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Michigan: A Continued Natural Population Decline

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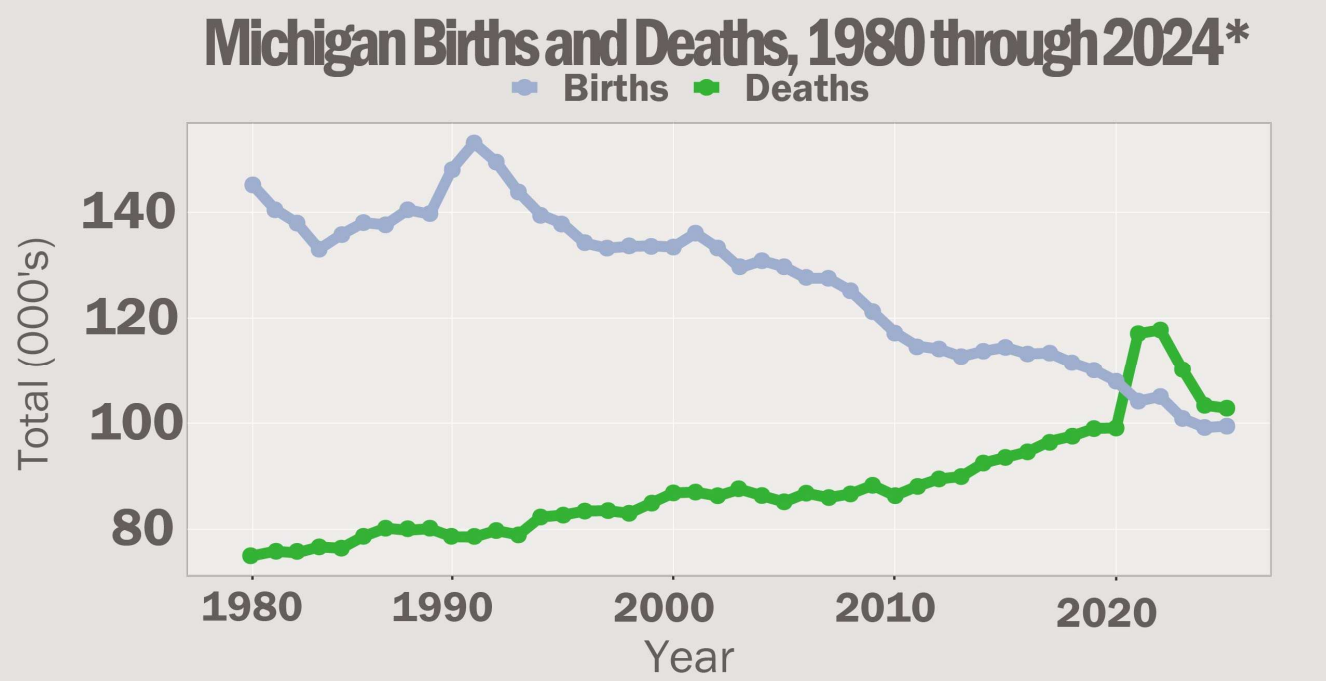
This paper updates a 2021 OneFAB report on Michigan's natural population trends. Provisional 2024 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data show that Michigan experienced its fifth consecutive year of natural population decline, with 99,420 births and 102,819 deaths, a decline of 3,399. "Natural population" refers to births and deaths only, excluding migration. Despite the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, provisional 2024 CDC data suggest that Michigan's decline in natural population (which started in 2020) has continued, though at a slower decline than in the years 2020 through 2023. The absolute number of births peaked in 1957 with 208,488 births, but as shown in Figure 1, the highest number of births in the past 45 years was in 1990 with a total number of 153,080 births. By 2023, births fell to 99,173, the lowest recorded since 1940, (increasing slightly to 99,420 in 2024) marking a 35% decrease from the 1990 peak to the 2023 trough. The number of deaths has continued to rise, with the five highest annual totals recorded between 2020 and 2024. To demonstrate the effect this period has had on the overall population change, the average annual total deaths from 2010 to 2024 is 99,427 deaths, a figure that would exceed any annual total for any year before 2020.

