

## II. RACE & ETHNICITY

### BY THE NUMBERS

**83%**

Non-white share of  
population growth,  
United States,  
2000 to 2008

**2**

Rank of Atlanta among all  
metro areas for black  
population, 2008  
(surpassing Chicago)

**17/31**

Metro areas (out of 100)  
with "majority minority"  
total population / under-18  
population, 2008

**12**

Primary cities (out of 100)  
with gains in share  
of population that is white,  
2000 to 2008



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## OVERVIEW

■ **Racial and ethnic minorities accounted for 83 percent of U.S. population growth from 2000 to 2008.**

The continued faster growth of Hispanic, Asian, and black populations put the country as a whole on track to reach “majority minority” status by 2042, and for children to reach that milestone by 2023. More than three-quarters of racial and ethnic minorities today live in the nation’s 100 largest metro areas.

■ **A majority of Asians, and a near-majority of Hispanics, live in just 10 metropolitan areas.** Yet during the 2000s a slow dispersal of these groups continued away from major immigrant gateway areas like Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco. Fast-growing areas of the South like Dallas, Houston, Atlanta, and Washington, D.C. ranked among the largest gainers of Asian and Hispanic population from 2000 to 2008.

■ **Metro areas in the Southeast and the Interior West, and a few in the Midwest, exhibited some of the most rapid gains in Hispanic and Asian populations in the 2000s.** During the latter part of the decade, however, Hispanic and Asian growth retrenched toward major gateways like Los Angeles, Chicago, and Miami, as the housing market collapse and recession slowed the movement of these groups to places like Riverside, Phoenix, and Orlando.

■ **Blacks continue to move southward, as metro Atlanta surpassed metro Chicago for total black population by 2008.** Whites moved to many of these “New South” areas in large numbers as well during the 2000s, though their population shrank in large, coastal metro areas like Los Angeles and New York that continued to attract significant minority populations.

■ **For the first time, a majority of all racial/ethnic groups in large metro areas live in the suburbs.** Deep divides by race and ethnicity still separate cities and suburbs in metro areas like Detroit, but others like Los Angeles show much greater convergence between jurisdictions. In a handful of cities including Atlanta, Boston, and Washington, D.C., the share of population that is white increased during the 2000s.

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## NATIONAL TRENDS

The racial and ethnic profile of the United States continued to evolve rapidly in the 2000s. Its direction built on the trend of the 1990s, with non-white minorities dominating national population growth. This reflects the combined impact of continued immigration, largely from Latin America and Asia, and higher fertility for minorities than for whites. The latter factor has become increasingly important

as these groups gain a larger presence in U.S. society; two-thirds of the decade’s Hispanic population growth was due to natural increase (more births than deaths) rather than immigration.

Whites still account for a majority of U.S. population at 66 percent (Figure 1). However, this is down from 76 percent in 1990. From 2000 to 2008, they accounted for only 17 percent of national population growth, and their total numbers increased by only

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2 percent. By contrast, the population of Hispanics during this period rose by 31 percent, Asians by 26 percent, and blacks by 8 percent. Additionally, people of two or more races, while still a small share of total U.S. population, represent a growing presence in U.S. society.

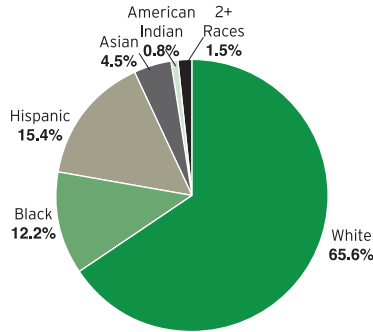
With their increasing numbers and higher growth rates, America's racial and ethnic minority representation is projected to increase substantially over time. According to the Census Bureau's most recent

estimates, the U.S. population will become minority white in the year 2042, at which time Hispanics would comprise 27 percent of the population, blacks 12 percent and Asians 7 percent.<sup>1</sup> Under this same scenario, the nation's under-18 population would achieve the same status in 2023.

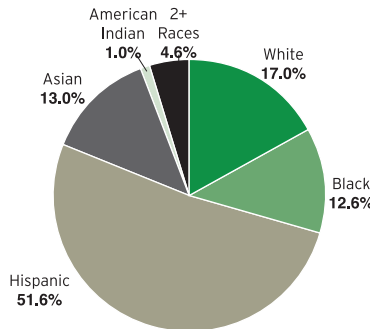
Despite these recent gains and long-term projections, the national growth of Hispanics and Asians especially tapered off toward the end of the decade, due to the Great Recession and its impacts on immigration. From 2000 to 2006, Hispanic population rose at an annual rate of 3.9 percent, which fell to 2.9 percent over the next two years. The drop-off in the Asian growth rate was even more dramatic, from 4.3 percent in the 2000-2006 period to 1.1 percent thereafter.

Minority populations in the United States concentrate even more heavily in large metropolitan areas than the overall population. In 2008, the 100 largest metro areas contained 66 percent of total U.S. population, but 77 percent of non-whites and Hispanics. This included 74 percent of blacks, 80 percent of Hispanics, and 88 percent of Asians.<sup>2</sup> As described below, a number of these large metro areas are on the cutting edge of the nation's transition to a "majority minority" society.

