

California cities leading in population growth, density

By Dan Walters

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Increasingly, Americans are living in cities, those cities are becoming more densely populated, and California is a major factor in both trends, a new [Census Bureau report](#) indicates.

Nearly two-thirds of the nation's population live in incorporated cities, with the highest proportion, 76.4 percent, found in Western states, somewhat surprisingly.

California cities, both large and small, are prominently found in the report's lists of the nation's fastest-growing, as well as those seeing ever-greater population density.

Three California cities – Fontana (52.1 percent), Irvine (47 percent) and Bakersfield (40.8 percent) – are among the 10 cities of 100,000 or more population that saw the greatest gains between 200 and 2010. Gilbert, AZ, topped the list at 90 percent.

The Sacramento suburb of Elk Grove, at 155.1 percent, topped all mid-sized American cities during that decade. Another capital suburb, Lincoln, was the nation's fastest growing small city at 282.1 percent.

During that decade, California's overall population growth was well under 10 percent, the slowest rate of recent history.

With California cities generally growing faster than the state as a whole, and the expansion of city limits often blocked by geography, they are becoming more densely populated, the report also shows.

San Francisco is the nation's second most densely populated large city at 17,858.9 persons per square mile, with New York City first at 27,781.2. And with the city hemmed in by water and the San Mateo County line, it cannot expand its 61 square miles, so it is becoming denser every year.

Between 2010 and 2013, San Francisco's density increased by 679.7 persons per square mile, adding to its legendary traffic and parking squeezes and a shortage of housing that has driven rents and home prices sky-high. That was the nation's third largest increase in density behind New York City and Washington, D.C.

Several other California cities are featured prominently in the Census Bureau's calculation of density. Daly City, just south of San Francisco in San Mateo County, is the nation's sixth densest city at 13,708.6 person per square mile. Others on the list include Santa Ana, Inglewood, Berkeley, Norwalk, Garden Grove and Long Beach.

The flip side of the density factor is what happened in Modesto during the 2010-13 period. It expanded its footprint by 7.5 square miles, the Census Bureau calculated, while adding fewer than 4,000 to its population, thus dropping its density by 837.6 persons per square mile – the nation's largest density decrease.