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U.S. Population Projections: 2005–2050

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Executive Summary

If current trends continue, the population of the United States will rise to 438 million in 2050, from 296 million in 2005, and 82% of the increase will be due to immigrants arriving from 2005 to 2050 and their U.S.-born descendants, according to new projections developed by the Pew Research Center.

Of the 117 million people added to the population during this period due to the effect of new immigration, 67 million will be the immigrants themselves and 50 million will be their U.S.-born children or grandchildren.

Among the other key population projections:

- Nearly one in five Americans (19%) will be an immigrant in 2050, compared with one in eight (12%) in 2005. By 2025, the immigrant, or foreign-born, share of the population will surpass the peak during the last great wave of immigration a century ago.
- The major role of immigration in national growth builds on the pattern of recent decades, during which immigrants and their U.S.-born children and grandchildren accounted for most population increase. Immigration's importance increased as the average number of births to U.S.-born women dropped sharply before leveling off.
- The Latino population, already the nation's largest minority group, will triple in size and will account for most of the nation's population growth from 2005 through 2050. Hispanics will make up 29% of the U.S. population in 2050, compared with 14% in 2005.
- Births in the United States will play a growing role in Hispanic and Asian population growth; as a result, a smaller proportion of both groups will be foreign-born in 2050 than is the case now.
- The non-Hispanic white population will increase more slowly than other racial and ethnic groups; whites will become a minority (47%) by 2050.
- The nation's elderly population will more than double in size from 2005 through 2050, as the baby-boom generation enters the traditional retirement years. The number of working-age Americans and children will grow more slowly than the elderly population, and will shrink as a share of the total population.

The Center's projections are based on detailed assumptions about births, deaths and immigration levels—the three key components of population change. All

these assumptions are built on recent trends. But it is important to note that these trends can change. All population projections have inherent uncertainties, especially for years further in the future, because they can be affected by changes in behavior, by new immigration policies, or by other events. Nonetheless, projections offer a starting point for understanding and analyzing the parameters of future demographic change.

The Center’s report includes an analysis of the nation’s future “dependency ratio”—the number of children and elderly compared with the number of working-age Americans. There were 59 children and elderly people per 100 adults of working age in 2005. That will rise to 72 dependents per 100 adults of working age in 2050.

The report also offers two alternative population projections, one based on lower immigration assumptions and one based on higher immigration assumptions.

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Barry Edmonston of the University of Victoria and Carl Haub of the Population Reference Bureau reviewed this report in draft form. Felisa Gonzales prepared the graphics and verified the accuracy of the reported numbers and figures. The authors appreciate their contributions, and are solely responsible for the data, analysis and writing in this report.

A Note on Terminology

The terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” are used interchangeably in this report.

The terms “whites” “blacks” and “Asians” are used to refer to the non-Hispanic components of each population.

“Children” refers to people ages 17 and younger.

“Working-age” refers to people ages 18–64.

“Elderly” refers to people ages 65 and older.

“Foreign-born” refers to an individual who is not a U.S. citizen at birth or, in other words, who is born outside the U.S., Puerto Rico or other U.S. territories and whose parents are not U.S. citizens. The terms “foreign-born” and “immigrant” are used interchangeably.

The terms “unauthorized immigrants,” “undocumented immigrants” and “illegal immigrants” are used interchangeably.

This report uses the following definitions of the first, second and third-and-higher generations:

First: Foreign-born or immigrant.

Second: U.S. native (born in the United States or territories), with at least one first-generation parent.

Third-and-higher: U.S. native (born in the United States or territories), with both parents native-born.

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Overview

If current trends continue, the demographic profile of the United States will change dramatically by the middle of this century, according to new population projections developed by the Pew Research Center.¹

The nation’s population will rise to 438 million in 2050, from 296 million in 2005, and fully 82% of the growth during this period will be due to immigrants arriving from 2005 to 2050 and their descendants. (Figure 1)

Of the 117 million people added to the population during this period due to the effect of new immigration, 67 million will be the immigrants themselves, 47 million will be their children and 3 million will be their grandchildren.

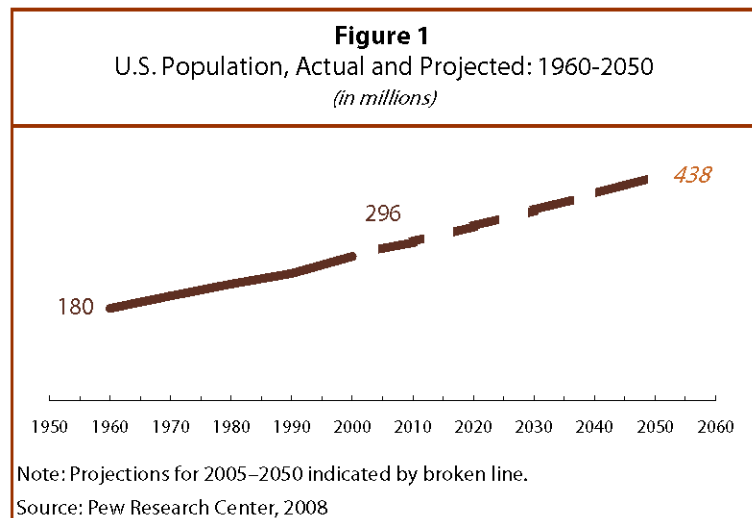
The Center’s projections indicate that nearly one in five Americans (19%) will be foreign born in 2050, well above the 2005 level of 12%, and also surpassing the historic peaks for immigrants as a share of the U.S. population—14.8% in 1890 and 14.7% in 1910. (Figure 2)

By 2050, the nation’s racial and ethnic mix will look quite different than it does now. Non-Hispanic whites, who made up 67% of the population in 2005, will be 47% in 2050. Hispanics will rise from 14% of the population in 2005 to 29% in 2050. Blacks were 13%

Table 1
U.S. Population, Actual and Projected:
2005 and 2050

	2005	2050
Population (in millions)	296	438
Share of total		
Foreign born	12%	19%
Racial/Ethnic Groups		
White	67%	47%
Hispanic	14%	29%
Black	13%	13%
Asian	5%	9%
Age Groups		
Children (17 and younger)	25%	23%
Working age (18–64)	63%	58%
Elderly (65 and older)	12%	19%

Note: All races modified and not Hispanic; American Indian/ Alaska Native not shown. See "Methodology."
Source: Pew Research Center, 2008



¹ The projections are based on a starting point of 2005, and build up to 2050 in five-year increments, so do not include totals for individual years. The Census Bureau’s most recent national population estimate, for July 1, 2007, is 301.6 million, and was released on Dec. 27, 2007.

of the population in 2005 and will be roughly the same proportion in 2050. Asians, who were 5% of the population in 2005, will be 9% in 2050.

Immigration is projected to be the key driver of national population growth in the coming half century, but it is important to note that possible future changes in immigration policy or other events could substantially alter the projected totals. These projections are based on trends over the past half century, during which immigration, both authorized and

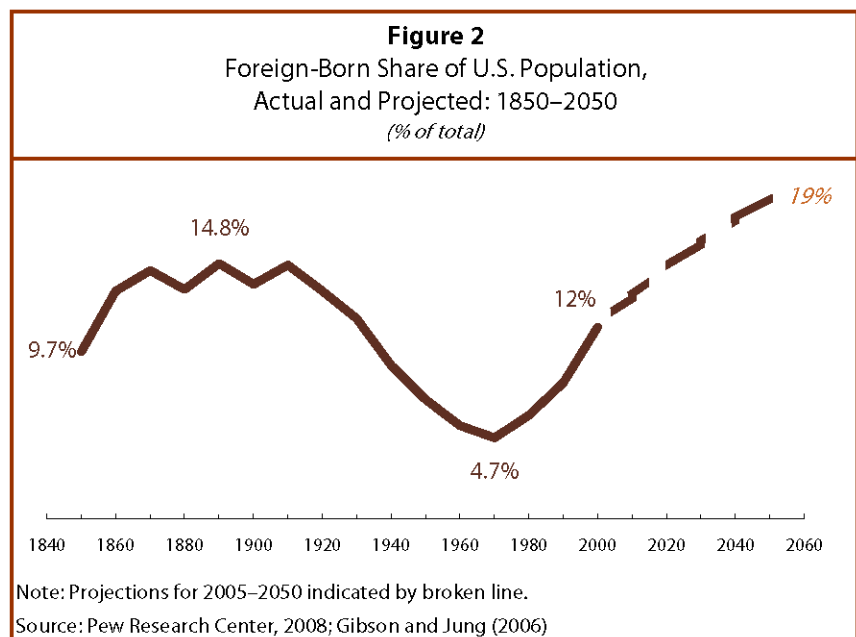
unauthorized, has played an escalating role in U.S. population growth. From 1960 to 2005, new immigrants and their U.S.-born descendants accounted for 51% of population increase. In the later part of that period, from 1980 to 2005, new immigration accounted for 58% of the 68 million additional people.

