

Demographics Analysis for Polk County

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Population

Polk County outpaced the state and nation in population growth between the July 2023 and April 2020 estimates, growing 12.90% as compared to 5.00% and 1.00% for the state and nation, respectively. Within the larger cities (populations greater than 5,000), growth is being led by Davenport, Haines City, and Auburndale, with all more than 25% estimated growth over the period. The fast growth experienced in the county is a stark contrast to the national growth which remained nearly flat during COVID-19 as birth rates remained low and immigration fell. Most of the growth experienced in pockets of the country were driven by relocations. As some normalcy returns to labor markets, it is yet to be seen if the population shifts will hold in the long run.

Population Proportion by City

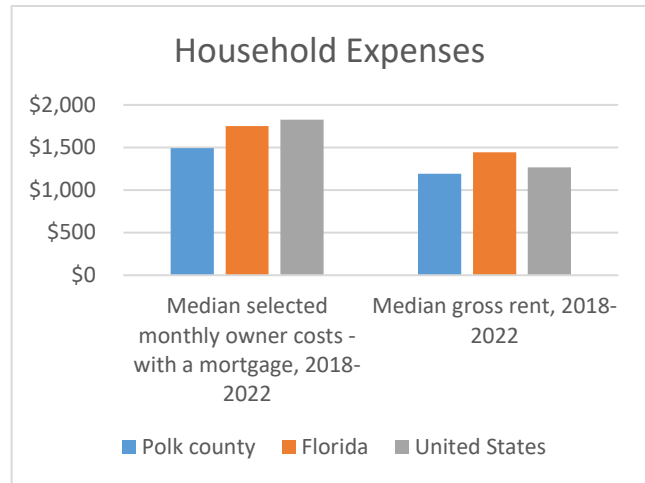
	2023	2020
Auburndale	2.45%	2.15%
Bartow	2.52%	2.69%
Davenport	1.84%	1.29%
Fort Meade	0.64%	0.70%
Haines City	4.55%	3.80%
Lake Alfred	0.90%	0.90%
Lakeland	14.94%	15.53%
Lake Wales	2.04%	2.22%
Winter Haven	6.98%	6.93%
Other	63.14%	63.79%

Age

The county's age distribution reflects a larger portion of younger people (22.0%, under 18) than the state (19.4%) and a larger population of older people (19.4%, 65 and over) than the nation (17.7%). Both Florida (21.7%) and the Polk County have older populations than the national average, however, the county's proportion fell while the state's rose over the past year. The larger portions of younger and older people negatively impact our economy as it results in a smaller population of working age people, as reflected in the smaller labor force population (56.5%, 59.0% and 63.0% for the county, state and nation based on 2018 – 2022 data, respectively). The long-run trend of an aging population will be partly responsible for the increasing strain on social security, other social services, and the medical system. While life expectancy fell during COVID, it has begun increasing again, rising to 77.5 years as of 2022 according to the CDC. The labor force population is largest in Davenport (69.2%), Lake Alfred (66.8%) and Bartow (64.1%).

