

The Brookings Institution

Metropolitan Policy Program
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New Jersey's Towns in the Middle: Trends, Challenges, and Options for Coalition-Building

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New Jersey's Towns in the Middle: Trends, Challenges, and Options for Coalition-Building

I

What is the national context for the discussion about first suburbs?

II

What are the major trends in first suburbs?

III

How are first suburbs organizing?

Baltimore County, MD



Camden County, NJ



Decentralization is still the prevailing trend in metropolitan America

Old demarcation lines between suburbs and cities are long gone; and suburbs are highly diverse

This range of experiences is often not reflected in the broad discussion of metropolitan growth

First suburbs can be thought of as older communities in the inner-ring outside central cities



Hudson County, NJ



Bergen County, NJ



Middlesex County, NJ

Situated in close proximity to center cities

Developed mainly before the era of rapid suburbanization

Also known as close-in suburbs, older suburbs, first-tier communities, trolley car suburbs, industrial boroughs, mature suburbs, and working class suburbs

First suburbs are caught in a policy blindspot

Attention is frequently focused on center cities and on newer suburbs

First suburbs are sometimes too small or not distressed enough to qualify for assistance

Little in federal or state policy is focused on the maintenance and rehabilitation needs of first suburbs

Some policies undermine first suburbs



Wayne County, MI



Lehigh County, PA

Fortunately, several important initiatives provide the foundation for a serious discussion about first suburbs



- ✓ **Nationally:** Important pending legislation; National League of Cities' First-Tier Suburbs Council
- ✓ **States:** Growth management laws; fix-it-first policies
- ✓ **Metros:** Regionalism efforts; countywide visions
- ✓ **Locally:** Formal and informal coalitions



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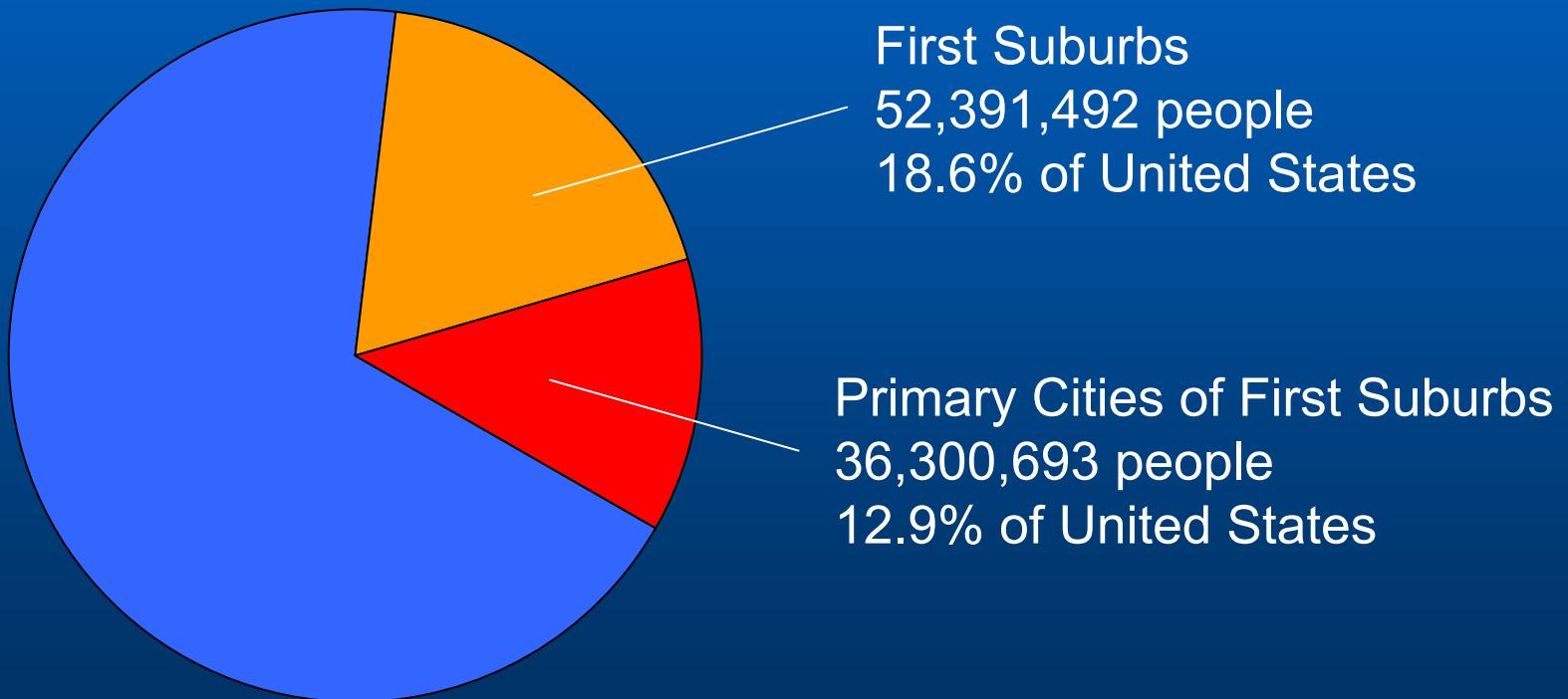
What are the major trends in first suburbs?

