



NEW YORK CITY COMPTROLLER
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Spotlight ——— New York: A City of Diverse & Evolving Neighborhoods

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Introduction

New York City has evolved on many dimensions over the past half century. After a massive economic downturn and loss of population in the early 1970s, the city has grown substantially, bringing meaningful improvement in opportunities and quality of life, but also growing pains. Back in the 1970s, the idea of a severe city-wide housing shortage, along with concern over gentrification displacing some residents, would have seemed a bizarre fantasy ... yet in 2025, that is reality. Of course, there have also been some massive improvements, particularly in the Bronx, as we will illustrate.

In this Spotlight, first examine how the economies of the five boroughs have evolved, both historically and since the pandemic. We then drill down a bit more, to the neighborhood or Community District (CD) level, and find some interesting patterns of growth that began well before the pandemic but accelerated during and after. Because housing has been the primary constraining factor for population growth, the neighborhoods that have changed (and grown) the most are those neighborhoods where a good deal of new housing has been allowed and subsequently developed. Interestingly, as we will see, the areas seeing the most development tend to be areas that are adjacent to Manhattan's central business districts, which happen to already be fairly densely populated. But as one gets further out into the outer boroughs, neighborhoods with high levels of homeownership—which also tend to be more affluent—have seen considerably less new housing added than more renter-dominated neighborhoods.

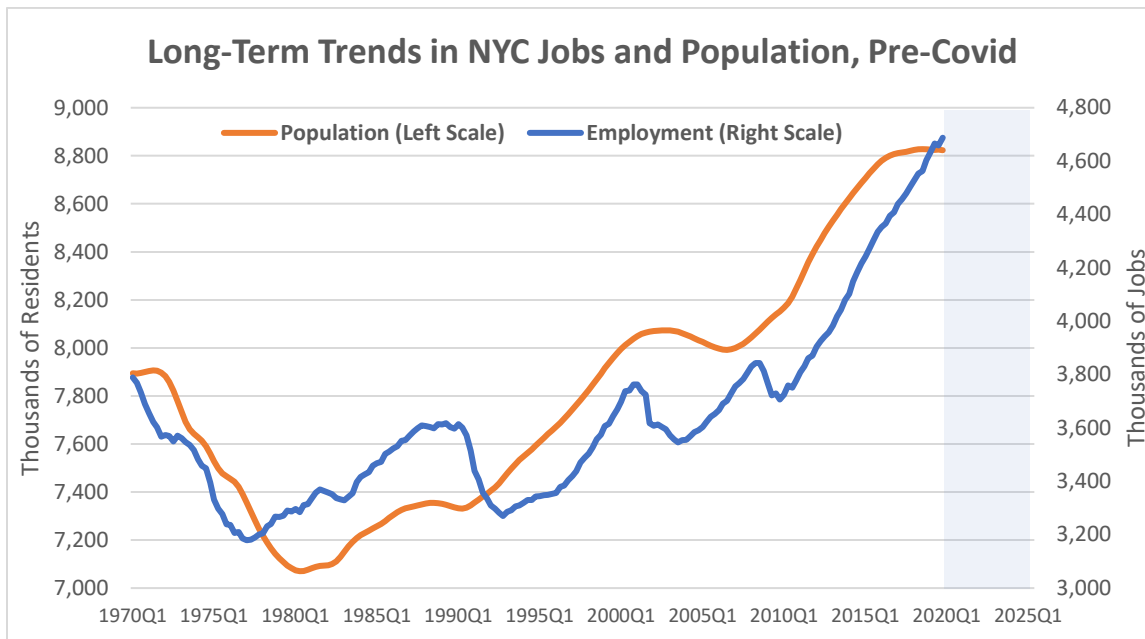
How Have the Boroughs Fared?

A Brief History

New York City's economic collapse in the early 1970s has been well documented and resulted from a “perfect storm” of declining manufacturing, deteriorating financial markets, fiscal recklessness, and a nationwide flight to the suburbs, among other factors. During the 1970s, the city's population fell by 10%, ranging from a 5% decline in Queens to a more than 20% decline in the Bronx; Staten Island, bucking the trend, saw a 20% increase in its population—albeit from a low base (even with that gain, only 5% of the city's residents lived on Staten Island in 1980).