Households

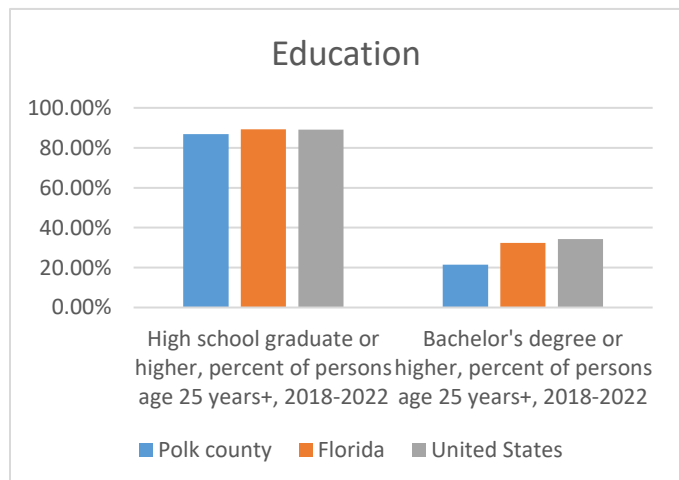
Polk County continues to have higher than average homeowner occupancy (69.8%, 66.9% and 64.8% for the county, state, and nation, respectively) and lower than average costs for both homeowners and renters. The lower property values during the survey years (2018 – 2022) reflect the relative affordability of ownership in Polk County, despite the increases that occurred during the post-COVID housing boom. There is a wide range in average home values across the county during the period with a low of \$133,000 in Fort Meade to a high of \$229,400 in Auburndale, in comparison to median values for the county, state and county of \$215,700, \$292,200, and \$281,900, respectively. It is worth pointing out that the county median home value as a percentage of the state’s value increased from 71.5% to 73.8% over the past year, while the state as a whole is getting more expensive relative to the nation (increased from 101.6% to 103.7% of the national median).



Polk County has also seen meaningful growth in taxable property values, with total taxable value increasing from \$59.5B in 2023 to \$66.3B in 2024 (+11.4%), with over \$2.7B of that attributable to new construction. Taxable new construction continues to be concentrated in Haines City (\$353M), Winter Haven (\$245M), and Auburndale (\$191M). The substantial increase in taxable value should provide a meaningful revenue increase for the county to alleviate the growing costs that come with the population growth the county has experienced.

Education

Polk County continues to trail the state and nation in both high school and college degrees. The portion of the population with bachelor’s degrees or higher increased 0.4% to 21.4% while the state has 32.3% (up 0.8%) and the nation has 34.3% (up 0.7%). While the county has made gains overall, the gap has widened relative to the state and nation. There is variation across the cities, with several at or below 15% and Lakeland just under 27%. Continued efforts to address education, both formal and career training, will be critical for maintaining a productive workforce in the county.



Medical

Both Polk County (14.7%) and the state (13.4%) trail the nation (9.5%) in the percentage of people without health insurance. The rates improved across all three geographies and the gap between the county and nation has closed somewhat since 2023. The size of the gap is partly driven by state policy to not expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act as other states have done and the state's lower income. The level of uninsured people in the county may drive up future medical costs and possible bad debts for local hospitals as many people cope with ongoing impacts of COVID-19 and other serious health conditions.

Business/Economy

As previously mentioned, Polk County lags the state and nation in labor force participation, partially due to a larger portion of older population, but partially due other factors, including education. Per capita retail expenditures are roughly proportional to per capita income, as compared to the state, but a bit lower than national averages. Polk County also has higher than average poverty, with 15.7% (up 0.1%) of the population living in poverty, as compared to 12.3% (down 0.4%) and 11.1% (down 0.4%) in the state and nation, respectively, and has worsened while the state and country have improved this year. There is wide variation among the cities as well, with poverty reaching a high of 23.0% in Fort Meade and low of 9.4% in Lake Alfred. The increased inflation during the 2021 – 2023 period is straining household budgets and the cash cushion households enjoyed following the COVID stimulus has been spent. Federal Reserve action to slow down inflation has taken hold and they have begun loosening policy once again. While the overall jobs market remains solid, reduce household savings and higher levels of consumer debt contribute to a more fragile economy with little room for error to avoid a recession.

Summary

Overall, Polk County, like much of the nation, is feeling the tail-end of the economics actions taken during COVID-19. The Federal stimulus which kept many households going underwater during the 2020 shutdowns lead to an excess of cash circulating in the economy, combined with a heavily disrupted global supply chain leading to underproduction of goods led to the highest inflation numbers in decades. While the Federal Reserve slowed down inflation without triggering a recession, household are still grappling with elevated price levels and wages that did not quite keep up. We are seeing signs of price reversals in some key markets, such as housing and automobiles, but prices of consumer staples remain at elevated levels. It may take several years of stable prices for wages to catch back up and spending power to reach prior levels.