For the period from 2005-2050, new immigrants and their descendants will account for 82% of population increase. The contribution of new immigration to population change was derived by comparing our main projection with an alternative projection that assumes no new immigrants arrive after 2005. (See [Contribution of Immigration to Population Change](#) in Appendix.)

The heightening role of immigration contrasts with a decrease in fertility in recent decades. The average number of births per woman has declined markedly since the late 1950s, from more than 3.5 then to about 2 now. Also, a smaller proportion of women are of childbearing age now, compared with earlier decades. These two changes have made immigration a more prominent factor in population growth.

Methods and Assumptions

The Center's projections for the period from 2005 to 2050 are based on detailed assumptions about patterns in births, deaths and immigration—the three building blocks of population change. (See [Methodology Box](#) and [Appendix](#).) All population projections have built in uncertainties, especially for years further in the future, because they are based on assumptions about future behavior. In



addition, these uncertainties can multiply because key aspects of population change are often interrelated—for example, a decline in immigration could also lead to a decline in the birthrate because immigrants tend to have larger families than do native born residents.

The Center has developed three different population projections for 2050, but the body of this report presents findings from the main projection (figures from projections based on lower or higher immigration levels are set forth in a section that starts on page 23). These projections consolidate and build upon past trends, present conditions, and factors affecting future behavior.

None of the projections should be treated as predictions. The country’s policies may change, as may the factors that influence birth, death and immigration rates. Even given these caveats, however, population projections are an important analytical tool for planners. A rise or decline in the overall population—as well as in particular age groups—will have important impacts on the nation’s tax base and workforce. Demographic change has major implications for government spending in key areas such as schools, health programs, community services, infrastructure and Social Security. Projections also provide business with a basis upon which to make judgments about future markets. And they are of increasing interest because of the role that population may play in climate change and other environmental concerns.

A Note on Methodology

The Center’s projections use well established demographic methods and models to carry the population forward in time. The models and assumptions are disaggregated by race and by Hispanic origin, as are many projection models (e.g., Census Bureau, 2000). With regard to immigration, the Center’s projections also incorporate methods developed by Edmonston and Passel (1992, 1994) that differentiate the population by generation, i.e., the first generation (foreign-born), the second generation (U.S. natives with at least one immigrant parent) and the third-and-higher generations (U.S. native children of two U.S. native-born parents). For more detail, see the “[Methodology](#)” Appendix to this report.

When incorporating birth estimates into the projections, the Center has assumed that the overall fertility rate will remain near the level it has been for the past three decades, with differing rates by race and ethnicity (Appendix, [Figure A2](#)). Birthrates are assumed to be well above average for immigrants, slightly above average overall for the second generation (U.S. natives with at least one immigrant parent) and below average for subsequent generations born in the United States. The Center’s fertility rate projections are virtually identical to those

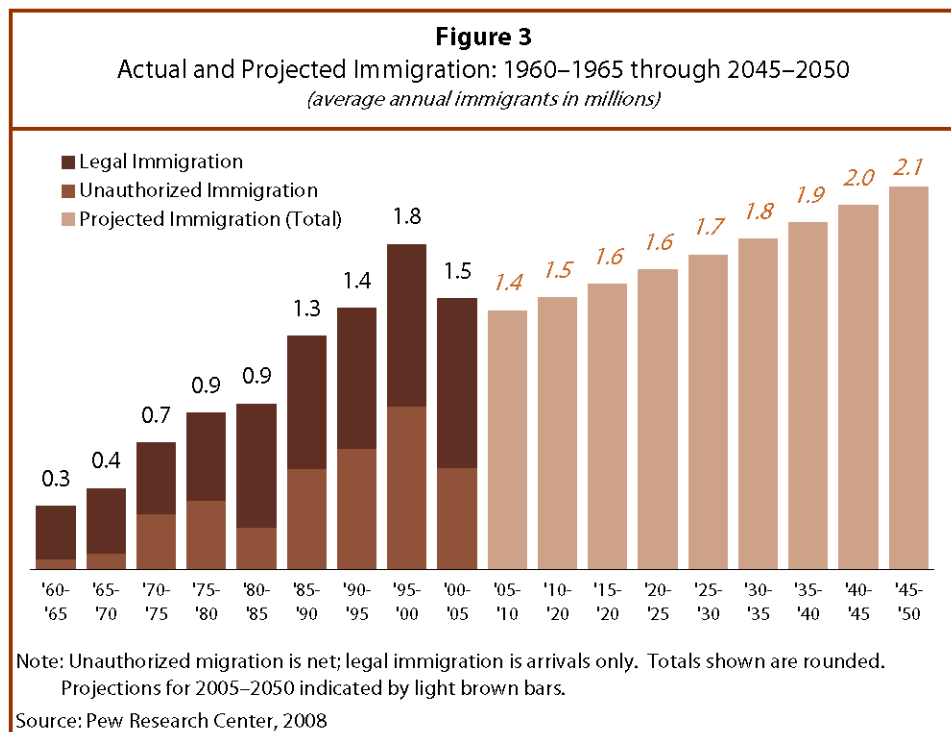
of the Social Security trustees and slightly lower than those of the Census Bureau. (Census Bureau, 2004; Social Security Administration, 2007).

As for death rates, life expectancy is assumed to improve somewhat for all groups throughout the period covered by these projections. (Appendix, [Figure A3](#)) The Center’s projections employ Census Bureau assumptions about life expectancy gains, which are higher than those of the Social Security Trustees.

Immigration to the United States has risen rapidly and steadily for decades as a result of increasing globalization and population movements, changes in U.S. immigration laws, the growing linkages of immigrant families within this country to communities abroad and labor market factors. Not only have the numbers of new U.S. immigrants increased over recent periods, but the rate of immigration also has risen steadily, whether measured from 1930, 1960 or 1980. In the face of these strong and persistent trends, most U.S. government projections, whether done by the Census Bureau (1996, 2000, 2004) or the Social Security Administration (2007) have assumed constant or even decreasing numbers of immigrants, implying sharp and sometimes immediate declines in the rate of immigration. As a result, official projections over the last several decades have consistently underestimated actual population growth.

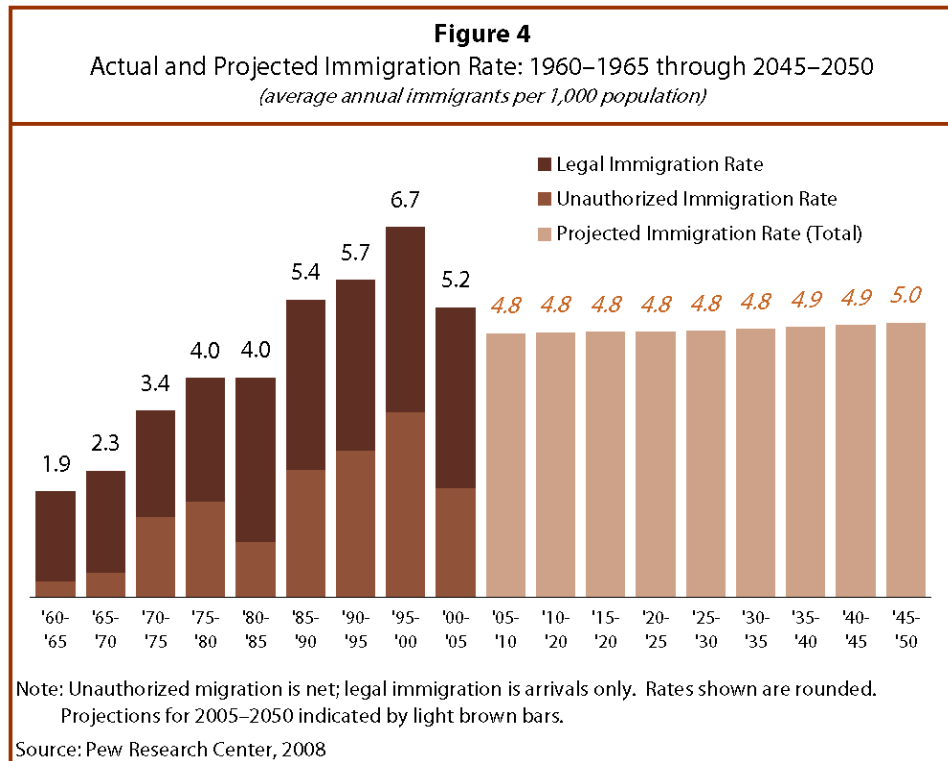
The Pew Research Center projections have assumed that the annual immigration level, now about 1.4 million people, will increase slowly by 1% per year, reaching 2.1 million immigrants in 2050. (Figure 3)

