

Cabarrus County’s Population Boom

Growth trends and spatial hot spots across North Carolina

Cabarrus County’s population grew from 131,063 in 2000 to 240,016 in 2023, a 83% increase that ranks 5th among all 100 counties in North Carolina. That growth is not happening in isolation: Cabarrus sits at the center of the Charlotte metro’s suburban expansion, part of a spatial cluster where high growth in one county reinforces high growth in neighboring counties.

<h3>240,016</h3> <p>Residents in 2023, up from 131,063 in 2000</p>	<h3>+83%</h3> <p>23-year growth rate, vs. a NC county median of +11%</p>	<h3>5th of 100</h3> <p>Fastest-growing county in NC by percentage, 2000–2023</p>
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Key Findings

- **Growth rate (Figure 1).** Cabarrus County grew by 83% between 2000 and 2023, adding more than 109,000 residents. That ranks it **5th out of 100** North Carolina counties for percentage growth over that period.
- **Regional clustering (Figure 2).** The growth is not a local accident. A hot spot analysis places Cabarrus in the **Hot Spot (99%)** category, meaning the surrounding region grew fast as well. Cabarrus is the statistical core of the most concentrated growth cluster in the state.
- **Annual trends (Figure 3).** Population has increased every year on record. The period average was 2.7% annual growth, with the highest rates occurring in the post-pandemic period as remote work expanded the effective commute radius of the Charlotte metro.
- **Within-county variation (Figure 4).** Growth is uneven across Cabarrus’s 47 census tracts. The median tract grew 14% between 2010 and 2020, but individual tracts range from -4.8% to 188.4%, reflecting where developable land and highway access overlap.

Population Growth Rate by County, 2000–2023

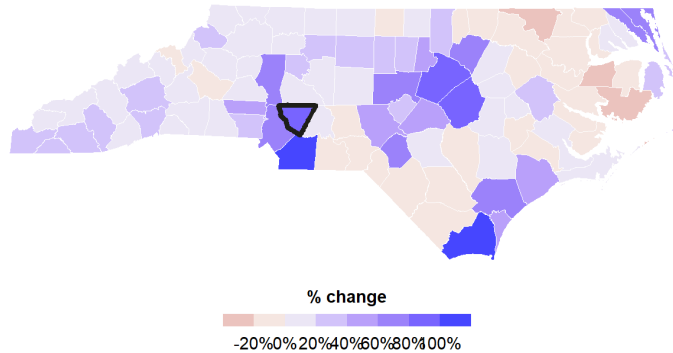


Figure 1: Population growth rate by county, 2000 to 2023. Cabarrus County outlined in dark.

North Carolina in Context

Growth in North Carolina is sharply uneven. The Research Triangle region and the Piedmont Crescent sweeping from Charlotte through Cabarrus and into the Triad absorbed most of the state’s population gains over the past two decades; many coastal plain and mountain counties declined or stagnated.

A hot spot analysis tests whether Cabarrus’s growth is an isolated spike or part of a genuine regional cluster. With a z-score placing it in the **Hot Spot (99%)** category, Cabarrus is not an outlier. It is the statistical core of a contiguous cluster of high-growth counties anchored by Mecklenburg, with less than a 1% probability that this level of spatial concentration occurs by chance.

The following figure and table show where Cabarrus sits within the full NC distribution.

Hot Spot Analysis: Spatial Clustering of Growth

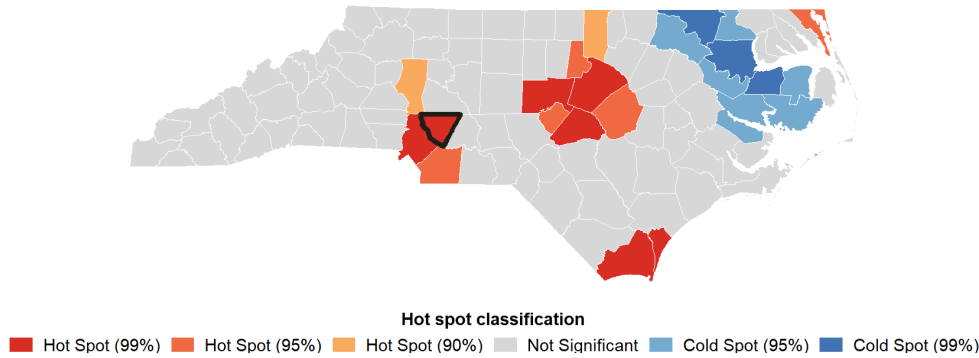


Figure 2: Hot spot classification based on spatial clustering of county-level growth rates. Cabarrus County outlined in dark.