III

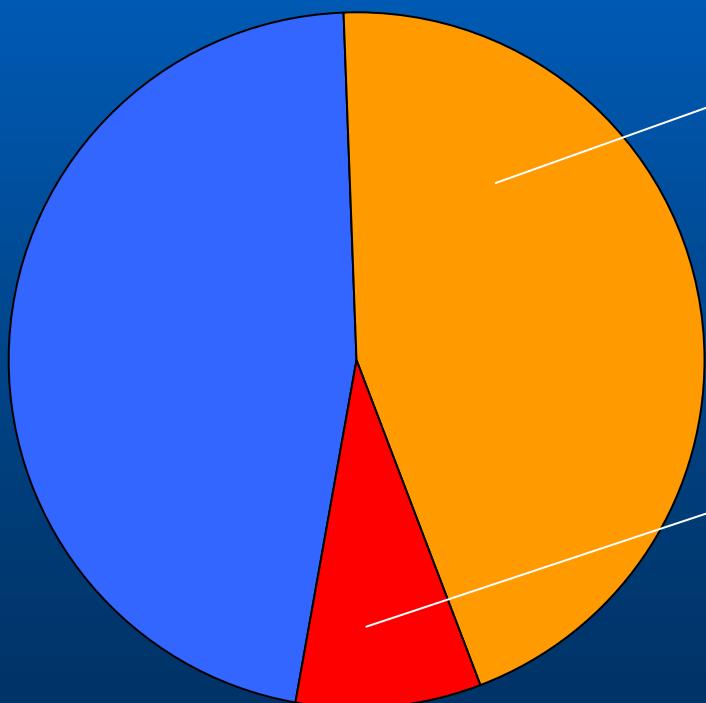
How are first suburbs organizing?

Over 31 percent of the nation lives either in a first suburb or primary city

Almost 90 million people live either in first suburbs or the primary cities of first suburbs



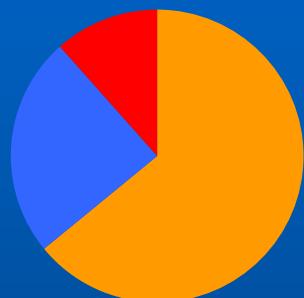
In New Jersey, nearly half the state's population lives in first suburban counties



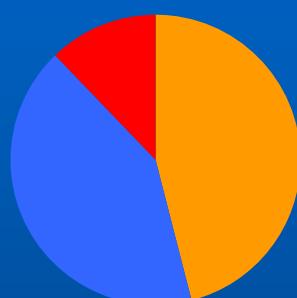
New Jersey's First Suburbs
3,777,682 people
44.9% of the state

Primary Cities of New Jersey's
First Suburbs
714,073 people
8.4% of the state

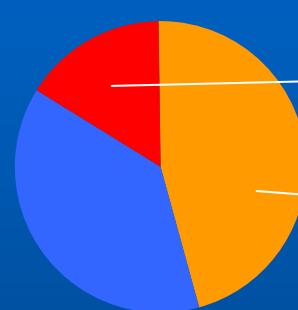
Significant majorities of first suburbs and primary cities could form in other states, as well.



Connecticut



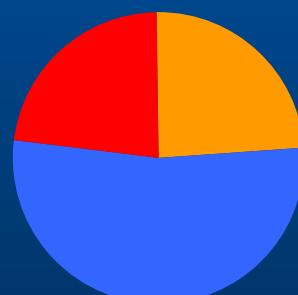
Maryland



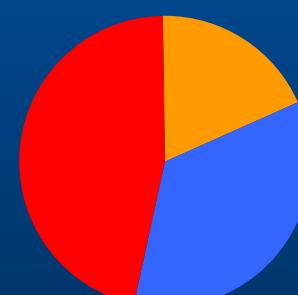
Massachusetts



California



Illinois



New York

Primary Cities
First Suburbs

Percent of select state's population living in a first suburb or primary city, 2000

By 2000, one-third of first suburbanites were not white, but this varies significantly across the country

Rank	First Suburb	Percent Non-White, 2000
1	Dade, FL	77.6%
2	Prince George's, MD	75.7%
3	Los Angeles, CA	68.2%
4	Hudson, NJ	57.0%
5	Alameda, CA	53.2%
61	Onondaga, NY	6.2%
62	Summit, OH	6.1%
63	Stark, OH	6.0%
64	Lackawanna, PA	5.1%
65	Berks, PA	4.9%
	All First Suburbs	33.4%
	All Primary Cities	61.1%
	All Newer Suburbs	21.0%
	United States	31.9%

