How **Demographic Change** Is Reshaping Your Recruitment Markets

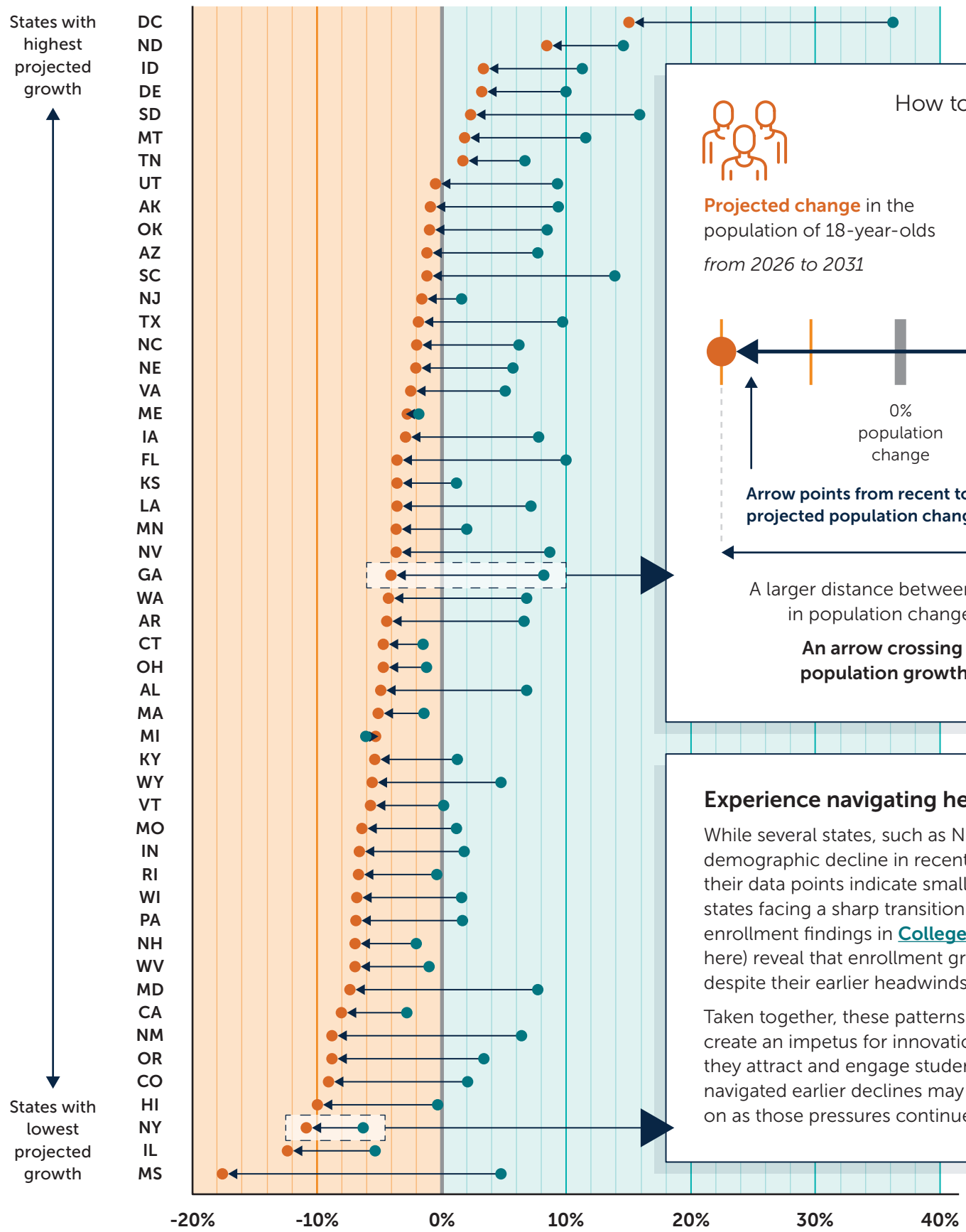
Compare Recent Conditions with What Lies Ahead in Your Key Markets

Demographic shifts are reshaping the pool of prospective students across recruitment markets. Many markets are moving from population growth to decline, others face continued or steeper declines in already-shrinking populations, and some can expect continued growth or relative stability. How does the outlook for your key markets compare with the conditions you've already navigated?

Use this infographic to assess recent and projected population changes across your primary and secondary recruitment markets, to inform recruitment strategy, and to ground leadership discussions about enrollment expectations.

Recent and Projected Demographic Change by State

Percentage of Change in the Population of 18-Year-Olds, 2021 to 2026 and 2026 to 2031

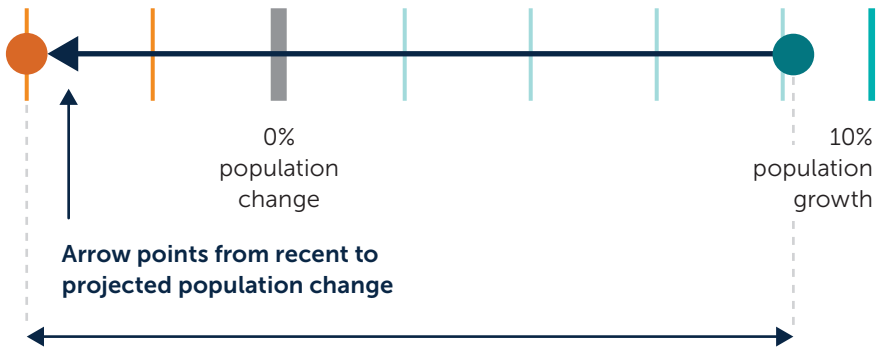


How to Read the Chart

Georgia

Projected change in the population of 18-year-olds *from 2026 to 2031*

Recent change in the population of 18-year-olds *from 2021 to 2026*



A larger distance between points indicates a greater shift in population change between the two periods.

An arrow crossing 0% indicates a shift from population growth to decline, or vice versa.

Experience navigating headwinds

While several states, such as New York, already have faced demographic decline in recent years, the shorter distances between their data points indicate smaller shifts in population change than in states facing a sharp transition from growth to decline. Additionally, enrollment findings in College Search Trends: 2026 Edition (not shown here) reveal that enrollment grew in New York and other such states despite their earlier headwinds.

Taken together, these patterns suggest that demographic pressures can create an impetus for innovation, pushing institutions to rethink how they attract and engage students. Institutions that successfully navigated earlier declines may have effective strategies they can build on as those pressures continue.

Three Scenarios for Enrollment Leaders to Consider

Tailwinds turn into headwinds

Schools in markets shifting from growth to decline should revisit enrollment expectations built during more favorable conditions and prepare for the greater recruitment effort needed to sustain results as the pool of prospective students shrinks.

Existing headwinds intensify

Schools facing deeper population losses should build on strategies that helped them navigate earlier declines while assessing where stronger recruitment efforts in established markets—and expansion into promising new ones—may be needed.

Conditions remain comparatively favorable

Schools in states least impacted by the demographic cliff should prepare for new or intensified competitive pressure as institutions facing steeper population declines expand recruitment into their markets.

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