Census QuickFacts 2024

	Polk county	Florida	United States	Auburndale	Bartow	Davenport	Fort Meade	Haines City	Lake Alfred	Lakeland	Lake Wales	Winter Haven
Population												
Population estimates, July 1, 2023, (V2023)	818,330	22,610,726	334,914,895	20,011	20,584	15,068	5,270	37,272	7,355	122,264	16,681	57,109
Population estimates base, April 1, 2020, (V2023)	725,048	21,538,216	331,464,948	15,605	15,511	9,335	5,100	27,542	6,527	112,629	16,074	50,230
Population, percent change - April 1, 2020 (estimates base) to July 1, 2023, (V2023)	12.90%	5.00%	1.00%	28.20%	5.40%	61.40%	3.30%	12.70%	12.70%	8.60%	3.80%	13.70%
Population, Census, April 1, 2020	725,046	21,538,187	331,449,281	15,616	19,309	9,043	5,100	26,669	6,374	112,641	16,361	49,219
Age												
Persons under 5 years, percent	5.60%	5.00%	5.50%	6.50%	6.10%	8.30%	6.40%	6.30%	8.30%	5.20%	4.70%	6.20%
Persons under 18 years, percent	22.00%	19.40%	21.70%	23.10%	20.80%	27.10%	20.40%	25.10%	20.40%	18.80%	20.30%	21.80%
Persons 65 years and over, percent	19.40%	21.70%	17.70%	17.00%	16.70%	10.20%	32.10%	14.10%	18.10%	21.70%	26.30%	22.60%
Gender, Race, Military and Foreign Born												
Female persons, percent	50.70%	50.90%	50.50%	52.50%	49.40%	49.40%	51.60%	50.90%	54.20%	50.90%	51.90%	52.20%
White alone, percent	76.90%	76.70%	75.30%	76.50%	59.90%	43.50%	68.70%	41.90%	54.40%	65.10%	58.80%	53.20%
Black or African American alone, percent	17.40%	16.90%	13.70%	13.20%	24.00%	21.50%	15.80%	26.70%	14.60%	19.80%	19.60%	25.70%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent	0.80%	0.60%	1.30%	0.20%	0.40%	1.70%	0.90%	0.10%	0.00%	0.30%	0.50%	0.20%
Asian alone, percent	2.10%	3.20%	6.40%	1.40%	2.80%	0.70%	1.50%	9.20%	1.50%	2.30%	0.10%	2.40%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, percent	0.10%	0.10%	0.30%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.10%	0.10%	0.00%
Two or More Races, percent	2.70%	2.50%	3.10%	3.80%	7.90%	10.10%	4.50%	11.30%	11.30%	6.50%	13.20%	10.60%
Hispanic or Latino, percent	30.30%	27.40%	19.50%	17.50%	15.00%	54.60%	27.60%	46.50%	23.50%	17.80%	27.50%	21.30%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, percent	50.60%	51.90%	58.40%	66.90%	55.00%	23.20%	54.90%	25.00%	49.40%	57.70%	49.80%	47.30%
Veterans, 2018-2022	45,358	1,369,719	17,038,807	743	1,317	295	349	1073	430	8,240	1,359	3,349
Foreign born persons, percent, 2018-2022	10.90%	21.10%	13.70%	9.30%	5.40%	18.80%	4.90%	18.40%	12.40%	10.30%	10.20%	9.00%
Households												
Housing Units, July 1, 2023, (V2023)	352,651	10,451,818	145,344,636	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Owner-occupied housing unit rate, 2018-2022	69.80%	69.90%	69.80%	69.80%	69.80%	93.20%	73.80%	68.30%	70.30%	54.80%	62.80%	62.00%
Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2018-2022	\$215,700	\$292,200	\$281,900	\$229,400	\$195,200	\$274,900	\$133,000	\$222,100	\$204,000	\$207,800	\$208,500	\$220,800
Median selected monthly owner costs -with a mortgage, 2018-2022	\$1,494	\$1,752	\$1,828	\$1,583	\$1,455	\$1,796	\$1,367	\$1,602	\$1,543	\$1,535	\$1,284	\$1,484
Median selected monthly owner costs -without a mortgage, 2018-2022	\$481	\$590	\$584	\$411	\$414	\$491	\$416	\$652	\$504	\$545	\$523	\$523
Median gross rent, 2018-2022	\$1,192	\$1,444	\$1,268	\$989	\$1,027	\$1,968	\$846	\$1,193	\$1,201	\$1,217	\$1,000	\$1,113
Building Permits, 2023	12,513	193,788	1,511,102	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Households, 2018-2022	264,145	8,353,441	125,736,353	5,636	6,921	3,059	2,227	9,319	2,254	44,323	6,734	18,741
Persons per household, 2018-2022	2.73	2.50%	2.57	2.88	2.73	3.33	2.3	3.07	2.89	2.42	2.88	2.67
Living in same house 1 year ago, percent of persons age 1 year+, 2018-2022	85.10%	85.60%	86.90%	90.20%	84.20%	83.70%	88.50%	85.60%	84.70%	79.60%	89.00%	85.20%
Language other than English spoken at home, percent of persons age 5 years+, 2018-2022	25.10%	29.90%	21.70%	19.60%	13.40%	60.00%	23.50%	48.40%	29.30%	18.40%	22.50%	23.40%
Education												
High school graduate or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2018-2022	86.90%	89.30%	89.10%	83.90%	91.10%	84.40%	82.10%	83.00%	87.10%	90.10%	86.00%	88.10%
