

# I. POPULATION & MIGRATION

## BY THE NUMBERS

**25  
million**

Increase in population,  
United States,  
2000 to 2009

**11.9%**

Share of population chang-  
ing residence, United States,  
2007 to 2008 (postwar low)

**+95,000 /  
-7,000**

Net domestic migration,  
Riverside-San Bernardino  
metro area, 2003 to 2004 /  
2007 to 2008

**67**

Number of primary cities  
(out of 100) with population  
increases, 2000 to 2008



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## OVERVIEW

- **Population growth in the United States and its large metro areas was robust in the 2000s.** The housing crisis and ensuing deep recession, however, slowed migration considerably, so that the share of Americans changing residence in 2007-2009 was lower than at any point in postwar history.
- **The decade continued the broad shift of U.S. population toward the Sun Belt.** Metropolitan areas gaining the most population from 2000 to 2009 included several of the fastest growers from the 1990s, as well as regions that boomed during the early part of the decade due to real estate development before the housing market crashed.
- **The 2000-2006 and 2006-2009 periods represent two distinct migration epochs for metropolitan America.** Migration magnets in Florida, the Intermountain West, and inland California during the first half of the decade saw inflows plummet post-crash, while metro areas in Texas and the Southeast with more diversified economies held steady. Large metro areas that had previously “exported” large numbers of residents to other parts of the country saw out-migration slow considerably toward the end of the decade.
- **Strong immigration throughout most of the 2000s cushioned populations in large metropolitan areas experiencing domestic out-migration.** Metropolitan New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and San Francisco lost hundreds of thousands of domestic migrants across the decade, but experienced substantial counterbalancing inflows of international migrants.
- **Two-thirds of primary cities in large metropolitan areas grew from 2000 to 2008.** City growth spread and accelerated between 2006 and 2008, as many core urban areas realized a “windfall” of residents due to the impact of the housing slump on movement to the suburbs.

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## NATIONAL AND REGIONAL TRENDS

Population growth remains an important barometer of economic and societal well-being in America. Though ours is an aging population—due to increasing life expectancy and the outsized baby boom generation about to reach seniorhood—healthy levels of fertility and immigration in the United States have combined to make it a fast-growing country among its industrialized peers over the last few decades.

This story remained true in the 2000s. Between 2000 and 2009, the country added roughly 25 million people, an 8.8 percent increase (Figure 1). This was not quite as high as the growth rate in Canada over the same time period (10.4 percent), though the United States added more than seven times the number of people as our northern neighbor. U.S. growth, meanwhile, far outpaced that in the European Union (3.5 percent).<sup>1</sup>

**Though ours is an aging population, healthy levels of fertility and immigration in the United States have combined to make it a fast-growing country among its industrialized peers over the last few decades.**



The 2000s also saw faster growth in large U.S. metropolitan areas than elsewhere in the country. The combined population of the 100 largest metro areas rose 10.5 percent through 2009, compared to 8.7 percent in smaller metro areas, and 2.7 percent outside of metro areas. Large metro areas together accounted for over three-fourths of the nation's population increase during that period. Metro areas with populations over 1 million grew at nearly exactly the same overall rate as those with populations between 500,000 and 1 million.

Continuing the trend from past decades, U.S. population in the 2000s shifted from the Northeast and Midwest, toward the South and West. Large metro areas in the latter regions experienced much higher growth rates than those in the former regions. The particular metropolitan areas at either end of the growth spectrum are detailed further below.

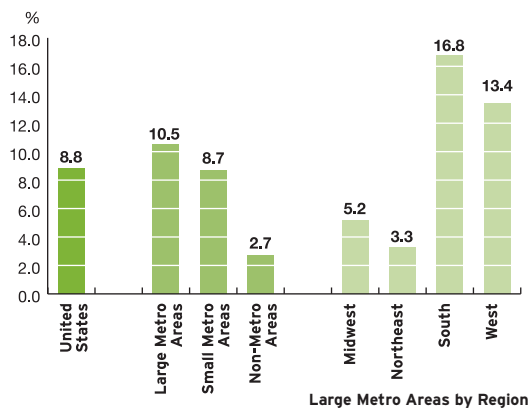
The 2000s, however, were a highly uneven decade. Beyond the population trends, the end of the decade

brought about a historic decline in migration, driven by a sequence of factors. First, the housing "bubble" that arose during the middle part of the decade popped, bringing an end to the rapid homebuilding and easy mortgage credit that propped up migration in previous years. Second, this precipitated a serious financial market crisis in September 2008 that produced sharp reductions in credit availability. As a result, potential buyers had difficulty obtaining mortgages, and potential sellers saw reductions in the values of their homes. Third, the financial crisis greatly exacerbated the national recession that had begun in December 2007, reducing job availability in most regions of the country. This triple whammy made it riskier for would-be homebuyers to find financing, would-be sellers to receive good value for their home, and potential long-distance movers to find employment in areas where jobs were previously plentiful.