This rate of growth is in line with, but somewhat slower than, the growth trends of the last several decades. These immigration levels are slightly higher than those

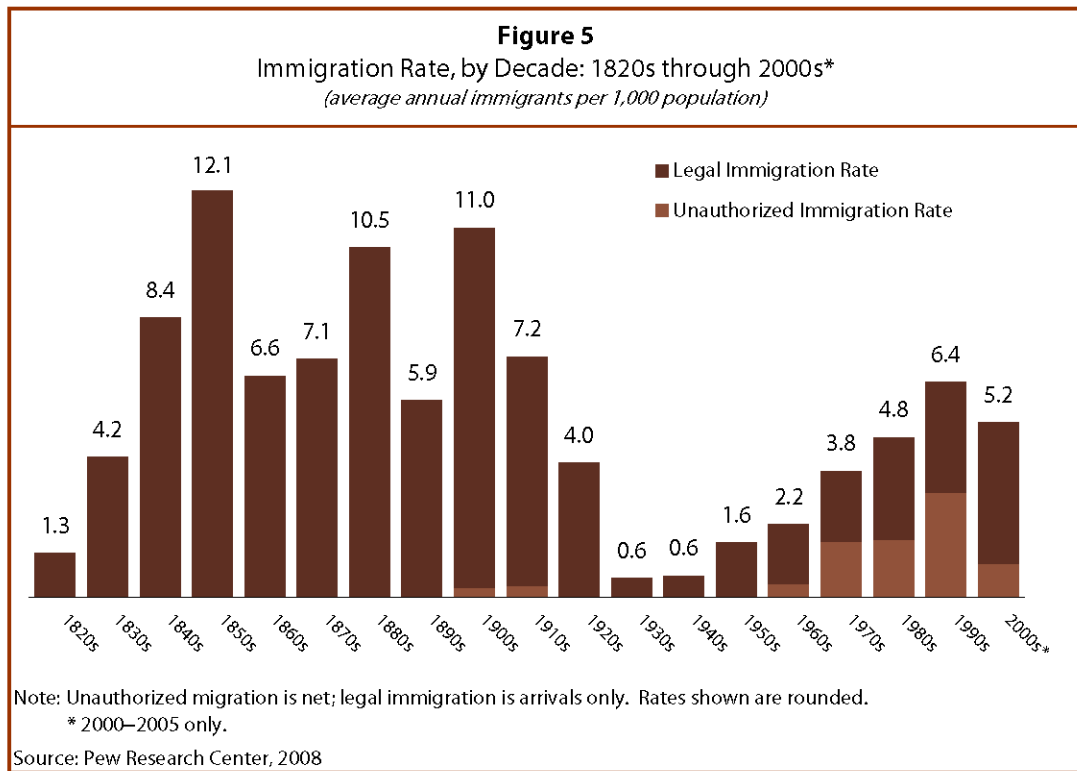


projected by either the Census Bureau or the Social Security Trustees in the short run and substantially higher toward the end of the projection horizon.

With the Center’s immigration assumption, the rate of immigration remains roughly constant over the 45-year projection horizon at 0.48% per year, or just under five immigrants per 1,000 population for each year. The rate is slightly below the rate for the first half of this decade and equal to the average for the last 35 years. (Figure 4)



The decades-long pattern of steady increases has been interrupted recently by year-to-year variation, including a spike in 1998-2001, a sharp decline in 2002-2004 (Passel and Suro, 2005), followed by a return to the long-term average in the last several years. The relatively steady growth of the last 70 years contrasts with substantial fluctuations that occurred in the 19th and early 20th centuries. (Figure 5)



Short-term fluctuations are likely to continue to occur, but the Center’s projections assume that those variations will be less important than the long-term trends. Although the rate is held steady in the Center’s projections, the number of new immigrants rises as the nation’s total population goes up. The projections also assume that several hundred thousand foreign-born residents will leave each year, which is in keeping with trends of the past several decades. Reflecting recent trends, the Center’s projections include a mix of new arrivals of legal permanent residents and unauthorized, or illegal, migrants, although the two groups are not broken out separately.

The issue of illegal immigration has become highly contentious in recent years. Last summer, Congress tried but failed to pass a comprehensive reform bill, and the debate over how to change immigration policies has become a major topic of the current presidential campaign. It is possible that a future Congress will enact laws that would sharply cut immigration flows. This has happened before. The Immigration Act of 1924 (along with an economic depression and a world war) drastically reduced immigrants as a share of the U.S. population from a 20th century peak of 14.7% in 1910 to a low of 4.7% in 1970.

This report offers two alternative population projections in addition to its main projection. The alternatives are based on immigration levels roughly 50% above

and 50% below the baseline projection, but use the same fertility and mortality assumptions as the baseline projection. Under the lower-immigration scenario, the population would rise to 384 million in 2050, and new immigration would account for 71% of growth during the projections period. Under the higher-immigration scenario, the population would go up to 496 million, and new immigration would account for 87% of the increase. The baseline projection shows the population will rise to 438 million, and new immigration will account for 82% of the increase.

Population Trends

The Center's main projection indicates that the nation's population will grow 48% over the 2005–2050 period. That growth rate is lower than the 64% increase in the nation's population from 1960 through 2005. The projected annual growth rate of 0.9% equals that of the 1980s but is lower than the pace of growth during other decades since the 1960s.

The Center's projections also indicate that between 2005 and 2050 the number of elderly will increase more rapidly than either the number of children or working-age adults.² Immigration and births to immigrants in the United States will be responsible for all growth of other age groups but will have little impact on the number of elderly, which is affected mainly by the aging of the post-World War II baby-boom generation.

The relationship between the size of the working-age population, on the one hand, and the young and elderly on the other hand, is sometimes referred to as a nation's "dependency ratio." The Center's projections show that the dependency ratio, which was 59 young and elderly for every 100 people of working age in 2005, will rise to 72 dependents per 100 people of working age in 2050. That means the costs per worker to support the young and elderly would go up. Under a lower-immigration scenario, the ratio would rise even higher, to 75 dependents per 100 people of working age. Under a higher-immigration scenario, it would be 69 dependents per 100 working-age people.

In terms of international comparisons, the United States will continue to be the world's third most populous nation in 2050, behind India and China, each with more than a billion people (United Nations, 2007). The projected annual growth rate for the United States will continue to exceed that in most other developed nations, which are growing at a slower pace, if at all. European countries generally are growing at no more than 0.5% a year, and some are losing population.

² Working age adults are defined as 18–64 years old.

As is true in the United States, the immigrant populations in many other developed nations have been growing rapidly in recent decades. The United States has a larger foreign-born population than any other country, but U.S. immigrants were a smaller share of the 2005 population (12%) than those in a few countries with long histories of receiving immigrants—including Australia at 20% or Canada with 19% (United Nations, 2006). Although immigrants are a larger share of the U.S. population than in most of Europe, some countries have a share of immigrants approaching that of the United States, including France (11%) and the United Kingdom (9%).

This report begins by presenting the baseline projection for the total population from 2005 to 2050. The next sections go into detail about the projected estimates for key segments of the population, including the foreign born, Hispanics, blacks, Asians, non-Hispanic whites, working-age adults, children and the elderly. This report then examines how these changes will affect the size of the potential workforce relative to the number of elderly and young people. A final section presents the results of two alternative projections. This overview concludes with a summary of major projections.

Racial and Ethnic Groups

In the Center's projections, each person is included in only one race or Hispanic category. These projections assume that definitions of race and ethnic categories will remain fixed and that self-identification does not change over time. In reality, the growing numbers of births to parents of different racial and ethnic groups, as well as changing social norms about racial and ethnic self-identification, are serving to blur the boundaries of racial/ethnic categories. Consequently, the future sizes of race/ethnic groups could be higher or lower than the projection values even if the underlying demographic assumptions about the future prove to be correct.