County	Pop. 2000	Pop. 2023	Change	% Change	Rank
Brunswick	73,143	159,964	+86,821	+118.7%	1
Union	123,677	256,452	+132,775	+107.4%	2
Johnston	121,965	241,955	+119,990	+98.4%	3
Wake	627,846	1,190,275	+562,429	+89.6%	4
<i>Cabarrus</i>	131,063	240,016	+108,953	+83.1%	5
Currituck	18,190	31,593	+13,403	+73.7%	6
Mecklenburg	695,454	1,163,701	+468,247	+67.3%	7
Pender	41,082	68,521	+27,439	+66.8%	8
Chatham	49,329	81,624	+32,295	+65.5%	9
Franklin	47,260	77,001	+29,741	+62.9%	10

Table 1: Top 10 fastest-growing NC counties by percentage, 2000–2023. Cabarrus County in italics.

Year by Year

Raw decennial snapshots show how far Cabarrus has traveled between censuses, but they obscure whether that journey was steady or turbulent. The chart below tracks annual population for every year on record (top panel) and the year-over-year growth rate for each year (bottom panel).

Growth has been uninterrupted since 2000. The period average is 2.7% annual growth, marked by the dashed line in the lower panel. Two notable departures bookend the record. A trough around 2010 reflects the Great Recession: homebuilding stalled and in-migration slowed, but Cabarrus never contracted. The surge from 2019 onward reflects the pandemic-era reshuffling of residential geography, as remote work expanded the geographic range of households willing to commute to Charlotte-area employers.