**Figure 1. Non-Whites Accounted for the Bulk of U.S. Population Growth in the 2000s**  
Share of 2008 U.S. Population by Race/Ethnicity



Share of 2000-2008 Population Change by Race/Ethnicity



Source: Brookings analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates Program data

## METROPOLITAN TRENDS

### Dispersal Amid Concentration of Hispanics and Asians

The historical clustering of America's immigrant minorities resulted from the initial settlement of these groups into a handful of "gateway" metropolitan areas. Friendship and family networks have drawn them to these traditional ports of entry,



**Table 1. Hispanics and Asians Continued a Gradual Shift Away from Large Gateways in the 2000s**  
Large Metro Areas Ranked by Hispanic and Asian Population, 2008, and Change, 2000 to 2008

2008 Population				2000 to 2008 Growth		
<i>Hispanics</i>						
Rank	Change from 1990	Metro Area	Population	Rank	Metro Area	Population Change
1	0	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA	5,719,249	1	Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA	635,298
2	0	New York-Newark, NY-NJ-PA	4,111,527	2	Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	596,917
3	0	Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL	2,142,735	3	Houston, TX	574,059
4	1	Houston, TX	1,945,238	4	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA	567,599
5	-1	Chicago-Naperville-Joliet, IL-IN-WI	1,903,748	5	New York-Newark, NY-NJ-PA	515,298
6	0	Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA	1,879,350	6	Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, AZ	492,187
7	1	Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	1,731,274	7	Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL	421,573
8	4	Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, AZ	1,321,713	8	Chicago-Naperville-Joliet, IL-IN-WI	395,647
9	-2	San Antonio, TX	1,080,482	9	Atlanta, GA	245,299
10	0	San Diego, CA	926,926	10	Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	225,638
<i>Asians</i>						
1	0	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA	1,782,387	1	New York-Newark, NY-NJ-PA	355,698
2	0	New York-Newark, NY-NJ-PA	1,777,325	2	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA	205,292
3	0	San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA	960,769	3	San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA	130,925
4	1	San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA	550,527	4	Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	119,481
5	1	Chicago-Naperville-Joliet, IL-IN-WI	504,597	5	San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA	108,892
6	-2	Honolulu, HI	471,090	6	Chicago-Naperville-Joliet, IL-IN-WI	105,979
7	0	Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	460,337	7	Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	96,405
8	1	Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA	368,449	8	Houston, TX	90,308
9	1	Houston, TX	326,301	9	Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA	87,905
10	-2	San Diego, CA	311,343	10	Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA	86,436

Source: Brookings analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates data

even during times when labor market conditions would suggest they move elsewhere. The past two decades reflect a growing but incomplete dispersal of Hispanics and Asians from these gateways to the country as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

As recently as the 1990 Census, taken 25 years after the 1965 Immigration Act liberalized the entry of more Hispanics from Latin America, the group

remained relatively geographically concentrated. At that time, the 10 metropolitan areas with the largest Hispanic populations housed fully 55 percent of all of U.S. Hispanics, with the top two—Los Angeles and New York—accounting for nearly three in 10 nationwide. Since 1990, only Phoenix—where the Hispanic population mushroomed—newly joined the top 10, taking over the eighth spot from San Francisco. Still,



**The past two decades reflect a growing but incomplete dispersal of Hispanics and Asians from major gateways to the country as a whole.**

the pecking order of the top three has not budged in the past two decades.

Nonetheless, the largest Hispanic settlement areas are showing signs of losing their grip. The top ten metro areas in 2008 housed nearly half (48 percent) of all Hispanics, but garnered only 40 percent of the nation's Hispanic growth from 2000 to 2008. The metropolitan areas gaining the most Hispanics during that period (Table 1, right panel) include two outside the top 10. Washington, D.C.'s and Atlanta's strong employment opportunities during most of the decade helped attract new Hispanic immigrants and longer-term residents from other parts of the United States. Riverside ranked first in total Hispanic gains from 2000 to 2008, owing in part to its attraction of Hispanics from nearby Los Angeles. The Texas metro areas of Dallas and Houston follow Riverside in registering the largest Hispanic gains.

A shift away from southern California, toward Florida, also underlies these patterns. During the 1990s, Los Angeles and New York led all metro areas in both numbers of Hispanics and total Hispanic population gains. But from 2000 to 2008, Los Angeles gained less than half as many Hispanics as it did during the 1990s (567,000 vs. 1.2 million). Meanwhile, Tampa, Orlando, and Jacksonville each gained more Hispanics in the first eight years of his decade than they did throughout the 1990s. This shift may have been temporary, however, given sharp downturns in the housing market in some of these newer destinations.

Asians concentrate even more heavily in traditional immigrant magnet areas than Hispanics. The same 10 metro areas that housed the most Asians in 1990 remain on the list for 2008 (Table 1 bottom left). Still, dispersal occurred, with the share of total U.S. Asian population those areas represent slipping from 61 percent in 1990 to 55 percent in

2008. The top three areas—Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco—still house one-third of all Asians nationwide.