Fiscal reforms and a rebounding U.S. economy set the stage for an historic turnaround in the city starting around 1977, as illustrated by long term trends in NYC payroll employment (blue) and population (orange) in Chart 1 below. During the last decade, 2010-19, New York City registered its strongest sustained job growth on record. On the eve of the Covid pandemic, both employment and population had reached record highs.

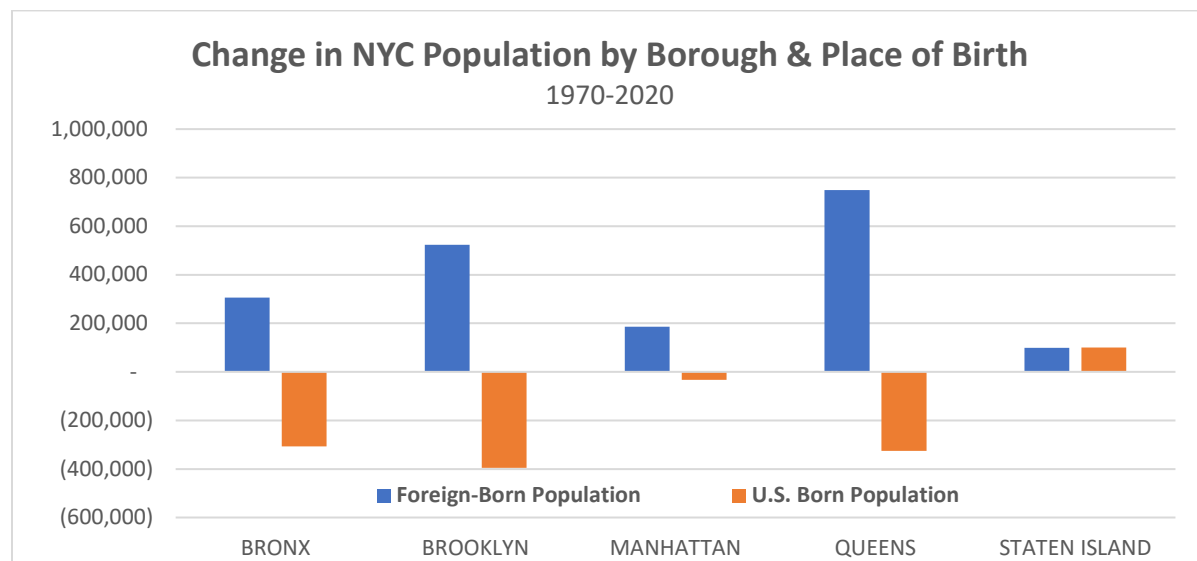
Chart 1



Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, New York Department of Labor, Moody's economy.com

Through the city's ups and downs, immigrants have played a vital role in maintaining the resilience of the city as a whole, and particularly the outer boroughs. Back in the 1970s, when the city's overall population tumbled by roughly 800,000 or 10%, its foreign-born population increased by 233,000 or 16%. Thus, in New York City's most challenging decade, net international migration helped to offset a far larger net domestic out-migration, mitigating potentially steeper losses that afflicted many other U.S. cities. Over the subsequent four decades, as the city's population and economy rebounded, foreign-born residents continued to play a vital role, accounting for somewhat over half of the population gain in Manhattan and Staten Island and virtually all of the growth across the other three boroughs. Chart 2 below shows that, over the full period (1970-2020), all of the city's population growth, and then some, was fueled by immigrants—particularly in Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx.

Chart 2



Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census (1970 & 2020 decennial Censuses)