These factors meant that by the end of the 2000s, America had reached a new low point in

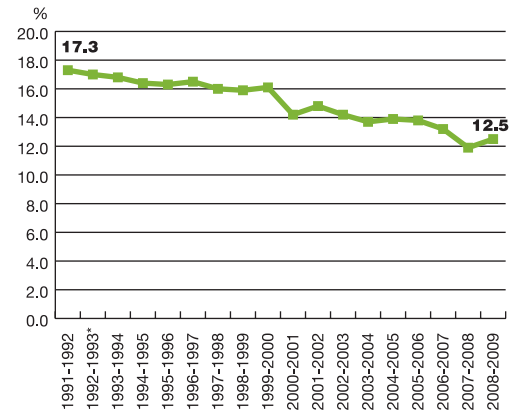
**Figure 1. Growth in Large Metro Areas, Especially Those in the South and West, Outpaced the National Growth Rate in the 2000s**

Population Change by Geography Type, 2000 to 2009



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

**Figure 2. The U.S. Annual Migration Rate Reached a Postwar Low in the Late 2000s**  
Share of Persons Changing Residence, 1991-1992 to 2008-2009



Source: Brookings analysis of Current Population Survey data



domestic migration.<sup>2</sup> In 2007-2008, only 11.9 percent of Americans changed residence, and this rose to just 12.5 percent in 2008-2009. Together, these are the lowest rates of annual mobility since the Census Bureau began collecting migration statistics in 1947-1948 (Figure 2).

Long-distance, between-state migration declined even more dramatically than within-county residential mobility. In fact, the 1.6 percent interstate migration rate in both 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 was half the value exhibited in 1999-2000, and far lower than the rate in the 1950s, when between 3 and 4 percent of the population moved across state lines annually. Although short-distance moves are more frequent, long-distance migration acts as an engine of growth in many metropolitan areas as people seek new job opportunities.

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## METROPOLITAN TRENDS

### Population Trends Across the 2000s

Metropolitan growth patterns across the 2000-2009 period, particularly the movement toward the Sun Belt, continued patterns evident in the 1990s. During the earlier decade, the familiar postwar population shifts from large Northeastern and Midwestern metro areas like New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia, to growing Southern and Western metro areas like Miami, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Dallas, and Houston began to spread to a larger number of areas in the interior West and the Southeast.<sup>3</sup> While the 10 fastest growing metro areas in the 1990s were all located in the Sun Belt (i.e., the South and West regions), seven lay outside the traditional postwar magnet states of Florida, Texas and California. One impetus for growth during this period was a high-

tech boom that manifested itself in several of these new Sun Belt growth magnets (Raleigh, Phoenix, and Boise) as well as in some traditional magnet states (Austin).

The big gainers in the post-2000 decade do not differ sharply from those in the 1990s (Table 1, right panel). Eight make the list for both decades, and four of the top five gainers in the 2000s are located outside the traditional magnet states. Climbing the list in the 2000s, however, were metro areas, such as Cape Coral in Florida, where booming real estate development contributed more to recent growth. The Las Vegas and Phoenix metro areas in the Intermountain West continued to occupy top growth spots due to similar housing-led migration. Of course, the growth dynamics of these regions shifted sharply in the latter part of the decade (see below).

Just as there were no dramatic shifts in the list of fastest gainers between the 1990s and 2000s, the list of slowest growing and declining metro areas did not change significantly. In both periods, metro areas in the nation's manufacturing belt populate the list. Youngstown, Buffalo, Pittsburgh, Syracuse, and Scranton registered population declines in both periods. An additional five metro areas showed population declines from 2000 to 2009, all of which lay in the industrial Northeast and Midwest, with the exception of New Orleans (resulting from out-migration due to Hurricane Katrina in 2005).

The division between growth in the Sun Belt and Snow Belt continued to characterize the 30 most populous metro areas during the 2000s (Map 1). The two largest metropolitan areas, New York and Los Angeles, registered growth levels below 5 percent. Among the seven additional metro areas with populations exceeding 5 million, Atlanta, Dallas, and Houston increased their populations by more than one-fifth. Among all 30 metro areas, Las Vegas and

**Metropolitan growth patterns across the 2000-2009 period, particularly the movement toward the Sun Belt, continued patterns evident in the 1990s.**



**Table 1. The Fastest and Slowest Growing Metro Areas in the 2000s Resemble Those From the 1990s**  
Highest and Lowest Ranked Large Metro Areas by Population Growth, 1990 to 2000 and 2000 to 2009