As with Hispanics, the largest gateways have garnered a lower share of recent Asian gains. They drew less than half (44 percent) of Asian population gains from 2000 to 2008, compared with 53 percent in the 1990s. Dallas and Riverside, two metro areas not among those with the most Asians, ranked 7th and 10th, respectively, among those gaining the most Asians this past decade (Table 1, bottom right). The jump in Riverside's rank, from 18th biggest gainer during the 1990s to 10th from 2000 to 2008, reflects a spillover effect from Los Angeles also evident for Hispanics. A similar pattern in northern California vaulted Stockton from 43rd on Asian gains in the 1990s to 26th from 2000 to 2008.

### **Hispanic and Asian Growth Centers of the 2000s**

The metro areas experiencing the highest recent growth rates for Hispanics and Asians diverge from those above that registered the highest numeric gains. They provide a measure of where the newest gains are taking place, often in places undergoing significant in-migration.

The Southeast, especially Florida, dominates the list for fastest Hispanic growth in the 2000s (Table 2). Cape Coral rose in rank from number 11 in the 1990s to number one from 2000 to 2008, and Lakeland moved up 7 notches to number five. The Midwestern metro areas of Indianapolis and Columbus make the top 10 as well.

A large number of metropolitan areas crossed significant thresholds for Hispanic population—either 5 percent or 10 percent—over the past two decades (Map 1). These metro areas began to spread to the Southeast, Intermountain West, and across New

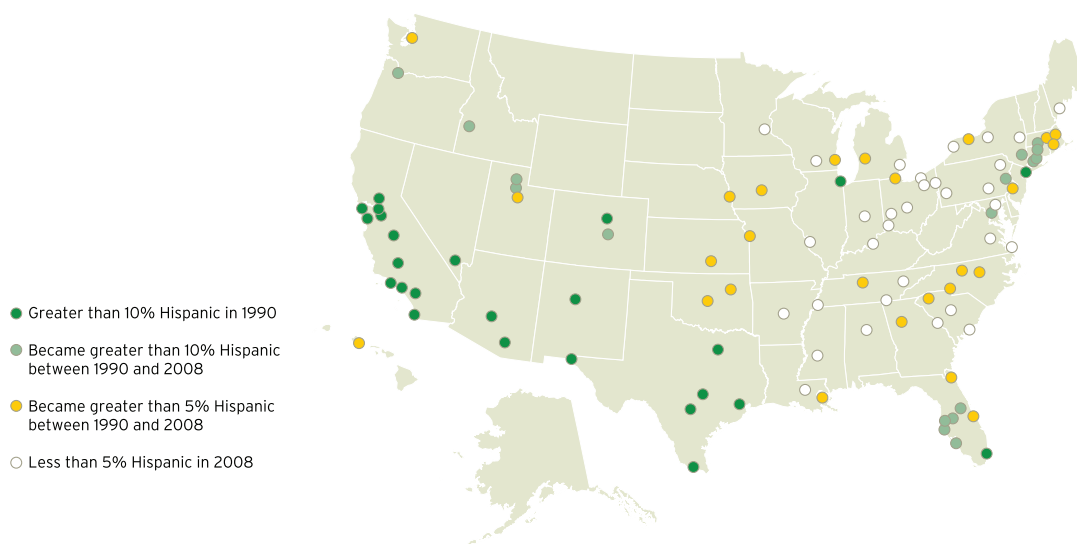


**Table 2. Metro Areas in the Southeast and Interior West Had Fast-Growing Hispanic and Asian Populations in the 2000s**  
 Highest Ranked Large Metro Areas by Hispanic and Asian Population Growth Rate, 2000 to 2008

Hispanics				Asians			
Rank	Change from 1990s	Metro Area	Population Change (%)	Rank	Change from 1990s	Metro Area	Population Change (%)
1	10	Cape Coral, FL	142.1	1	0	Las Vegas, NV	76.2
2	-1	Charlotte, NC-SC	117.6	2	4	Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, AZ	70.2
3	-1	Raleigh-Cary, NC	113.7	3	25	Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA	58.8
4	0	Nashville, TN	105.7	4	-2	Atlanta, GA	58.0
5	7	Lakeland, FL	102.3	5	-2	Orlando, FL	57.4
6	0	Indianapolis, IN	99.5	6	1	Indianapolis, IN	55.7
7	2	Provo, UT	94.1	7	-2	Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL	53.7
8	-3	Atlanta, GA	89.2	8	16	San Antonio, TX	48.3
9	8	Columbus, OH	86.0	9	3	Columbus, OH	47.6
10	-7	Greensboro-High Point, NC	80.5	10	-6	Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	47.2

Source: Brookings analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates data

**Map 1. Hispanics Represent a Significant Share of Population in an Increasing Number of Metro Areas**  
 Period in which Hispanic Population Share Crossed 5% / 10% Threshold, Large Metro Areas



Source: Brookings analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates Program data



England and eastern Pennsylvania. In this respect, new Hispanic destinations coincide with recent growth centers for overall U.S. population, such as Atlanta, Orlando, Provo, and Charlotte.

