THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
BROOKINGS CAFETERIA PODCAST

WHITE DECLINE AND INCREASED DIVERSITY IN AMERICA'S AGING POPULATION

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DEWS: Welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria, the podcast about ideas and the experts who have them. I'm Fred Dews.

America's white population is declining and aging, while the share of Latinos or Hispanics, Asians, and people who identify as two are more races is increasing. These are some of the findings in new analysis from Brookings Senior Fellow Bill Frey, who joins the Brookings Cafeteria to talk about America's changing demographics and the implications.

Also on this episode, Tony Pipa, a senior fellow in the Center for Sustainable Development, highlights the work of local elected leaders and private sector leaders in the U.S. who are prioritizing action on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

You can follow the Brookings Podcast Network on twitter @policypodcasts to get information about and links to all our shows including Dollar and Sense: The Brookings Trade Podcast, The Current, and our events podcast.

First up, here's Tony Pipa with another Sustainable Development Spotlight.

PIPA: I'm Tony Pipa, a senior fellow in the Center for Sustainable Development, here with a Sustainable Development Spotlight, a regular segment to highlight work from the Center.

Last week, President Joe Biden addressed the United Nations for the first time as president. He and his administration made a bid to reestablish U.S. leadership on global development by announcing three important commitments during the UN's high-level week: To donate another 500 million vaccines to other countries, bringing the total of U.S. donated vaccines to more than 1.1 billion; to double funding for countries most impacted by the climate crisis; and to commit $10 billion to global hunger as food insecurity rises because of both COVID-19 and climate change.

These announcements came against the backdrop of serious negotiations in Congress to adopt Biden's "Build Back Better" agenda through the budget reconciliation process, and to pass the bipartisan infrastructure bill, both of which are linchpins for the administration's efforts to drive an equitable and sustainable economic transformation coming out of COVID-19.

Missing, however, from the president's remarks and U.S. activity at the UN, was any reference to the Sustainable Development Goals, or the SDGs as they are more commonly known, even though the goals are reflected in the pillars of the administration's international commitments made at the UN and its domestic priorities outlined in the Build Back Better agenda. These goals, agreed by all countries at the UN in 2015, set out ambitious targets on poverty, take action on climate change, and substantially reduce inequalities by 2030.

And while the U.S. government stays silent on how the SDG relates to its priorities on climate and equity, American leadership on the SDGs was on full display during an event co-hosted by the Center for Sustainable Development and the UN Foundation. Local elected leaders such as Mayor Buddy Dyer of Orlando and Mayor Kate Gallego of Phoenix, showcased their cities' commitments and initiatives with Orlando launching its own review of its local progress on the SDGs, and highlighting partnerships among the Central Florida Foundation and the Center for Global Economic and Environmental Opportunity at the University of Central Florida.

As Mayor Dyer remarked, if you're going to be a great city, you have to be a sustainable city.

Phoenix made its own commitment to follow suit, working with partners such as the Thunderbird School of Global Management to do its own review of local progress on the SDGs.

Another conversation addressed the issues of racial and gender equity head on, with leaders highlighting how the Leave No One Behind imperative of the SDGs reinforces the importance of these issues in the U.S.

Michael McAfee, CEO and president of PolicyLink, emphasized that more than 100 million people, or 1/3 of all Americans, are economically insecure.

Youth, corporate, and philanthropic leaders showed how government at all levels and the private sector must be committed to fixing what is essentially a structural design challenge.

And as Congresswoman Sarah Jacobs from California's 53rd district in San Diego County stated, the United States is not existing above or apart from these goals, the United States is a part of these goals, because to be a global leader, the United States has to be a global example.

The momentum evident across different segments of American society is having both local and global impact, and it could be a ready-made boon to the administration's attempt to rebuild U.S. credibility abroad.

With the 2030 end date of the Goals just nine years away, the US. government might take a cue from the local leadership on display at Brookings last week and find its own voice on the SDGs, holding itself accountable at home, while, as President Biden suggested it might at the UN last week, rally the world to action, quote, "Not just with the example of our power, but with the power of our example," end quote.

