

**The State of Metropolitan America:  
Suburbs and the 2010 Census  
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Thanks for this opportunity to address a group of people who share my own passion for a couple of topics that others tell me are rather curious things to spend one's time thinking about—suburbs and the census!

I hope this presentation demonstrates that, increasingly, when we talk about suburbs, we're talking about America. In particular, we're talking about the major metropolitan areas that stand at the forefront of the country's ongoing demographic transformation.

My talk today will reflect three main points:

- **First, the initial results from the 2010 Census signal a continuing demographic convergence within U.S. metropolitan areas, one that is blurring the lines that have long separated cities and suburbs.**
- **Second, this convergence results from a complicated mix of economic, social, and physical changes in metro areas, and raises a host of consequences for suburban communities at the front lines of change.**
- **And third, in light of these growing and shared challenges, we must adopt a metropolitan approach to managing and making the most of demographic change in an increasingly metropolitan world.**

So let's return to the first point, that **Census 2010 signals continued demographic convergence within U.S. metro areas.**

As we all know by now, the decennial census ain't what it used to be. With the advent of the annual American Community Survey, the 2010 Census collected information on just the 5 basic "short form" subjects shown here.

The research that my colleagues at the Brookings Metro Program have conducted with respect to the 2010 census results thus far has focused on three of these subject areas: population, race and ethnicity, and age. In each of these areas, amid dynamic national demographic shifts, we see continued or increasing similarities between cities and suburbs.

On population, the 2000s yielded slower nationwide growth than the 1990s, owing to an aging population and sluggish economic expansion.

Both cities and suburbs grew more slowly in the 2000s than the 1990s. The combined growth rate for cities in the 100 largest metro areas dropped to a little more than half that from the prior decade.

Yet the aggregate picture obscures the continued strong relationship between city and suburban growth *within* metropolitan areas. Metropolitan-wide population change—*increase, decrease, or stagnation*—continued to set the stage for both city and suburban growth patterns.

On race and ethnicity, as the white population continued to age, racial and ethnic minorities accounted for an astonishing 91 percent of U.S. population growth in the 2000s. Hispanics and Asians alone accounted for almost three-quarters of that growth.

The widespread growth of new minority groups fueled population gains in both cities and suburbs. The combined population of cities in the 100 largest metro areas is now fully 59% non-white. Their suburbs are more than one-third non-white.

That disparity, however, began to narrow more rapidly this past decade. After growing at nearly the same rate as in cities in the 1990s, the non-white share of population in suburbs jumped 7 percentage points in the 2000s. For the first time, more than half of every major racial and ethnic group in major metro areas lives in suburbs.

On age, as the younger boomers entered their late 40s over the past decade, they greatly inflated the size of America's 45-and-over population. That group's numbers grew at more than *eighteen* times the rate of those for the under-45 population in the 2000s.

Within metro areas, suburbs do remain a more child-oriented environment than cities, evidenced by the significantly larger share of their population aged 5 to 14.

But as the Boomers—America's first truly suburban generation—age in place, their communities are aging, too. As a result, suburbs originally built for families with children are increasingly home to larger empty nester and elderly populations than their nearby cities.

Of course, we cannot ignore the continued differences that mark American cities and suburbs—the product of more than a century of economic, sociological, and political forces. But my major takeaway from Census 2010 thus far is that cities and suburbs increasingly share common attributes, both across and within our major metro areas.

This brings me to my second point, which is that **demographic convergence within metro areas arises from a range of causes and gives rise to important consequences for these communities**. I'll explore several of these in turn.

First, as somebody once said, "It's the economy, stupid." Suburbs grew up as bedroom communities to city employment centers. Today, however, traditional downtowns account for only one in five jobs in metro areas. By contrast, more than 45 percent of metropolitan jobs now lie at least 10 miles from the downtown core—outside the Beltway, if you will. Employment decentralization blurred the traditional

economic distinctions between cities and suburbs; in doing that, it helped blur their demographic distinctions as more groups settled close to where the jobs are.

Among these groups were immigrants. Economic opportunities drew them to the suburbs, but so too did the social networks that proliferated in new “gateway” regions in the American South and West with little recent history of immigration—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.

Affordable housing is suburbanizing, too. A mixture of policy changes like fair housing laws and subsidies for low-income homeownership, combined with the aging of suburban infrastructure, has made suburban housing more accommodating of racial and ethnic diversity. Nearly half of all voucher holders, and more than half of all rental units priced below HUD’s Fair Market Rents, are located in suburbs. The past few years may be accelerating further economic diversification of suburbs, which in regions like Chicago are the primary locus for foreclosed homes.

The causes of demographic convergence within metro areas yield a new set of challenges for suburbs that have traditionally been the province of cities. Chief among these is poverty. Twenty years ago, cities were home to well more than half of America’s metropolitan poor. Fast-forward to 2000, and suburbs began to catch up. But as the economically difficult 2000s expanded the number of poor people in metro America by a stunning 5.4 million, more than two-thirds of that increase happened in suburbs.

While the suburban poor do tend to live in less poor neighborhoods than their city counterparts, the prevalence of high-poverty suburban communities—where more than 20% of people live below the poverty line—expanded rapidly in the 2000s, as my colleagues Elizabeth Kneebone and Carey Nadeau will discuss in a paper they’ll present tomorrow. Over time, this may introduce more suburbs to the myriad challenges associated with concentrated poverty, including poor-performing schools, private-sector disinvestment, and health and safety issues.