Key Projections

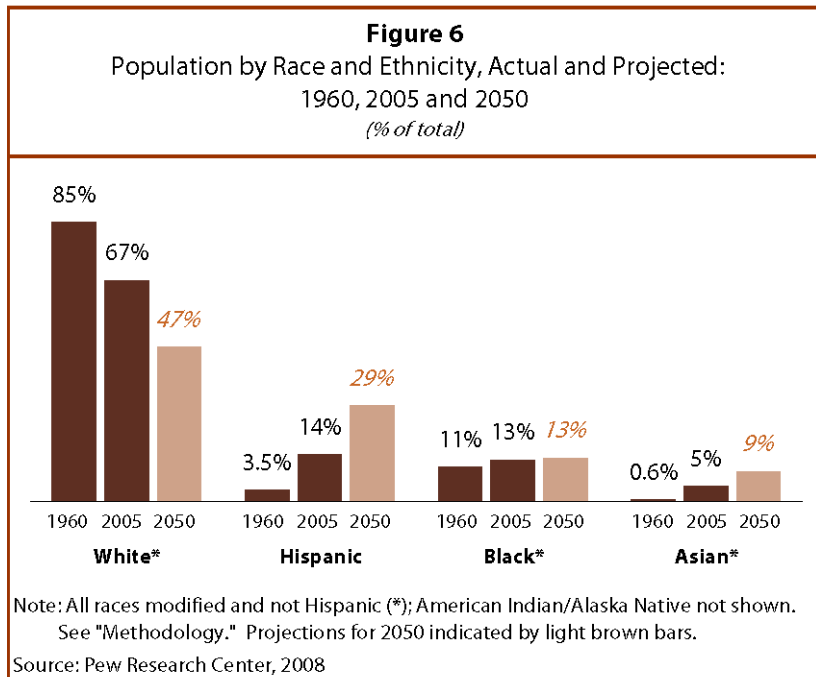
Population and Immigration

- Between 2005 and 2050, the nation's population will increase to 438 million from 296 million, a rise of 142 million people that represents growth of 48%.
- Immigrants who arrive after 2005, and their U.S.-born descendants, account for 82% of the projected national population increase during the 2005–2050 period.

- Of the 117 additional people attributable to the effect of new immigration, 67 million will be the immigrants themselves and 50 million will be their U.S.-born children and grandchildren
- The nation’s foreign-born population, 36 million in 2005, is projected to rise to 81 million in 2050, growth of 129%.
- In 2050, nearly one in five Americans (19%) will be an immigrant, compared with one in eight now (12% in 2005).
- The foreign-born share of the nation’s population will exceed historic highs sometime between 2020 and 2025, when it reaches 15%. The historic peak share was 14.7% in 1910 and 14.8% in 1890.
- Births in the United States will play a growing role in Hispanic and Asian population growth, so a diminishing proportion of both groups will be foreign-born.

Racial and Ethnic Groups

- The Hispanic population, 42 million in 2005, will rise to 128 million in 2050, tripling in size. Latinos will be 29% of the population, compared with 14% in 2005. (Figure 6) Latinos will account for 60% of the nation’s population growth from 2005 to 2050.

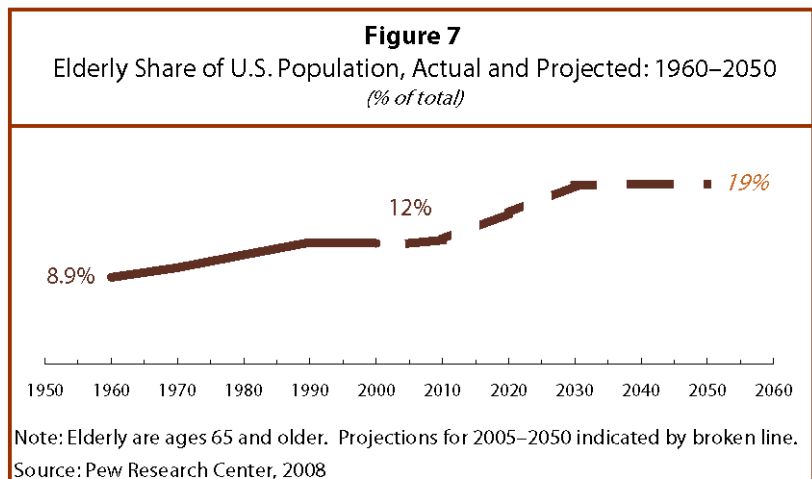


- The black population, 38 million in 2005, will grow to 59 million in 2050, a rise of 56%. In 2050, the nation’s population will be 13.4% black, compared with 12.8% in 2005.

- The Asian population, 14 million in 2005, will grow to 41 million in 2050, nearly tripling in size. In 2050, the nation’s population will be 9% Asian, compared with 5% in 2005. Most Asians in the United States were foreign born in 2005 (58%), but by 2050, fewer than half (47%) will be.
- The white, non-Hispanic population, 199 million in 2005, will grow to 207 million in 2050, a 4% increase. In 2050, 47% of the U.S. population will be non-Hispanic white, compared with 67% in 2005.

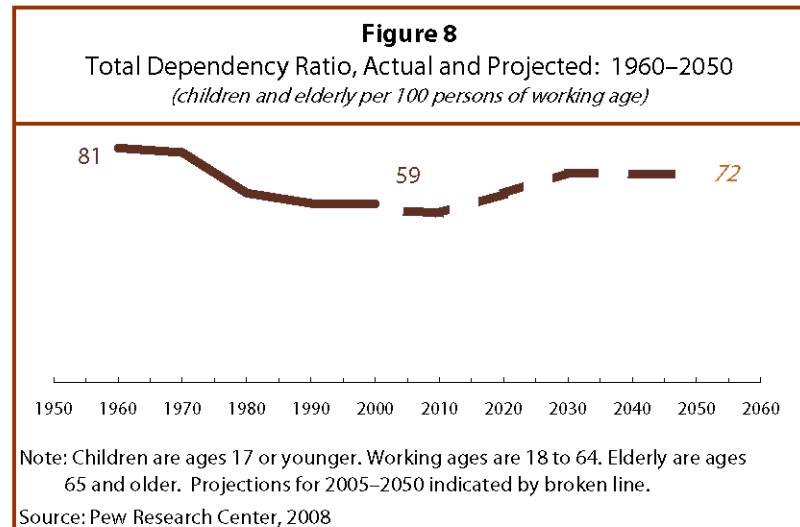
Age Groups

- The working-age population—adults ages 18 to 64—will reach 255 million in 2050, up from 186 million in 2005. This segment will grow more slowly over the projection period (37%) than the overall population. Future immigrants and their descendants will account for all growth in this group.
- Among working-age adults, the foreign-born share, 15% in 2005, will rise to 23% in 2050. The Hispanic share, 14% in 2005, will increase to 31% in 2050. The non-Hispanic white share, 68% in 2005, will decline to 45% in 2050.
- The nation’s population of children ages 17 and younger will rise to 102 million in 2050, up from 73 million in 2005. The child population will grow more slowly in future decades (39%) than will the overall population. Future immigrants and their descendants will account for all growth in this population segment.
- Among children, the share who are immigrants or who have an immigrant parent will rise to 34% in 2050 from 23% in 2005. The share of children who are Hispanic, 20% in 2005, will rise to 35% in 2050. Non-Hispanic whites, who make up 59% of today’s children, will be 40% of children in 2050.
- The nation’s elderly population—people ages 65 and older—will grow to 81 million in 2050, up from 37 million in 2005. This group will grow



more rapidly than the overall population, so its share will increase to 19% in 2050, from 12% in 2005. (Figure 7) Immigration will account for only a small part of that growth.

- The dependency ratio—the number of people of working age, compared with the number of young and elderly—will rise sharply, mainly because of growth in the elderly population. There were 59 children and elderly people per 100 adults of working age in 2005. That will rise to 72 dependents per 100 adults of working age in 2050. (Figure 8)



Alternative Projection Scenarios

- Under a lower-immigration scenario, the total population would rise to 384 million, the foreign-born share would stabilize at 13% and the Hispanic share would go up to 26% in 2050.
- Under a higher-immigration scenario, the total population would rise to 496 million, the foreign-born share would rise to 23% and the Hispanic share would go up to 32% in 2050.
- Under a lower- or higher-immigration scenario, the dependency ratio would range from 75 dependents per 100 people of working age to 69 dependents per 100 people of working age. Both of these ratios are well above the current value of 59 dependents per 100 people of working age.

