

Demographics Analysis for Polk County

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Population

Polk County outpaced the state and nation in population growth between the July 2024 and April 2020 estimates, growing 17.63% as compared to 8.52% and 2.59% 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 30% 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 during and after COVID-19.

Population Proportion by City		
	2024	2020
Auburndale	2.42%	2.15%
Bartow	2.59%	2.70%
Davenport	1.97%	1.29%
Fort Meade	0.63%	0.70%
Haines City	4.93%	3.80%
Lake Alfred	1.01%	0.90%
Lakeland	14.66%	15.53%
Lake Wales	2.09%	2.22%
Winter Haven	7.03%	6.92%
Other	62.68%	63.79%

Age

The county's age distribution reflects a larger portion of younger people (21.8%, under 18) than the state (19.25%) and a larger population of older people (19.22%, 65 and over) than the nation (18.0%). Both Florida (21.8%) 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 may negatively impact our economy as it results in a smaller population of working age people, as reflected in the smaller labor force population (57.0%, 59.2% and 63.0% for the county, state and nation based on 2019 – 2023 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 78.4 years as of 2023 according to the CDC. The labor force population is largest in Davenport (68.4%), Lake Alfred (66.5%) and Bartow (62.7%).

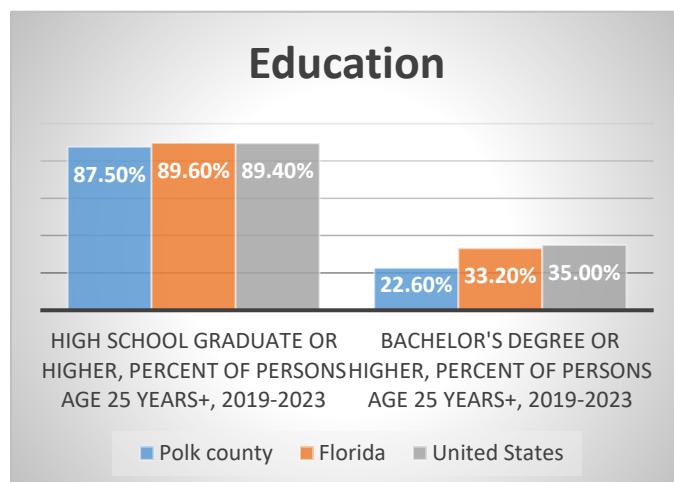
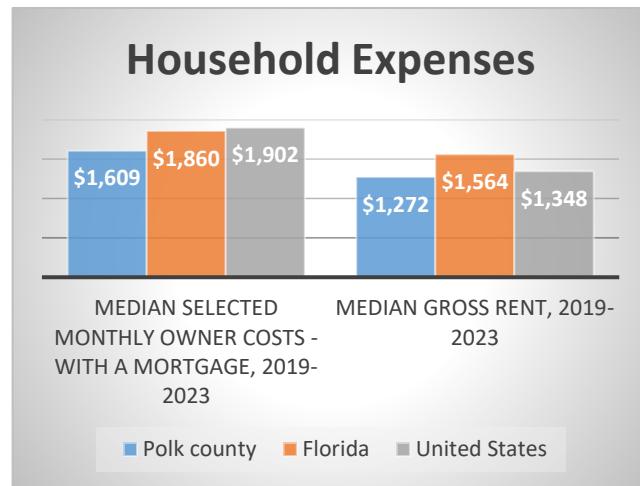
Households

Polk County continues to have higher than average homeowner occupancy (70.0%, 67.3% and 65.0% 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 (2019 – 2023) 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 \$141,500 in Fort Meade to a high of \$279,000 in Davenport, in comparison to median values for the county, state and county of \$240,000, \$325,000, and \$303,400, respectively. It is worth pointing out that the county median home value as a percentage of the state's value remained at 73.8% over the past year, while the state, as a whole, is getting more expensive relative to the nation (increased from 103.7% to 107.1% of the national median).

