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N.Y. / REGION

People Fled the Bronx in the 1970s. Now Its Population Is Booming.



The intersection of Fordham Road and Webster Avenue, in one of the busiest areas in the Bronx, on Thursday. Census projections indicate the borough's population has surpassed its historic peak.

Gregg Vigliotti for The New York Times

By [SAM ROBERTS](#)

The Bronx is surging.

The borough, which lost one in five residents during the 1970s when it was afflicted by high crime and arson fires, has not only recouped its population loss but also appears to have surpassed its historic peak, according to new census projections.

An influx of immigrants helped boost the borough's population to 1.455 million as of July 1, 2015, according to the United States Census Bureau. At the annual rate the Bronx has been growing since 2010, about 1 percent, the highest of any county in the state, that would place the current total ahead of the high of 1.472 million in 1970, demographers agree.

And Queens, already a polyglot mix of residents from every corner of the globe, is growing ever more diverse. Nearly half, or about 48 percent, of the population of Queens is foreign-born, ranking the borough second only to Miami-Dade in Florida (with nearly 53 percent) among larger American counties in the share of residents from abroad. One-fourth of Queens residents come from Asia.

The latest figures from the bureau's American Community Survey and other estimates also confirm that New York City's total population has exceeded 8.5 million, the highest it has ever been.

In the Bronx, a housing boom has contributed to the population comeback.

A recent report by the New York Building Congress found that the Bronx accounted for nearly 32 percent of building permits issued by mid-2016, compared with an annual average of 11 percent between 2011 and 2015. The Bronx led all five of the city's boroughs in the number of homes and apartments authorized for construction, with 1,926.

Over 50,000 more people are employed in the Bronx this year than five years ago, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

In the 1970s alone, the Bronx population declined to 1.169 million, from 1.472 million, largely as a result of white flight. From 2007 to 2014, 30,000 more whites left the Bronx. But from 2014 to 2015, fewer than 1,000 did.

In that same one-year period, the borough gained 13,000 foreign immigrants, second only to Brooklyn and even more than the usual leader, Queens. The 3 percent increase in the Bronx's foreign-born population was surpassed only by the rate of increase on Staten Island.

"Folks are starting to realize we're no longer the Bronx of the '70s and '80s, that we're safer than we've been in 50 years," Ruben Diaz Jr., the Bronx borough president, said.

Prof. Andrew A. Beveridge, a Queens College demographer, said, "The continued population growth of the outer boroughs of New York City, typical of Brooklyn and to some extent Queens, now seems to be spreading to parts of the Bronx, as they reach their record population."

Over the five years ending July 1, 2015, Brooklyn led the boroughs in population growth, followed by the Bronx, Queens, Manhattan and Staten Island. The city's overall population increased by 375,000 residents or about 4.6 percent during that period — the greatest growth since the 1920s.

Mirroring a national trend, between 2014 and 2015, median household income citywide rose to \$55,752, and the poverty rate declined to 20 percent, from 20.9 percent. But New Yorkers were not as well off by either measure as they were in 2007 before the recession.

"This is the first tangible sign that the impact of the recession is starting to abate," said David Jones, of the Community Service Society, a research and advocacy group. But the fact that the rate barely declined among Hispanic New Yorkers, for one thing, he said, made his organization's agenda for a higher minimum wage and more affordable housing all the more relevant.

"I'm not going out of business," Mr. Jones said.