For the Asian population, further moves into the interior West characterized growth patterns in the 2000s. Las Vegas ranked first among large metro areas for Asian growth rate from 2000 to 2008, just as it did during the 1990s. Moving up noticeably to the second and third spots were Phoenix and Riverside, the latter vaulting from 28th place in the 1990s. Several metropolitan areas in Florida and other parts of the South make the list as well, including Atlanta, Orlando, Tampa, San Antonio, and Dallas. As with Hispanics, Indianapolis and Columbus make the list of fastest Asian gainers; their Midwestern neighbors Cincinnati and St Louis climbed to 11th and

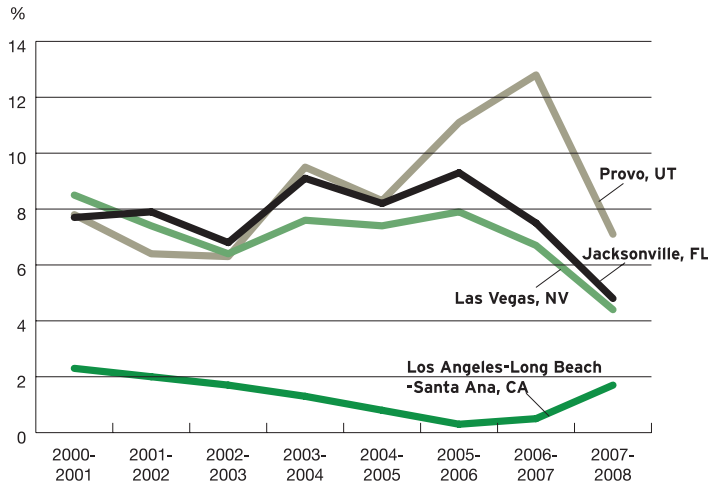
15th as well (not shown). Because Asians comprise a much smaller share of the U.S. population (4.5 percent) than Hispanics (15.4 percent), there are far fewer places with significant Asian populations. Nonetheless, there are signs of continued “spreading out,” as Asians comprised at least 5 percent of population in 22 of the nation’s 100 largest metro areas, up from nine in 1990.

### Late-Decade Hispanic Retrenchment

Just as the housing market collapse and ensuing recession severely curtailed overall growth in many of the nation’s real-estate driven migration magnets, it also impacted dispersal among racial and ethnic minorities. This was especially true for Hispanics, as labor market opportunities in fast-growing metro areas in fields like construction and retail diminished rapidly with the bursting of the housing bubble.

The “retrenchment” of Hispanics toward traditional gateway areas is most vivid within California. Hispanic gains in metropolitan Los Angeles quadrupled in 2007-2008 compared with just two years earlier, at the same time that they halved in metropolitan Riverside. Other traditional Hispanic areas, including Chicago, New York, Miami, San Francisco, and San Diego, saw increased gains in 2007-2008, at the same time that Hispanic growth declined significantly in places like Phoenix, Las Vegas, Orlando, and Atlanta. About half of the nation’s 100 largest metro areas showed Hispanic growth slowdowns that year, mostly represented by non-traditional Hispanic areas. Jacksonville, Provo, and Las Vegas, compared against Los Angeles, demonstrate this trend (Figure 2). Until employment opportunities reappear in these areas in significant number, the widespread spatial assimilation of Hispanics in some new destinations may be on hold.

**Figure 2. Hispanic Growth Retrenched Toward Traditional Gateway Areas After the Housing Crash**  
Change in Hispanic Population by Year, Selected Metro Areas, 2000-2001 to 2007-2008



Source: Brookings analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates Program data



**Table 3. Black Population Continued to Head Southward in the 2000s**  
 Large Metro Areas Ranked by Black Population, 2008, and Growth, 2000 to 2008

2008 Population				2000 to 2008 Growth			
2008 Rank	2000 Rank	1990 Rank	Metro Area	Population	Rank	Metro Area	Population Change
1	1	1	New York-Newark, NY-NJ-PA	3,162,284	1	Atlanta, GA	445,578
2	4	7	Atlanta, GA	1,669,518	2	Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	159,494
3	2	2	Chicago-Naperville-Joliet, IL-IN-WI	1,667,376	3	Houston, TX	151,362
4	3	3	Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	1,370,929	4	Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	97,874
5	5	4	Philadelphia, PA-NJ-DE-MD	1,169,265	5	Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL	95,876
6	8	8	Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL	1,042,874	6	Charlotte, NC-SC	94,171
7	6	6	Detroit-Warren, MI	1,008,171	7	Orlando, FL	71,698
8	9	9	Houston, TX	942,101	8	Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, AZ	62,884
9	7	5	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA	898,695	9	Baltimore, MD	60,351
10	10	11	Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	874,216	10	Tampa-St. Petersburg -Clearwater, FL	59,997

Source: Brookings analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates data

### Continued Southward Shift of Blacks

The historic pattern of black settlement in the United States can be measured more in centuries than in decades. The most prominent shifts occurred during much of the 20th century, with the “Great Migration” out of the South, first to cities in the Northeast and Midwest, and then to the West. Still, through the 1960s, the South housed more than half of the nation’s black population. In the early 1970s, African Americans began to follow white population into the South. Since then, and especially during the 1990s, black movement to the South has become substantial.<sup>4</sup> It has occurred less in historic “Old South” states such as Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, and more in “New South” growth centers such as Texas, North Carolina, Georgia, and Florida.