Polk County has also seen meaningful growth in taxable property values, with total taxable value increasing from \$66.3B in 2024 to \$72.2B in 2025 (+8.8%), with nearly \$2.8B of that attributable to new construction. Taxable new construction continues to be concentrated in Haines City (\$476M), Winter Haven (\$278M), and Lakeland (\$223M). While the increases in taxable values have slowed compared to recent years, they are still substantial and should continue to provide the increased revenues needed to maintain the infrastructure of a growing population.

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 0.8% to 22.6% at the county level, while the state has 33.2% (up 0.9%) and the nation has 35.0% (up 0.7%). While the county has made gains overall, the gap remains firm between the county, state, and nation. There is variation across the cities, with a couple at or below 18% and Lakeland just under 28%. 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 (13.0%) and the state (11.9%) trail the nation (8.6%) in the percentage of people without health insurance. The rates improved across all three geographies over the past year, and the gap between the county and nation has closed somewhat since 2024. 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.

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 to other factors, including education. The ratio of per capita retail expenditures to household income is higher at the county level (31.5%) than the state (30.1%) and nation (26.6%), suggesting higher retail spending per dollar of income. Polk County also has higher than average poverty, with 14.7% (down 1.0%) of the population living in poverty, as compared to 12.6% (up 0.2%) and 12.4% (up 1.3%) in the state and nation, respectively, however this has improved over the past year. There is wide variation among the cities as well, with poverty reaching a high of 24.4% in Lake Wales and low of 8.9% in Lake Alfred. The elevated prices due to 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, however the speed at which household income will catch up to prices remains unknown. While the overall jobs market remains solid, reduced 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 ongoing effects of higher prices and tightening budgets. While the higher interest rates served the purpose of slowing inflation, inflation has remained above target levels and new cracks are beginning to show in the economy. While the economic actions of the Federal Reserve have so far avoided a recession, households 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. We will need several more years of stable prices for wages to have a chance to catch up in order for household to feel the same level economic prosperity experienced before 2020.