Economic Shifts Pre- and Post-Pandemic

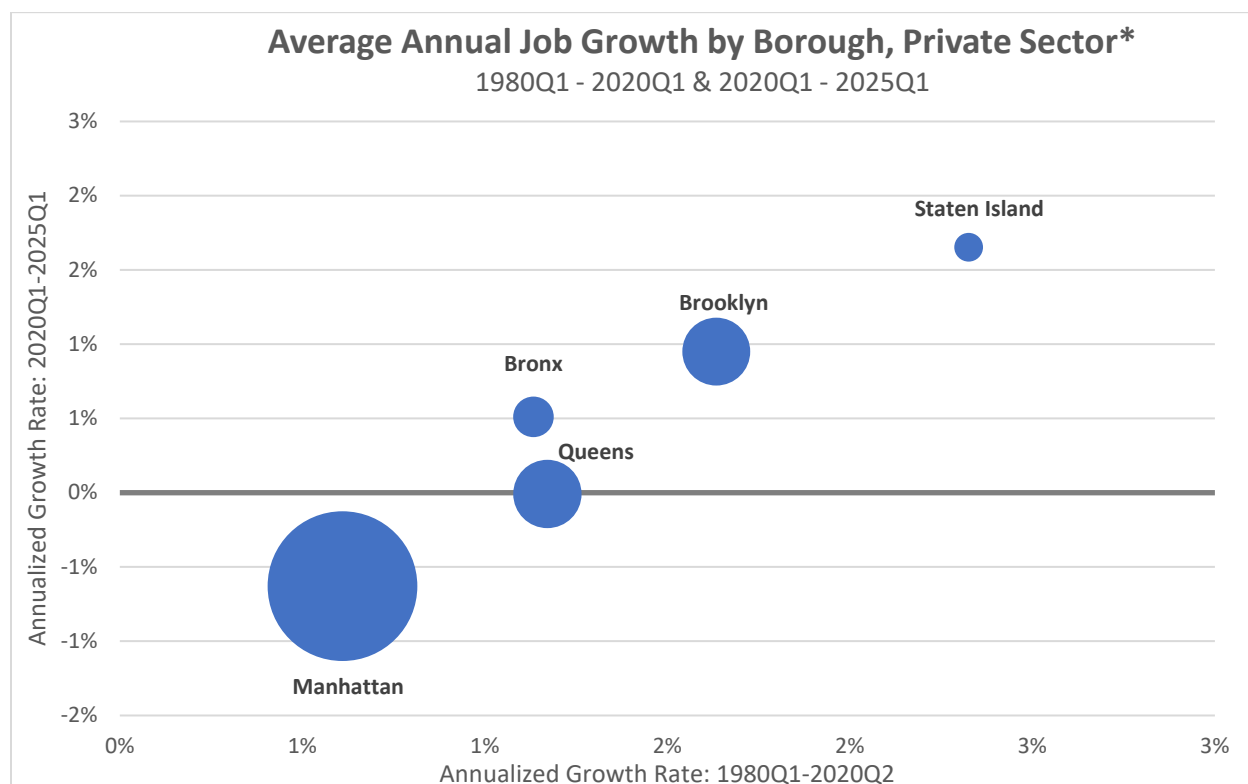
But how has economic and job growth played out across the city's five boroughs? Historically, Manhattan has been the primary hub and engine of growth for the city's economy. That is still true, of course, but the outer boroughs have been catching up. The early stages of the city's recovery from the mid-70s were led by Manhattan. But starting in the late 1980s, the outer boroughs proved to be more resilient to economic downturns, and they grew at least as fast as Manhattan during economic booms. From early 1980 to early 2020, prior to the pandemic, private-sector employment had grown by 75% (1.4% annual rate) in the outer boroughs, versus 28% (0.6% annual rate) in Manhattan.

The gradual economic convergence of the outer boroughs with Manhattan kicked into high gear with the pandemic. Even more so than in prior recessions, Manhattan was hit hardest in terms of job losses. And as the U.S. and local economies rebounded, Manhattan continued to lag. The various face-to-face services in Manhattan's core business hubs that relied heavily on office workers—bars, coffee shops, restaurants, gyms, hair salons, etc.—lost market share to their counterparts in various residential areas across the rest of the city. One segment of Manhattan's economy that has fully rebounded is tourism. But even there, the outer boroughs have gained ground on Manhattan.

In the four years since the pandemic, all the outer boroughs have seen a fairly solid net job gain, whereas Manhattan has seen a decline. Not surprisingly, though, even in the outer boroughs, much of the net job gain, both before and after the pandemic (but especially after), has been in Healthcare & Social Assistance. Employment in that sector, because it is largely publicly financed, is less reflective of economic cycles and structural trends; this is also true, of course, for government employment.

Chart 3 below shows the annualized rate of private-sector job growth over the 4 decades leading up to the pandemic on the horizontal axis, and over the 5 years since on the vertical axis¹. While all five boroughs registered a steep reduction in their growth trajectories, the relative, gradual shift of jobs from Manhattan to the outer boroughs continued following the pandemic.