1990 to 2000				2000 to 2009			
Rank	Change to 2000-2008	Metro Area	Population Change (%)	Rank	Change from 1990-2000	Metro Area	Population Change (%)
<b>Highest Growth</b>				<b>Highest Growth</b>			
1	-2	Las Vegas, NV	84.3	1	6	Provo, UT	46.2
2	-2	Austin, TX	48.6	2	2	Raleigh-Cary, NC	40.0
3	-6	McAllen, TX	48.1	3	-2	Las Vegas, NV	36.6
4	2	Raleigh-Cary, NC	46.6	4	-2	Austin, TX	34.7
5	0	Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, AZ	45.8	5	0	Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, AZ	33.1
6	-2	Boise City, ID	45.5	6	6	Cape Coral, FL	32.2
7	6	Provo, UT	40.3	7	6	Charlotte, NC-SC	30.2
8	-2	Atlanta, GA	38.5	8	-2	Boise City, ID	29.3
9	-3	Orlando, FL	33.5	9	-6	McAllen, TX	29.3
10	-17	Denver-Aurora, CO	32.3	10	-2	Atlanta, GA	27.9
<b>Lowest Growth/Decline</b>				<b>Lowest Growth/Decline</b>			
91	-5	Cleveland, OH	2.1	91	6	Syracuse, NY	-0.6
92	8	Albany, NY	2.0	92	-4	Rochester, NY	-0.6
93	7	Springfield, MA	0.9	93	-11	Detroit-Warren, MI	-1.2
94	7	Toledo, OH	0.7	94	1	Dayton, OH	-1.5
95	1	Dayton, OH	0.4	95	5	Scranton, PA	-1.8
96	-1	Pittsburgh, PA	-1.6	96	-5	Cleveland, OH	-2.6
97	6	Syracuse, NY	-1.8	97	-1	Pittsburgh, PA	-3.0
98	0	Buffalo, NY	-1.8	98	0	Buffalo, NY	-3.9
99	0	Youngstown, OH-PA	-1.9	99	0	Youngstown, OH-PA	-6.5
100	5	Scranton, PA	-2.9	100	-13	New Orleans, LA	-9.5

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

Phoenix registered the fastest growth rates, each exceeding 30 percent despite slowdowns post-2006. Meanwhile, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Detroit all lost population over the eight-year period.

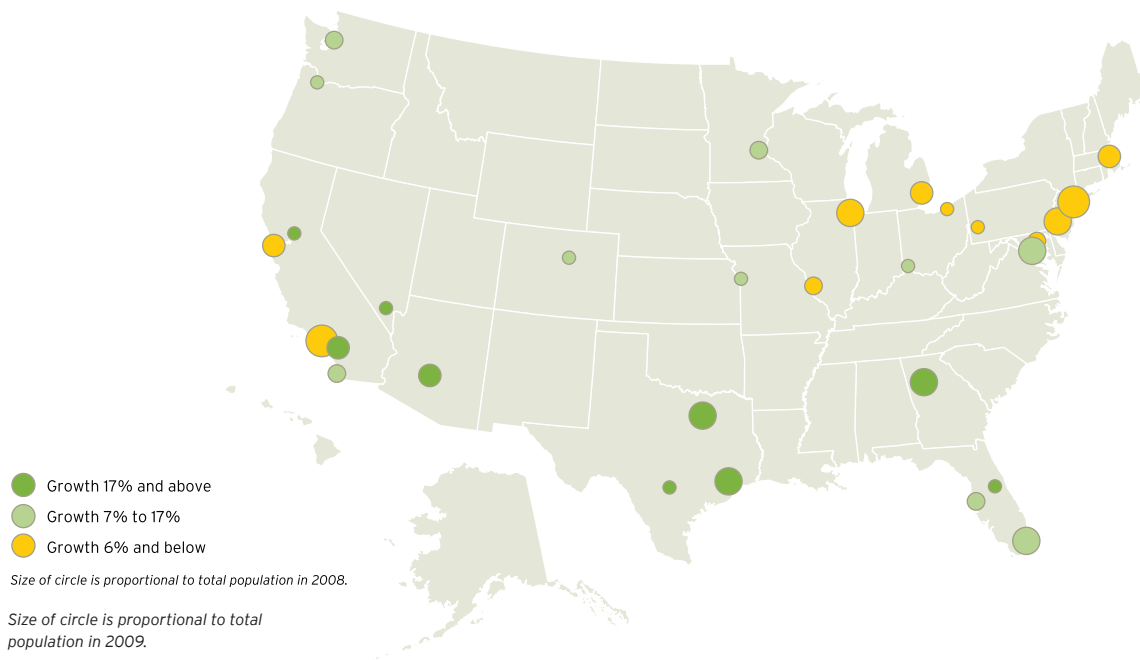
### Metropolitan Population Booms and Busts

In light of the sharp downturn in migration toward the end of the 2000s, the broad patterns of

metropolitan growth from 2000 to 2009 described above clearly camouflage what will be defined as a tumultuous decade for population shifts among metro areas. To get an overview of these boom-to-bust impacts on metro areas, Table 2 contrasts the fastest growing large metros from 2000 to 2006 with those from 2006 to 2009.