This trend expanded in the 2000s. The region’s share of total U.S. black population continued to rise from 54 percent in 1990 to 57 percent in 2008. The

South accounted for fully 75 percent of the nation’s black population gains from 2000 to 2008, up from 65 percent in the 1990s. Northern destinations for blacks during the Great Migration still figure prominently among the metropolitan areas with the largest black populations in 2008, as do several areas in the South (Table 3, left panel). The biggest shift occurred in metropolitan Atlanta, which rose rapidly from seventh in 1990 to fourth in 2000, and in the 2000s surpassed Chicago to house the second-largest African American population in the United States. In the process it more than doubled its black population, overtaking the metropolitan area whose city Martin Luther King, Jr. once called the “Birmingham of the North.”

Atlanta also far surpassed other metropolitan areas in its black population gain during the 2000s (Table 3, right panel). Its large middle-class black population, along with its diversified and growing





**Table 4. White Population Losses in Coastal and Midwestern Metro Areas Counterbalanced Gains in the South and West**

Large Metro Areas Ranked by White Population Gains and Losses, 2000 to 2008

Gains			Losses		
Rank	Metro Area	Population Change	Rank	Metro Area	Population Change
1	Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, AZ	353,665	1	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA	-662,170
2	Atlanta, GA	285,981	2	New York-Newark, NY-NJ-PA	-490,380
3	Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	214,150	3	San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA	-106,025
4	Austin, TX	164,567	4	San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA	-106,017
5	Charlotte, NC-SC	157,566	5	Philadelphia, PA-NJ-DE-MD	-100,147
6	Raleigh-Cary, NC	149,081	6	Pittsburgh, PA	-84,597
7	Houston, TX	145,071	7	San Diego, CA	-72,769
8	Portland-Vancouver, OR-WA	133,127	8	Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA	-72,530
9	Nashville, TN	130,293	9	Honolulu, HI	-70,912
10	Provo, UT	125,091	10	Buffalo, NY	-60,620

Source: Brookings analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates data

economy, provided a continued draw for African Americans from across the country. Nine of the top 10 metro areas for black population gains from 2000 to 2008 are located in the South, including the three “New South” areas of Charlotte, Orlando, and Tampa. These regions are attracting more highly-educated blacks, including those from northern destinations. Washington, D.C., Atlanta, and Dallas rank sixth, ninth, and 25th, respectively, on the share of black adults with a bachelor’s degree, whereas Philadelphia and Detroit rank, respectively, 59th and 79th.

### White Gains and Losses

Compared to Hispanic, Asian, and black population, white population distributes much more evenly across the country. With lower fertility and minimal growth through immigration, whites’ movement among metropolitan areas effectively amounts to a

zero-sum game, reflecting domestic in- and out-migration to a greater degree than for minorities.

Consequently, metropolitan areas among the nation’s 100 largest exhibited both significant gains and losses of white population during the 2000s. Those with the largest gains included metropolitan areas in the South and West, such as Phoenix, Atlanta, Dallas, Charlotte, and Raleigh (Table 4, left panel). While many of these areas also experienced fast growth of Hispanics and Asians in the 2000s (Table 2), they contrast with traditional immigrant magnets such as Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago, where gains of those groups were greatest over the decade (Table 1).

Indeed, the list of metropolitan areas sustaining the greatest white population losses over the 2000-2008 period contains many of these traditional immigrant magnets (Table 4, right panel). Out-migration in response to the high cost of housing



through most of the decade in those expensive coastal metro areas contributed to their losses. In areas like Pittsburgh, Buffalo, Cleveland, and Hartford that also lost significant white population, economic stagnation and aging of the population were more important factors. Overall, more than one-third (35) of the 100 largest metro areas lost white population during this time.