Chart 3



Sources: New York Department of Labor (Quarterly Survey of Employment and Wages), Moody's economy.com

*Employment over the 2020-25 period also excludes the Healthcare & Social Assistance sector.

Neighborhoods

A Deeper Dive into Neighborhoods:

For insights on the dynamics shaping New York City's evolution, it is useful to look below the borough level. Community Districts provide an effective framework for gauging how the city's many neighborhoods differ and how they have been changing. While timely, reliable, high frequency economic indicators—most notably employment—are available by borough, they are

¹ The latest borough-specific data are only available through the 1st quarter of 2025. Growth rates for the 2020-25 period exclude Healthcare & Social Assistance, as they are largely not driven by the private sector.

not available by neighborhoods. However, annual metrics from programs such as the ACS (American Community Survey), as well as less frequent data sets such as the Housing & Vacancy Survey and decennial Census, provide a wealth of housing, demographic, and socioeconomic data that can be tracked over time. In addition to Community Districts (CDs), neighborhoods can also be delineated by Sub-Boroughs, PUMAs (Public Use Microdata Areas), and NTAs (Neighborhood Tabulation Areas). The box below provides a summary of the various definitions of neighborhood; this Spotlight primarily uses the CD delineations.

Defining Neighborhoods: Community Districts, PUMAs, and NTAs

The various definitions of “neighborhoods” across New York City, and the patchwork can be complex. Aside from political districts—City Council, State Senate, State Assembly, and U.S. Congress—there are three widely-used frameworks for delineating neighborhoods. In this report we primarily focus on the 59 CDs (Community Districts) spread across the five boroughs and illustrated in the maps shown here. The advantage of this definition is that it was incorporated into the City Charter in 1975, with each CD containing a Community Board (a more complete history is outlined [here](#)). A similar but not identical breakout of neighborhoods is offered by PUMAs (Public Use Microdata Area), which is a standard nationwide framework used by the Census Bureau. There are 55 PUMAs across New York City; most align almost exactly with CDs, though some comprise two CDs and some have slightly different boundaries. NTAs (Neighborhood Tabulation Areas) are a subset of PUMAs (and, for the most part CDs); they provide a more granular definition of neighborhoods. The NYC Department of City Planning has created [a detailed interactive map](#) overlaying these three sets of boundaries. One major advantage of CDs, and the reason they are used here, is that their definition is fixed over time, whereas PUMAs and NTAs get modified periodically based on shifts in the geographic distribution of the population.