Percent of population other than non-Hispanic white, 2000

7	Essex, NJ	50.1%
15	Middlesex, NJ	38.1%
16	Union, NJ	37.6%
22	Bergen, NJ	27.7%
29	Burlington, NJ	23.7%
31	Camden, NJ	20.9%

Several first suburban counties in New Jersey rank high in racial and ethnic change

Black

Rank	First Suburb	Share change 1980-2000
1	Prince George's, MD	25.2%
2	Fulton, GA	14.3%
3	Baltimore, MD	11.8%
4	Essex, NJ	10.5%
5	Dallas, TX	10.3%
	All First Suburbs	3.0%

Percent point change in share, 1980-2000, by race/ethnicity

Hispanic

Rank	First Suburb	Share change 1980-2000
1	Dade, FL	25.5%
2	Dallas, TX	16.6%
3	Hudson, NJ	16.2%
4	Harris, TX	16.1%
5	Orange, CA	15.9%
	All First Suburbs	8.3%

Asian

Rank	First Suburb	Share change 1980-2000
1	Alameda, CA	16.1%
2	Middlesex, NJ	11.8%
3	San Mateo, CA	11.5%
4	Orange, CA	9.3%
5	Bergen, NJ	8.3%
	All First Suburbs	4.1%

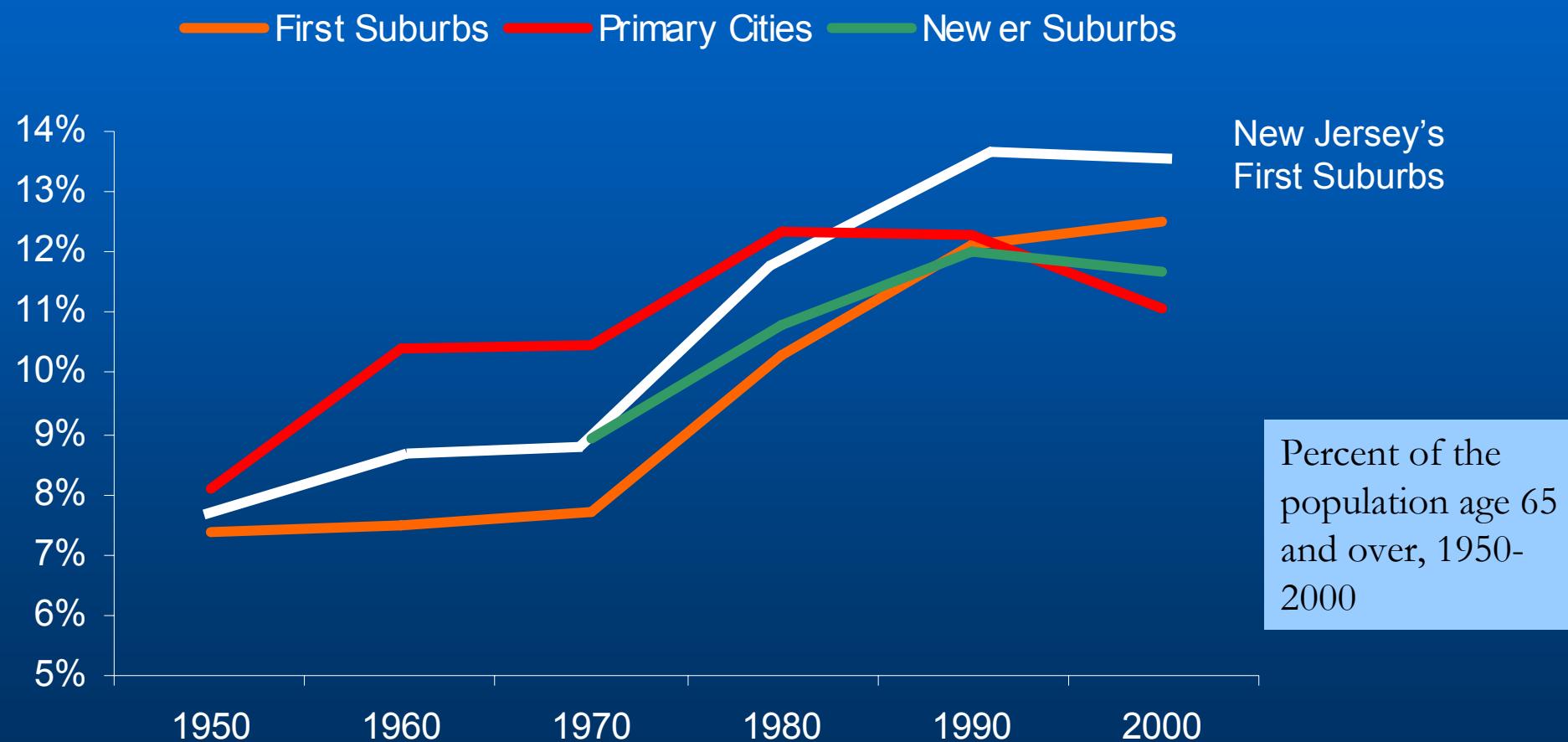
By 2000, over 17 percent of first suburban residents were foreign-born, compared to 11 percent nationally