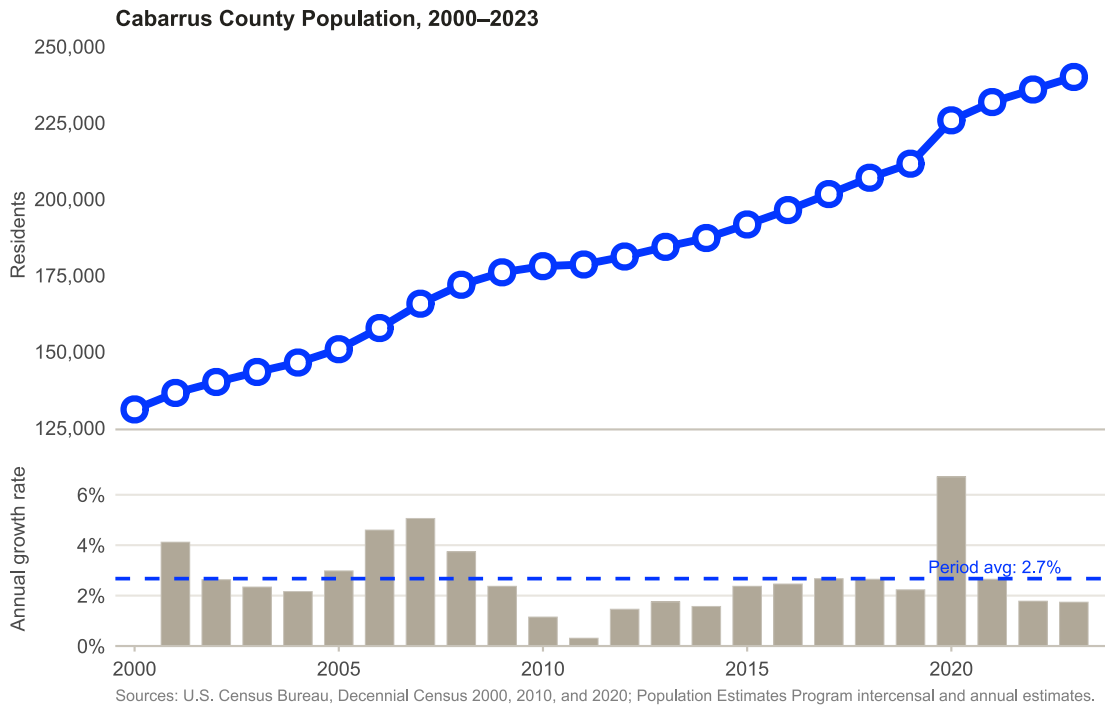


Figure 3: Cabarrus County annual population (top) and year-over-year growth rate (bottom), 2000 to 2023. Dashed line marks the period average growth rate of 2.7%.

Within Cabarrus County

The county-level figures describe aggregate growth. They do not reveal where within the county that growth has landed. Cabarrus’s 47 census tracts tell a more granular story.

The median tract grew 14% between 2010 and 2020, but the range is wide: from -4.8% at the slow end to 188.4% at the fast end. Growth has concentrated where developable land meets highway access and new infrastructure investment. Quieter tracts tend to be either long-established neighborhoods near the county seat where most parcels are already built out, or rural areas at the county’s edges where the suburban wave has not yet arrived.

Population Change by Census Tract, 2010–2020

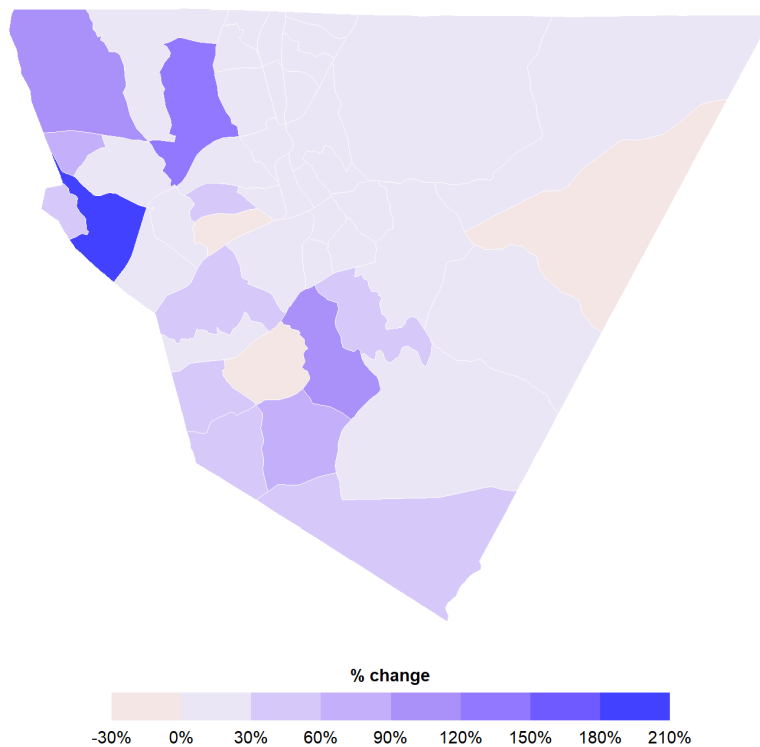


Figure 4: Population change by census tract, 2010 to 2020. Tract boundaries reflect 2020 vintage geography. Tracts with no 2010 population base shown in gray.

Note

About this brief. The 2000 baseline uses the Decennial Census (SF1, table P001001). The 2023 county-level estimate uses the Census Bureau’s Population Estimates Program (vintage 2023), which models county populations from the 2020 Census baseline using administrative records on births, deaths, and migration. The annual time series combines three sources: post-2010 intercensal estimates (2001-2009), the PEP annual series (2011-2019), and post-2020 PEP vintage estimates (2021 onward), with decennial counts anchoring each segment. The hot spot analysis uses queen contiguity spatial weights; z-scores at or above 2.576 indicate less than a 1% probability of spatial clustering occurring by chance. Tract-level 2010 populations are expressed in 2020 tract geography using a block-level centroid crosswalk. Full methodology at cabarrusdatalab.com/blog.