For several metro areas in California and Florida and the Intermountain West the housing market

**Map 1. The Fastest-Growing Large Metro Areas in the 2000s Lay in the Sun Belt**  
2000-2009 Growth Rate and 2009 Population Size, 30 Largest Metro Areas



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

crash also precipitated a migration crash. Population growth in Cape Coral, Riverside, and Orlando, along with several other metro areas in California's Central Valley (not shown), fell dramatically between 2000-2006 and 2006-2009. Las Vegas dropped out of the top ten. Other Florida metro areas not near the top of the list also experienced a substantial growth slowdown as well between 2000-2006 and 2006-2009, including Bradenton (falling in growth rank from 19th to 59th) and Tampa (from 28th to 60th). The metro areas that either survived or moved up in growth rank as the housing bubble popped and the recession took root had less overheated housing

markets and more diversified economies. Between 2006 and 2009, metro areas in Texas (Austin, Dallas, San Antonio), the Southeast (Raleigh, Charlotte, Charleston, Greenville), and parts of the interior West (Ogden, Denver) did as well or better in the rankings than earlier in the decade.<sup>4</sup>

The list of metro areas experiencing the slowest growth or population decline changed less dramatically between these two periods. The fall of Detroit reflects the impact of an accelerated decline in the area's important auto manufacturing industry. Upstate New York and Ohio metro areas clearly felt the impacts of industrial decline in both periods.



**Table 2. The Housing Market Collapse Shifted the Locus of U.S. Metropolitan Growth**  
Highest and Lowest Ranked Large Metro Areas by Population Growth, 2000 to 2006 and 2006 to 2009

2000 to 2006				2006 to 2009			
Change to 2006- Rank	2009	Metro Area	Population Change (%)	Change from 2000- Rank	2006	Metro Area	Population Change (%)
<b>Highest Growth</b>				<b>Highest Growth</b>			
1	-1	Provo, UT	29.3	1	99	New Orleans, LA	20.5
2	-9	Las Vegas, NV	27.6	2	-1	Provo, UT	13.0
3	-45	Cape Coral, FL	27.5	3	1	Raleigh-Cary, NC	12.7
4	1	Raleigh-Cary, NC	24.2	4	4	Austin, TX	11.5
5	-2	Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, AZ	23.4	5	7	Charlotte, NC-SC	10.2
6	-24	Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA	21.1	6	5	McAllen, TX	8.4
7	-6	Boise City, ID	20.9	7	-2	Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, AZ	7.8
8	4	Austin, TX	20.8	8	14	Ogden, UT	7.6
9	-32	Orlando, FL	20.7	9	7	Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	7.5
10	-4	Atlanta, GA	19.6	10	14	San Antonio, TX	7.2
<b>Lowest Growth/Decline</b>				<b>Lowest Growth/Decline</b>			
91	17	Bridgeport-Stamford, CT	-0.8	91	-32	Virginia Beach-Norfolk-Newport News, VA-NC	0.1
92	2	Syracuse, NY	-0.8	92	-2	Akron, OH	0.0
93	-5	Dayton, OH	-0.9	93	-7	Providence, RI-MA	-0.2
94	6	Rochester, NY	-1.1	94	-12	Toledo, OH	-0.2
95	-2	Cleveland, OH	-2.1	95	2	Pittsburgh, PA	-0.3
96	7	Scranton, PA	-2.1	96	2	Buffalo, NY	-0.6
97	2	Pittsburgh, PA	-2.8	97	-2	Cleveland, OH	-0.7
98	2	Buffalo, NY	-3.2	98	-5	Dayton, OH	-0.8
99	-1	Youngstown, OH-PA	-4.3	99	-10	Detroit-Warren, MI	-1.8
100	99	New Orleans, LA	-24.6	100	-1	Youngstown, OH-PA	-2.3

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

## Reversal of Metropolitan Migration Fortunes

The broad shift of American population from the Snow Belt toward the Sun Belt was largely driven by domestic migration. The sharp migration slowdown toward the end of the 2000s began to turn this long-standing dynamic on its head.

Examining different regional groups of metro

areas puts this departure from the historical norm in sharp relief (Figure 3). Florida, an epicenter of the housing crash and ensuing foreclosure crisis, represents one side of the coin. Orlando and Tampa each added more than 50,000 residents from domestic migration as recently as 2004-2005, but saw those inflows plummet in recent years, turning negative in Orlando's case by 2008-2009. Cape Coral also



**Figure 3. The Housing Market Crisis Disrupted Metropolitan Migration Across and Within Regions**  
**Net Domestic Migration for Metro Areas by State/Region, 2000-2001 to 2008-2009**



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





**Immigration remained an important contributor to population gains in larger metropolitan gateways throughout the 2000s.**

exhibited the migration gain to loss scenario. The Miami metro area, which lost residents to migration throughout the decade, suffered particularly steep declines from 2006 to 2007.