DEWS: You can listen to more Sustainable Development Spotlights on our SoundCloud channel, soundcloud.com/brookings-institution, and visit brookings.edu/sustainabledevelopment.

And now, here's my interview with Bill Frey on America's changing demographics.

Bill, welcome back to the Brookings Cafeteria podcast.

FREY: Oh, it's good to be with you, Fred.

DEWS: So, you were on the show in June of this year to talk about your recent census analyses. And on that show, you mentioned that there would be a release of what's called the Redistricting File. Now the Redistricting File is out, and you have a bunch of new analysis over the past few months that we're here to talk about. Can you remind listeners what the Redistricting File is all about?

FREY: Sure. The redistricting file, its major purpose is to allow states and state legislatures to draw congressional districts every 10 years. This happens as a result of the census. So, it has all kinds of detailed data at the geography level by race and for the voting age population. So, this allows, as I say, for the redistricting. It's been delayed in the release because of a lot of other issues with the census having to do with the pandemic and other things. So, a lot of these states are going

to have to hurry up. And parties and state legislatures—it differs from state-to-state who draws these districts. But you they need to get this stuff out, certainly in time for the next congressional election. And there's also a lot of back and forth about it there.

So, my work is not so much with the redistricting itself. I like to use these data just to get a good sense of how the nation is changing with, of course, the gold standard of data, which is the census and now the 2020 Census. And that's what I've been looking at.

DEWS: All right, well, I'll put a link to some of your earlier analyses about the congressional redistricting, about which states gain, which states lost in the show notes of this episode. It's fascinating stuff. But I've asked you here to talk about your new report, "Mapping America's Diversity with the 2020 Census." It's also a new report on the Brookings website. You open that report by noting that America's diversity explosion, which is the title of the book that you wrote a few years ago, America's diversity explosion is continuing with an absolute decline in the white population, but also continuing racial and ethnic diversity. So, let's start with the decline in the white population. Can you talk about the scale and breadth of the white population decline, like total numbers and where it's evident in U.S. states and metro areas?

FREY: Yes, I think the 2020 Census results with the racial information came as a surprise to a lot of people by having a fairly noticeable decline in the white population between 2010 and 2020. A lot of us had anticipated perhaps a small decline in the white population as a result of the fact that this last decade was one where fertility went down due to the Great Recession and other things that happened among young people. In general, the white population is aging. So, in this last decade, we had more deaths than births among the white population. So, those are two issues that I think a lot of us expected the white population to not grow very rapidly or even perhaps decline. Census projections, in fact, show that in the future the white should have declined as a result of this aging.

But in addition, the Census Bureau changed its questionnaire just a little bit in how people define themselves and allowed people a little more latitude in writing down what other racial group they might identify with in addition to white. So, I think that may add some addition as well. We

know that there is a large increase in interracial marriages in the United States, so that many young people who have a white mother or a white father may have someone of another race as the other spouse and may decide to call themselves multi-race or mixed race on the census, or maybe their parents, when they fill out the census for them, will write that down for them.

And in addition, the Census Bureau made this a little more convenient to write down multi-race. I won't go into all the details. So, that added a little more to the multiracial population.

So, the people who said they were only white in the United States actually declined by about five million people between 2010 and 2020. We don't know yet how much of this has to do with those demographic things I was talking about—more deaths than births among whites or more people identifying themselves as multiracial. But this is clearly part of a long-term trend in the U.S. because of the aging of the white population. Whatever the multiracial issue is, we were expecting that very slow growth or a decline and aging of the white population. And that's come true in these census results.