Population Projections

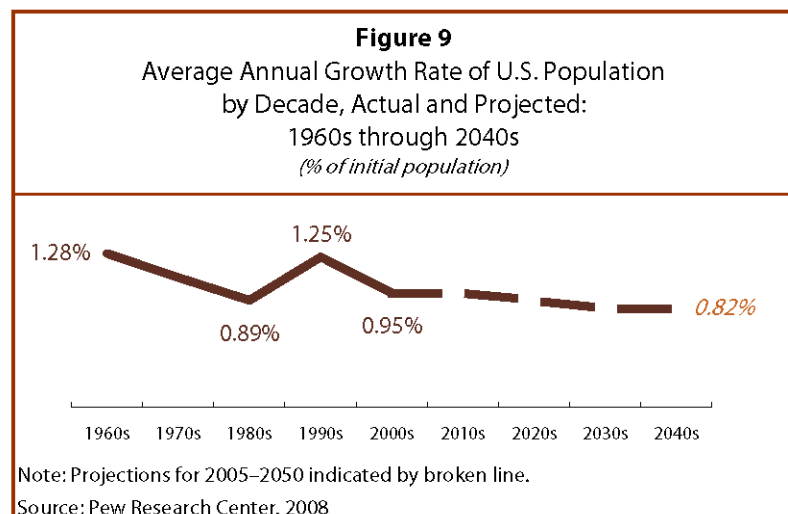
Between 2005 and 2050, the nation's population is projected to rise by 142 million, an increase of 48%. During those 45 years, it will expand from 296 million to 438 million. By contrast, the U.S. population rose by 116 million people between 1960 and 2005, which was a 64% increase.

Nearly all of the increase from 2005 to 2050 will be due to new immigrants and their U.S.-born descendants. They will account for 82% of the nation's population growth, or 117 million additional people by 2050. Of those new residents, 67 million will be the immigrants themselves, 47 million will be their U.S.-born children and 3 million will be their U.S.-born grandchildren. That means new immigrants themselves will account for 47% of population growth during the projections period.

Only 25 million of the growth over the 2005–2050 period, or 18%, can be attributed to the resident population in 2005 and its descendants.

The Center's population totals, calculated in five-year increments, were based on underlying demographic assumptions about births, deaths and immigration. They combine to yield an average annual growth rate of 0.9% over the 45-year horizon of the projections.

The nation's annualized growth rate has been somewhat higher than that in recent years, with upturns in the 1960s that resulted from high fertility and in the 1990s that mainly reflected elevated immigration levels. The Center's projections show somewhat less variation in future growth rates, because of underlying assumptions that immigration levels will rise slowly and that fertility will be stable. Under this scenario, the nation's population would double in 80 years. (Figure 9)



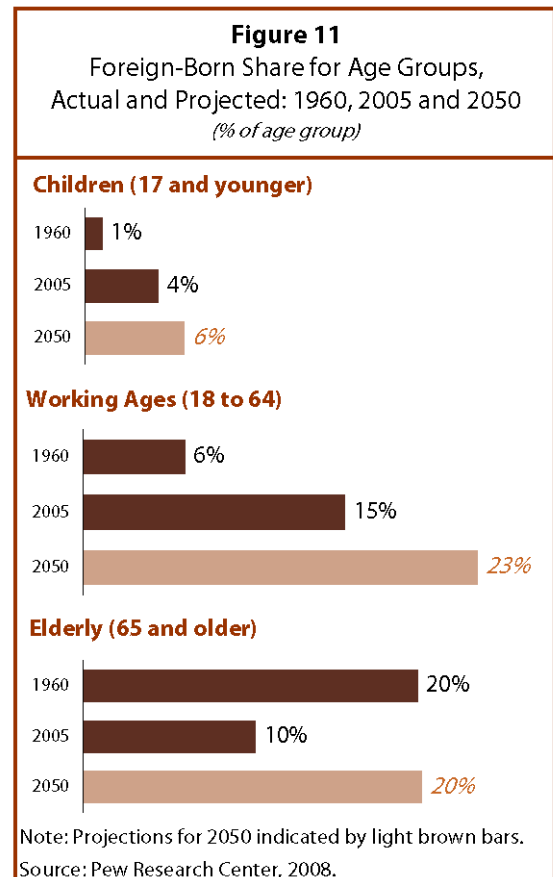
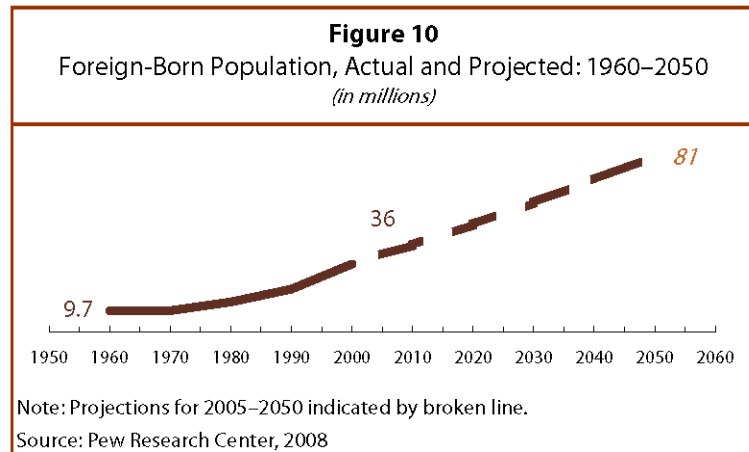
Foreign-born Population

The nation’s foreign-born population, 36 million in 2005, is projected to rise to 81 million in 2050. The 129% rise during the 2005–2050 period is a sharper increase than for the population overall. In 2050, nearly one in five Americans (19%) will be an immigrant, compared with one in eight now. (Figure 10)

The number of foreign-born residents in the United States already is at a record number but is a somewhat smaller share of the population than a century ago. The foreign-born population was 12% of the total in 2005.³ At its previous peak, the percentage of foreign-born residents fluctuated from 13% to 15% for 60 years between 1860 and 1920 (Gibson and Jung, 2006 and [Figure 2](#)).

Pew Research Center projections indicate that the proportion of immigrants will exceed historical highs (14.7% in 1910 and 14.8% in 1890) sometime between 2020 and 2025, when 15% of the population will be foreign born.

Because most people immigrate as working-age adults, the foreign-born population is more heavily concentrated in the 18–64 age group than is the native population. In this country, about four out of five immigrants (81%) are ages 18–64. That share will decline slowly as the foreign-born population ages, reaching 73% in 2050. By contrast, only 60% of native-born residents were ages 18–64 in 2005, a share that will decrease to 55% by 2050. Thus, the foreign-born share of the working-age



³ The foreign born population was 12.7% of the total in 2007, according to the Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey.

population will grow to 23% in 2050 from 15% in 2005.

Immigrants' children and grandchildren born in the United States will account for all growth in the population ages 17 and younger. Most children of immigrants are born in the United States (about four of five) and therefore are U.S. natives. For this reason, the number of foreign-born children will remain relatively low throughout the projection period.