Large metro areas in Texas, including Dallas, Houston, and Austin, exhibit an entirely different pattern. They experienced far greater net in-migration in the latter years of the decade, at the same time that the migration bubble popped in Florida metro areas.<sup>5</sup> Those Texas areas did not experience the same run-up in home prices and speculative mortgage lending seen throughout most of Florida.<sup>6</sup>

Coastal California metro areas display something of a mirror-image migration pattern to their interior West counterparts. The San Francisco Bay Area, San Diego, and especially Los Angeles saw increasing out-migration through the middle part of the decade, due in part to increasingly unaffordable home prices. That trend moderated (along with home prices) over the past few years, such that San Francisco posted small migration gains between 2007 and 2009. Los Angeles lost only about a third as many migrants in 2008-2009 as it did in 2005-2006. Its net migration pattern roughly inverts that of the Phoenix metro area, the destination for many Angelenos in the early to mid-2000s. Las Vegas and Riverside also received many of their migrants from coastal California during that earlier period but have since seen those inflows turn to small outflows.

Other areas of the country that experienced significant migration outflows during the housing bubble years also saw their trends turn less negative in the second half of the decade. The Boston and Chicago metro areas shed increasing numbers of migrants through the middle part of the decade, but began to stanch the outflow by 2006. The same held for the New York area; while net out-migration reduced its population by fully 110,000 in

2008-2009, that was well below half the annual loss it sustained in the middle of the decade.

Pittsburgh posted its first net migration gain in more than a decade, while rising outflows from Buffalo, Cleveland, and Providence moderated after peaking mid-decade. The latter two metro areas have among the weakest regional economies in the United States today, however, and their migration fortunes may slip once again as long-distance household mobility begins to rise. Yet for the present, their migration patterns are mirror images of past years, when they lost many residents to fast-growing areas of the Sun Belt.

### **Immigration as a Metropolitan Migration “Cushion”**

The recent downturn in domestic migration left a slight imprint on international migration as well, with the most recent inflows becoming noticeably less than the average 1 million per year over the last 20 years. Nonetheless, immigration remained an important contributor to population gains in larger metropolitan gateways throughout the 2000s, providing a demographic “cushion” to bolster small gains or losses from domestic migration.

Despite the continued spread of foreign-born population across the nation, immigration remained relatively concentrated in major gateway areas during the 2000s. From 2000 to 2009, 21 percent of all net immigrant gains occurred in the two largest metropolitan magnets, New York and Los Angeles (which account for roughly 10 percent of U.S. population). Fully 46 percent of gains went to the eight largest metro areas (Table 3).

Metropolitan New York and Los Angeles each withstood considerable domestic out-migration, especially during the “bubble years” when many of their residents were drawn to growing, more



**Table 3. Immigration Cushioned Many of the Largest Metropolitan Gateway Populations from Domestic Out-Migration in the 2000s**

International and Domestic Migration by Metropolitan Area and Year, 2000-2001 to 2008-2009

		2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	Total
<b>New York</b>	International	159,787	147,104	125,082	110,156	113,065	114,870	103,640	100,643	100,669	1,075,016
	Domestic	-177,171	-207,348	-236,039	-247,541	-283,328	-288,260	-220,521	-150,259	-110,278	-1,920,745
<b>Los Angeles</b>	International	116,487	108,487	93,158	83,517	87,057	86,426	78,155	75,265	75,062	803,614
	Domestic	-103,877	-109,081	-119,572	-140,643	-199,800	-243,722	-222,018	-118,909	-79,900	-1,337,522
<b>Miami</b>	International	64,635	62,654	56,216	52,514	56,673	58,160	52,639	51,384	51,548	506,423
	Domestic	-3,576	-1,499	-20,179	-3,295	-10,086	-70,414	-93,453	-53,037	-29,321	-284,860
<b>Chicago</b>	International	56,281	50,473	40,344	38,716	37,933	38,584	34,082	33,358	33,363	363,134
	Domestic	-55,024	-68,594	-72,392	-65,648	-77,413	-73,066	-52,317	-42,587	-40,389	-547,430
<b>Dallas</b>	International	44,847	42,193	36,731	33,856	35,399	35,545	32,369	31,430	31,571	323,941
	Domestic	48,668	13,847	-1,389	8,203	23,471	76,443	50,566	42,857	45,241	307,907
<b>Washington, D.C.</b>	International	39,465	36,262	28,210	36,343	35,552	37,697	32,573	32,216	31,904	310,222
	Domestic	15,978	1,377	-8,734	-14,785	-17,011	-51,414	-36,945	-17,430	18,189	-110,775
<b>Houston</b>	International	40,294	37,990	33,099	30,221	31,686	31,707	28,779	27,876	27,996	289,648
	Domestic	4,532	24,472	2,824	6,370	6,104	91,985	19,466	37,158	49,662	242,573
<b>San Francisco</b>	International	36,691	34,296	29,622	26,852	27,983	27,867	25,264	24,367	24,376	257,318
	Domestic	-24,885	-78,931	-74,108	-64,631	-51,031	-44,753	-19,866	6,394	7,977	-343,834

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

affordable destinations in the South and West. During all of these years, international migration gains served to counter domestic migration declines in these areas. And as net domestic out-migration fell rapidly from its mid-decade peak by 2007-2009, immigration—while down from its own peak early in the decade—held steady.