Now, of course, if you have a national small decline in the white population, there's migration within the United States. So, when whites move to some areas, those places will gain whites. When whites leave some areas, those places will lose whites. So, we've found that in this census that 35 states actually lost their white population, sometimes only a little bit. And of course, the other states gained their white populations. The gaining places tended to be places in the Sunbelt, especially in the West and in the South, states like Utah and Idaho and Oregon and Washington and Texas; Austin and some of the other metropolitan areas there; and in Florida, in the southeast, North and South Carolina. But then a whole swath of states in the middle of the country as well as New England tended to lose whites; even places like California, a very pricey state that has a lot of outmigration because of the cost of living; New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, and other states like that. So, when you have a baseline very slow growth or decline in the white population, then it's the migration that determines whether an area is going to gain or lose whites. And that's what we're coming up with with this census.

DEWS: Now, those states that did gain white population also gained nonwhite population. So, is the share of the white population growing in states like Utah, or is the share still, like in many other states, declining?

FREY: Well, in fact, we're talking about the white population. Let's talk about all the other racial groups. And in fact, the fact that the United States did grow by 7.4 percent between 2010 and 2020 meant all of that growth occurred from other racial and ethnic groups—Latinos, Asians, African Americans, people of two or more races, American Indians, and Alaska Natives, and so forth. But the big gains came from Latinos and from Asians and now from people with two or more races. So, if a state is going to gain people, if they're gaining whites, they're also going to gain from these other groups as well. And so, a lot of the states in the Southwest, Texas going all the way into the Mountain West, a lot of those gains came from Latinos and Asians as well as whites. In the South, there's a continued migration of Blacks from other parts of the country back to the South. I say back to the South because a hundred years ago a lot of Blacks were leaving the South as part of the Great Migration. And now that's reversed for now several decades. So, many of those southern states that are gaining whites also gained Blacks and maybe also Hispanics and Asians.

So, the big gains in the U.S. are not from whites anymore. So, places that are growing and attracting migrants may be attracting whites, but they're also attracting these others as well. And as a result, the white share of the population in most parts of the United States has gone down a little bit because of the growth of these other groups.

DEWS: Sticking with a few more questions about the decline in the white population, because the report is full of just really fascinating data on this, and one of the data points that really struck me is that decade, 2010 to 2020, 95 percent of all U.S. counties registered a decline in the white population share. So, it's almost everywhere. And I'll just point out also for listeners, you should go visit this report for the great analysis, but also there's a really amazing interactive map of the United States at a county level. And you can see the county-by-county share of different populations.

FREY: Yeah, I mean, the decline in the white population share doesn't necessarily mean a decline in the white population. You can have a decline in the white population share if other groups come in faster than whites come in. And that's why almost all of the counties in the United States and a good share of the metropolitan areas and cities and so forth, showing a decline. Sometimes it's only a small decline in the white population share, it's because these other groups are growing more rapidly. And as we said, in many parts of the country, there's actually decline in the white population in many areas.

DEWS: Another really fascinating data point is just globally or nationally, I should say, is the trajectory of the white population share over the past, say, 40 years. I think it was 80 percent—the U.S. population was 80 percent white or identifying white in 1980. Twenty years later, in 2000, it was a little over 69 percent. And in the 2020 census, it was 57.8 percent identifying as white.

FREY: Yeah, it went down by a share of about 11 percentage every 20 years, from 80 percent to 69 percent, from 69 percent to 58 percent over these 20-year periods. And of course, over this period, back in 1980, about 6 percent of the population was Latino and about 11 or 12 percent were Black. When we get up to 2000, the Latino and the Black population are almost the same. In fact, the Latino population was a bit higher than the Black population. And now with this last census, the Latino population is about 18.7 percent of the population. That's like three times as high as it was in 1980, and the Black population is still about 12 percent, what it was generally over this case.

So, we have kind of a decline in the white population, a growth in the Latino as well as the Asian population, and a kind of a steady share of the Black population nationwide. It shows something about the changing nature of our country as the white population ages, is not a big part of the immigration over time. And as the Latino population, which is a much younger population, therefore because there are more women in their childbearing years have more kids, and also have come through immigration in large numbers in the 1980s and '90s and 2000s, and even this last

decade, though it's not as much in this last decade, has helped to increase the size of the Latino population. And the Asian population as well has increased from immigration.