Rank	First Suburb	Percent, 2000
1	Dade FL	49.3%
2	Hudson NJ	41.5%
3	Los Angeles CA	33.6%
4	San Mateo CA	32.3%
5	Orange CA	29.9%
61	St. Clair IL	2.1%
62	Trumbull OH	1.8%
63	Lackawanna PA	1.8%
64	Stark OH	1.8%
65	Madison IL	1.3%
	All First Suburbs	17.1%
	All Primary Cities	23.8%
	All Newer Suburbs	16.7%
	United States	11.1%

Foreign-born
population, 2000

9	Bergen, NJ	25.1%
10	Middlesex, NJ	24.2%
12	Essex, NJ	19.6%
13	Union, NJ	19.4%
42	Camden, NJ	6.6%
44	Burlington, NJ	6.3%

The percent of elderly in first suburbs is increasing very fast and is now higher than primary cities and newer suburbs

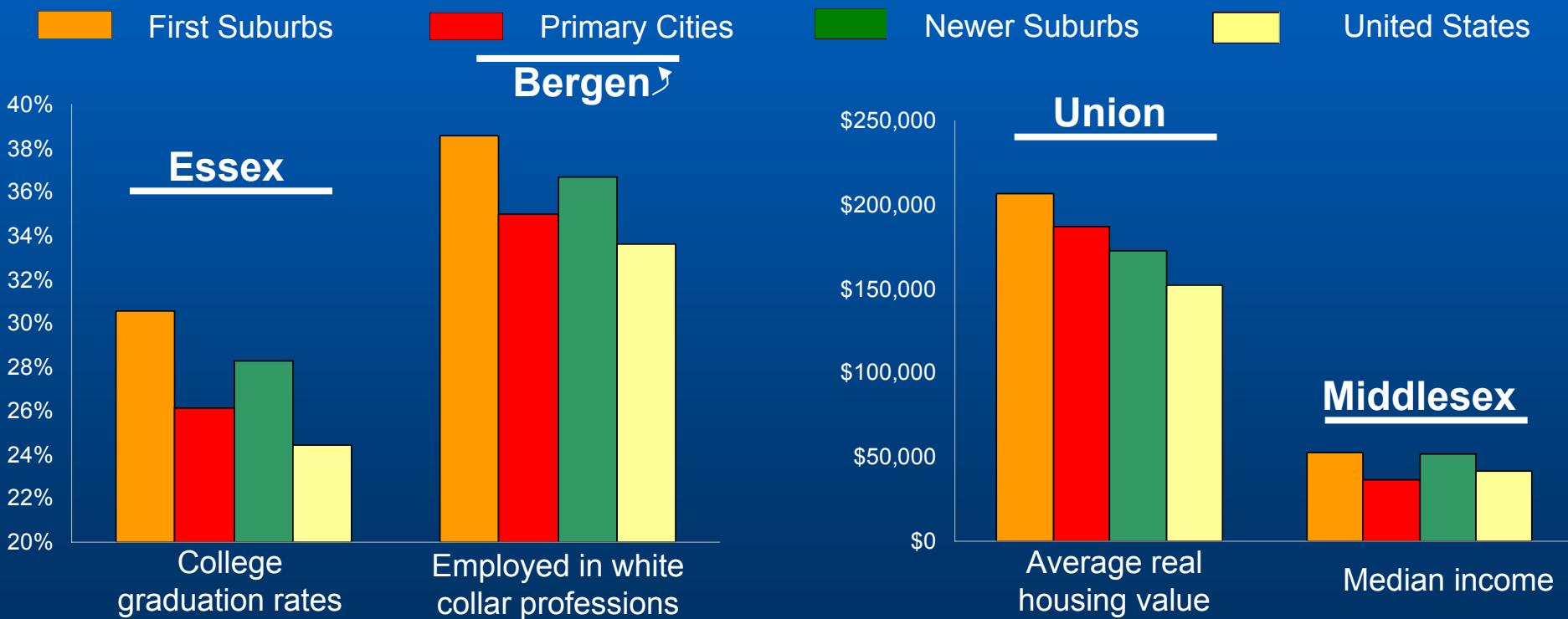


Percent of the population age 65 and over, 1950-2000

Since 1970, the total number of children barely grew – yet households are still large in first suburbs

