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WASHINGTON, DC

Kids in the City:
Indicators of Child Well-Being in Large Cities from the 2004 American Community Survey

The Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program and the Population Reference Bureau [1]

"In 2004, more than one-fourth of children in large cities lived in poverty."

Findings

Analysis of data from the Census Bureau's 2004 American Community Survey on the 50-largest cities in the U.S. reveals that:

■ **In 2004, the child poverty rate in the nation's 50 largest cities was 28 percent, much higher than the national child poverty rate of 18 percent.** Estimated child poverty rates in big cities ranged widely, however; cities like Virginia Beach and Wichita occupied the low end of the distribution, while cities like Atlanta and Detroit exhibited very high poverty rates.

■ **The child poverty rate increased significantly between 1999 and 2004 nationwide and in the 50 largest cities.** Sixteen cities experienced a statistically significant increase in their child poverty rates between 1999 and 2004, and only one—Los Angeles—saw a significant decline.

■ **Across large cities, the share of children with no parents in the labor force was very closely associated with child poverty rates.** Cities that ranked high on child poverty also tended to have high proportions of children living in single-parent families. Parental education levels did not relate as closely to child poverty at the city level as either labor force participation or single parenthood.

■ **Cities with falling, mostly white and black populations, such as Baltimore and Cleveland, had the highest rates of child poverty and children living in single-parent families.** Cities with growing, multiethnic populations, such as Austin and Phoenix, had lower-than-average child poverty rates largely due to their higher rates of parental work and lower rates of single parenthood.

By continuing to track indicators of child well-being at the local level using tools like the American Community Survey, individuals and institutions concerned about the future of children can contribute to a more informed dialogue about how to ensure better opportunities for disadvantaged kids and families nationwide.

Introduction

Conditions for children living in large cities are worse than those for children nationwide on most measures of well-being. Children growing up in large cities are at greater risk of dropping out of school, living with parents who are not in the labor force, and residing in single-parent families. Children in large cities are twice as likely as children nationwide to have difficulty speaking English (10 percent compared with 5 percent), creating potential barriers for children in school and for young adults who are entering the labor market. As a reflection of these underlying disadvantages, in 2004, more than one-fourth of children in large cities lived in poverty.

But conditions for children are not uniform across the country. Widely varying demographic and economic trends in urban areas have produced very different landscapes for raising children in cities located in different parts of the United States.

Migration trends, in particular, have shaped the conditions for children growing up in cities. High levels of international immigration during the last three decades have transformed the demographic make-up of many urban areas. International migration is no longer confined to large cities on the East and West Coasts, but instead new immigrant gateways have emerged in interior cities in the South and West, transforming the demographic and socioeconomic composition of places like Atlanta, Charlotte, and Las Vegas.[2] In new gateway cities, recent waves of immigrants have contributed to population growth, but have also increased the number of children who live in low-income families, are high school dropouts, and have limited English proficiency.

There has also been a steady flow of migrants from within the United States to cities located in the "New Sunbelt," including those in Arizona, Nevada, and North Carolina, further fueling population growth in the Southern and Western states.[3] Populations in these cities have increased at a rapid pace, largely at the expense of populations in rural communities and in older cities in the Midwest and Northeast.

Racial and ethnic dynamics, as well as general population growth and loss, add texture to these trends. In cities like Baltimore and Detroit, which continue to experience population declines each year, high concentrations of African American children and families live in severely distressed neighborhoods.[4] In many cities located in the Southwestern United States, Latino families face similar circumstances.

In this report, we investigate levels of child poverty in the 50 largest cities in the United States, and the factors underlying those rates. Our goal is to document the variation in child poverty rates in different cities and the contextual factors that are associated with outcomes for children and families in different parts of the country. In addition, we seek to demonstrate the usefulness of the Census Bureau's American Community Survey for monitoring child well-being in cities and elsewhere. Local officials in the public, private, and non-profit sectors can benefit from greater understanding of these trends and factors as they strive to improve outcomes for children, families, and neighborhoods.

Methodology

In this report we investigate child poverty in the 50 largest cities in the United States based on data (both published and unpublished) from the Census Bureau's 2004 American Community Survey (ACS).[5] The ACS is a nationwide annual survey designed to provide communities with reliable and timely demographic, housing, social, and economic data each year. The 2000 through 2004 ACS surveys provide information for states and geographic areas with 250,000 or more people, based on samples of people residing in households. By 2010, pending continued Congressional funding, the ACS will have sampled 15 million addresses and will provide, for the first time, the ability to monitor social and economic trends in local communities, including small towns, counties, and city neighborhoods.

The cities included in this analysis are tremendously diverse in their demographic and socioeconomic makeup. Among the 50 largest cities, populations range from 344,000 people in Wichita to 8 million people in New York. Some cities are majority black (e.g., Detroit), others are majority Latino (e.g., El Paso), and others are mostly non-Hispanic white or "melting pots" of different racial and ethnic groups. Furthermore, many of these cities have expanded rapidly in population in recent years (e.g., Las Vegas, Austin) while others continue a three- to four-decade trend of population loss (e.g., Cleveland). In recognition of the fact that child well-being correlates closely with these underlying demographic profiles and trends, we use data from the 1990 and 2000 decennial censuses to classify the 50 cities into five city types, based on their recent population trajectory and their racial/ethnic composition (see Table 1):[6]