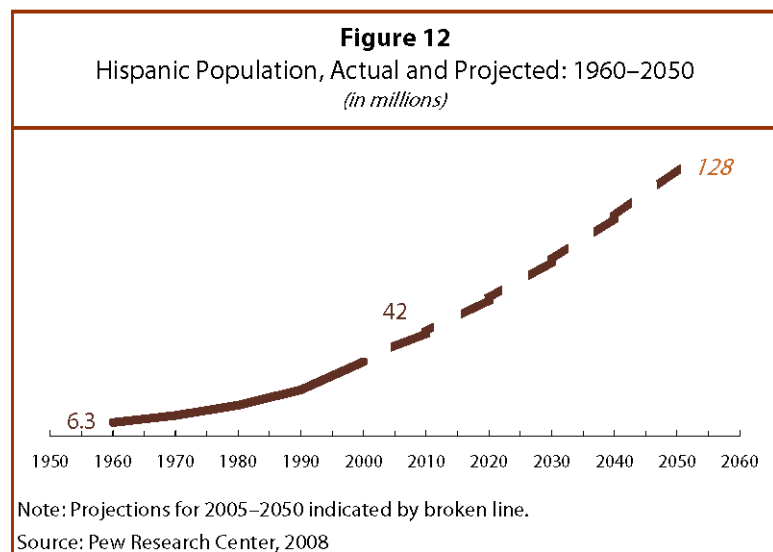
Very few people immigrate at older ages, so new immigration will have little immediate impact on the size of the elderly population. However, as younger immigrants age into the elderly group, they will make up a growing share of that population. In 2050, 16 million of the projected 81 million elderly will be foreign born, about 20%; in 2005, only 10% of the 37 million elderly were foreign born. (Figure 11)

Racial and Ethnic Groups

Hispanic

The Hispanic population, 42 million in 2005, will rise to 128 million in 2050, tripling in size. Latinos will be 29% of the population, compared with 14% in 2005.⁴ As the fastest growing major race or ethnic group, the Hispanic population will account for 60% of the nation's growth during the 2005–2050 period. (Figure 12)

New immigrants and their descendants account for most of the projected Latino growth (74%), but the growth is mainly due to births in the United States. However, the Latino population is relatively young and has a higher than average fertility rate, so its growth would continue to outpace that of other groups even without new immigration. Growth of the current Hispanic population will add 22 million new U.S. residents by 2050, a 52% increase.



⁴ The Latino population in 2007 was 47 million, based on the Census Bureau's October Current Population Survey, and Hispanics were 15.5% of the total population.

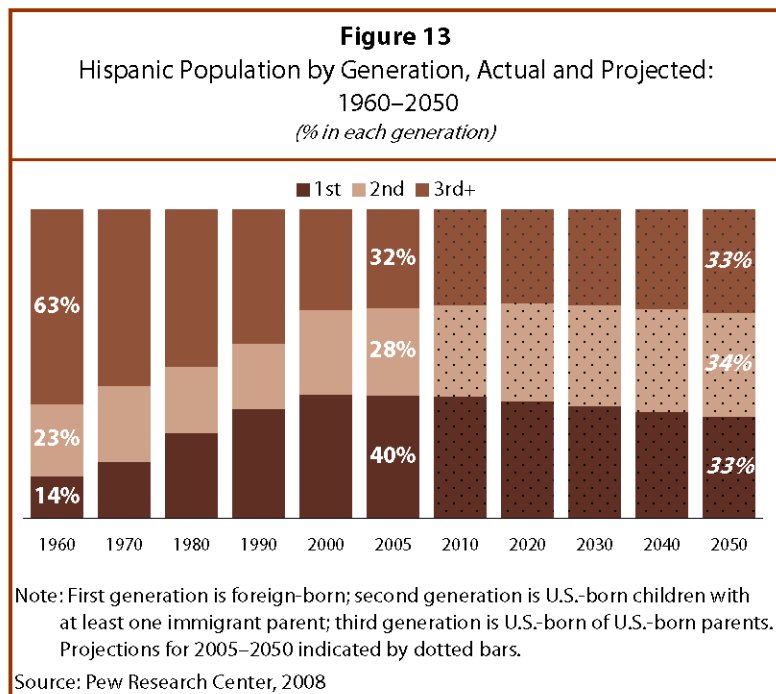
Although the Hispanic population will grow more quickly than the total number of U.S. residents, its growth rate will moderate—from 3.1% per year for 2005–10 to 2.0% per year for 2045–50. The reduced growth rate will be due, in part, to the increasing proportion of the Latino population born in the United States, because U.S.-born Hispanics have lower fertility rates than do first-generation Hispanics.

The Hispanic population already is mainly U.S. born (60%), and that proportion is projected to rise (to 67% in 2050) because of changes in the sources of growth. In a reversal of past trends, the number of births to Latino women will grow more rapidly than the number of new Latino immigrants. For a period of three decades, beginning in the early 1970s, new Hispanic immigrants had considerably outnumbered births to Latino mothers. As a result, the percent foreign-born among Hispanics increased from only 14% in 1960 to 40% in 2005.

However, this pattern of Latino births and immigration shifted during the current decade: From 2000 to 2005, there were more Hispanic births than new immigrants. The Center’s projections are that Hispanic births will grow much more rapidly than Hispanic immigration, so that by 2045–50 there will be almost twice as many Latino births as new Latino immigrants.

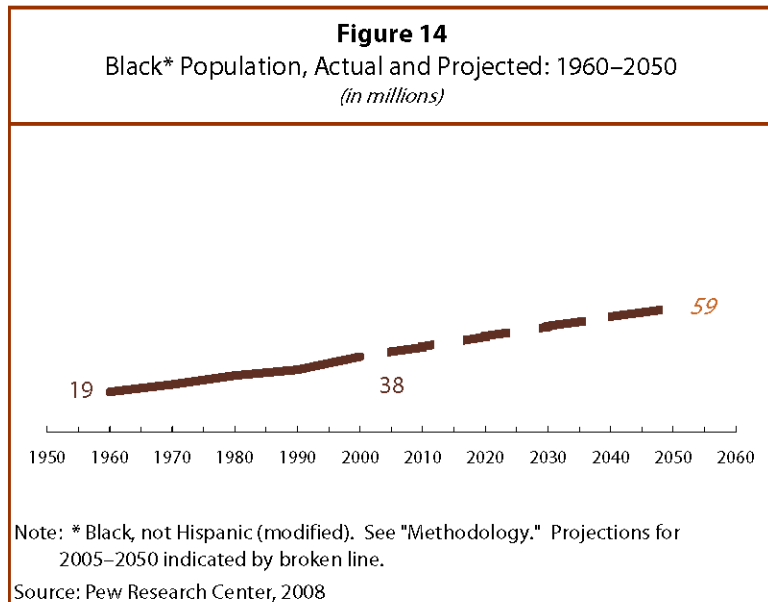
Accompanying this change will be a substantial shift in the generational composition of the Hispanic population. By 2050, the foreign-born share will drop to 33%. The second generation, which represented 23% of Hispanics in 1960 and has grown to 28% in 2005, will continue to increase. In 2050, 34% of Hispanics will be U.S.-born children with at least one immigrant parent.

The third-and-higher generations had accounted for a majority of Hispanics in 1960 (63%), but this had dropped to 32% in 2005 due to the large influx of immigrants. But as the share of births to U.S.-born Latinos increases, the third-and-higher generations will continue to grow. By 2050, all three generational groups of Hispanics will be roughly the same size. (Figure 13)

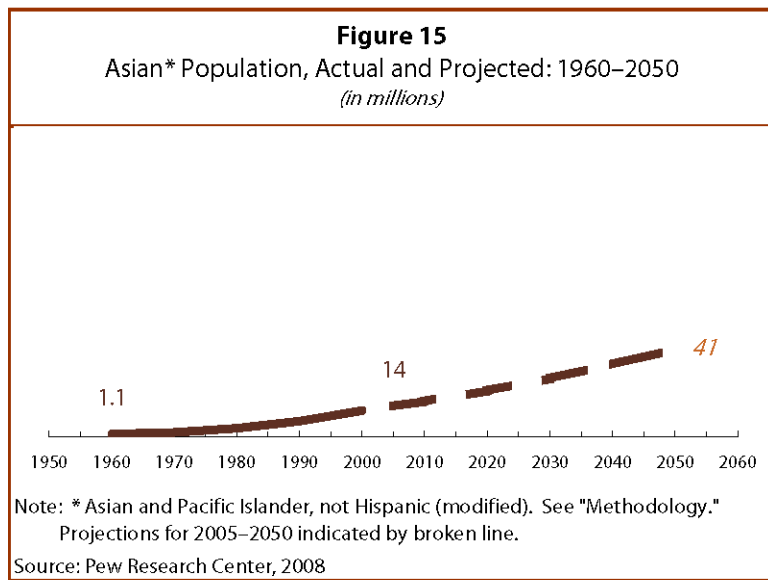


Non-Hispanic Race Groups

From 2005 to 2050, the black population will grow by about 56%, but as a share of the nation’s population it will be stable.⁵ By 2050, the nation’s population will be 13% black, about the same share as in 2005. In 2000, the Hispanic and black populations were nearly the same size; by 2005, the number of Hispanics (42 million) exceeded the size of the black population (38 million). The gap will continue to grow because of sustained Latino immigration. In 2050, there will be more than twice as many Hispanics as blacks (128 million compared with 59 million). (Figure 14)



The Asian population will grow almost as fast as the Hispanic population in percentage terms, almost tripling from 14 million in 2005 to 41 million in 2050. (Figure 15) In 1960, Asians represented a minuscule 0.6% of the total population. By 2005, the share of Asians had grown to 5%; by 2050, it will be 9%. Nearly all of the future growth in the Asian population (94%) will be due to immigrants arriving after 2005 and their descendants. But arrivals of new immigrants will play a declining role in Asian population change, and births in the United States to immigrants and their



⁵ All race groups are non-Hispanics only.

