

## **IMMIGRATION KEY FACTOR IN GROWTH OF URBAN COUNTIES**

By Genaro C. Armas GENARO C. ARMAS, The Associated Press  
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WASHINGTON -- Immigrants helped stabilize some of the nation's big city centers last year while people moving around the country continued to push out the metropolitan fringes.

Rockwall County, Texas, about 20 miles east of Dallas, was the fastest growing county, ballooning by 8 percent between July 2001 and July 2002. Suburban counties around Denver, Atlanta and Washington also had big gains on the list released Thursday by the Census Bureau.

The latest figures provide fresh evidence of demographic trends that have developed for decades, said William Frey, a demographer at the Brookings Institution, a Washington think tank.

"These big counties are increasingly dependent on immigration," Frey said. "Growth in the suburbs has occurred because the more affordable homes are the ones further out."

Sprawling Los Angeles County, the nation's largest, added 118,000 immigrants from abroad while losing 83,000 residents to other U.S. destinations. Overall, the population grew 1.3 percent in the year, to 9.8 million.

Cook County, Ill., home to Chicago, saw a net increase of 50,000 international migrants and a net decrease of 97,000 domestic migrants. The county's population overall remained relatively unchanged at 5.4 million.

The 2000 census showed immigration from Mexico helped Chicago reverse a decades-long decline in population. Newcomers came to the neighborhood of "La Villita," or "The Little Village," in southwest Chicago in search of jobs and to network with family and friends already there, which in turn helped businesses boom there, said Abel Nunez, an administrator at Centro Romero, a local social service agency.

Most of the largest urban counties had little or no growth, while suburban counties in the West and South once again dominated the list of fastest-growing areas.

After Rockwall County, the next three fastest-growing places were Loudoun County, Va., which is west of Washington; and the Atlanta suburbs of Henry and Forsyth counties in Georgia. Fifth was Flagler County, Fla., on the Atlantic coast between Jacksonville and Daytona Beach.

To compile the Census Bureau's annual estimate of county populations, demographers studied birth and death records while estimating immigration and domestic relocations based on the 2000 census.

Nationally, there were 288.4 million U.S. residents last July.