Census QuickFacts 2025

	Polk county	Florida	United States	Auburndale	Bartow	Davenport	Fort Meade	Haines City	Lake Alfred	Lakeland	Lake Wales	Winter Haven
Population												
Population estimates, July 1, 2024, (V2024)	852,878	23,372,215	340,110,988	20,659	22,084	16,764	5,341	42,073	8,632	124,990	17,798	59,975
Population estimates base, April 1, 2020, (V2024)	725,036	21,538,192	331,515,736	15,602	19,562	9,344	5,100	27,540	6,521	112,614	16,072	50,208
Population, percent change - April 1, 2020 (estimates base) to July 1, 2023, (V2023)	17.63%	8.52%	2.59%	32.41%	12.89%	79.41%	4.73%	52.77%	32.37%	10.99%	10.74%	19.45%
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	5.61%	4.94%	5.47%	5.50%	6.30%	9.00%	6.40%	5.80%	10.60%	5.20%	5.90%	5.20%
Persons under 18 years, percent	21.80%	19.25%	21.50%	23.50%	20.80%	29.00%	22.90%	24.20%	22.90%	18.90%	20.70%	21.20%
Persons 65 years and over, percent	19.22%	21.78%	18.00%	18.20%	16.40%	9.10%	25.20%	15.00%	19.70%	21.80%	27.00%	21.00%
Gender, Race, Military and Foreign Born												
Female persons, percent	50.69%	50.83%	50.51%	53.80%	51.40%	50.30%	53.10%	52.20%	51.10%	50.50%	52.40%	52.00%
White alone, percent	59.80%	59.90%	63.40%	69.80%	57.90%	38.30%	59.20%	34.90%	52.60%	62.70%	55.30%	49.70%
Black or African American alone, percent	14.80%	15.30%	12.40%	15.20%	22.60%	20.50%	13.60%	25.50%	12.00%	18.30%	19.20%	26.00%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent	0.40%	0.30%	0.90%	0.10%	0.30%	1.90%	1.10%	0.10%	0.00%	0.30%	0.40%	0.20%
Asian alone, percent	1.80%	2.90%	5.80%	1.50%	2.80%	2.90%	0.10%	2.00%	8.90%	2.20%	0.70%	1.80%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, percent	0.00%	0.10%	0.20%	0.10%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.10%	0.00%	0.00%
Two or More Races, percent	11.80%	16.00%	10.70%	6.60%	10.50%	12.20%	14.00%	13.10%	7.90%	8.70%	14.20%	12.10%
Hispanic or Latino, percent	27.70%	26.70%	19.00%	17.90%	16.00%	52.00%	32.00%	45.40%	30.00%	19.20%	30.70%	24.60%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, percent	52.60%	51.40%	58.20%	64.40%	55.30%	22.00%	52.00%	26.30%	48.50%	57.00%	47.60%	44.00%
Veterans, 2019-2023	45,507	1,347,330	16,569,149	854	1,271	337	247	1209	365	8,075	1,228	3,358
Foreign born persons, percent, 2019-2023	11.50%	21.40%	13.90%	11.10%	5.70%	18.10%	10.70%	17.90%	15.30%	10.70%	9.70%	11.80%
Households												
Housing Units, July 1, 2024, (V2024)	329,750	10,082,356	142,332,876	6951	7635	4115	2768	12796	3078	53926	7961	22944
Owner-occupied housing unit rate, 2019-2023	70.00%	67.30%	65.00%	67.80%	66.40%	92.80%	71.00%	67.90%	75.40%	56.10%	61.00%	62.30%
Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2019-2023	\$240,000	\$325,000	\$303,400	\$272,700	\$210,400	\$297,000	\$141,500	\$250,700	\$226,800	\$229,100	\$225,900	\$248,200
Median selected monthly owner costs -with a mortgage, 2019-2023	\$1,609	\$1,860	\$1,902	\$1,784	\$1,504	\$1,887	\$1,417	\$1,799	\$1,676	\$1,626	\$1,395	\$1,612
Median selected monthly owner costs -without a mortgage, 2019-2023	\$511	\$629	\$612	\$462	\$467	\$480	\$469	\$650	\$526	\$535	\$554	\$559
Median gross rent, 2019-2023	\$1,272	\$1,564	\$1,348	\$1,127	\$1,073	\$2,875	\$919	\$1,216	\$1,348	\$1,299	\$1,060	\$1,200
Building Permits, 2024	8,514	173,326	1,478,000	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Households, 2019-2023	276,643	8,550,911	127,482,865	5,968	6,956	3,406	2,173	10,362	2,538	46,339	6,560	19,691
Persons per household, 2019-2023	2.69	2.51	2.54	2.89	2.7	3.41	2.37	2.98	2.65	2.35	2.44	2.64
Living in same house 1 year ago, percent of persons age 1 year+, 2019-2023	85.50%	86.00%	87.30%	91.00%	85.50%	82.60%	89.20%	85.70%	83.40%	80.50%	88.90%	82.40%
Language other than English spoken at home, percent of persons age 5 years+, 2019-2023	26.40%	30.10%	22.00%	23.50%	13.50%	62.40%	27.60%	46.20%	33.50%	19.90%	24.60%	26.30%
Education												
High school graduate or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2019-2023	87.50%	89.60%	89.40%	84.10%	90.20%	85.10%	76.50%	83.70%	90.30%	90.60%	87.50%	87.60%
Bachelor's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2019-2023	22.60%	33.20%	35.00%	16.50%	22.30%	21.40%	10.20%	19.50%	25.00%	27.70%	22.00%	22.20%