Similar patterns defined Miami, Chicago, Washington, D.C., and San Francisco during this

period, though the latter two areas exhibited recent, small domestic migration inflows to complement their immigration gains. Dallas and Houston showed steadily declining, though positive and significant, levels of migration from abroad. Unlike those other gateways, however, net domestic migration to these metro areas remained mostly positive throughout, and in recent years contributed more to these areas' population gains than international migration.



**Table 4. The Fastest Growing Cities in the 2000s Were in Different Metro Areas than the Fastest Growing Suburbs**  
Highest and Lowest Ranked Primary Cities and Suburbs by Population Growth, 2000 to 2008

Primary Cities of Metro Area			Suburbs of Metro Area	
Rank	Metro Area	Population Change 2000-2008 (%)	Metro Area	Population Change 2000-2008 (%)
<b>Highest Growth</b>			<b>Highest Growth</b>	
1	Cape Coral, FL	51.8	Provo, UT	54.0
2	Raleigh-Cary, NC	34.7	Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, AZ	49.8
3	Bakersfield, CA	31.0	Austin, TX	48.7
4	Atlanta, GA	27.9	Boise, ID	44.3
5	Palm Bay, FL	26.6	Las Vegas, NV	43.9
6	McAllen, TX	21.3	Raleigh-Cary, NC	35.9
7	Charlotte, NC-SC	20.6	Colorado Springs, CO	32.6
8	Orlando, FL	19.3	Charlotte, NC-SC	31.7
9	Sacramento-Roseville, CA	17.5	Tucson, AZ	30.9
10	Stockton, CA	17.4	Jacksonville, FL	29.7
<b>Lowest Growth/Decline</b>			<b>Lowest Growth/Decline</b>	
91	Syracuse, NY	-5.5	Rochester, NY	0.6
92	Birmingham, AL	-5.5	Syracuse, NY	0.4
93	Rochester, NY	-5.7	Detroit-Warren, MI	0.1
94	Toledo, OH	-6.4	Dayton, OH	0.0
95	Dayton, OH	-7.0	Cleveland, OH	-1.0
96	Pittsburgh, PA	-7.1	New Orleans, LA	-1.2
97	Buffalo, NY	-7.3	Scranton, PA	-1.4
98	Cleveland, OH	-9.0	Pittsburgh, PA	-2.6
99	Youngstown, OH	-10.8	Buffalo, NY	-2.7
100	New Orleans, LA	-35.5	Youngstown, OH	-5.3