### Majority-Minority Metro Areas

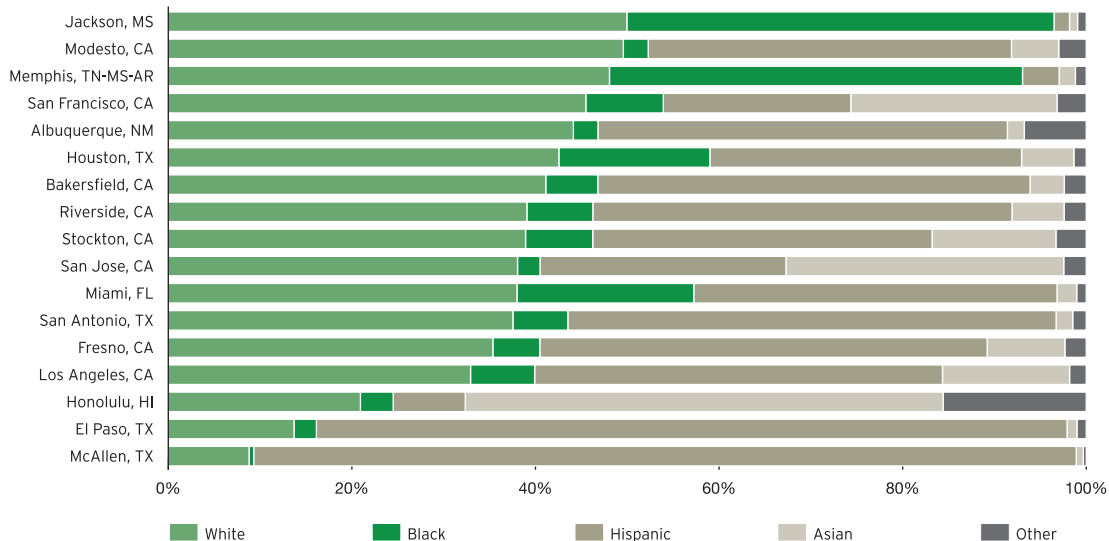
As described above, America is on its way to becoming a much more racially and ethnically diverse country, with whites expected to account for less than half the population by 2042. But the historic clustering of immigrant and African American settlement, and the continued growth of these populations, has led numerous areas to become “majority minority”

already (Figure 3). This is now the case for 17 metro areas, up from 14 in 2000 and just five in 1990. The Texas border metro areas of McAllen and El Paso, where more than four-fifths of the population is Hispanic, lead the list. Among metro areas with at least 1 million people, Los Angeles has the smallest white population share at 33 percent. Eight of the 17 are located in California, and another four are in Texas. The New York metro area, which clocked in at 50.7 percent white in 2008, will soon cross this threshold as well, perhaps by this year’s decennial census.

Because the younger part of the population is even more racially and ethnically diverse than adults (see the Age chapter), fully 31 metro areas already possess “majority minority” child populations (Map 2). They include all of the regions in Figure 3, as well

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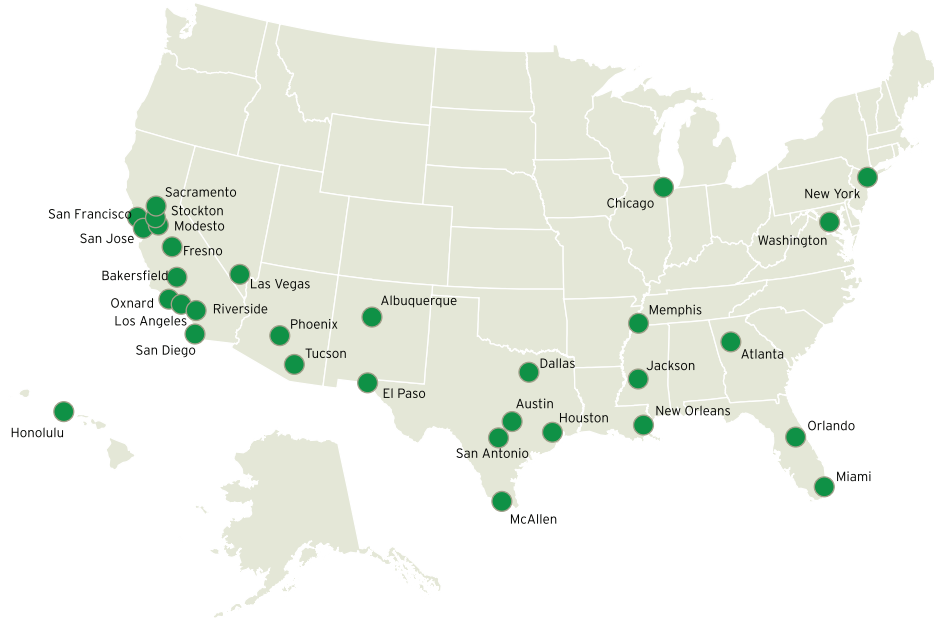
**Figure 3. Seventeen Large Metro Areas Have Majority-Minority Populations**  
Share of Population by Race/Ethnicity, 2008



Source: Brookings analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates Program data  
Note: Metro area names are shortened



**Map 2. In 31 Large Metro Areas, A Majority of Children Are From Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups**  
 Large Metro Areas with Majority-Minority Child (Under 18) Populations, 2008



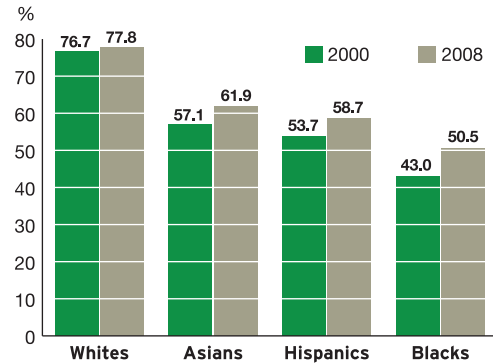
Source: Brookings analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates Program data

as many that have more of a “white” image overall but a minority-dominated child population beneath the surface, such as Phoenix, Las Vegas, Washington, D.C., Orlando, Atlanta, and Chicago.