- *Melting Pot Fast Gainers* are largely located in the Southwest and California, and have significant Hispanic (and in the case of a few Texas cities, black) populations. In San Antonio, for instance, nearly three-fifths of the population is of Hispanic origin. Population growth between 1990 and 2000 in these 14 cities ranged from 10 percent in Sacramento and San Diego to 85 percent in Las Vegas. Overall, there were 3.3 million children living in these 14 cities in 2000.
- *Melting Pot Slow Gainers* represent mostly continuous and

Table 1. Racial/Ethnic and Population Change Typology, 50 Largest Cities, 2000

City	Population (1990)	Population (2000)	Population change 1990–2000	Non-Hispanic white population (2000)	African American population (2000)	Hispanic population (2000)	Asian/ Pacific Islander population (2000)	Children in households (2000)	Child share of population (2000)
Melting Pot Fast Gainers									
Albuquerque	384,736	448,607	17%	50%	3%	40%	2%	124,377	28%
Austin	465,622	656,562	41%	53%	10%	31%	5%	150,291	23%
Dallas	1,006,877	1,188,580	18%	35%	26%	36%	3%	334,908	28%
Denver	467,610	554,636	19%	52%	11%	32%	3%	133,920	24%
Fort Worth	447,619	534,694	19%	46%	20%	30%	3%	190,850	36%
Fresno	354,202	427,652	21%	37%	8%	40%	11%	148,191	35%
Houston	1,630,553	1,953,631	20%	31%	25%	37%	5%	531,847	27%
Las Vegas	258,295	478,434	85%	58%	10%	24%	5%	135,819	28%
Phoenix	983,403	1,321,045	34%	56%	5%	34%	2%	393,125	30%
Sacramento	369,365	407,018	10%	41%	15%	22%	17%	119,690	29%
San Antonio	935,933	1,144,646	22%	32%	7%	59%	2%	340,707	30%
San Diego	1,110,549	1,223,400	10%	49%	8%	25%	14%	304,663	25%
San Jose	782,248	894,943	14%	36%	3%	30%	27%	235,340	26%
Tucson	405,390	486,699	20%	54%	4%	36%	3%	130,172	27%
Total	9,602,402	11,720,547	22%	43%	12%	35%	7%	3,273,900	28%
Melting Pot Slow Gainers									
Boston	574,283	589,141	3%	49%	24%	14%	8%	107,651	18%
Chicago	2,783,726	2,896,016	4%	31%	36%	26%	4%	723,560	25%
El Paso	515,342	563,662	9%	18%	3%	77%	1%	175,726	31%
Honolulu	365,272	371,657	2%	19%	2%	4%	62%	69,613	19%
Long Beach	429,433	461,522	7%	33%	14%	36%	13%	143,039	31%
Los Angeles	3,485,398	3,694,820	6%	30%	11%	47%	10%	987,329	27%
Miami	358,548	362,470	1%	12%	20%	66%	1%	72,910	20%
New York City	7,322,564	8,008,278	9%	35%	25%	27%	10%	1,916,653	24%
Oakland	372,242	399,484	7%	24%	35%	22%	16%	83,020	21%
San Francisco	723,959	776,733	7%	44%	8%	14%	31%	108,643	14%
Total	16,930,767	18,123,783	7%	33%	22%	32%	11%	4,388,144	24%
Largely White-Black Gainers									
Atlanta	394,017	416,474	6%	31%	61%	4%	2%	88,060	21%
Charlotte	395,934	540,828	37%	55%	32%	7%	3%	155,906	29%
Indianapolis	731,327	791,926	8%	67%	25%	4%	1%	215,057	27%
Jacksonville	635,230	735,617	16%	62%	29%	4%	3%	213,970	29%
Kansas City	435,146	441,545	1%	58%	31%	7%	2%	96,131	22%
Memphis	610,337	650,100	7%	33%	61%	3%	1%	164,895	25%
Nashville	488,374	569,891	17%	64%	27%	5%	2%	125,426	22%
Total	3,690,365	4,146,381	12%	54%	37%	5%	2%	1,059,445	26%

Table 1. Racial/Ethnic and Population Change Typology, 50 Largest Cities, 2000 (continued)

City	Population (1990)	Population (2000)	Population change 1990–2000	Non-Hispanic white population (2000)	African American population (2000)	Hispanic population (2000)	Asian/ Pacific Islander population (2000)	Children in households (2000)	Child share of population (2000)
Largely White-Black Decliners									
Baltimore	736,014	651,154	-12%	31%	64%	2%	2%	158,385	24%
Cleveland	505,616	478,403	-5%	39%	50%	7%	1%	109,819	23%
Detroit	1,027,974	951,270	-7%	11%	81%	5%	1%	254,019	27%
Milwaukee	628,088	596,974	-5%	45%	37%	12%	3%	154,843	26%
New Orleans	496,938	484,674	-2%	27%	67%	3%	2%	116,918	24%
Philadelphia	1,585,577	1,517,550	-4%	42%	43%	8%	4%	370,196	24%
St. Louis	396,685	348,189	-12%	43%	51%	2%	2%	85,122	24%
Washington	606,900	572,059	-6%	28%	59%	8%	3%	107,899	19%
Total	5,983,792	5,600,273	-6%	33%	56%	6%	3%	1,357,201	24%
Largely White Gainers									
Colorado Springs	281,140	360,890	28%	75%	6%	12.0%	3%	105,864	29%
Columbus	632,910	711,470	12%	67%	24%	2.5%	3%	176,084	25%
Mesa	288,091	396,375	38%	73%	2%	19.7%	2%	119,112	30%
Minneapolis	368,383	382,618	4%	62%	18%	7.6%	6%	73,812	19%
Oklahoma City	444,719	506,132	14%	65%	15%	10.1%	3%	131,457	26%
Omaha	335,795	390,007	16%	75%	13%	7.5%	2%	93,554	24%
Portland	437,319	529,121	21%	75%	7%	6.8%	7%	113,797	22%
Seattle	516,259	563,374	9%	68%	8%	5.3%	14%	91,310	16%
Tulsa	367,302	393,049	7%	67%	15%	7.2%	2%	92,422	24%
Virginia Beach	393,069	425,257	8%	69%	19%	4.2%	5%	117,472	28%
Wichita	304,011	344,284	13%	72%	11%	9.6%	4%	89,451	26%
Total	4,368,998	5,002,577	15%	70%	13%	7.9%	5%	1,204,335	24%
All 50 cities	**40,576,324**	**44,593,561**	**10%**	**41%**	**24%**	**24%**	**7%**	**11,283,025**	**25%**