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

## CITY AND SUBURBAN TRENDS

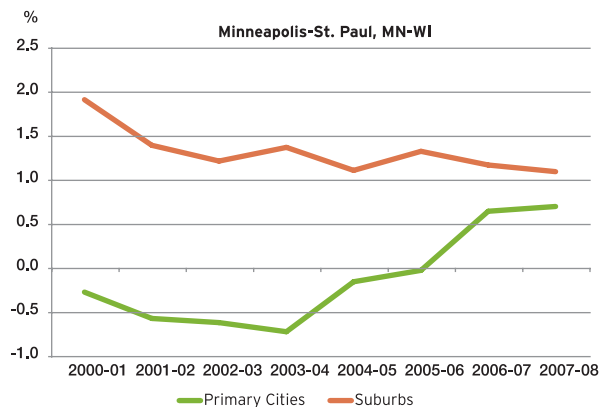
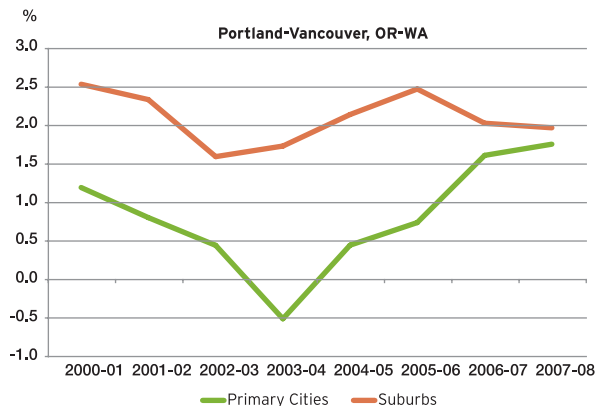
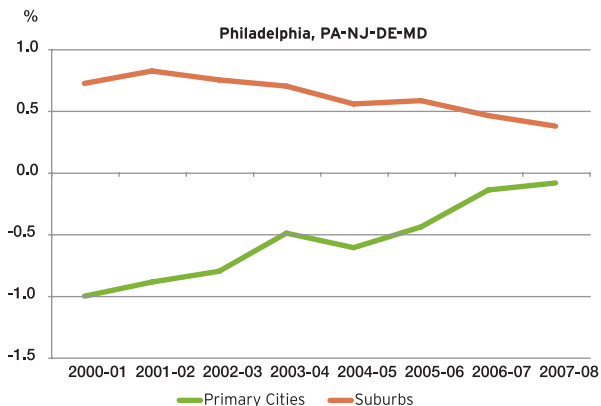
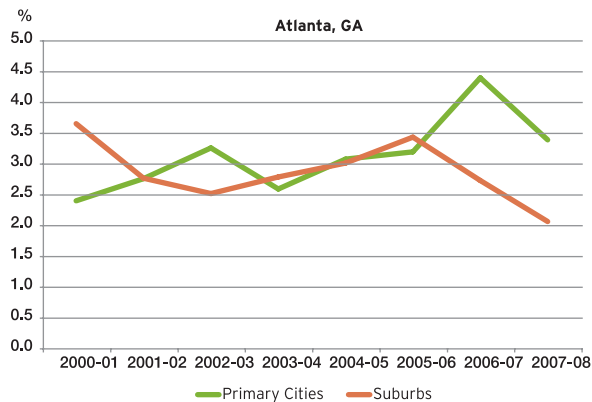
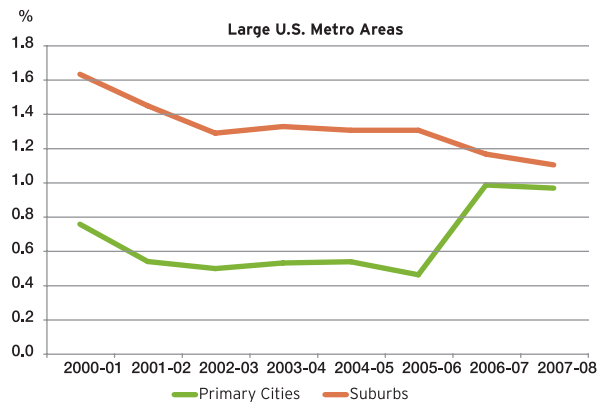
As with the 1990s, the post-2000 period was largely a good one for big city populations. Among the primary cities of the 100 large metros, 67 showed gains from 2000 to 2008.<sup>7</sup> As Table 4 shows, the fastest growing primary cities tended to be located inside some of the fastest growing metropolitan areas, including many in the Southeast, Texas, interior California and the Intermountain West. Likewise,

declining primary cities were located in metro areas that experienced slow growth or decline, such as Youngstown, Cleveland, Buffalo, and Pittsburgh. These metro areas saw population losses in their suburbs as well.

Interestingly, the fastest growing suburbs in the 100 largest metro areas do not match up closely with the fastest growing primary cities; eight of the 10 are different. Not on the list are the suburbs of the fast



**Figure 4. A Burst Housing Bubble Provided a Population Lift to Cities and Slowed Growth in Suburbs**  
 Population Change by Year, Selected Metro Areas, Primary Cities versus Suburbs, 2000-2001 to 2007-2008



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



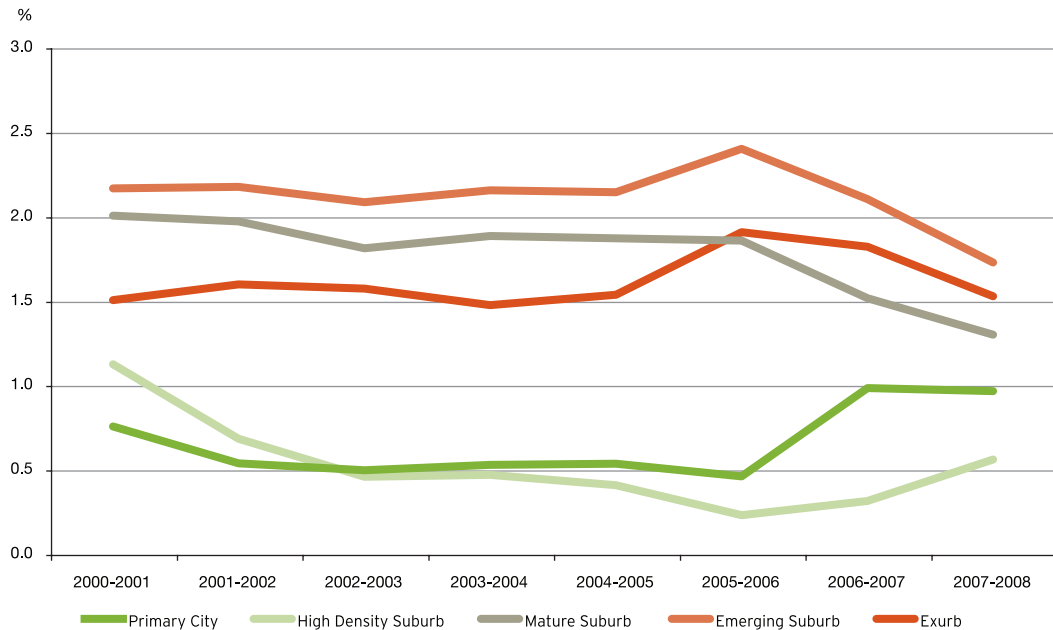
growing cities of Atlanta and Orlando. Suburbs that grew considerably faster than their cities included several in the interior West, such as Provo, Boise, Colorado Springs, and Tucson.