DEWS: So, the Latino or Hispanic and Asian American populations are the fastest growing groups nationally, but you also note that they're dispersing to more places. So, where traditionally did we see these groups and where do you see that they're going now?

FREY: If you looked at the census in 1990, about two-fifths of the Latinos in the United States lived in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, or Miami. Now we can add a couple of more metro areas that add to that two-fifths—we'll include Dallas and Houston and Riverside, California. So, all of those now are about two-fifths of the Latino population.

But a huge amount of the growth in the Latino population is elsewhere in the United States. So, in my report, I show that there are 155 metropolitan areas where the Latino population was at least 10,000 and increased by more than 150 percent of the national Latino growth in the last decade. So, those places are all over the country. I mean, they're in the Northeast, they're in the Midwest, they're in the Southeast. A lot of them are still, as I say, maybe only have 10,000 or so Latinos, but are growing very rapidly. And this shows you the dispersion when we say that most of the country's areas have a slightly smaller share of whites than they did before, part of the reason for that is a dispersion of this Latino population to all parts of the country.

DEWS: Another really fascinating data point in your report is that 73 of the nation's largest 100 metro areas now have a highly represented nonwhite group. So, what is highly represented and where are those cities? What kind of cities are those? And what are some of the 27 metro areas that still don't have a highly represented nonwhite group?

FREY: By highly represented, I meant that if in your metropolitan area you have a higher percentage of a nonwhite group than the nation as a whole. So, there's 18.7 percent of the U.S. population are Latinos. If you're in a metropolitan area where more than that 18.7 percent of the population is Latino, I say, well, there Latinos are highly represented. Similarly, for Asians, about 6.1 percent of the nation's population are Asians, Hawaiians, and other Pacific Islanders. If you

have more than that in your metropolitan area, then you're highly represented. Similarly, for Blacks, 12.1 percent, and if you have more than 12.1 percent Blacks there.

I changed the bar a little bit for Native Americans or American Indians and Alaska Natives. I made them 7 percent. Their percentage of the U.S. population is much lower, but I wanted to make sure that when I said they were highly representative, they were kind of highly represented in general. I did the same for people who said they were identified with two or more races. So, that sounds kind of complicated, but basically, if you live in an area where there's proportionately more people of these different racial groups that is higher than the nation as a whole, then those groups are highly represented.

And in quite a few places there are two or more of these groups, these nonwhite minority groups, that are highly represented. Places like New York and Chicago are places, and some of the Texas metropolitan areas, where Latinos, Asians, and Blacks are more represented than they are in the nation as a whole. So, it gives you a sense that there's a lot of diversity there. And when we say there are 73 of the hundred metropolitan areas where one or more of these groups are highly represented, they could be various different combinations. In many California metropolitan areas there are Latinos and Asians that are highly represented. In many Southern metropolitan areas, it's just Blacks that are highly represented, although in some cases you would have Hispanics and Blacks like in Miami, for example. In Albuquerque, you have American Indians and Alaska Natives that are highly represented along with the Latino population.

So, we tried to derive this colorful map. It's kind of hard to present all these different statistics in kind of one glance. But I thought I'd do it this way so you could see, get a flavor at least, which of these metropolitan areas have these different groups and make them highly represented in areas. And we find out that in fact, there are 27 areas where none of these nonwhite minorities are highly represented. And these are places largely in the center part of the country, although New England has a few of them there as well. Places like Kansas City, or some places in Pennsylvania, they're pretty white. They're not just more than half white, they're very white. But

even in these areas between 2010 and 2020, the white population share has gone down. So, yes, they're whiter than the rest of the country. But this dispersion of Latinos and Asians and then the movement of Blacks to many parts of the South is making fewer and fewer areas as white as they used to be, even using these new census statistics.

DEWS: I encourage listeners to go to the report to find this map. It is color coded and then you can drill down at a county level to see the data in that county. It's really amazing. Let's move on, Bill, to the age component of all of this. And you've written also about this a lot in some of your previous writings. You write that over the 2010 to 2020 decade, the under-18 population declined by a million people despite gains in the previous decades. So why is that? And is this loss seen all over the country, but also is it seen across all the different racial and ethnic groups?