Source: Brookings Institution and Population Reference Bureau analysis of 2004 American Community Survey data

post-World War II gateways for immigrant populations.[7] They have very diverse populations overall, and continue to receive large numbers of immigrants today. Population growth in these cities during the 1990s ranged from 1 percent in Miami to 9 percent in El Paso, Texas and New York. In 2000, 4.4 million children lived in these 10 cities.

- *Largely White-Black Gainers* are mostly expansive Southeastern cities that lie at the heart of economically healthy regions.[8] Cities in this category have relatively large African American populations but few Latinos. Between 1990 and 2000, population growth ranged from only 1 percent in Kansas City to 37 percent in Charlotte. There were 1 million children living in these seven cities in 2000.

- *Largely White-Black Decliners,* on the other hand, are troubled cities largely in the Northeast and Midwest with significant African American populations. They include eight cities that lost population during the 1990s— Baltimore, Cleveland, Detroit, Milwaukee, New Orleans, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Washington, D.C. With the exception of Washington, these are mostly industrial cities that have struggled in recent decades as factories have closed down and jobs have moved to the suburbs, to other states, or overseas. There were 1.4 million children living in these cities in 2000.

- *Largely White Gainers* include 11 growing cities with relatively small minority populations. Cities in this group include fast-growing Colorado Springs and Mesa, as

well as cities with slower growth, such as Minneapolis. Cities in this group are smaller on average than cities in the other categories, averaging less than half a million people. Collectively, they were home to 1.2 million children in 2000.

For each city or category of cities in this analysis, we provide additional information on three key factors that are expected to contribute to geographic variations in child poverty rates:

- Family structure—the proportion of children living in single-parent families;
- Labor force participation—the proportion of children living in a household with no parents or other household heads in the labor force; and
- Education—the proportion of children living with a householder who did not complete high school

These three variables alone do not account for all of the underlying factors affecting child poverty, but we expect them to help explain some of the key differences in child poverty rates among the 50 cities and the five city types.

ACS estimates are based on a sample of households. The data are consequently subject to some degree of sampling error. That is, the data reflect estimates of the actual figures that would have been obtained by interviewing the entire population using the same methodology. The Census Bureau reports ACS estimates accompanied by 90-percent confidence intervals. The confidence intervals show the margin of error around each estimate.[9] For instance, the ACS estimate of the child poverty rate in Phoenix in 2004 is 22.2 percent. Based on the number and characteristics of Phoenix households surveyed in the ACS, the Census Bureau calculates a confidence interval ranging from 18.4 percent to 26.0 percent—plus or minus 3.8 percentage points from the estimate. This

means that there is roughly a 90-percent probability (a standard threshold) that the true child poverty rate in Phoenix lies somewhere between these two figures.

This report refers to the reported confidence intervals around ACS estimates at various points in the analysis. We report estimates and confidence intervals for city-level child poverty rates in Finding A. In Finding B, we compare child poverty rates from Census 2000 to the 90-percent confidence intervals for child poverty rates in individual cities and groups of cities in the 2004 ACS to see whether these rates have risen, fallen, or remained the same.

In Finding C, instead of reporting ACS estimates directly, we use the reported estimates of child poverty and related factors to classify each city as *low, medium,* or *high* on the indicators relative to other cities. Finally, in Finding D, by grouping cities together into the five city types discussed above, we increase the effective sample sizes and thereby reduce the sampling errors to the degree that we report estimates without confidence intervals. As the ACS moves to an expanded sample for 2005 and beyond, the sampling errors and associated confidence intervals around estimates for child poverty and other indicators should become smaller.

Findings

A. In 2004, the child poverty rate in the nation's 50 largest cities was 28 percent, much higher than the national child poverty rate of 18 percent.

Children in cities are more likely to live in poor families than children elsewhere. In 2004, the child poverty rate in the 50 largest cities was 28 percent, while the child poverty rate nationwide was 18 percent. Moreover, city children tend to be more economically disadvantaged than city populations as a whole. Among the 50

largest cities in 2004, the child poverty rate was significantly higher than the overall poverty rate in 30 cities.

However, conditions for children vary significantly across cities in different parts of the country. In 2004, the estimated percentage of children in poverty in the nation's 50 largest cities ranged from nearly 50 percent in Atlanta and Detroit to a low of around 11 percent in Virginia Beach. In Figure 1, the lines above and below each percentage represent the 90-percent confidence intervals associated with estimates derived from the ACS. This means that the child poverty rate in Atlanta was not statistically different from that in 13 other U.S. cities, because the lower bound for that city (39.4 percent) lies below the upper-bound child poverty rate in those 13 other cities. At the bottom end of the rankings, the estimated child poverty rate in Virginia Beach was not statistically different than the rate in 14 of the 50 cities.