Medical												
With a disability, under age 65 years, percent, 2019-2023	11.30%	10.10%	10.70%	8.50%	12.60%	5.00%	15.50%	8.00%	7.80%	12.20%	12.40%	9.60%
Persons without health insurance, under age 65 years, percent	13.00%	11.90%	8.60%	15.50%	9.00%	16.90%	17.10%	18.50%	10.90%	11.30%	8.70%	11.40%
Business/Economy												
In civilian labor force, total, percent of population age 16 years+, 2019-2023	57.00%	59.20%	63.00%	56.90%	62.70%	68.40%	46.30%	58.00%	66.50%	55.50%	44.70%	56.20%
In civilian labor force, female, percent of population age 16 years+, 2019-2023	52.60%	55.00%	58.70%	48.70%	59.70%	59.20%	36.00%	49.40%	62.80%	51.50%	40.80%	51.20%
Total accommodation and food services sales, 2022 (\$1,000)	1,585,762	94,559,362	1,196,215,575	45,727	57,789	46,188	6,614	113,222	5,258	561,295	65,025	214,503
Total health care and social assistance receipts/revenue, 2022 (\$1,000)	4,604,124	211,744,080	3,330,304,719	41,022	232,984	18,242	D	351,817	248,26	2,386,809	192,264	956,231
Total transportation and warehousing receipts/revenue, 2022 (\$1,000)	2,432,406	98,048,310	1,316,303,546	89174	145,479	14,073	12887	56,195	283	953,860	63125	125,994
Total retail sales, 2022 (\$1,000)	15,852,723	484,218,148	6,974,691,329	505,333	743,131	284,549	80,968	1,519,086	19,006	7,478,790	972,416	1,366,420
Total retail sales per capita, 2022	\$20,053	\$21,637	\$20,881	\$27,126	\$37,136	\$20,983	\$15,520	\$45,030	\$2,668	\$62,011	\$58,678	\$24,744
Mean travel time to work (minutes), workers age 16 years+, 2019-2023	30.2	28	26.6	29.9	24.6	40.5	37.8	35	28.4	23.5	26.4	28.3
Median household income (in 2023 dollars), 2019-2023	\$63,644	\$71,111	\$78,538	\$68,267	\$66,944	\$65,157	\$55,131	\$58,227	\$68,854	\$60,947	\$55,799	\$59,604
Per capita income in past 12 months (in 2023 dollars), 2019-2023	\$31,927	\$41,055	\$43,289	\$30,582	\$31,020	\$25,523	\$25,351	\$28,150	\$32,738	\$34,313	\$27,794	\$30,101
Persons in poverty, percent	14.70%	12.60%	12.40%	12.90%	16.50%	18.00%	23.90%	16.90%	8.90%	14.50%	24.40%	16.50%
Total employer establishments, 2023	13,992	645,575	8,361,342	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Total employment, 2023	232,278	9,988,508	139,831,742	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Total annual payroll, 2023 (\$1,000)	11,650,019	599,437,122	9,556,351,319	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Total employment, percent change, 2021-2022	4.08%	3.74%	3.01%	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Total nonemployer establishments, 2021	77,602	3,117,327	30,427,808	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
All employer firms, Reference year 2022	10,823	487,617	5,876,787	293	544	390	81	617	96	2,857	434	1,211
Men-owned employer firms, Reference year 2022	6,551	295,466	3,633,787	S	281	S	S	S	66	1,575	S	620
Women-owned employer firms, Reference year 2022	1,950	115,979	1,309,282	83	S	S	S	76	10	540	S	S
Minority-owned employer firms, Reference year 2022	2,768	146,054	1,326,462	S	108	S	S	S	19	S	43	255
Nonminority-owned employer firms, Reference year 2022	6,946	316,983	4,230,881	S	321	186	S	250	S	1,692	S	670
Veteran-owned employer firms, Reference year 2022	614	23,793	273,542	S	S	S	S	S	S	157	S	35
Nonveteran-owned employer firms, Reference year 2022	9,007	440,163	5,275,279	216	415	338	S	89	2,096	S	943	
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	3,533,038.28	13.56	46.34	3.74	8.18	18.75	9.26	66.15	18.85	32.48
EIPS Code	"12105"	"12"	"1"	"1202550"	"#203675"	"1216450"	"#224100"	"1232400"	"1232552"	"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 Class

Value Flags	<p>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</p> <p>D Suppressed to avoid disclosure of confidential information</p> <p>F Fewer than 25 firms</p> <p>FN Footnote on this item in place of data</p> <p>NA Not available</p> <p>S Suppressed; does not meet publication standards</p> <p>X Not applicable</p> <p>Z Value greater than zero but less than half unit of measure shown</p>
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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.