Bachelor's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2018-2022	21.40%	32.30%	34.30%	18.00%	22.10%	18.70%	10.30%	17.70%	20.60%	26.70%	23.30%	19.50%
Medical												
With a disability, under age 65 years, percent, 2018-2022	9.80%	8.70%	8.90%	6.60%	12.20%	5.40%	11.00%	5.60%	9.80%	10.50%	11.10%	8.40%
Persons without health insurance, under age 65 years, percent	14.70%	13.40%	9.50%	10.10%	10.10%	18.60%	20.90%	20.30%	12.00%	14.30%	13.10%	15.80%
Business/Economy												
In civilian labor force, total, percent of population age 16 years+, 2018-2022	56.50%	59.00%	63.00%	59.10%	64.10%	69.20%	42.50%	58.50%	66.80%	55.10%	48.00%	54.30%
In civilian labor force, female, percent of population age 16 years+, 2018-2022	52.10%	54.60%	58.50%	52.00%	60.80%	60.20%	32.80%	50.20%	63.50%	51.00%	44.30%	48.00%
Total accommodation and food services sales, 2017 (\$1,000)	1,019,024	67,950,386	938,237,077	34,633	41,685	39,784	4,309	58,708	3,127	416,485	52,655	130,979
Total health care and social assistance receipts/revenue, 2017 (\$1,000)	3,505,936	155,283,578	2,527,903,275	23,326	248,147	32,335	0	256,582	0	1,897,206	145,007	644,431
Total transportation and warehousing receipts/revenue, 2017 (\$1,000)	1,329,471	68,145,959	895,225,411	137,554	92,435	37,153	3,186	48,331	495	232,078	326,411	34,100
Total retail sales, 2017 (\$1,000)	8,333,421	333,134,553	4,949,601,481	376,520	286,724	385,229	74,737	355,299	119,265	3,221,360	1,082,853	1,082,853
Total retail sales per capita, 2017	\$12,152	\$15,881	\$15,224	\$23,718	\$14,722	\$85,322	\$12,252	\$14,795	\$20,482	\$29,894	\$36,259	\$26,472
Mean travel time to work (minutes), workers age 16 years+, 2018-2022	29.5	27.9	26.7	30.2	40.4	38.4	34.1	29.5	34.1	29.2	27.9	27.9
Median household income (in 2022 dollars), 2018-2022	\$60,901	\$67,917	\$75,149	\$67,661	\$60,974	\$64,428	\$34,474	\$57,718	\$62,311	\$58,290	\$55,833	\$56,425
Per capita income in past 12 months (in 2022 dollars), 2018-2022	\$30,262	\$38,850	\$41,261	\$29,670	\$29,728	\$25,066	\$26,206	\$26,919	\$28,713	\$33,154	\$26,994	\$28,967
Persons in poverty, percent	15.70%	12.30%	11.10%	11.00%	15.50%	17.90%	23.00%	16.90%	9.40%	14.10%	20.30%	15.90%
Total employer establishments, 2022	13,689	633,353	8,296,562	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Total employment, 2022	223,169	9,628,867	135,748,407	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Total annual payroll, 2022 (\$1,000)	11,046,420	556,430,324	8,965,035,263	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Total employment, percent change, 2021-2022	7.30%	8.50%	5.80%	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Total nonemployer establishments, 2021	66,433	2,770,424	28,477,518	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
All employer firms, Reference year 2017	9,105	438,491	5,744,643	307	464	308	82	407	120	2,524	318	1,075
Men-owned employer firms, Reference year 2017	5,502	261,671	3,480,438	5	254	153	5	5	50	1,446	160	633
Women-owned employer firms, Reference year 2017	1,392	93,163	1,134,549	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	146
Minority-owned employer firms, Reference year 2017	1,465	102,627	1,014,958	5	5	5	5	123	41	267	5	147
Nonminority-owned employer firms, Reference year 2017	6,638	309,451	4,371,152	5	251	147	5	5	72	1,750	178	713
Veteran-owned employer firms, Reference year 2017	591	28,391	351,237	5	5	5	5	5	5	134	5	5
Nonveteran-owned employer firms, Reference year 2017	7,431	382,527	4,968,606	5	335	253	5	5	102	1,867	199	748
Geography												
Population per square mile, 2020	403.3	401.4	93.8	1,151.80	416.7	2417.9	623.20	1,422.00	688.5	1,702.70	868.2	1,515.30
Land area in square miles, 2020	1,797.76	53,652.17	3,533,098.28	13.56	46.34	3.74	8.18	18.75	9.26	66.15	18.85	32.48
FIPS Code	"12105"	"12"	"1"	"1202550"	"1203675"	"1216450"	"1224100"	"1228400"	"1237525"	"1238250"	"1238950"	"1278275"
FIPS Code	"12105"	"12"	"1"	"1202550"	"1203675"	"1216450"	"1224100"	"1228400"	"1237525"	"1238250"	"1238950"	"1278275"