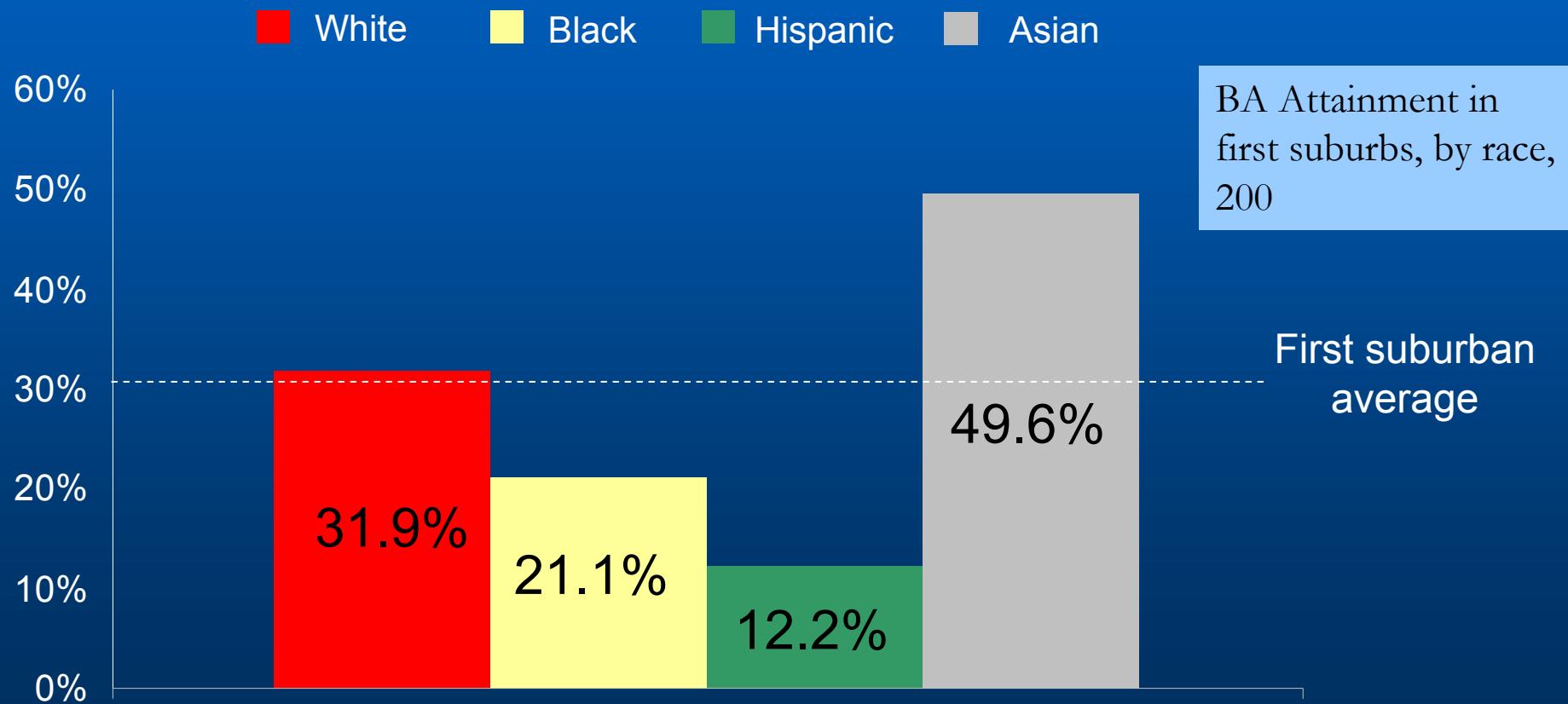
- However, the population of children under 15 is growing very slowly. There are only 190,000 more children in first suburbs than there were 30 years ago
- Every first suburban county in New Jersey lost young people *in absolute numbers* since 1970. Some, like Bergen dramatically so (-57,307).
- Many first suburbs – Middlesex, Bergen, Union – still have a much higher percentage of their households that are married-with-children than the national average. (Hudson ranks last.)
- Yet the largest increase in household type was female-headed households with children. And the number of so-called “non-families” is greater than any household type

First suburbs have largely retained their position as home to some of the most highly educated and wealthy residents, those with white collar jobs, and highest housing values