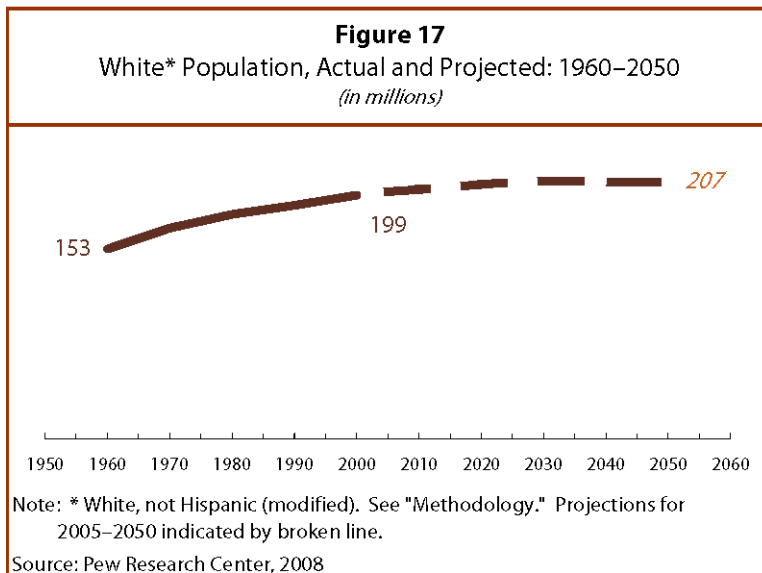
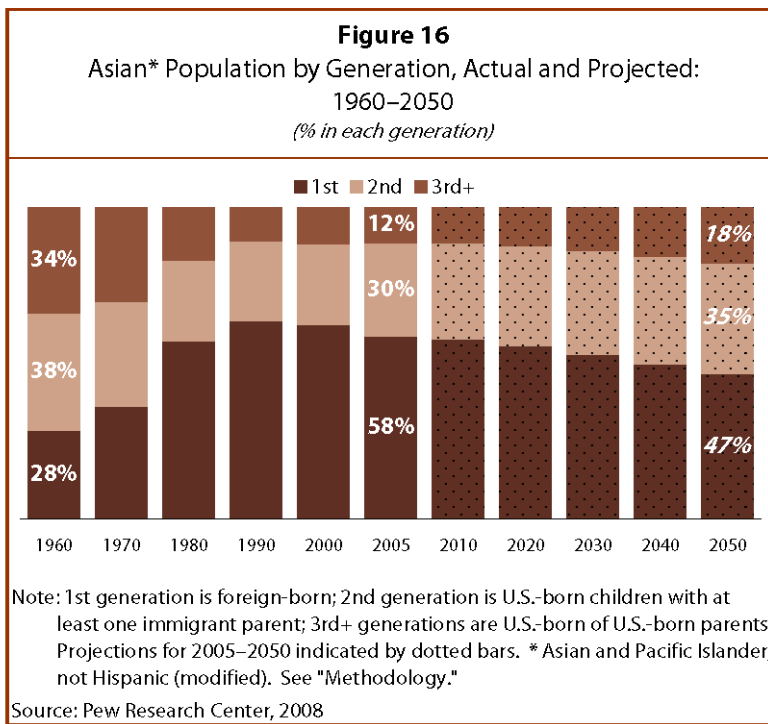
descendants will play a growing role. In 2005, most Asians in the United States (58%) were foreign born; by 2050, fewer than half (47%) will be foreign born. (Figure 16)

The white non-Hispanic population will grow much more slowly than any of the other groups because of low fertility rates and relatively low immigration. It is projected to rise by only 8 million, or 4%, over the 45-year period, with little change after 2025. As a result, the non-Hispanic white population’s share of the total will continue the decrease that has occurred since 1960, when 85% of the population was white, non-Hispanic. By 2005, the share had dropped to 67% and it will decrease steadily to 51% in 2040 and 47% in 2050. (Figure 17)

Age Groups

Working-age Adults

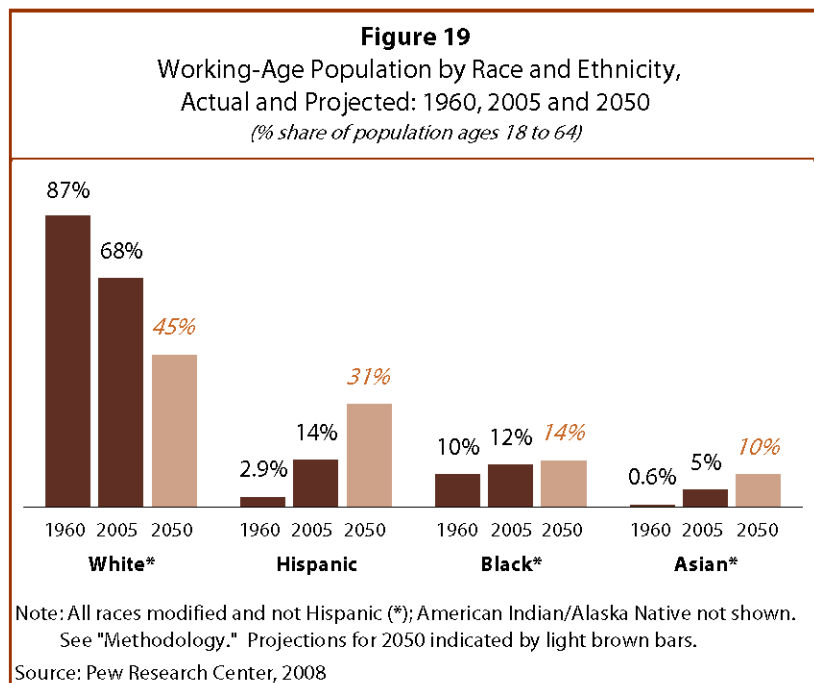
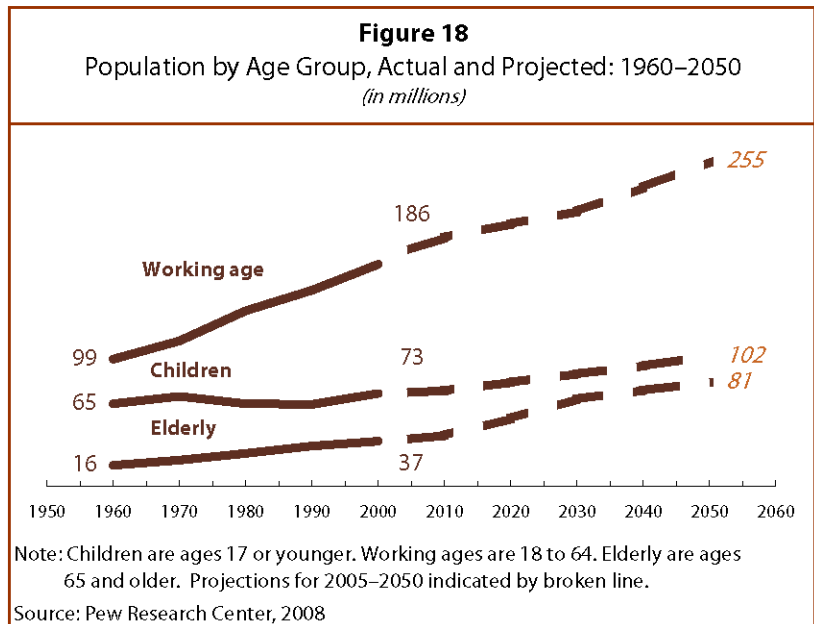
The working-age population—adults ages 18 to 64—will reach 255 million in 2050, up from 186 million in 2005. That is a 37% increase, a rate somewhat lower than for the population as a whole. At that time, working-age adults will be 58% of the population, down from 63% in 2005. (Figure 18)



Future immigrants and their descendants born in the United States account for all growth in the working-age population over this period, adding 76 million people to the 2050 size of this group. Absent new immigration, there would be a decline of 7 million people in this group.