Notably, the city population rebound that began in the 1990s continued into the 2000s. Figure 4 shows that growth of primary city populations of the nation's 100 metropolitan areas accelerated from 2006 to 2008, at the same time that suburban population growth slowed. Some of this resurgence of big cities is due to inherent strengths, such as broad economic diversity at a time when smaller cities and one-industry towns are vulnerable to economic shocks. But much is attributable to a "windfall" of residents attracted to and retained in cities, who

might—in the absence of the housing crisis and deepening recession—have moved to the suburbs.

The effects of a burst housing bubble on big city populations were evident nationwide. Among the 100 primary cities of large metropolitan areas, 73 grew faster in 2007-2008 than in 2004-2005. On the Pacific coast, San Diego, San Jose, Oakland, Portland, and Seattle each exhibited its fastest growth rate of the decade that year. Growth rate increases also appeared in large Midwestern primary cities that are less steeped in manufacturing (particularly auto manufacturing), such as Minneapolis-St Paul. Some Southern cities that were less exposed to the mortgage meltdown, such as Raleigh, Charlotte, and Austin, showed high, though sometimes

**Figure 5. Cities and Inner Suburbs Made Late-Decade Gains as Outer Suburban Growth Slowed**  
Annual Population Growth Rate by City/Suburban Type, 100 Largest Metro Areas, 2000-2001 to 2007-2008



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



decreasing, growth rates. Atlanta managed to continue its recent gains, even as foreclosures wracked its outer suburbs. In this way, cities have benefited, at least in the short term, from declines in American mobility and the collapse of fast-developing suburban housing markets.

In fact, both primary cities and inner, dense suburbs achieved late decade growth upticks at the expense of outer suburbs and exurbs (Figure 5). The latter areas rode the wave of strong housing bubble related growth up through 2005-2006 only to come crashing down in the subsequent two years.

## LOOKING AHEAD

The 2000s amounted to a tale of two epochs in metropolitan population and migration trends. While the first part of the decade resembled a continuation of the 1990s shift from Snow Belt to Sun Belt, and rapid growth of suburbia, the latter part upended those trends. The dramatic impact of the housing boom and bust, followed by a financial crisis and the deepest recession of the postwar era, have put the brakes on migration in general, and on growth in many Sun Belt metro areas.

As a new decade dawns, questions about future growth patterns across and within metropolitan America abound. Will the downward growth trajectories of Sun Belt metro areas continue? Will suburban and exurban growth be permanently stunted? Is the recent growth “bounce” for northern and coastal metropolitan areas and large primary cities simply a short-term demographic windfall, or the beginning of a longer-run transition to a new settlement pattern?

Reliable answers to these questions await a rebound in our economy and housing markets. Meanwhile, the late decade lull in migration provides

an opportunity to re-think metropolitan growth prospects in light of each area’s attributes and assets, such as age, racial and ethnic composition, educational attainment, and wage structure. As subsequent chapters explore, metropolitan areas exhibit great diversity on these and other dimensions, and those differences may be growing more pronounced over time. ■

**While the first part of the decade resembled a continuation of the 1990s shift from Snow Belt to Sun Belt, and rapid growth of suburbia, the latter part upended those trends.**

## ENDNOTES

1. Statistics Canada; Eurostat
2. William H. Frey, “The Great American Migration Slowdown: Regional and Metropolitan Dimensions” (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2009).
3. William H. Frey, “Metropolitan America in the New Century: Metropolitan and Central City Demographic Shifts Since 2000” (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2005).
4. New Orleans’ number one ranking from 2006 to 2009 reflects the population rebound associated with the return of residents displaced by Hurricane Katrina in 2005.
5. Large gains in Houston, and to a lesser extent Dallas, in 2005-2006 reflect in part temporary gains from Louisianans displaced by the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.
6. Alan Berube, Howard Wial, and Alec Friedhoff, “MetroMonitor: Tracking Recession and Recovery in the Nation’s 100 Largest Metropolitan Areas” (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2009).
7. As of the publication date, the latest available population data for cities from the Census Bureau’s Population Estimates Program were for the year ending July 2008 (versus July 2009 for counties and metro areas).