FREY: It's important to understand that even though our country is becoming much more racially diverse, it's growing more slowly than it has in any decade since the Great Depression, 7.4 percent. And one of the reasons it's growing so slowly is actually a decline, a very small decline in the under-age 18 population. The part of the population that's growing most rapidly are the people age 65 and over, largely because baby boomers have been moving into those age groups. But the younger part of the population is actually declining slightly. And part of this has to do with the fact that the white population is aging rapidly. And because the white population is aging rapidly, there are proportionately fewer white women in their childbearing years. As a result, not only this last decade, but the decade before showed an absolute decline in white people under age 18, not because white women aren't having fertility at all, but because they're proportionately a smaller part of the population and that white population is aging. And in fact, not a lot of immigrants coming to the U.S. are white.

So, what this means is, of course, overall, the aging and slow growth of the white population is making its mark on the national population, especially among the youth. The saving grace for all of this, if we're concerned about having the growth in the younger population, is the last several decades of immigration, because immigrants and their children are younger than the rest of the

population, especially Latinos. It means that they have helped to contribute to the growth of this younger population. In the last decade, while there is a slow decline in the white population, it would have been a much bigger decline were it not for the contributions, the positive contributions, for Latinos, of Asians, and people who identify as two or more races.

And as a result, for the very first time in the 2020 Census, less than half of the under age 18 population identifies with white. About almost 40 percent identify as Latino and Black, the brown and Black population is almost 40 percent of the child population. So, this is very important, the fact that we are not growing very rapidly for our youth population. But all of the growth in our youth population comes from people of color means that as we move forward, the younger part of our labor force age population will also adapt this kind of pattern. And in fact, is all of the baby boomers, mostly white baby boomers, move out of the labor force all together, it will really be people of color—again, Latinos, to some degree Asians, to some degree Blacks—will have a lot to say about the growth of our younger age population.

And I say—I always go off a little bit of a rant on this—I mean, I think this really means we have to invest in the well-being of this very diverse younger population. We know from a lot of other studies that there are sharp disparities in terms of poverty, in terms of educational attainment, in terms of wealth between, say, Black and brown Americans and white Americans. And this is going to be especially important for our younger population. So, I think, as our population ages, and we need more people in our labor force, a lot of this is going to be these younger, diverse folks, that we need to really invest in their in their future. The demography is pretty clear about this.

DEWS: Well, one other factor I know you've talked about this a lot is that it's those younger workers who are more diverse, are going to be not only supporting the economy, but they're going to be contributing to programs like Social Security and Medicaid that will support the retiring and aging older population.

FREY: Yes, I mean, I think it's kind of ironic. I write a lot about what I call the cultural generation gap in the United States, but we see it a lot in our politics. Older white folks, at least in

several recent elections, have tended to vote strongly for candidates, often Republican candidates, but generally candidates who say, well, we shouldn't be spending so much money of our federal largesse into these huge social programs that might be benefiting a lot of the young people. Some of the older folks say, well, they're not my children, they're not my grandchildren. Why should I pay my taxes for it? And the answer, of course, is because if you want your Social Security and if you want your Medicare and if you want the nation to be productive as you get into your 70s and 80s, the people who are going to be helping that along and contributing to that will be these very diverse, younger generations of folks.

In the past, when the baby boomers were of that age back in the 1950s, the country invested a lot into the well-being of young people in the schools and all of this sort of thing. And now the shoe is on the other foot. The baby boomers are now in these older ages and it's a whole new generation that needs to have those kinds of investments. And this 2020 Census makes that demographic fact extremely clear.

DEWS: Well, I'm going to stay on that politics point for a few more moments, because we hear it a lot in the current discourse, very recently. And let me go back to a recent post that you have on the Avenue blog on the Brookings website, where you talked about the so-called fears of, quote, white replacement that have been stoked by the former president and his followers and some in the conservative news media. We don't have to talk about that concept. But you say that America's white population could be facing a different kind of fear.