Some of the country's highest child poverty rates are found in Atlanta, Detroit, Long Beach, Milwaukee, and Miami. These are mostly older cities with areas of concentrated poverty and several highly distressed neighborhoods.[10] Cities with some of the lowest child poverty rates tend to be those with relatively high concentrations of wealthy families, singles, and retirees—places like Honolulu, Las Vegas, San Francisco, San Jose, and Virginia Beach.

B. The child poverty rate increased significantly between 1999 and 2004 in the 50 largest cities and nationwide.

Year-to-year changes in child poverty rates are closely linked to trends in parental employment. In the *2005 KIDS COUNT Data Book,* the Annie E. Casey Foundation reported that the number of children living with parents facing persistent unemployment grew by more than 1 million since 2000.[11] During the five years from 1999 to

Figure 1. Child Poverty Rates, 50 Largest Cities, 2004
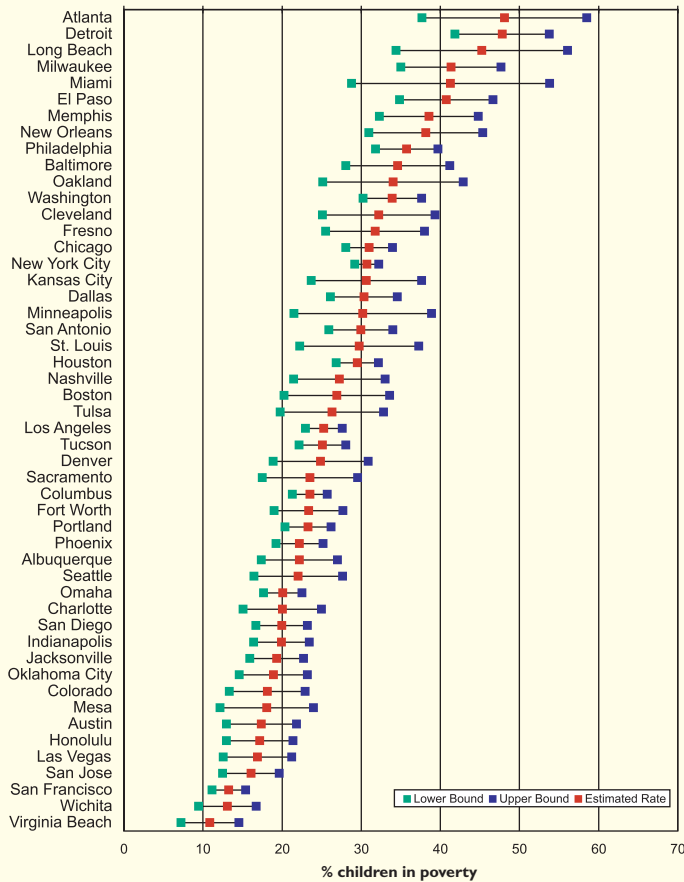
Source: Brookings Institution and Population Reference Bureau analysis of 2004 American Community Survey data

Table 2. Child Poverty Rates by City Type, 1999 versus 2004

	% children in poverty 1999	% children in poverty, 2004		Change 1999-2004
		lower bound estimate	upper bound estimate	
United States	16.6	18.1	18.7	Increase
50 Largest Cities	26.1	27.5	28.5	Increase
Melting Pot Fast Gainers	22.7	23.7	25.6	Increase
Melting Pot Slow Gainers	29.5	29.0	30.8	No Change
Largely White-Black Gainers	21.6	25.3	28.5	Increase
Largely White-Black Decliners	33.9	36.4	39.4	Increase
Largely White Gainers	16.6	19.0	21.4	Increase

Source: Brookings Institution and Population Reference Bureau analysis of 2004 American Community Survey and Census 2000 data

2004, there was a corresponding increase in the child poverty rate nationwide and in the 50-largest cities, as shown in Table 2.[12]

These poverty rate increases have been relatively widespread. In four of the five types of cities described in the methodology, child poverty rates increased between 1999 and 2004. Cities classified as Melting Pot Slow Gainers were the only cities that did not witness a significant increase in child poverty rates. (The underlying factors that help explain child poverty rates in these five city types are explored further in Finding D.)

The improved outlook for children in Meting Pot Slow Gainers owes largely to the trend in Los Angeles, the only one of the 50 cities exhibiting a statistically significant decline in child poverty between 1999 and 2004 (Table 3).[13] Of the remaining 49 cities, 16 saw their child poverty rates increase by a statistically significant margin, including six of the 11 cities classified as Largely White Gainers. In the majority of cities, however, ACS estimates of the child poverty rate in 2004 are statistically the same as in 1999, based on the large confidence intervals that surround the estimates themselves (displayed visually in Figure 2). Future years of data collection from the ACS will likely yield smaller intervals, consistent with the increased sample size in the survey, and will thus improve our ability to gauge the direction and magnitude of changes in child well-being in cities across time.

C. Across large cities, the share of children with no parents in the labor force was very closely associated with child poverty rates.

