

# ISA S Brief

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## Census 2011:

### The Curious Case of Changes in Tamil Nadu Demographics

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#### Abstract

*The latest 2011 census shows that Tamil Nadu is the only state to experience an increase in the decadal population growth rate, from 11.7 per cent in 1991-2001 to 15.6 per cent in 2001-11. The category of child population within the age of zero to six years constitutes 9.5 per cent of the state's population, a decline from the 11 per cent in 2001. Thus, the growth in population is due to a sharp rise in numbers, aged seven years and above, the causes for which can only be verified once age group wise data is released for the 2011 census. Studying district wise data reveals that the most likely explanation for this population increase is in-migration of labour, especially in districts with high industrial activity.*

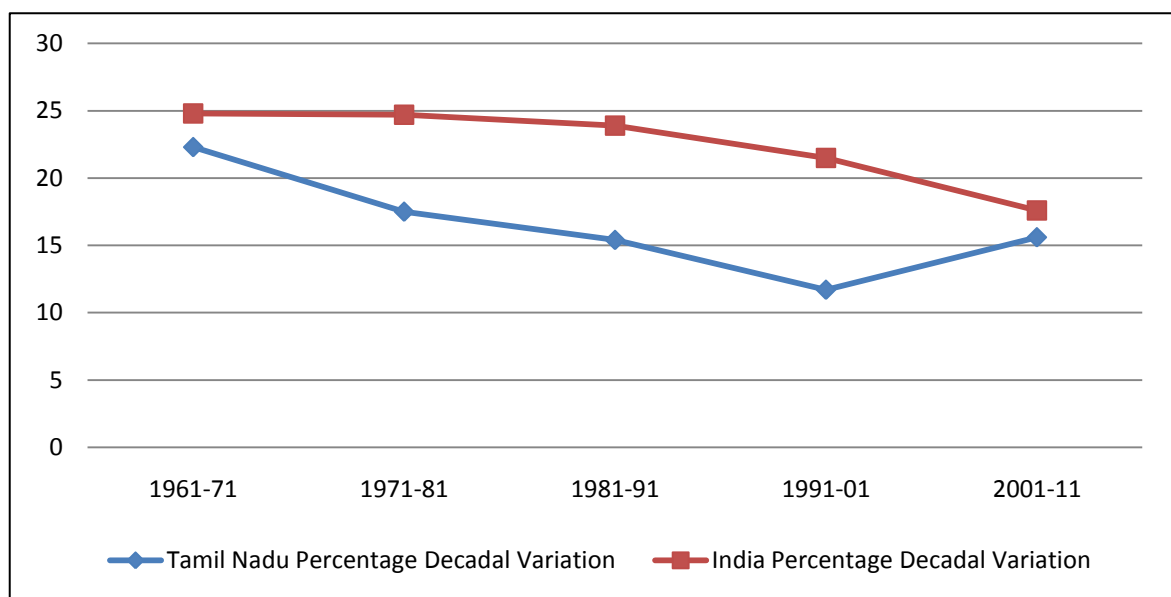
Decadal growth rates in population have shown consistent downward trends in Tamil Nadu since 1961 and as a result the state has been hailed as a success story in population management. Decadal growth rates have gone down from 22.3 per cent in 1961-71 to 11.7 per cent in 1991-2001. In the latest census, however, Tamil Nadu was the only state to show a major increase in the decadal growth rate at 15.6 per cent, a 33.3 per cent rise from the previous census.

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Figure 1 shows the reversal of population trends in the state.

**Figure 1: All India and Tamil Nadu Percentage Decadal Variation in Population**



**Source:** ‘Provisional Population Totals Paper 1: 2011’, *Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India*, [www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/census2011\\_PPT\\_paper1.html](http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/census2011_PPT_paper1.html). Accessed on 13 May 2011.

This sudden increase in state population is unusual, given that the decadal growth rate in the country has also reduced from 24.8 per cent in 1961-71 to 17.6 per cent in 2001-11.<sup>2</sup> Tamil Nadu can, therefore, be considered an outlier in the country.

A thorough study of this issue entails breaking up the population into age groups and examining which age group saw the largest increase in numbers. The category of population in the age group of zero to six years is used to shed some light on whether the birth rate in the state went up, increasing total population as a result. The population between zero to six years comprised of 9.5 per cent of the state’s total population, a decline from both 13.3 per cent in 1991 and last decade’s 11 per cent. This is in line with India’s population between the age of zero to six years as a proportion of the entire population, which fell from 17.9 per cent in 1991 to 15.4 per cent in 2001 and further to 13.1 per cent according to the 2011 census.<sup>3</sup> It can be concluded that the population increase is not a result of high birth rates in the state and the increase is in the age groups of seven years and above.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Provisional Population Totals Paper 1: 2011’, *Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India*, [www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/census2011\\_PPT\\_paper1.html](http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/census2011_PPT_paper1.html). Accessed on 13 May 2011.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

A second explanation to this phenomenon could be increases in the life expectancy in Tamil Nadu, compared to the rest of the country. This longevity would indicate that due to better healthcare facilities in the state people are living longer. Unfortunately, upon corresponding with the census commissioner of India, it was found that the age wise breakdown of the 2011 census data will not be available for at least two years. Thus, there is no way to check which specific age group (above seven years of age) has experienced the highest increase in population and therefore no way to verify the validity of the argument indicating that the people in Tamil Nadu have started living longer.