## CITY AND SUBURBAN TRENDS

For much of the post-World War II period, “white flight” to the suburbs and concentrations of blacks and immigrants in urban areas combined to create a common perception of cities as having large minority presences, surrounded by largely white suburbs. These patterns changed gradually as a consequence of Civil Rights-era anti-discrimination legislation, the rise of Hispanic and Asian populations in suburbs,

**Figure 4. A Majority of All Racial/Ethnic Groups in Major Metro Areas Live in the Suburbs**  
 Share of Population in Suburbs by Race/Ethnicity, Large Metro Areas, 2000 and 2008



Includes 93 of 100 metro areas for which data are available  
 Source: Brookings analysis of Census 2000 and 2008 American Community Survey data



and less segregated development patterns in newer metropolitan areas.

While whites reside in the suburbs in larger numbers and shares than any minority group, the first decade of the new century brought the United States to a new benchmark. For the first time, more than half of all racial and ethnic groups residing in large metro areas live in the suburbs (Figure 4). This was the case already for Asians and Hispanics in 2000, and blacks crossed this threshold during the decade. In 2000, 43 percent of blacks in major metro areas lived in the suburbs, but that share increased rapidly to more than 50 percent by 2008.

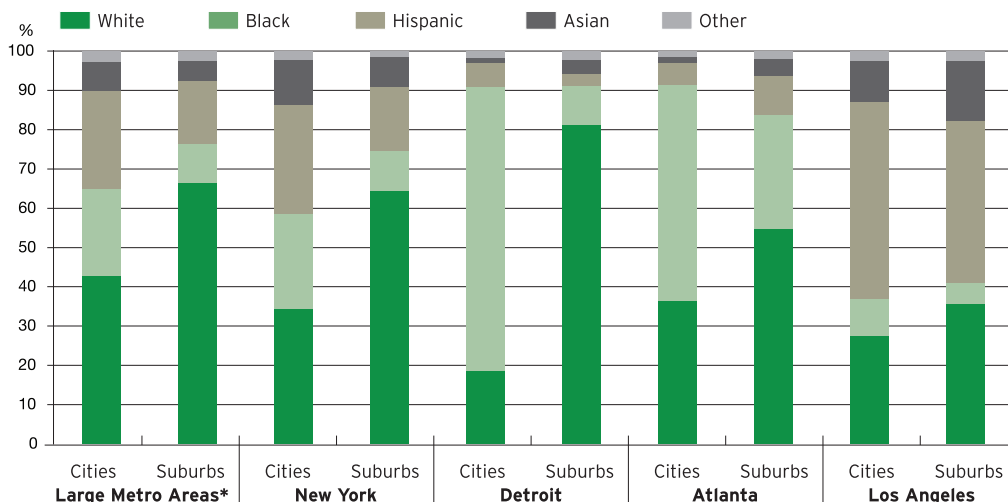
Notably, this transformation occurred as the total number of blacks living in suburbs rose from 2000 to 2008, but dropped in cities by a small amount, and by a larger margin than for whites. New Orleans alone accounted for a significant part of this

difference; the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina contributed to a significant reduction in the city's black population, and a less-severe decline in its white population.<sup>5</sup>

Because whites are far more likely to be suburban residents than minorities, the racial and ethnic composition of suburbs still tilts rather heavily toward whites, though this too varies across metropolitan areas. About two-thirds of all suburbanites are white, compared to 43 percent in primary cities (Figure 5). At one extreme are slow-growing, black/white metro areas like Detroit with a longstanding pattern of racial and ethnic segregation. Today, more than four-fifths of residents in Detroit's suburbs are white, compared to less than one-fifth of the city's population. At the other extreme is Los Angeles, whose prototypical "melting pot suburbs" are almost as diverse as its city population. In between are fast

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**Figure 5. Metro Areas Vary Considerably in the Location of their Racial/Ethnic Populations**  
Share of Population by Race/Ethnicity and Metropolitan Location, Selected Metro Areas, 2008



\*Includes 93 of 100 metro areas for which data are available  
Source: Brookings analysis of Census 2000 and 2008 American Community Survey data



growing destinations like Atlanta, whose suburbs are still “whiter” than its city, but whose black population has also increasingly suburbanized with declines in segregation and growth of the black middle class.

In fact, Atlanta and a few other cities experienced a somewhat new phenomenon in the 2000s—a gain in the share of population that is white. In Atlanta, whites increased from 32 percent of population in 2000 to 36 percent in 2008. Similar, though smaller, increases occurred in New York, Washington D.C., San Francisco, Boston, and primary cities in another seven of the nation’s 100 largest metro areas. What some have termed a “demographic inversion” in metro areas, with whites repopulating cities and minorities moving out to the suburbs, is not yet a widespread phenomenon, but bears watching in the years and decades ahead as metro areas grow even more diverse.<sup>6</sup>

