

# Diverse Localities: Demographics Matter

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America's demographic landscape is transforming rapidly as many young children enter the school system, young adults enter the housing market, and baby boomers age. Yet national trends are not spread evenly throughout the country. Diverse local demographics require planners to give attention to unique local needs regarding housing and services.

## National Trend 1: Simultaneous aging and "younging"

Nationally, **all U.S. states are showing noticeable growth in their older and advanced middle age populations.** Not only is 25.6 percent of the total population 45 years old or over, this segment of the population is also growing 18 times faster than the rest. Concurrently, as the diagram below shows, the population between age 15-24 is also growing.

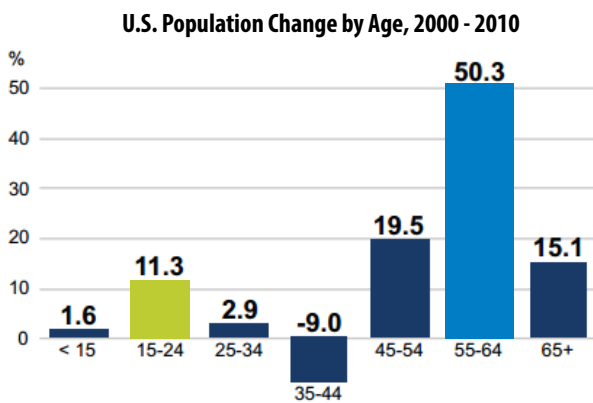
Regionally, some pockets of the country are experiencing a more significant growth in their younger population than others. **22 states and the District of Columbia showed gains in their under-45**

**populations, as did 64 out of 100 largest metro areas** (Frey 2011).

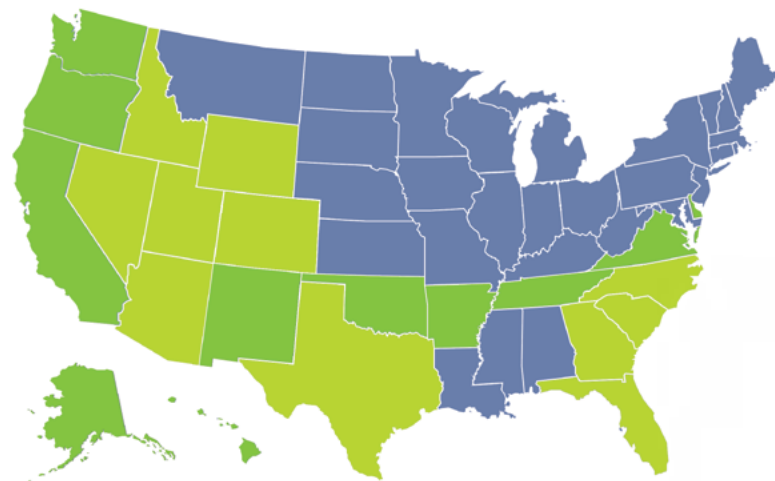
In fact, the highlighted states and metro areas in the map below show both the highest gains in the older population and growth in their younger generations.

### Population Gains on Both Ends of the Age Spectrum, 2000-2010

- Growth in elder population & >5% growth in younger generations
- Growth in elder population & 0 - 5% growth in younger generations
- Only growth in older generations



Source: Frey (2011)'s analysis of 2000 and 2010 Census



Source: Frey (2011)'s analysis of 2000 and 2010

## National Trend 2: Financial stress for both the young & elderly

Median income has stagnated to under \$53,000 per family nationally (U.S. Census Bureau 2013), creating financial stress for all, especially seniors and families with children. Due to the lack of viable employment alternatives to traditional industries, poverty is a bigger challenge in rural settings (Smith and Mattingly 2012).

The table on the right shows, a) the growth rate in elders is highest in suburbs, whereas rural areas have a higher percentage of seniors; b) the poverty rate for both the younger and older generations is significantly higher in rural areas.

	Metro Core	Suburban	Rural
Population 65+ years old <sup>1</sup>	13%	14%	17%
Population growth in 65+ years old <sup>2</sup>	8%	14%	9%
Population less than 18 years old <sup>1</sup>	24%	25%	23%
Poverty rate 65+ years old <sup>3</sup>	9%	9%	12%
Poverty rate under 18 years old <sup>3</sup>	19%	16%	23%
Per capita income <sup>3</sup>	\$25,000	\$24,000	\$20,000

Source: United States Counties, n = 3,031; \$ (2007=100). Sources: (1) US Census 2010, (2) US Census 2000 and 2010, (3) American Community Survey 2006-2010.

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## Local demographics matter

What is obvious from nation wide trends is the diverse local demographic landscape. Local demographics matter because successful plans rely on accurate assessments of who lives in specific communities. Housing, transportation and economic development should reflect the types, needs and preferences of community residents. **Planners in different localities must respond to demographic scenarios that are different from the national average.**

### Local Challenge 1: Suburban and rural area pressures

Today's American suburbs are diversifying more rapidly than cities, both in terms of ethnicity and income levels (Berube 2011). **As suburbs age and diversify, residents face new challenges: seniors may experience difficulty aging in place.** Current transportation routes and reliance on single-family housing may be challenging for both seniors and newcomers. According to market analysis, mixed-use development and walkability are top factors for Millennials and seniors alike when describing an ideal suburban environment. Many are willing to live in smaller spaces that are closer to amenities they desire, from nightlife to parks (Spivak 2013).