Figure 1: Most Recent 45 Years of Michigan Births and Deaths

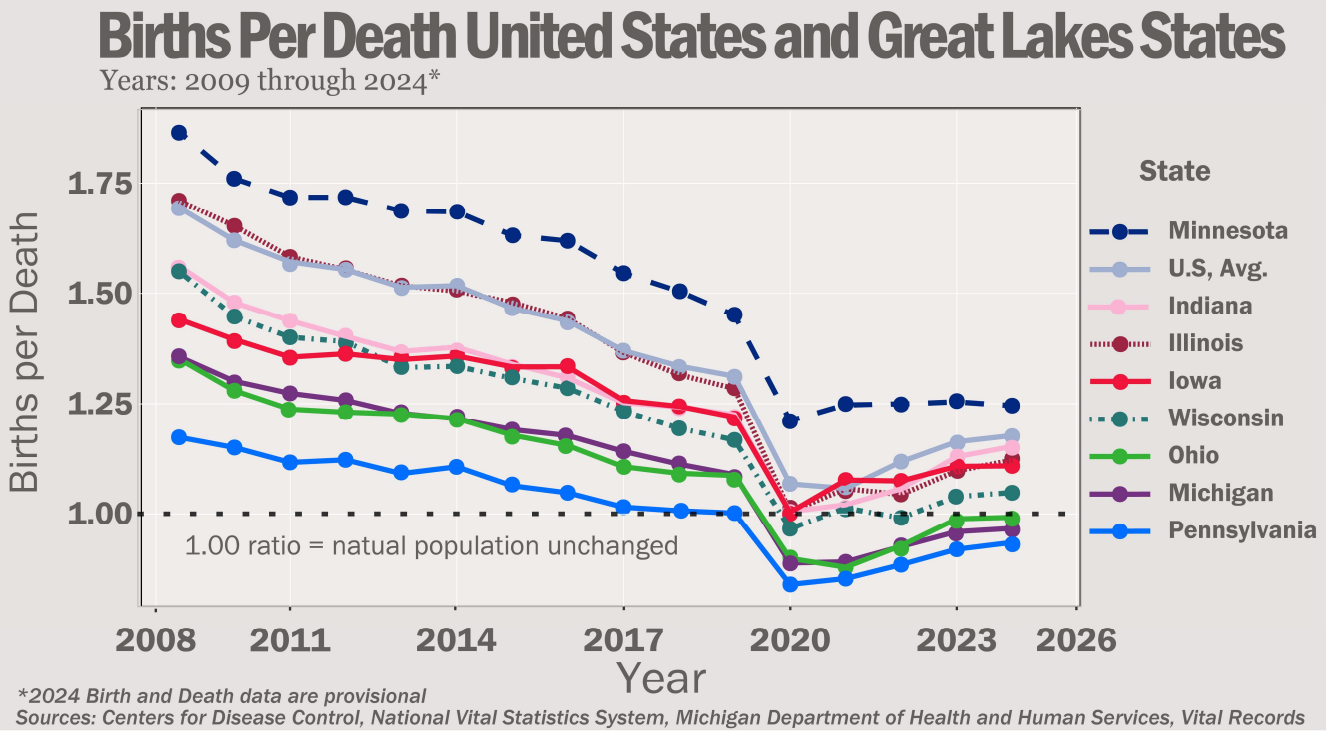


*2024 Birth and Death data are provisional
Sources: Centers for Disease Control, National Vital Statistics System, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, Vital Records

Between 2015 and 2024, Michigan births fell by 12.2% and deaths rose by 8.7%. Although the gap between deaths and births shrank from its 2020 peak, 12,938, to 3,399 in 2024, long-term averages suggest a natural decline will persist; from 2010 to 2024, deaths rose by 1.3% annually while births fell by 1.1%. According to the Michigan State Demographer a continued decline in natural population is likely to continue: “Michigan could briefly return to natural increase as high mortality from the COVID-19 pandemic subsides. However, Michigan is soon projected to return to sustained and steepening natural decrease through 2050.”[i]

The "birth-per-death" ratio indicates population growth (above 1.0) or decline (below 1.0). As shown in Figure 2 in 2019, the United States and all Great Lakes states had ratios above 1.0. However, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin fell below 1.0. As of 2024, Wisconsin is the only state that sunk below 1.0 to regain a ratio surpassing 1.0. Michigan's ratio in 2024 is projected to be 0.97, while Pennsylvania records the lowest figure among the Great Lakes states at 0.94.

Figure 2: Births Per Death in Selected States



From 2019 to 2024, the US birth-to-death ratio fell by 0.14 births. Minnesota had the biggest drop among Great Lakes states, with 0.20 fewer births per death. Michigan's decline was 0.12 births, matching the average for Great Lakes states and coming in slightly better than the national decline. Over the 15 years between 2010 and 2024, the United States experienced a decline of 0.44 births in the births-to-deaths ratio, while Michigan's ratio decreased by 0.33 births. This difference is because Michigan's birth rate began to slow earlier than the national average; from 1997 to 2006, the United States saw an average of 1% increase in births, whereas Michigan recorded an average of 1% decrease during the same period.

In the previous paper on this topic, there were open questions about trends after the COVID-19 pandemic led to a dramatic acceleration of long-term trends of birth decreases and death increases. Some forecasts stated population growth would return to pre-COVID-19 trends: "Population growth then returns to more normal patterns in 2024…births (115,267) exceeds the number of deaths (96,948) by 18,319 that year. The number of births in Michigan is forecast to slowly increase between 2024 and 2029…, so that by 2029, the natural population increase in the state is only 15,498."[ii] Three years on from this estimate, the data indicate that while deaths in Michigan have returned to a pre-pandemic trend, births have not. From 2000 to 2019, deaths rose by a three-year moving average of 1%, a trend that continued through the period of 2019 to 2024. Births, however, continued to decline, with the three-year moving average decreased from 1% (2000–2019) to 2% (2019–2024). Based on the past five years of data and a continued aging of the Michigan population, it is unclear as to the next point in time when there will be a natural population increase in Michigan.

[i] Michigan Center for Data and Analytics, Michigan Statewide Population Projections through 2050
[ii] University of Michigan Research Seminar in Quantitative Economics, The Economic and Demographic Outlook for Michigan Through 2050.