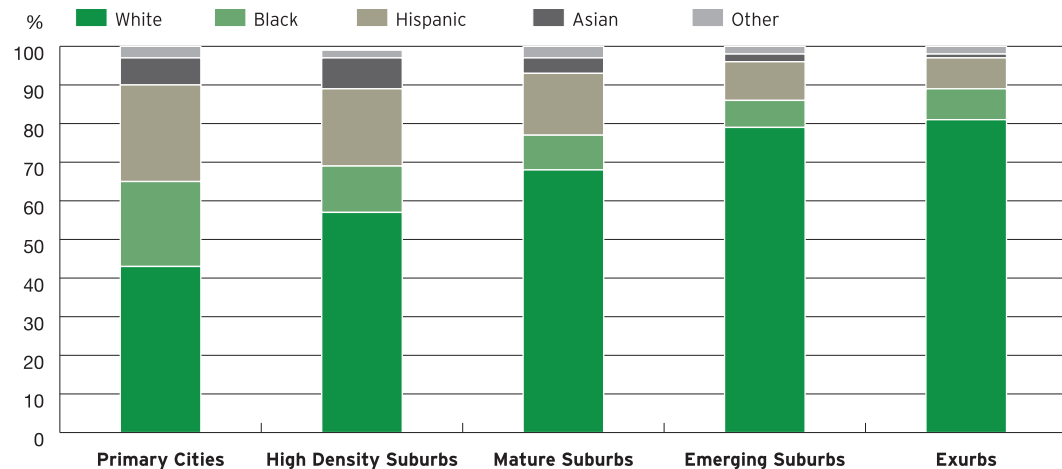
Still, there are notable gradations within suburbia.

At the national level, exurbs and emerging outer suburbs are predominantly white; mature suburbs reflect more of the national race-ethnic profile; and inner high-density suburbs are highly diverse (Figure 6).

## LOOKING AHEAD

Beginning with the 1990s, and continuing into the 2000s, there has been a noticeable blurring of the regional and city-suburban racial and ethnic divide. At the regional level, much of this blurring owes to the widespread dispersal of Hispanics, both native- and foreign-born, to new parts of the country where employment opportunities lured them away from traditional settlement areas. To a lesser extent, Asians have also moved to many of the same areas. And while blacks have dispersed to some degree,

**Figure 6. Racial/Ethnic Diversity Decreases Farther Away from the Urban Core in Metro Areas**  
Share of Population by Race/Ethnicity and Metropolitan Community Type, 2008



Source: Brookings analysis of 2008 American Community Survey data



their major shift has been to the South, in a reversal of the Great Migration at the beginning of the 20th century. Despite these dispersals, minorities still concentrate unevenly across metropolitan America. Notwithstanding the growth of more majority-minority metro areas, more than half of the 100 largest are over 70 percent white, and whites comprise more than 80 percent of population in more than a quarter.

As the growth rates of Hispanic and Asian populations continue to dwarf those of the nation's aging white population, more metropolitan areas will undoubtedly show a reduced presence of whites, suggested by the large and growing number of metro areas with majority-minority child populations. Yet a truly nationwide integration of racial and ethnic minorities still seems a long way off. The latter part of the decade indicates that further dispersal of Hispanics into new destinations over the short run may await significant improvement in underlying labor market conditions. Over the longer run, the growth of second- and third-generation minority groups that are more assimilated into the "mainstream" labor market suggests that their movements will increasingly mirror those of the overall population. Still, the emerging "cultural generation gap" between a largely minority, multiethnic child and young adult population, and a primarily white elderly and older baby boomer population, suggests that a more gradual assimilation may take place.

Finally, within metropolitan areas, the 2000s indicate that the nation is well on its way toward achieving greater city-suburban racial and ethnic integration. This, too, is an uneven phenomenon regionally, and the demographic similarities between cities and suburbs in faster-growing metro areas of the South and West exceed those in slower-growing parts of the Northeast and Midwest. Still, 20th-

century notions of who lives in cities and suburbs are increasingly out of step with 21st century realities. Tracking the further movement of these groups into suburbia, and examining the underlying forces and resulting outcomes, will be a clear priority for both the public and private sectors for the foreseeable future. ■

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## ENDNOTES

1. Among other assumptions, the Census Bureau's projections assume immigration rises from about 1.3 million people a year to 2 million a year over time.
2. Regarding the American Indian/Alaskan Native population, the 100 largest metro areas house 39 percent of the nation's 2.3 million members of this group. The Phoenix metro area leads all others as home to about 80,000, followed by Tulsa, Albuquerque, and Oklahoma City, each with more than 40,000. Five other large metro areas—New York, Seattle, Los Angeles, Dallas and Tucson—house more than 25,000. Tulsa leads all large metros in the share of its residents who are American Indians/Alaska Natives at 7 percent, followed by Albuquerque at 5 percent and Oklahoma City at under 4 percent.
3. William H. Frey, "Diversity Spreads Out: Metropolitan Shifts in Hispanic, Asian, and Black Populations Since 2000" (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2006).
4. William H. Frey, "The New Great Migration: Black Americans' Return to the South, 1965-2000" (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2004).
5. William H. Frey, Audrey Singer, and David Park, "Resettling New Orleans: The First Full Picture from the Census" (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2007).
6. Alan Ehrenhalt, "Trading Places: The Demographic Inversion of the American City." *The New Republic*, August 13, 2008.

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