990. There were 45,261 of them, with only a few in college. Ten years later in 2000 this group totaled 49,376. And twenty years later the number increased to 50,110. That's a gain of 4,849 people, or 11% in twenty years.

This trend also holds for the 30 to 34 year-old age group which increased in size by 5% over the periods

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Population Change by Age Group: 1990 to 2010

Age Group in 1990	Number in 1990	Number 10 Years Later	Number 20 Years Later	20-Year Absolute Change	20-Year Percent Change
5 to 9	41,789	45,770	35,441	-6,348	-15%
10 to 14	37,990	37,852	34,181	-3,809	-10%
15 to 19	41,699	34,182	36,358	-5,341	na
20 to 24	43,510	40,385	42,001	-1,509	na
25 to 29	45,261	49,376	50,110	4,849	11%
30 to 34	49,996	52,513	52,493	2,497	5%
35 to 39	49,057	50,107	48,739	-318	-1%

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reviewed in the table. Therefore, it appears that while Vermont is losing its young, it is gaining middle-aged people. The same result was found in our previous analysis and at roughly the same rate.

We cannot use this simple analysis for any older age groups as higher death rates begin to cause the numbers in each age group to decline over time. Death rates for the younger age groups are low enough to allow migration patterns to emerge from the data.

So Why Care?

We find demographics interesting in and of itself. But from an economic perspective losing young people and gaining older people is a worrisome tradeoff. The young bring new, fresh ideas to an economy. The young are more entrepreneurial and take greater business risks than the middle-aged. And if the middle-aged who migrate into Vermont have already “made it,” they would be less likely to tolerate change, which could help to explain the “nimbyism” that seems to prevail in the state. This suggests the tradeoff of young versus old can lead to slower economic growth in Vermont.■

Vermont: Missing 20,000 Potential Workers

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Simple economic theory suggests that firms will just raise their wages and this will attract in-migrants from other states. But that means those firms will have higher costs and in a competitive environment, their sales will suffer. Rather than hiring, they will either have to automate their production processes (easier in some industries than others) or move to another state where labor is more abundant.

VEN's concern is the latter: that Vermont will see an increase in businesses leaving the state because of the lack of young workers.■

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