Children's economic circumstances depend on the actions and characteristics of the adults with whom they live. Nationally, research demonstrates three key differences between poor and nonpoor families.[14] First, poor families are much less likely to be headed by a married couple. Second,

Table 3. Child Poverty Rates, 1999 vs. 2004, 50 Largest Cities

City	% children in poverty, 1999	% children in poverty 2004 lower bound estimate	upper bound estimate	Change 1999-2004
Estimated child poverty rate dropped				
Los Angeles	30.7	22.5	28.1	Decrease
Estimated child poverty rate rose				
Atlanta	39.3	39.4	56.8	Increase
Charlotte	14.1	14.3	25.7	Increase
Colorado Springs	11.3	11.4	24.8	Increase
Columbus	19.0	21.0	26.0	Increase
Dallas	25.5	26.1	34.5	Increase
Detroit	34.8	41.0	54.6	Increase
El Paso	30.1	34.3	47.1	Increase
Kansas City	20.6	23.6	37.6	Increase
Long Beach	33.0	35.1	55.3	Increase
Memphis	30.4	31.8	45.2	Increase
Mesa	11.2	11.8	24.2	Increase
Milwaukee	32.0	35.2	47.4	Increase
Omaha	16.0	17.0	23.2	Increase
Portland	16.6	20.0	26.6	Increase
San Jose	10.9	11.5	20.5	Increase
Seattle	14.5	14.7	29.3	Increase
Estimated child poverty rate remained unchanged				
Albuquerque	17.9	16.1	28.1	No Change
Austin	17.0	12.4	22.4	No Change
Baltimore	31.0	27.2	42.0	No Change
Boston	25.9	18.9	34.9	No Change
Chicago	28.5	27.6	34.4	No Change
Cleveland	38.0	24.6	39.8	No Change
Denver	20.8	16.3	33.3	No Change
Fort Worth	21.8	17.2	29.2	No Change
Fresno	36.8	23.8	39.6	No Change
Honolulu	15.1	12.9	21.5	No Change
Houston	26.4	26.3	32.7	No Change
Indianapolis	16.7	15.5	24.3	No Change
Jacksonville	17.0	14.8	23.8	No Change
Las Vegas	15.9	11.1	22.7	No Change
Miami	38.5	31.5	51.1	No Change
Minneapolis	25.1	20.2	40.2	No Change
Nashville	19.8	19.7	34.7	No Change
New Orleans	40.5	30.4	45.8	No Change
New York City	30.3	29.1	32.3	No Change
Oakland	28.2	23.8	44.2	No Change
Oklahoma City	23.5	13.4	24.4	No Change
Philadelphia	31.6	31.0	40.4	No Change
Phoenix	21.5	18.4	26.0	No Change
Sacramento	29.9	15.7	31.3	No Change
San Antonio	24.6	24.5	35.3	No Change
San Diego	20.3	15.5	24.3	No Change
San Francisco	14.2	10.4	16.0	No Change
St. Louis	36.9	22.2	37.2	No Change
Tucson	24.3	21.3	28.9	No Change
Tulsa	20.9	19.4	33.2	No Change
Virginia Beach	9.0	5.9	15.7	No Change
Washington	31.7	29.4	38.4	No Change
Wichita	14.9	8.0	18.0	No Change

Source: Brookings Institution and Population Reference Bureau analysis of 2004 American Community Survey and Census 2000 data

and related to the first factor, parents in poor families work only about half as many hours per year, on average, as parents in nonpoor families (in large part because many poor families lack second earners). Third, education levels in poor families are generally lower; the average head of a poor family lacks a high school diploma, while the average head of a nonpoor family has completed some college. These three factors alone do not identify further underlying influences such as divorce, low wages, lack of dependable child care, and parental sickness or disability that can contribute to child poverty. Nonetheless, they can help us understand better the nature of the problem as it affects particular places.

All three factors—single parenthood, work effort, and education levels—help to explain the city-level variation in child poverty rates in 2004. Certain factors are more important in some cities than others, however. Table 4 classifies cities into three groups based on levels of child poverty, and then shows the corresponding share of children living in single-parent families; the share of children with no parent in the labor force; and the share of children living with a household head who did not complete high school.

- *Single parenthood.* The cities that rank high on child poverty consistently rank high on single parenthood as well. Of the 17 cities in the high-child-poverty category, 14 (82 percent) rank among the highest on the percentage of children living with one parent. In medium- and low-child-poverty cities, however, single parenthood is not as predictive a factor. For instance, in nearly half of cities with a low child poverty rate, a medium proportion of children (36 to 45 percent) live in single-parent families.
- *Labor force participation.* Cities with high child poverty rates and high proportions of parents not in the labor force overlap strongly as

well, though not quite as strongly as on single parenthood. But the proportion of children living in families without a working parent seems to explain child poverty rates more consistently across the full spectrum of cities. About two-thirds of cities that rank high on child poverty rank high on this indicator, and about two-thirds of low-child-poverty cities rank low on this indicator. Thus, just as high single parenthood seems to be closely associated with high child poverty, high rates of labor force participation among parents seem to be associated with low child poverty.

• *Education.* Of the three factors, the percentage of children residing with a household head who lacks a high school diploma appears to have the weakest relationship with child poverty rates in the 50 largest cities. Less than half (42 percent) of cities appeared in the same parental education category as their child poverty category. Many cities that ranked either medium or high on this indicator—such as Austin, Denver, Phoenix, and Sacramento—have experienced inflows of Hispanic migrants with less formal education, but these cities do not exhibit high child poverty rates overall. In general, lower rates of single parenthood and higher rates of labor force participation seem to compensate for lower levels of parental education in many of these cities.

City-level differences in the levels and determinants of child poverty suggest that approaches to alleviating poverty must take account of local conditions. The next section returns to the five city types to illustrate the importance of demographic makeup in explaining the variation in child well-being across the nation's big cities.