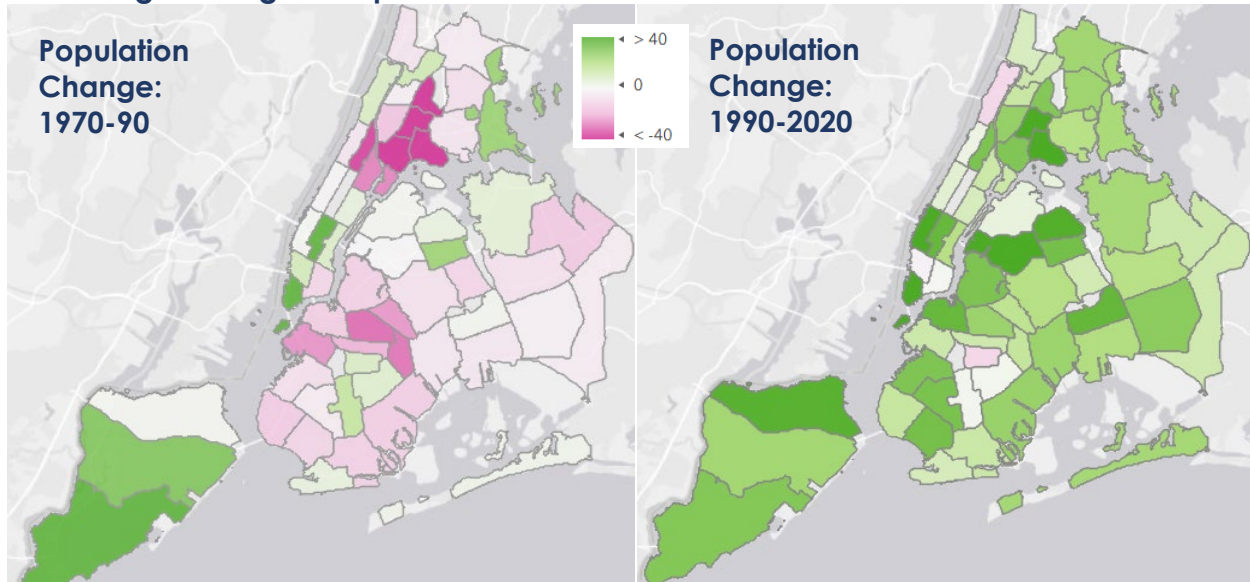
Population Growth by Neighborhood

The most basic indicator that can be tracked over time is total population. Over the past half century many neighborhoods have seen periods of dramatic population change—both increases and declines. During the 1970s, when the city was losing population, these losses were far from uniform. Even the 21% drop in the Bronx does not nearly capture what occurred in some of its neighborhoods. For instance, the South Bronx neighborhoods of Morrisania/Croton Park East and Hunts Point/Longwood lost a striking 60% of their population in just that one decade. Within the Bronx, the [Cross Bronx Expressway](#) contributed to the demise of a number of neighborhoods, while the newly-constructed Co-op City helped raise that eastern-Bronx neighborhood’s population by 27%. And in Manhattan, Tribeca combined with the newly-built Battery Park City enabled that neighborhood’s population to more than double.

Following a fairly severe regional recession starting in 1989, 1990-2020 was a period of secular expansion for the city's overall economy. Over this period, not a single one of the city's 59 CDs lost population. Moreover, a number of neighborhoods saw extraordinarily rapid population growth, amid brisk residential construction, including new buildings, renovations, and office conversions.

Chart 4

Percentage Change in Population: 1970-90 & 1990-2020



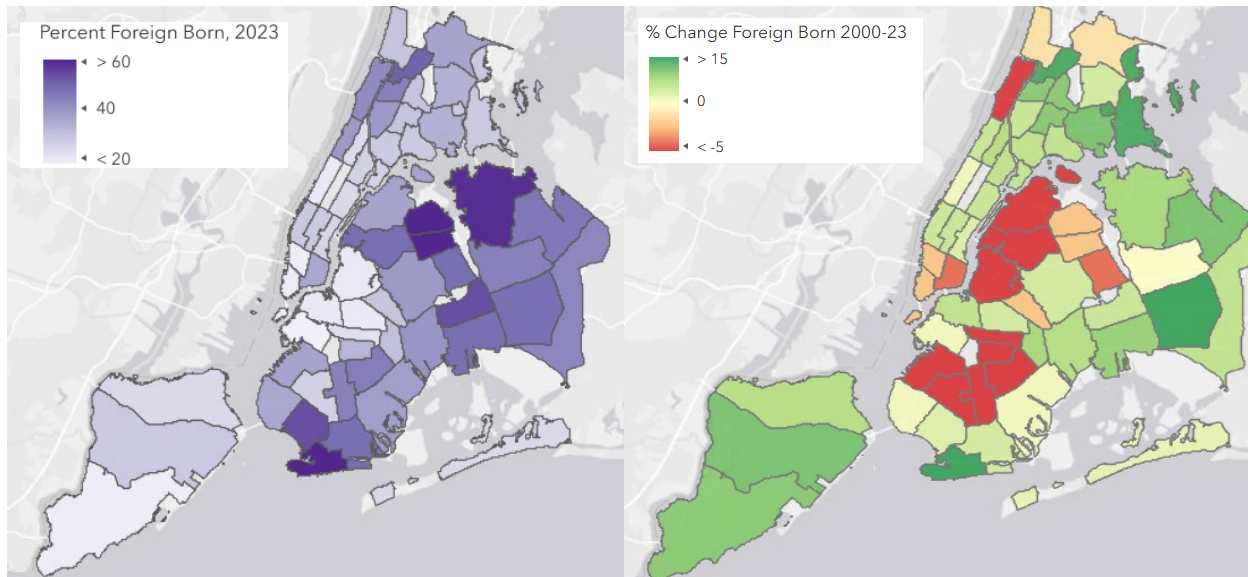
Sources: New York City Department of City Planning; U.S. Bureau of the Census (decennial Censuses)

From 1990-2020, the two Bronx neighborhoods that had seen the steepest population drops in the 1970s registered particularly brisk growth. Yet with townhouses and single-family homes often replacing the abandoned, destroyed and decaying apartment buildings of yore—as pictured in [this montage](#)—population density in these areas remains well below pre-1970 levels.