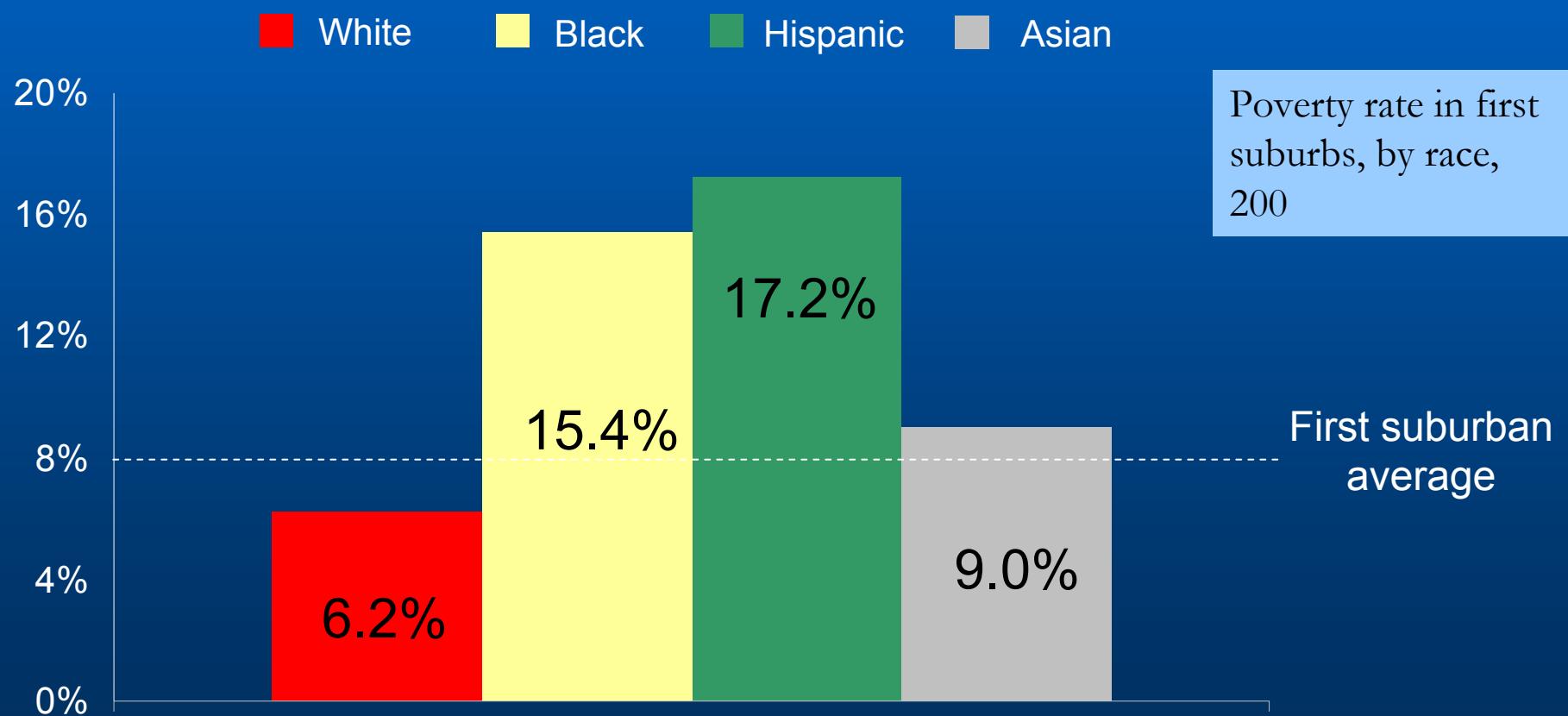


Select statistics, 2000

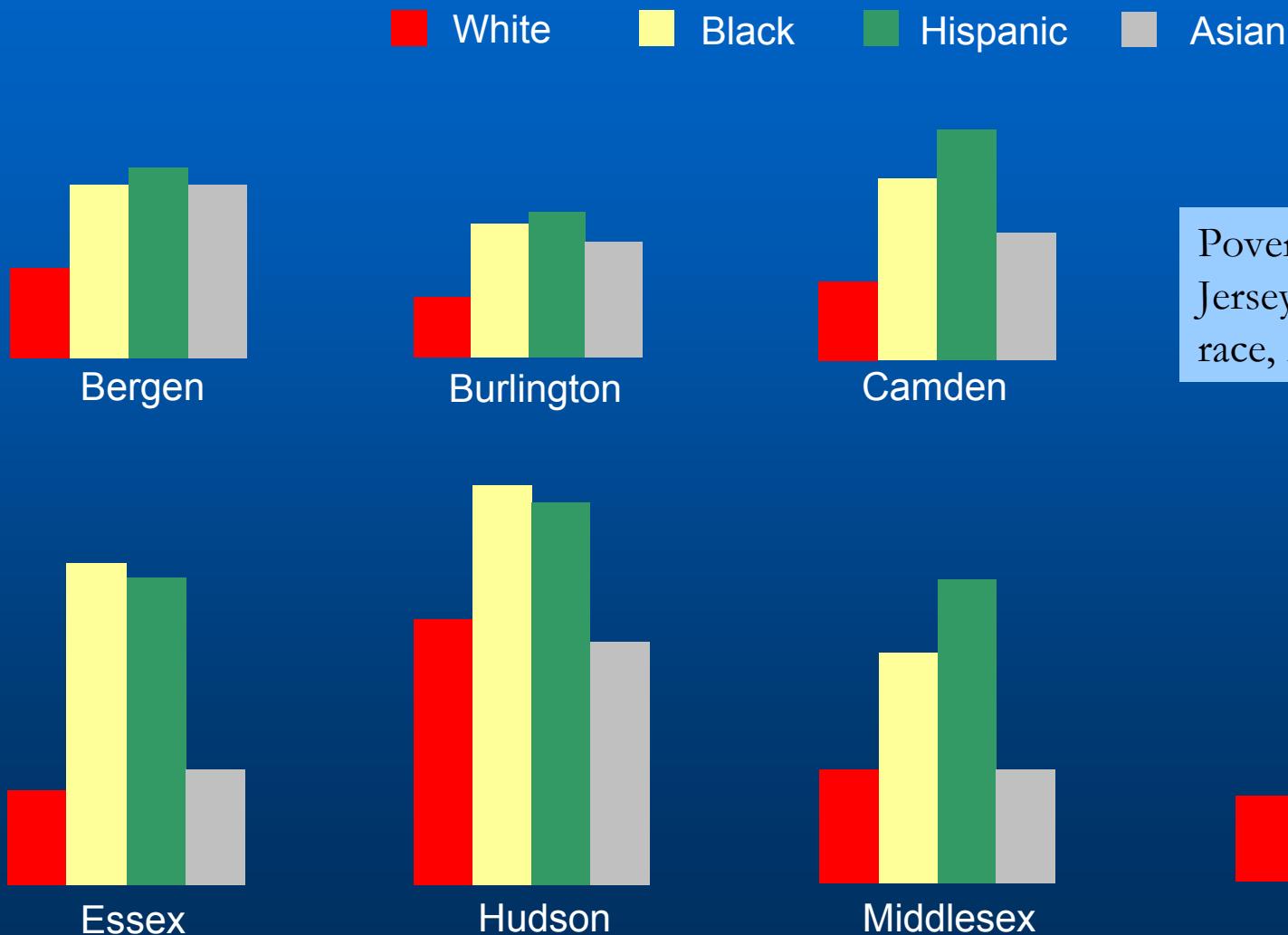
But many of these trends vary sharply by race and ethnicity – probably due to intermunicipal differences