Table 4. Rankings for Child Poverty Rates and Explanatory Factors, 50 Largest Cities, 2004

Rank	City	% children in poverty	% children in single-parent families	% children with no parent in labor force	% children with a householder who did not complete high school
1	Atlanta	High	High	Low	High
2	Detroit	High	High	High	Medium
3	Long Beach	High	High	High	High
4	Milwaukee	High	High	Medium	High
5	Miami	High	High	High	High
6	El Paso	High	High	Low	High
7	Memphis	High	High	Medium	Medium
8	New Orleans	High	High	High	Medium
9	Philadelphia	High	High	High	High
10	Baltimore	High	High	High	High
11	Oakland	High	Medium	High	High
12	Washington	High	High	High	Medium
13	Cleveland	High	High	Medium	Medium
14	Fresno	High	Medium	Medium	High
15	Chicago	High	High	High	High
16	New York City	High	Medium	High	Medium
17	Kansas City	High	High	High	Low
	% with High ranking		**82%**	**65%**	**59%**
18	Dallas	Medium	High	Medium	High
19	Minneapolis	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium
20	San Antonio	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
21	St. Louis	Medium	High	High	Low
22	Houston	Medium	Medium	Medium	High
23	Nashville	Medium	Medium	High	Low
24	Boston	Medium	High	High	Medium
25	Tulsa	Medium	Low	High	Low
26	Los Angeles	Medium	Low	Medium	High
27	Tucson	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
28	Denver	Medium	Low	Low	High
29	Sacramento	Medium	Medium	High	High
30	Columbus	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low
31	Fort Worth	Medium	Medium	Medium	High
32	Portland	Medium	Low	Medium	Low
33	Phoenix	Medium	Low	Low	High
34	Albuquerque	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low
35	Seattle	Medium	Low	Low	Low
	% with Medium ranking		**44%**	**56%**	**22%**
36	Omaha	Low	Low	Low	Low
37	Charlotte	Low	Medium	Low	Low
38	San Diego	Low	Low	Medium	Medium
39	Indianapolis	Low	Medium	Low	Medium

Table 4. Rankings for Child Poverty Rates and Explanatory Factors, 50 Largest Cities, 2004 (continued)

Rank	City	% children in poverty	% children in single-parent families	% children with no parent in labor force	% children with a householder who did not complete high school
40	Jacksonville	Low	Medium	Low	Low
41	Oklahoma City	Low	Medium	High	Low
42	Colorado Springs	Low	Medium	Low	Low
43	Mesa	Low	Low	Low	Medium
44	Austin	Low	Medium	Low	Medium
45	Honolulu	Low	Low	Medium	Low
46	Las Vegas	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium
47	San Jose	Low	Low	Medium	Medium
48	San Francisco	Low	Low	Low	Medium
49	Wichita	Low	Low	Low	Medium
50	Virginia Beach	Low	Low	Low	Low
% with Low ranking			53%	67%	47%
% with same ranking on indicator as on child poverty			60%	62%	42%
Range by Indicator					
	High	31% to 48%	46% to 70%	15% to 27%	27% to 45%
	Medium	21% to 30%	36% to 45%	10% to 15%	18% to 26%
	Low	11% to 20%	25% to 35%	4% to 9%	7% to 18%

Source: Brookings Institution and Population Reference Bureau analysis of 2004 American Community Survey data

D. Cities with declining, mostly white and black populations, such as Baltimore and Cleveland, had the highest rates of child poverty and children living in single-parent families.

Significant differences in the population profiles of the 50-largest cities underlie the explanatory factors for child poverty described above. Historical and contemporary migration, geography, economic growth, and fertility have combined to shape the racial and ethnic structure of these cities and their recent population growth or decline. In turn, their demographic profiles indicate a great deal about the economic status of children in these cities, and the specific factors that contribute to that status. In par-