On the latter count, while crime dropped throughout metropolitan areas over the past two decades, the declines in suburbs were not as steep as those in cities. True, cities had farther to fall, but the result is that crime—particularly violent crime—is more of a shared metropolitan challenge today than ever.

With aging and lower-income populations come new transportation challenges for suburbs. Unfortunately, suburbs in many metro areas lie well beyond the reach of metropolitan transit systems—sometimes quite intentionally. Our recent research revealed that suburban households that cannot or choose not to own a car face severe constraints on their access to employment, particularly in regions like Atlanta where transit reaches a small share of the extensive suburban population.

So we have a mix of factors that are driving demographic convergence within metro areas, factors that ultimately present a series of challenges quite new to suburbs, but rather familiar to many of their cities.

I’d argue that we see this shift mirrored in our popular images of suburbia, too. When I was growing up in suburban central Massachusetts, *Family Ties* brought us Morning in America every Thursday evening, in the suburbs of Columbus, OH. Steven, Elyse, Alex, Mallory, and Jennifer’s problems mostly revolved around the political divide between aging hippie parents and materialistic Reagan-era teenagers.

Now, I reckon the archetypal suburban TV program is South Park. The exurbs of Denver are home to people and problems that would probably make the Keatons run away screaming in terror.

That's a caricature, to be sure. But it's also a buildup to my final point, which is that we need not an exclusively city or suburban perspective on the census, but rather a **metropolitan approach to managing America's continuing demographic transformation.**

This is the main message of our continuing work at the Metro Program to chronicle the *State of Metropolitan America*, through a series of reports on the key dimensions of demographic change in metro areas, and an interactive website that visualizes these changes for states, metro areas, cities and suburbs nationwide.

This work is showing not only how our country's demographic dynamism confounds conventional wisdom about cities versus suburbs, but also how it complicates traditional notions of regional identity in America.

Indeed, we find that there's a new "metro map" of the nation that unites places not by their age or geographic proximity, but by their demographic similarities. These associations relate to three of the key dimensions of demographic transformation in metro areas—population growth, racial and ethnic change, and educational attainment. Through the lens of these metro areas, we identify seven distinct new demographic regions of the United States.

- At one end of the spectrum lie nine **Next Frontier** metros, the demographic success stories of the 2000s. These places are fast growing, rapidly diversifying, and outperforming the nation in educational attainment. Eight of these nine metro areas lie west of the Mississippi River, with Washington, D.C. as the lone Eastern exception.
- Seven metros are **Diverse Giants**, places that post above-average educational attainment and diversity, but below-average population growth, owing in part to their large sizes. This cluster includes the three largest metros in the country (New York, LA, and Chicago), as well as metros in the San Francisco Bay Area.
- The 19 metros in the **New Heartland** cluster span the nation geographically. These places are fast growing and highly educated, but have lower shares of Hispanic and Asian populations than the national average. They include many communities in the "New South" where blacks are the dominant minority group, such as Atlanta, Charlotte, and Richmond, as well as largely white metro areas throughout the Midwest and West, such as Indianapolis, Kansas City, and Portland (OR).
- 13 metros comprise a new **Border Growth** bloc, growing and diversifying fast but lagging substantially on educational attainment. This cluster stretches from Miami and Orlando through Texas, Arizona, and Nevada, and up California's Central Valley. These metros are marked by a significant and growing presence of Mexican and Latin American immigrants.
- 17 **Mid-Sized Magnets** are growing fast but are distinguished by lagging education and lower shares of Hispanic and Asian minorities. Some of these communities, particularly those in Florida, have seen population growth slow considerably in the wake of the housing market crash.

- 19 metros are **Skilled Anchors**, slow-growing, less diverse metro areas that boast higher-than-average levels of educational attainment. Most lie in the Northeast and Midwest, and include large regions such as Boston and Philadelphia, as well as smaller regions such as Albany and Providence.
- Industrial Cores are the final, most demographically disadvantaged of the metropolitan types. These 16 older industrial centers of the Northeast, Midwest, and Southeast are slower-growing, less diverse, and less educated than national averages.

The new “Metro Map” of the United States forces us to think outside the conventional regional boxes that have informed our collective narrative for generations. Moreover, the *distinct* demographic starting points of different types of metros like these tell us a lot about the *distinct* sorts of policy issues—economic, social, and environmental—that confront leaders in these different places.

And ultimately, what matters for ensuring prosperity and an improving quality of life for their residents are *metropolitan* assets and institutions, and policies to support their growth and vitality:

- The advanced manufacturing industry clusters that can drive the economic revival of Industrial Core metros
- The institutions of higher education that can help close the yawning racial attainment gaps in Next Frontier, Diverse Giant, and Border Growth metros
- The housing and associated transportation networks that can accommodate aging suburban populations in Mid-Sized Magnet and Skilled Anchor metros
- And the amenities that create a “quality of place” bind us together within all metro areas, even if they occasionally drive us apart across metro areas

The world’s population just became majority urban in 2007, and the pace of global metropolitan growth continues to accelerate. McKinsey estimates that just 100 metro areas, mostly in the developing world, will drive more than one-third of global economic growth in the next 15 years. In Europe, Asia, and South America, our competitors have moved well past old city/suburban battles, and are taking distinctly *metropolitan* approaches to fostering regional and national prosperity.

To conclude, there’s not only an economic imperative to think and act more metropolitan in America, but also an emerging demographic basis for doing so. The 2010 Census shows that suburbs and cities share increasingly common attributes and associated challenges. I hope your conversations over the next two days contribute to a greater understanding of the metropolitan context for suburban success, and reaffirm the value of sharing experience among demographic peers nationwide.