Given that immigrants have fueled the city's population, as well as economic, growth, it is informative to look at where the city's foreign-born residents have largely settled. As shown in Chart 5 (Map) below, the rapidly-growing neighborhoods in or near Manhattan's central business district shown earlier tend to have a lower prevalence of foreign-born residents than the further-out areas of Queens and Brooklyn. These same areas have also seen a decline in the foreign-born share since the turn of the century, suggesting that a large share of the people moving in have been those who are U.S.-born. This is likely, at least in part, a function of relative affordability.

Chart 5

Percent of Residents Foreign-Born (2023) & Change in % Foreign-Born Residents (2000-23)



Sources: American Community Survey, U.S. Bureau of the Census

Housing Expansion Across Neighborhoods

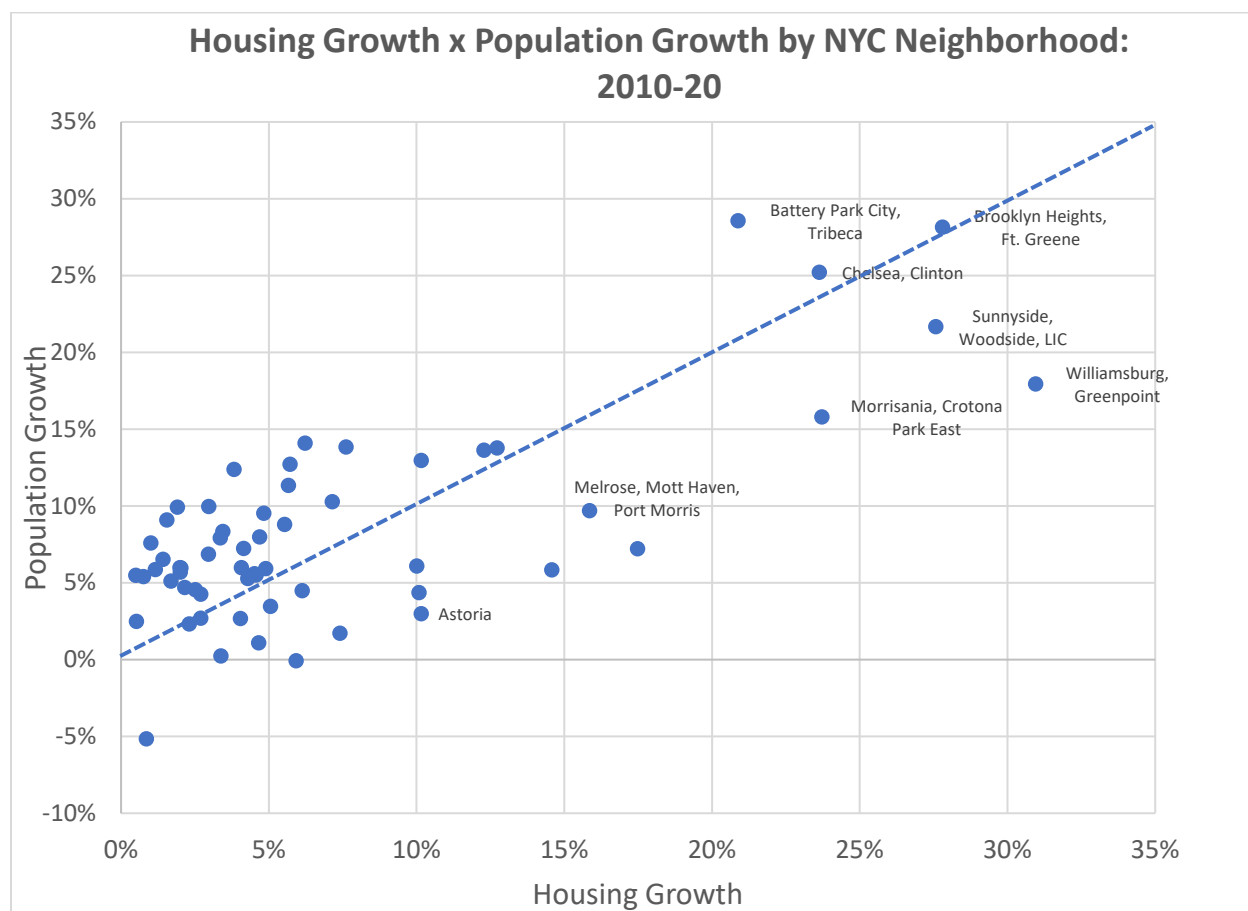
During periods of population decline, such as the 1970s, the supply of housing is not a major determining factor in population change. But during periods of population growth, when housing is in short supply, it is a major factor. From 2010-24, a period during which citywide employment expanded by 27%, the city's housing stock grew by only 10%. As highlighted in our July 2025 Spotlight, not only did growth in the city's housing stock not keep pace with job growth, but the housing supply in the surrounding region—areas from which people can commute to city jobs—expanded even more slowly. While the pandemic temporarily alleviated the housing shortage in 2020 and 2021, it returned in full force by 2023, when the snapback in employment and the gradual return to in-office work pushed the rental vacancy rate to a record low².