A final possible explanation to this sudden increase in population growth is the prospect of migration in search of employment. Tamil Nadu is one of the fastest growing states and every year thousands of labourers migrate into the state in search of work. Since these migrants are included in the total population of the state, this may explain the surge in Tamil Nadu's population figures. The unemployment rate for Tamil Nadu (as of 2004-05) was 1.2 per cent for rural areas, lower than the all India 1.7 per cent, and 3.5 per cent for urban areas which is also less than the all India figure of 4.5 per cent.<sup>4</sup> The per capita gross domestic product (at current prices) also grew at the rate of 10.6 per cent in 2008-09, making Tamil Nadu a very attractive destination for migrant labourers.<sup>5</sup>

Delving further, the district level data supports the argument crediting migration as a possible cause. The district of Kancheepuram experienced an increase in its decadal population growth rate from 19.2 per cent in 1991-2001 to 38.7 per cent in 2001-11. Thiruvallur's decadal growth rate increased from 23.1 per cent in 1991-01 to 35.3 per cent in the last census. Coimbatore increased from 17 per cent to 19.1 per cent while Tiruppur increased from 25.3 per cent to 28.7 per cent in 2001-11 (Table 1).<sup>6</sup> All of these districts are major hubs of industrial activity, specifically information technologies and manufacturing, indicating the influx of non Tamil labourers from around the region and even other states (refer to Table 1).

Indeed another related reason could be the returning labourers, particularly plantation and construction labourers, from neighbouring states like Kerala. The Madurai district saw an increase in decadal population growth rate from 7.4 per cent in 1991-2001 to 18 per cent in 2001-11. The Sivaganga district also experienced a similar rise from 4.7 per cent to 16.1 per cent.<sup>7</sup> These districts, despite not having much industrial activity, saw their populations

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<sup>4</sup> Compiled from the statistics released by Rajya Sabha, 'Unstarred Question, No. 828', *Indiastat* (29 November 2006), [www.indiastat.com/labourandworkforce/380987/employment/85/unemploymentsituation/281124/stats.aspx](http://www.indiastat.com/labourandworkforce/380987/employment/85/unemploymentsituation/281124/stats.aspx). Accessed on 13 May 2011.

<sup>5</sup> 'Per Capita Net State Domestic Product at Current Prices', *Planning Commission, Government of India* (9 September 2010), <http://planningcommission.nic.in/>. Accessed on 13 May 2011.

<sup>6</sup> 'Provisional Population Totals – Census 2011: Tamil Nadu', *Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India*, [www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/prov\\_data\\_products\\_tamilnadu.html](http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/prov_data_products_tamilnadu.html). Accessed on 13 May 2011.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

increasing as labourers migrated from neighbouring states to these districts as Tamil Nadu started progressing economically.