FREY: Yes, I think rather than worrying about a white cultural displacement, I think not only the white population but our population in general needs to be concerned about an aging population that's not going to be reproducing itself at the younger ages. Now, of course, fertility has gone down. It's probably not going to go up again. The main way we are going to grow our younger population is from immigration, something another total topic that we could get into some time. But we've had somewhat slower immigration in this last decade for a number of reasons. That's going to be the way we're going to beef up the size of our younger population.

And what that means is people are going to be coming here from other parts of the world, from Latin America, from Asia, from Africa, yes from Europe, too. But the immigrants and their children are the people who can help to make the growth of our population younger, make our labor force age population grow. And, I think that worrying about replacement, white replacement for other groups, I think we should just talk about demographic replacement, because this is what we really need. This will put us in a much better situation than Japan or Italy or places in Eastern Europe, which haven't had a lot of immigration, which are aging rapidly, which are facing a decline in their labor force age population. We are not quite in that situation, even though we have a smaller growth and, in fact, decline of our child population, because of the immigration that we had in the '80s and the '90s and the 2000s. Those folks helped to beef up the size of this younger population. And if we invest in that, we're going to be in much better shape than a lot of our peer nations across the globe.

I think if this message comes across, the demographic replacement rather than a cultural displacement, older folks are going to get the idea better. I've mentioned Trump, I mentioned other politicians, but I'm just a demographer. I mean, people aren't going to listen to what I say. You really need to have people who have some clout politically to make these kinds of points. And I'm very hopeful that as people see the results of the census and the results of analyses that people like I do will make the case that this demographic replacement is what we really need to achieve in this country moving forward.

DEWS: Well, Bill, I do listen to you, and I think everyone should listen to you because I think your insights and your analyses are really important. So, to kind of wrap up here, and I don't want to press the point too much, because I think, as you say, demographic replacement is far more important than like what the actual mix is. But I have heard you talk about the fact that if the United States stops immigration entirely, just somehow zeroed it out, the U.S. would still become more diverse over the coming decades and less white. And at some point, it would become a majority nonwhite nation if even if immigration was totally wiped out somehow.

FREY: Yes. I mean, part of the reason for that is, of course, the white population is older and is now declining, and the Latino population, most of its growth, about three-quarters of its growth, is from children being born to Latinos who are already here in the United States, not from immigration. Yes, we'll have fewer Latinos if we don't have immigration, but the Latino population will continue to grow. The Asian population is dependent more on immigration, but I think eventually they'll continue to grow. And of course, then, there's this mixed-race population, the young people who are being born to the spouses of different mixed-race. About 16 or 17 percent of recent marriages or mixed-race marriages, about 10 percent of all marriages of mixed-race marriages. And so, you know, I think if we move ahead and talk about this moving forward as the nature of our country, you know, almost like it was 100 years ago when we were a melting pot, we're going to be a melting pot again. I think people need to understand this. And, you know, we will be that way. Being white or being Black or being Hispanic or being Asian should be less important over time. It shouldn't be kind of a political dividing line. And I think it's important for people to understand that as they look at these numbers.

DEWS: Well, Bill, I think we'll leave it at that. As always, I thank you for your time and expertise today. This has been a fascinating conversation, as they always are with you.

FREY: Well, I really enjoyed it again, Fred, thank you for inviting me.

DEWS: You can find Bill's recent report and much more research, "Mapping America's Diversity with the 2020 Census," on our website, brookings.edu.

A team of amazing colleagues makes the Brookings Cafeteria possible. My thanks go out to audio engineer Gaston Reboredo; our audio intern this semester, Nicolette Kelly; Bill Finan, director of the Brookings Institution Press, who does the book interviews; my communications colleagues Marie Wilkin, Adrianna Pita, and Chris McKenna for their collaboration. And finally, to Ian McAllister, Soren Messner-Zidell and Andrea Risotto for their guidance and support.

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Until next time, I'm Fred Dews