Value Notes
 ⚠ This geographic level of poverty and health estimates is not comparable to other geographic levels of these estimates
 Some estimates presented here come from sample data, and thus have sampling errors that may render some apparent differences between geographies statistically indistinguishable. Click the Quick Info icon to the left of each row in TABLE view to learn about sampling error.
 The vintage year (e.g. V2016) refers to the final year of the series (2010 thru 2016). Different vintage years of estimates are not comparable.
Fact Notes
 (a) Includes persons reporting only one race
 (b) Hispanics may be of any race, so also are included in applicable race categories
 (c) Economic Census - Puerto Rico data are not comparable to U.S. Economic Census data

Value Flags
 - Either no or too few sample observations were available to compute an estimate, or a ratio of medians cannot be calculated because one or both of the median estimates falls in the lowest or upper interval of an open ended distribution.
 D Suppressed to avoid disclosure of confidential information
 F Fewer than 25 firms
 FN Footnote on this item in place of data
 NA Not available
 S Suppressed; does not meet publication standards
 X Not applicable
 Z Value greater than zero but less than half unit of measure shown
 QuickFacts data are derived from: Population Estimates, American Community Survey, Census of Population and Housing, Current Population Survey, Small Area Health Insurance Estimates, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, State and County Housing Unit Estimates, County Business Patterns, Nonemployer Statistics, Economic Census, Survey of Business Owners, Building Permits.