**Table 1: District wise percentage decadal variation in population for Tamil Nadu**

State/District	Percentage Decadal Variation										
	1901-11	1911-21	1921-31	1931-41	1941-51	1951-61	1961-71	1971-81	1981-91	1991-01	2001-11
<b>Tamil Nadu</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>11.9</b>	<b>14.7</b>	<b>11.9</b>	<b>22.3</b>	<b>17.5</b>	<b>15.4</b>	<b>11.7</b>	<b>15.6</b>
Thiruvallur	7.2	5.1	8.5	9.8	7.7	10.7	30.0	30.5	31.5	23.1	35.2
Chennai	3.9	3.0	23.9	20.3	59.8	22.1	45.2	27.0	17.2	13.1	7.8
Kancheepuram	7.2	5.1	9.2	9.8	7.7	13.1	30.3	28.2	26.1	19.2	38.7
Vellore	9.3	2.9	12.9	17.2	16.4	8.4	22.7	17.8	15.1	14.9	13.0
Dharmapuri	4.7	-4.5	16.7	15.6	12.7	10.5	29.8	17.8	24.5	15.3	16.0
Krishnagiri	4.7	-4.5	16.7	15.6	12.5	33.0	22.8	20.1	19.2	19.6	20.7
Tiruvannamalai	16.0	7.7	13.6	9.6	4.3	8.6	14.8	17.2	14.4	7.0	12.9
Viluppuram	12.2	-1.8	5.8	6.3	6.4	7.1	17.2	15.9	16.1	7.4	17.0
Salem	3.5	7.9	12.6	19.1	20.3	12.2	24.4	13.7	13.4	17.2	15.4
Namakkal	3.5	7.9	12.6	19.1	20.3	2.1	15.0	17.7	12.8	12.9	15.2
Erode	7.1	6.3	11.4	15.0	17.2	9.5	22.5	17.2	13.6	11.8	12.1
The Nilgiris	5.1	6.7	33.8	23.9	48.7	31.3	20.7	27.6	12.7	7.3	-3.6
Coimbatore	7.1	6.3	11.4	15.0	17.2	19.2	25.7	17.5	12.5	17.0	19.1
Tiruppur	7.1	6.3	11.4	15.0	17.2	7.4	19.1	17.1	15.7	25.3	28.7
Dindigul	9.3	4.3	5.7	13.4	11.2	8.7	18.6	11.9	12.5	9.2	12.4
Karur	8.5	4.1	0.7	12.8	14.3	6.7	7.5	10.1	12.9	9.5	15.1
Tiruchirappalli	8.5	4.1	0.7	12.8	14.3	10.1	26.6	15.1	15.6	10.1	12.2
Perambalur	8.5	4.1	0.7	12.8	14.3	7.6	18.7	12.4	17.9	9.5	14.4
Ariyalur	8.5	4.1	0.7	12.8	14.3	9.9	17.4	11.5	11.2	9.3	8.2
Cuddalore	12.2	-1.8	5.8	6.3	6.4	13.5	20.7	16.5	16.1	7.7	13.8
Nagapattinam	5.4	-2.0	2.9	7.4	15.9	10.4	14.1	13.4	11.7	8.1	8.4
Thiruvarur	5.4	-2.0	2.9	7.4	15.9	9.4	16.4	12.9	12.0	6.3	8.4
Thanjavur	5.4	-2.0	2.9	7.4	15.9	7.3	20.9	16.0	11.1	7.9	8.4
Pudukkottai	6.5	4.2	-5.6	8.6	13.1	6.6	26.2	22.1	14.7	10.0	10.9
Sivaganga	6.8	3.1	6.3	8.7	3.9	11.4	18.6	12.4	10.7	4.7	16.1
Madurai	15.4	4.1	12.0	13.1	20.6	12.7	25.5	18.1	17.5	7.4	18.0
Theni	15.4	4.1	12.0	13.1	20.6	12.0	23.8	14.7	13.0	4.3	13.7
Virudhunagar	12.1	5.5	6.9	3.9	11.9	13.1	18.4	16.5	16.7	11.9	11.0
Ramanathapuram	8.1	0.3	8.0	11.7	-4.6	27.4	17.2	21.4	12.1	6.1	12.6
Thoothukkudi	8.1	3.2	6.8	8.3	5.2	9.9	16.7	11.6	7.7	7.9	9.1
Tirunelveli	8.1	8.7	7.6	10.8	12.4	8.4	17.6	11.7	12.6	8.9	13.7
Kanniyakumari	17.5	17.0	17.8	16.4	22.1	20.7	22.6	16.4	12.4	4.7	11.2

**Source:** 'Provisional Population Totals Paper 1: 2011', *Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India*, [www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/census2011\\_PPT\\_paper1.html](http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/census2011_PPT_paper1.html). Accessed on 13 May 2011.

The figures above (Table 1) represent certain geographical concentration of employment and population growth that are likely to lead to several economic, and social consequences. The belt around metropolitan Chennai, which would cover the Kanchipuram and Tiruvallur districts, appears to be growing the fastest. This urban agglomeration now consists of educated and skilled employees who are demographically young, and migrants from other

states. A natural consequence would be the rise in consumption expectations and standard of living, putting pressure on urban infrastructure, and a significant growth of entertainment, housing, and hospitality related services, as well as retail and consumption expenditures. Pressure on infrastructure would manifest in rising demand for power, water, waste management and transportation. In a smaller measure, this would also be true for Coimbatore and Tirupur.

The growth in Madurai and Sivaganga are likely to have slightly different consequences. These are rural districts with low industrial bases and are unlikely to be areas of full employment for returning migrant workers. Two alternatives are possible, either they set up service industries in these small towns, much as the returning workers in Kerala towns have done, or workers may migrate to bigger cities in search of employment. In either case, the standard of living for the returning workers will be higher than the districts they return to or once again there will be a pressure of consumption led growth.

All of these hypotheses can only be verified once the Registrar General of India makes the census 2011 age wise population data available. However, there is strong evidence that these trends would require a new set of development initiatives that would focus on these fast growing regions within the state. On the one hand, it may be necessary to focus on infrastructure, especially urban infrastructure in these areas. On the other, there may be a need to spread the economic development initiatives more broadly to other regions in the state, through policy measures to incentivise economic activities in other regions. In either case, the demographic changes require attention and policy changes.

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