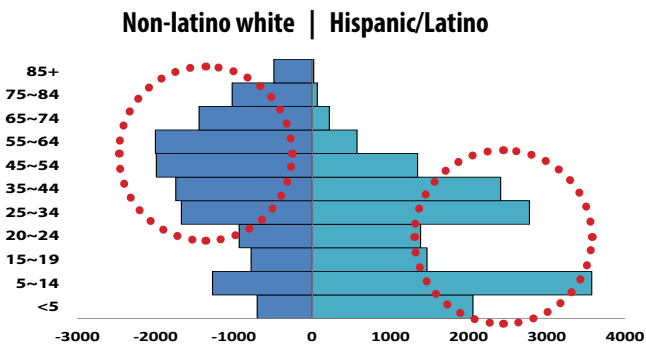
American rural areas are already disproportionately old and will likely remain so as the aging trend continues (Glasgow and Brown 2012). And like suburbs, rural America is also diversifying. **As restructuring in the meat processing industry propels the movement of young Hispanics into some rural areas, planning initiatives should find ways to support the growing diverse and young population** (Sáenz 2012).

#### Simultaneous growth of aging and young populations

##### Example of Dalton, Georgia

According to 2010 Census Data, non-whites accounted for 91 percent of U.S. population growth (Brookings 2011). The share of the Latino population is projected to grow from 16.3 percent to 27.9 percent in 2050 (Myers 2013). This phenomenon is visible in some places more than others.

Dalton is one of those places because of its meat-packing industry (Kandel and Parrado 2005). It has a growing young Hispanic workforce and a large older white population. This yields new demands for services ranging from ESL instruction to elder care, as well as suitable living arrangements such as multi-family housing.



Source: Analysis of 2010 Census Data

#### Why are suburbs increasingly diverse?

*“Employment decentralization blurred the traditional economic distinctions between cities and suburbs; it helped blur their demographic distinctions.*

*Economic opportunities drew immigrants to the suburbs, but so too did the social networks that proliferated in new “gateway” regions in the American South and West—Atlanta, Charlotte, Dallas, Denver, and Washington, among others. In these regions, immigrants skipped cities altogether and headed straight for suburbs, pushing foreign-born numbers in suburbs well above those in cities by the mid-2000s.”*

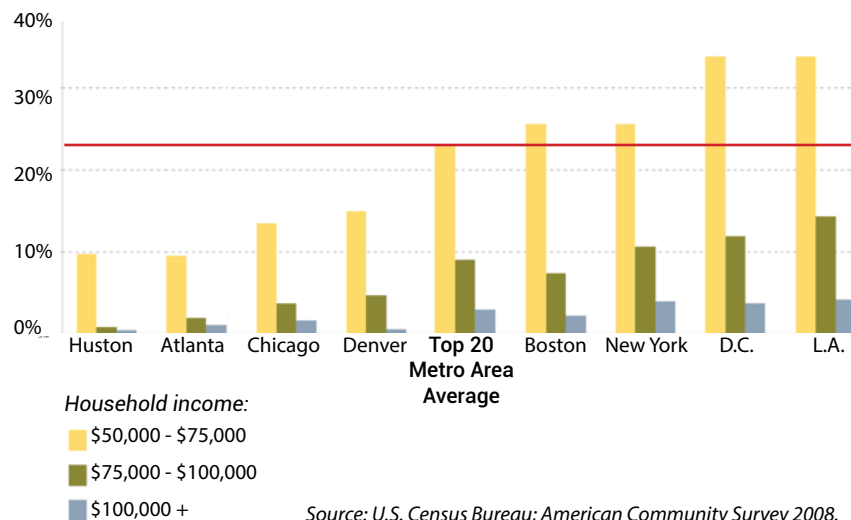
- Alan Berube, Sr. Fellow and Deputy Director, Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program, July 11

### Local Challenge 2: Cities pricing out families

American cities have been promoting themselves to young professionals for decades. However, older Millennials are beginning to have families of their own and their needs are shifting from lofts, cafes and bars to larger homes, childcare, parks and good schools (USA Today 2012). As much as they like to continue living in cities, it is not always affordable.

The following diagram shows that in major U.S. cities, renter households spend a significant portion of their incomes on rent, especially those with lower income. When families need larger homes, the financial stress is expected to increase. Therefore, **cities that lack family-friendly amenities, especially affordable larger homes, may price out families and risk losing the core of their economy** (ULI 2009).

#### Percentage of Renter Households Spending 30% or More of Household Income on Rent



Source: U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey 2008.

## Multigenerational planning: an adaptive planning approach to shifting demographics

**Multigenerational planning is an approach to adaptively and reponsively address the variety of demographic scenarios that characterize today's communities.** Planning that is more inclusive and flexible will contribute to building places that cater to a range of needs of different generations living in different settings. By addressing the needs of children, seniors and diverse segments of the population, multigenerational planning can lead to holistic improvements to the physical environment and service provision that expand choice and build strong communities for everybody.

**National, regional and local demographic changes have multifaceted implications for planning. The most important one is that local demographics matter to planning decisions.** While cities should offer a range of housing options that are both affordable and suitable to the changing needs of new families, suburban areas need to consider walkability and mixed used development that allow for more lively, dense communities for a diversifying population. Transportation options that may improve access to services are especially important for rural America (Morken and Warner 2012). Planners are the visionary professionals that can initiate these changes.

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