ticular, minority children are significantly more likely to live in poverty than white children. According to the 2004 ACS, the poverty rate for African American children was 36 percent, the poverty rate for Hispanic children was 29 percent, and the poverty rate for non-Hispanic white children was 11 percent.
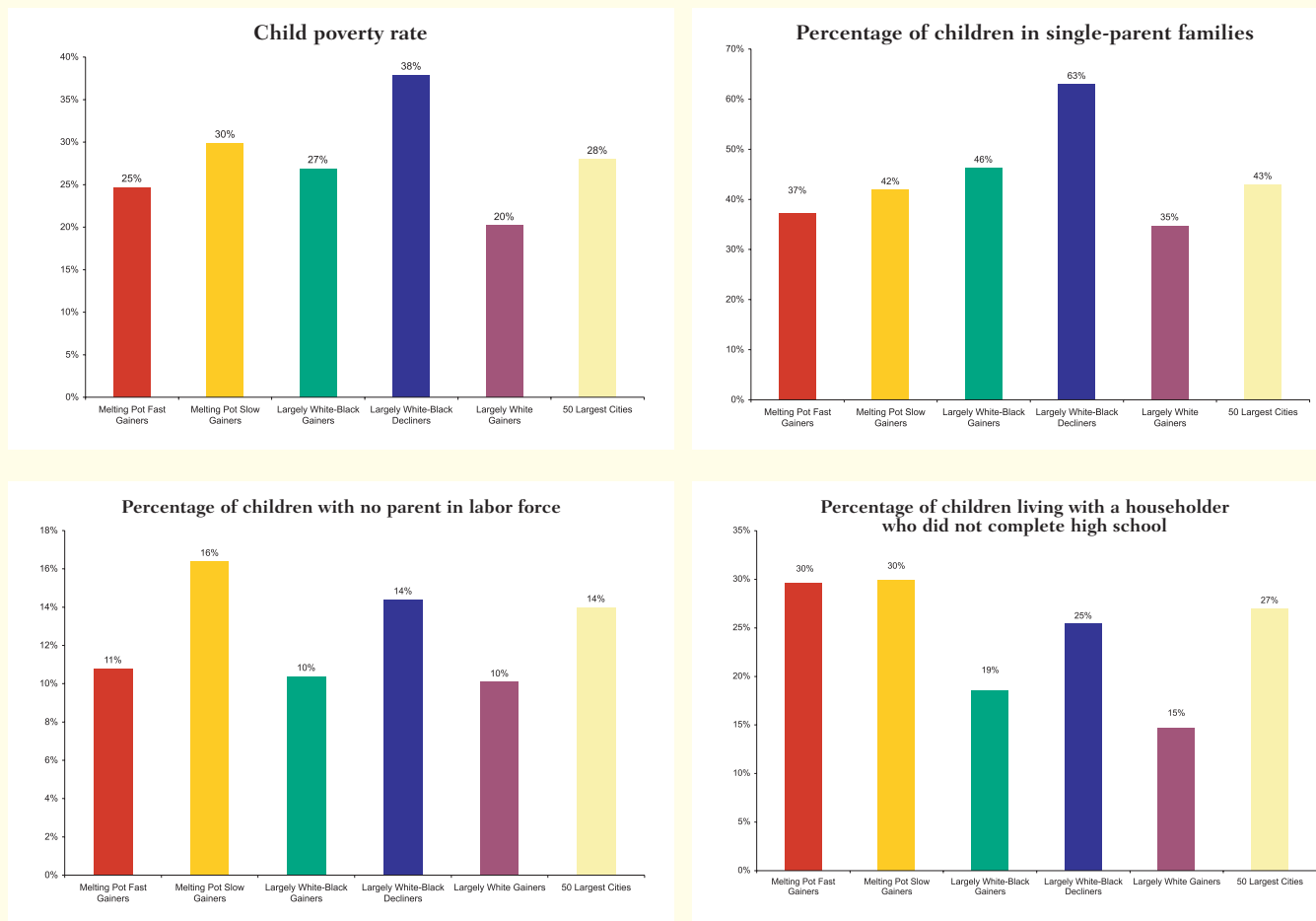
Reflecting the underlying demographic differences among the 50 largest cities, Figure 2 demonstrates how overall child poverty rates and related socioeconomic drivers varied among the five city types in 2004:

- **Melting Pot Fast Gainers.** Cities in this category exhibited the second-lowest overall child poverty rate among the five city types (25 percent). This seems to owe both

to their lower rates of single parenthood and their smaller proportion of children without working parents. These factors help to compensate for the higher proportion of parents in these cities who did not complete high school, a reflection of their large Latin American immigrant populations.

- **Melting Pot Slow Gainers.** Overall, 30 percent of children in these cities lived below the poverty line, the second-highest rate among the city types, and five percentage points higher than in the fast-growing Melting Pots. It seems that the major difference between the faster- and slower-growing melting pot cities with respect to child poverty stems from the lower labor force participation of parents in these slower-growing cities. Overall, 16 percent of children in Melting Pot Slow Gainers live in families without a working parent, a higher proportion than in the four other city types.

- **Largely White-Black Gainers.** These cities exhibit a moderate level of child poverty overall (even though Atlanta had the highest estimated child poverty rate among the 50 cities). Single parenthood is more common in these cities than in the Melting Pots, but overall levels of parental education and labor force participation are generally stronger in the White-Black Gainers. Each of these cities has neighborhoods of high poverty and distress, but they also contain large numbers of economically better-off families that improve their overall indicators of child well-being.

- **Largely White-Black Decliners.** Of the eight cities in this category, seven had among the highest child poverty rates in 2004 (Table 2). These cities, mostly located in the Mid-Atlantic and Midwest, suffer high levels of racial segregation

Figure 2. Child Well-Being Indicators By City Type, 2004

Child poverty rate

City Type	Value
Melting Pot Fast Gainers	25%
Melting Pot Slow Gainers	30%
Largely White-Black Gainers	27%
Largely White-Black Decliners	38%
Largely White Gainers	20%
50 Largest Cities	28%

Percentage of children in single-parent families

City Type	Value
Melting Pot Fast Gainers	37%
Melting Pot Slow Gainers	42%
Largely White-Black Gainers	46%
Largely White-Black Decliners	63%
Largely White Gainers	35%
50 Largest Cities	43%

Percentage of children with no parent in labor force

City Type	Value
Melting Pot Fast Gainers	11%
Melting Pot Slow Gainers	16%
Largely White-Black Gainers	10%
Largely White-Black Decliners	14%
Largely White Gainers	10%
50 Largest Cities	14%

Percentage of children living with a householder who did not complete high school

City Type	Value
Melting Pot Fast Gainers	30%
Melting Pot Slow Gainers	30%
Largely White-Black Gainers	19%
Largely White-Black Decliners	25%
Largely White Gainers	15%
50 Largest Cities	27%

Source: Brookings Institution and Population Reference Bureau analysis of 2004 American Community Survey data

and—perhaps with the exception of Washington, D.C.—continue to experience job losses associated with their industrial heritage.[15] Overall, 38 percent of children in these cities lived in poor families, well above the fraction in the other city types, and 11 points above that in Largely White-Black Gainers. As Table 3 indicates, the high rate of single parenthood in these cities seemed to dictate their high rate of child poverty—overall, a staggering 63 percent of children in Largely White-Black Decliners resided with only one parent.[16] And although more parents in these cities than in the Melting Pots completed high

school, the education gap between these cities and the Largely White-Black Gainers may further explain the child poverty gap between the two city types.