Poverty rates in first suburbs also vary by race and ethnicity; blacks and Hispanics are two and three times more likely to be poor than whites



New Jersey's first suburban counties clearly mirror this trend



Poverty rate in New Jersey's first suburbs, by race, 2000



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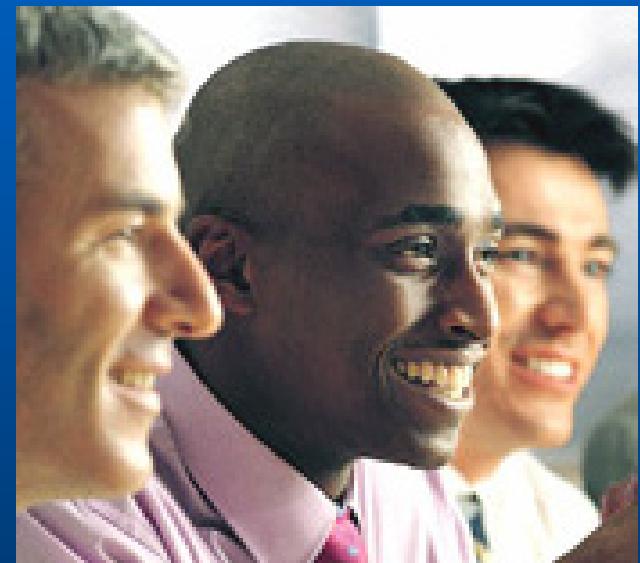
How are first suburbs organizing?

Advancing a policy agenda for first suburbs will require new political coalitions and working alliances