In terms of number of units, there was a net increase of 222,000 housing units citywide from 2010-2020 and another 123,000 from 2021-2024 for a total net gain of 345,000 from 2010-24, with well over a third of the increase coming in Brooklyn. Chart 6 below illustrates the importance of housing supply in determining population growth during periods of expansion. The chart uses the most accurate population data available from the decennial Census enumerations in 2010 and 2020.

² 2023 Housing & Vacancy Survey

<https://www.nyc.gov/assets/hpd/downloads/pdfs/about/2023-nychvs-selected-initial-findings.pdf>

Chart 6



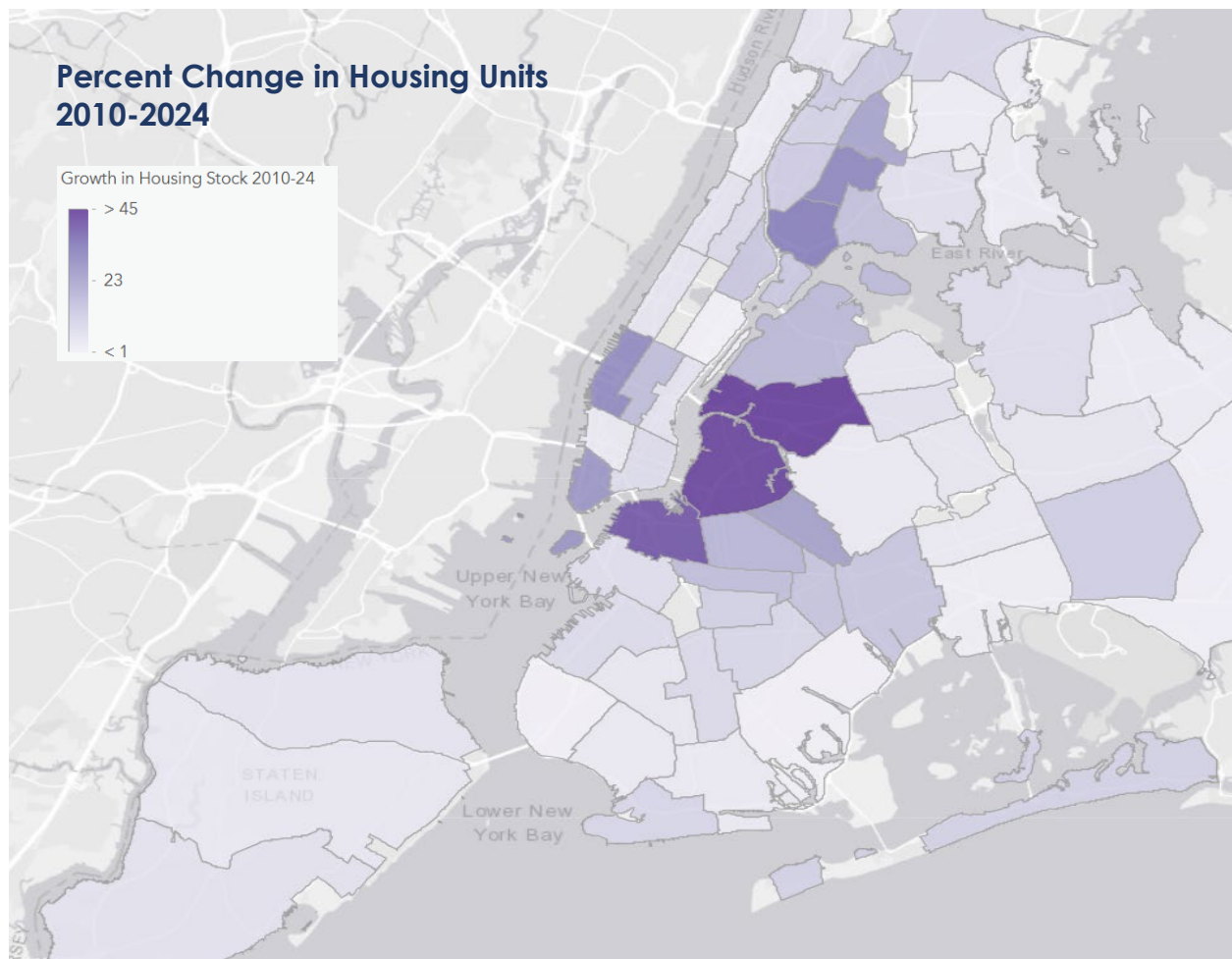
Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census (2010 & 2020 decennial censuses); NYC Department of City Planning