- *Largely White Gainers.* Cities in this group exhibit the lowest poverty rates among the five city types. While 20 percent of children in these cities still lived in poverty in 2004, this rate was below the 25 percent for Melting Pot Fast Gainers, and roughly half that for White-Black Decliners. Although a significant share of children in these cities live in single-parent families (35 percent), the relatively high educational levels and rates of work among their

parents helped to raise their overall level of child well-being. Notably, not every White Gainer has a low child poverty rate; Minneapolis, Tulsa, Portland, and Seattle all rank among the cities with medium levels of child poverty (Table 2).

A city's racial and ethnic structure paired with its recent population trend thus offer a useful lens through which to view the economic well-being of that city's children. Moreover, these city "peer groups" help to identify important additional questions for research and policy. For instance, why is Portland's child poverty rate higher than that among other White Gainers? What are the barriers to labor market

participation shared among parents in the Melting Pot Slow Gainers that are not present elsewhere? Rather than simply affirm that "demography is destiny," such groupings encourage us to dig deeper to understand and respond to the economic and social dynamics affecting children in different types of places.

Conclusion

Those who design, influence, and implement policies that shape the fortunes of families and children in cities—from labor market and income supports to education and health care programs—need up-to-date, reliable information in order to make the right decisions. While the decennial census will remain the ultimate source for basic indicators like population, household formation, and racial/ethnic data, the American Community Survey has begun to provide a rich array of information on the socioeconomic characteristics of city residents on an annual basis, rather than once every 10 years. By 2010, pending continued Congressional funding, the ACS will have sampled 15 million addresses and will start to provide annual social and economic estimates for even smaller geographic areas, such as small towns, counties, and city neighborhoods.

This report shows the potential value of the ACS as a tool to monitor local trends in child well-being. It demonstrates that relatively widespread increases in child poverty accompanied the labor market downturn at the beginning of the current decade. Furthermore, by focusing on the factors that underlie child poverty in the nation's 50 largest cities, it highlights the need for differentiated strategies to improve economic outcomes for children and their families, and the opportunity for demographically similar cities to share relevant knowledge and strategies. By continuing to track these indicators at the local level using tools like the ACS, individuals and institutions concerned about the future of children can contribute to a more informed dialogue about how to ensure better opportunities for disadvantaged kids and families nationwide.

Endnotes

1. Authors at the Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program include Alan Berube, William Frey, and Audrey Singer; authors at the Population Reference Bureau include Mark Mather and Kerri Rivers.

2. Audrey Singer, "The Rise of New Immigrant Gateways" (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2004).

3. William Frey, "The New Migration Equation." *Orlando Sentinel,* November 9, 2003.

4. William O'Hare and Mark Mather, 'The Growing Number of Children in Severely Distressed Neighborhoods: Results from the 2000 Census" (Washington: KIDS COUNT/Population Reference Bureau, 2004).

5. The child poverty rate is measured as the share of children under age 18 who live in families with incomes below the U.S. poverty threshold, as defined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget. In 2004, the poverty threshold for a family of two adults and two children was $19,157.

6. These categories are similar to those developed by Frey for metropolitan areas. William Frey, "Melting Pot Suburbs: A Census 2000 Study of Suburban Diversity" (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2001).

7. Singer, "The Rise of New Immigrant Gateways."

8. Memphis and Kansas City are exceptions here; they grew during the 1990s by annexing land and associated population.

9. "Accuracy of the Data (2004)." U.S. Census Bureau, 2005. Available at **www.census.gov/ acs/www/Downloads/ACS/accuracy2004.pdf** [accessed June 2006].

10. Alan Berube and Bruce Katz, "Katrina's Window: Confronting Concentrated Poverty Across America" (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2005).

11. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *2005 KIDS COUNT Data Book* (Baltimore, 2005).

12. If the 1999 child poverty estimate, based on the 2000 Census, falls below the lower-bound ACS estimate, then there has been a significant increase in child poverty over the five-year period. If the 1999 estimate falls above the upper-bound estimate, then child poverty has decreased. And if the 2000 estimate falls within the ACS confidence interval, then the child poverty rate has not changed. This comparison assumes that the confidence intervals around the 2000 Census estimates are small. Differences in the methods used to conduct the 2000 Census long-form survey and the ACS could also contribute to differences in child poverty rates in the two surveys. However, national trends presented here are consistent with those derived independently from the Current Population Survey, which showed an increase in the child poverty rate from 17 percent to 18 percent during this five-year period.

13. Los Angeles' statistically significant decline in child poverty owes in part to the city's large population, which yields a large sample size in the ACS and a relatively small margin of error around the 2004 estimate.

14. Ron Haskins and Isabel Sawhill, "Work and Marriage: The Way to End Poverty and Welfare" (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2003).

15. The 2004 American Community Survey results do not reflect the impacts of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath on New Orleans in August and September 2005; therefore, figures for the city here are based on its pre-storm population.

16. Although the proportion of children who live in families without a working parent is lower in Largely White-Black Decliners than in Melting Pot Slow Gainers, further tabulations indicate that 53 percent of children in Largely White-Black Decliners live in families where no parent worked full-time, year-round, compared to only 41 percent of children in Melting Pot Slow Gainers.

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