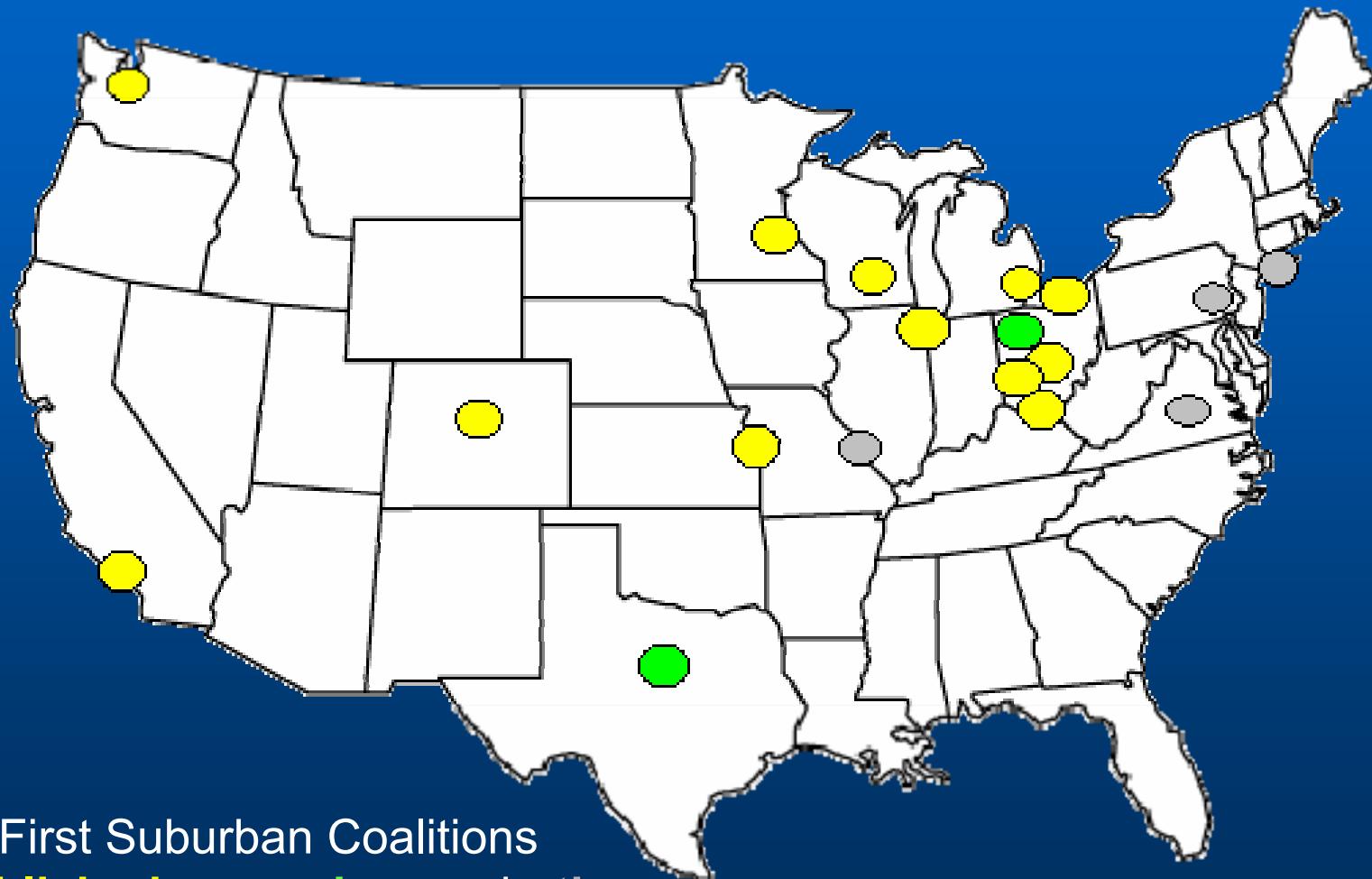
Politically, the counties containing first suburbs hold many local governments, often with their own land use, zoning, taxation powers.

A high level of competition makes it difficult to respond to large scale challenges or to advocate for reforms in the state capitol

Although represented on boards, leagues, and commissions, first suburbs need a special focus on their unique issues and challenges



Coalitions of first suburban leaders have formed – and are forming – in many disparate metro areas



First Suburban Coalitions
Established, emerging, and other

There are several examples of statewide and metropolitan coalitions



And there are informal coalitions, metropolitan conveners, researchers, and countywide visions to assist first suburbs



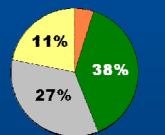
Generally, there is a similar set of core issues around which first suburban coalitions are engaged:



REDEVELOPMENT AND REINVESTMENT: Attracting metropolitan growth, infill pressures, eminent domain, brownfields



TRANSPORTATION: Seeking additional funding for transit, promoting fix-it-first statewide policies.



MUNICIPAL REVENUES: Fixated on state fiscal decisions around revenue cuts, local government assistance, and school funding



FAIR SHARE HOUSING: Ensuring all metropolitan municipalities plan, and accept, a diverse range of housing types



OUTREACH: Increasing general attention, connecting with state legislators, connecting with other metro areas in the state

Policy reform that leads to systemic, meaningful change in first suburbs will not occur in a vacuum

→ Build regional and statewide political coalitions around state reform and local practices that reflect a unique set of first suburban issues and challenges

→ Identify funding to staff and support coalitions

→ Partner with university and other research organizations for independent research analysis and policy positions



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KNOW THE CONTEXT

Who Lives Downtown

Though downtown populations have remained stable over the past 30 years, as a new analysis of 44 cities by Eugenie L. Birch shows, the number of households has increased, demonstrating the rise of singles and childless couples there. Today, these households—increasingly homeowners—are ethnically and racially diverse, young, and educated. The paper also categorizes the downtowns by strength and compares their health to their surrounding cities. As no downtown is the same, understanding unique and changing downtown demographics is central to putting together a tailored and more effective plan for [revitalization](#).

► [read the report](#)
► [Living Cities Census Series](#)

HURRICANE KATRINA: ISSUES AND THE AFTERMATH

Housing Families Displaced by Katrina

A new analysis of the storm recovery housing options currently made available by the federal government, along with the

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