While the expansion in the city's housing stock has not kept pace with demand/need for housing, that is not uniformly the case across neighborhoods, as is evident from Chart 6 above. So why is it that some neighborhoods have seen brisk development while others have not? A number of factors appear to be driving the geographic profile of residential development: specifically, regression analysis suggests that neighborhoods within or adjacent to Manhattan's Central Business District (CBD), those that tend to be less densely populated and those with a low incidence of homeownership have contributed most to increasing the housing supply and, thus, to alleviating the city's housing shortage.

Chart/Map 7 below illustrates where the housing stock has grown more or less rapidly. Specifically, a third of the net increase occurred in just 5 neighborhoods: all of them either adjacent to or inside Manhattan's CBD (i.e. south of 59th Street): Williamsburg/Greenpoint, Downtown Brooklyn, Astoria, LI City/ Woodside/ Sunnyside, and Chelsea/Clinton. In contrast, less densely populated neighborhoods and neighborhoods with high homeownership—largely in Staten Island, eastern Queens, southern Brooklyn, and eastern Bronx—have barely seen any net residential development. One dense and centrally located neighborhood, however, has also seen relatively little new construction in recent years, and that is Manhattan's Upper East Side.

This is somewhat analogous to a trend noted in our [July Spotlight](#): that in the New York metro area, as well as in other major U.S. metros, the (less dense) surrounding counties were actually seeing slower growth in the housing stock than the city itself. Of course, a major determinant of where housing has been built is related to zoning changes—both within the city and across the metro area. In fact, Chart 7 looks remarkably similar to the estimated change in residential capacity from the rezonings that took place during the Bloomberg administrations up to 2010 (see Armstrong A., Been V., Madar J., McDonnell S. (2010) “[How Have Recent Rezonings Affected the City’s Ability to Grow?](#)”, Furman Center Policy Brief).

Chart 7



Source: NYC Department of City Planning

Looking Ahead

Over the past half century, a steady influx of immigrants has been a major catalyst for New York City’s growth, while an intensifying shortage of housing has been a constraint, especially in recent years. Neighborhoods that have seen up-zoning—the removal of barriers to residential

development—have seen a boom in housing and have thus contributed to alleviating the shortage of housing, including affordable housing. One prime example is the [ongoing transformation of Gowanus](#) in Brooklyn’s 6th Community District, which has the potential to add as many as 8,000 residential units.

At the other end of the spectrum are the neighborhoods that have added relatively little housing in recent years. With the City of Yes initiative looking to expand the city’s housing stock in a way that is more evenly distributed geographically across the city, one major proposal in the works looks to “fast-track” affordable housing construction in the 12 CDs that have seen the sparsest new development. These neighborhoods align closely with CDs that have seen the least new overall housing as shown in the map above. This proposal is part of the package of Charter reforms that will be presented to voters in November.

Longer term, New York City’s growth prospects will depend on immigration, which has been a consistent driver of growth, and on mitigating the shortage of housing—particularly affordable housing—which has been the leading constraint on growth.

Acknowledgements

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