Because immigration plays such a prominent role in future growth of the working-age population, the share of foreign-born residents in this segment will rise to 23% in 2050, compared with 15% in 2005. The Hispanic share of working-age adults, 14% in 2005, will more than double, to 31% in 2050. The non-Hispanic white share, 68% in 2005, will decline to 45% in 2050. (Figure 19)

It is important to note that not all working-age adults are in the labor force. Currently, more than three-quarters in the 18-to-64-age group are, but that could change depending on many economic and demographic factors. For example, a greater share of workers ages 50 and older may choose to stay in the labor force. Also, foreign-born Hispanic women now are much less likely to be in the work force than either U.S.-born Hispanic women or other U.S.-born women. If education levels of foreign-born Hispanic women continue to increase and their



fertility continues to fall, their low labor force participation rates could increase, as has happened with other groups.

Children

The nation's child population will rise to 102 million in 2050, from 73 million in 2005. The 39% increase is somewhat slower than for the population as a whole. Children will make up 23% of the population in 2050, compared with 25% in 2005.

Even though the projected increase in the child population is relatively modest, it stands in marked contrast to the much slower growth during the previous 45-year period (1960–2005). In 1960, there were 65 million children ages 17 and younger, making up more than a third (36%) of the population. That number grew by only 14%, to 73 million (or 25% of the population), in 2005. The slow growth during those years reflects the aging of the post-World War II baby boom, a period of high birthrates that lasted from 1946 to 1964. The baby-boom babies are now middle-aged adults, and the first of them will turn 65 years old in 2011.

All of the projected increase in the population ages 17 and younger through 2050 will be due to the arrival of new immigrants and the children born to them in the United States. By 2050, 36 million children will be descendants of immigrants who arrived after 2005. Absent new immigration, there would be a decline of 8 million people in this age group.

Immigrants do not generally arrive as children, nor do immigrant families tend to bring large numbers of children with them from other countries. Instead, the pattern is that young adults immigrate and have children after they arrive. Consequently, the vast majority (94%) of these 102 million young people in 2050 will be born in the United States.

Because immigrants on average have more children than native-born U.S. residents, the share of U.S. children who are children of immigrants—the first and second generations combined—will increase. In 2050, one child in three (34%) will be an immigrant or the son or daughter of an immigrant, compared with almost one in four (23%) in 2005.

The share of children who are Hispanic will rise markedly, from 20% in 2005 to 35% in 2050. Non-Hispanic whites, who made up 59% of children in 2005, are projected to be 40% of children in 2050. (Figure 20)

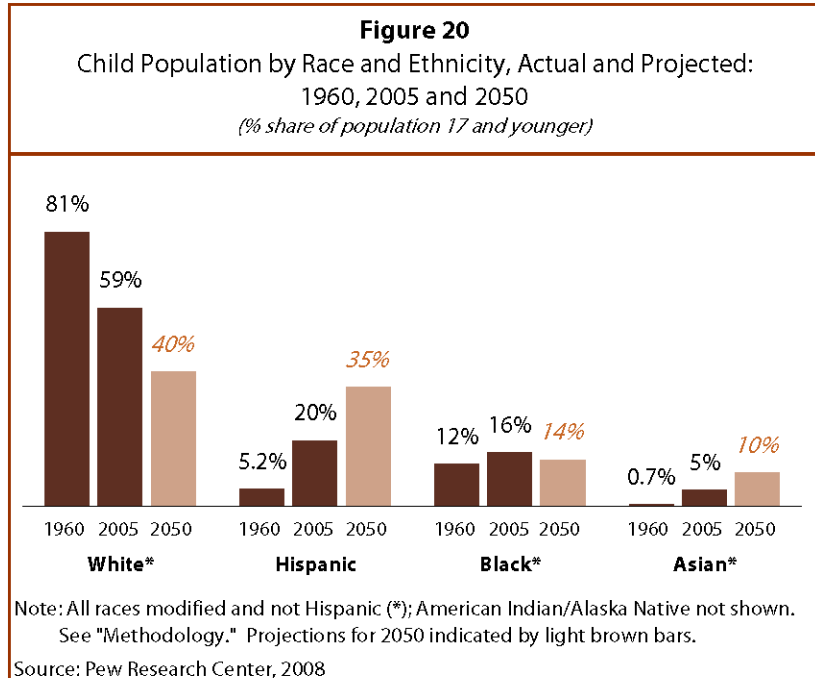
Elderly

The nation’s elderly population—people ages 65 and older—is projected grow to 81 million in 2050, from 37 million in

2005. This group will grow more sharply than other segments because of the aging of the generation born during the post-World War II baby boom. The last of the baby boomers turns 65 in 2029. Among all age groups, projections about the size of the elderly population are least uncertain because the vast majority already are part of the U.S. population.

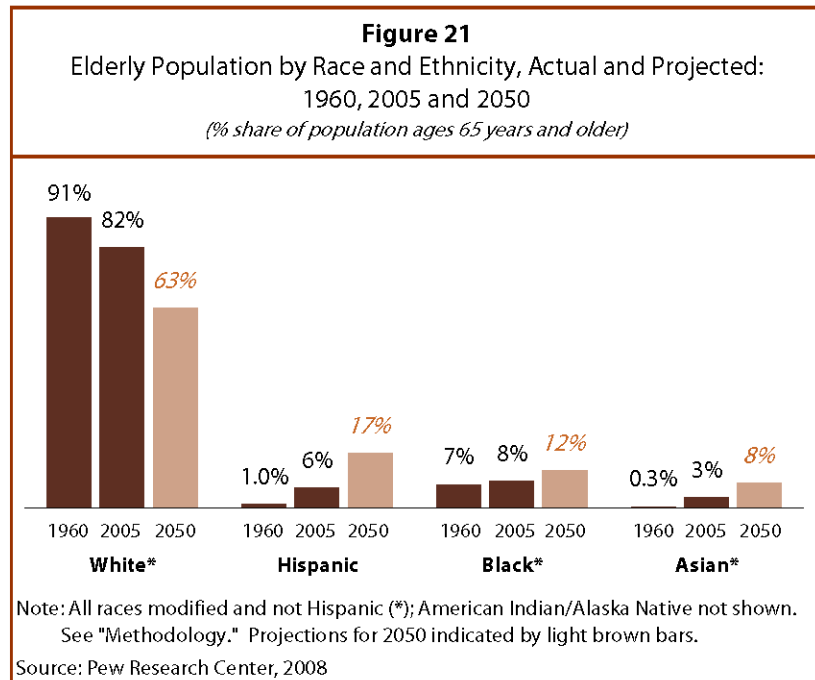
The elderly have accounted for 12% to 13% of the population since 1990; this range is higher than at any time in the nation’s history. With each successive decade, the percentages will increase so that by 2050 the elderly will represent 19% of the population. By way of comparison, in Florida, the state with the highest proportion of elderly residents, 17% are in that age group today (Census Bureau 2006).

The proportion of Hispanics in the elderly population will almost triple, from 6% to 17%, between 2005 and 2050 but will be substantially less than the proportion of Hispanics in younger age groups.



The racial/ethnic composition of the elderly population will change as the overall population does, but the changes lag behind those of younger age groups. Thus, non-Hispanic whites will remain a majority of the elderly, but their share will drop markedly to 63% in 2050, compared with 82% in 2005. The proportions of other race groups in the elderly population will

increase over the projections horizon. The share of blacks will grow from 8% in 2005 to 12% in 2050; the share of Asians will grow from 3% to 8%. (Figure 21)



Dependency Ratio

The dependency ratio is a demographic and economic indicator that compares the size of non-working-age groups—children and the elderly—with that of the working-age population.⁶ A higher number of elderly or children relative to the number of workers translates into higher costs per worker to pay for all government programs, including those targeted at the young and old such as schools and Social Security.

In 2005, there were 59 elderly people and children for every 100 Americans of working ages. In 2050, assuming current trends continue, that dependency ratio will rise to 72. The main reason for the increase is that the elderly population will grow more rapidly over the next four decades than the working-age population. Most of the increase in the number of elderly will occur by 2030 as the baby-boom generation enters the retirement years. The ratio of children to working-age people, on the other hand, will change little.

The elderly dependency ratio was 20 people ages 65 and over for every 100 people ages 18 to 64 in 2005. That ratio has risen slightly since 1960 (from 16 per 100) and will increase rapidly (to 32 per 100) until 2030, when the

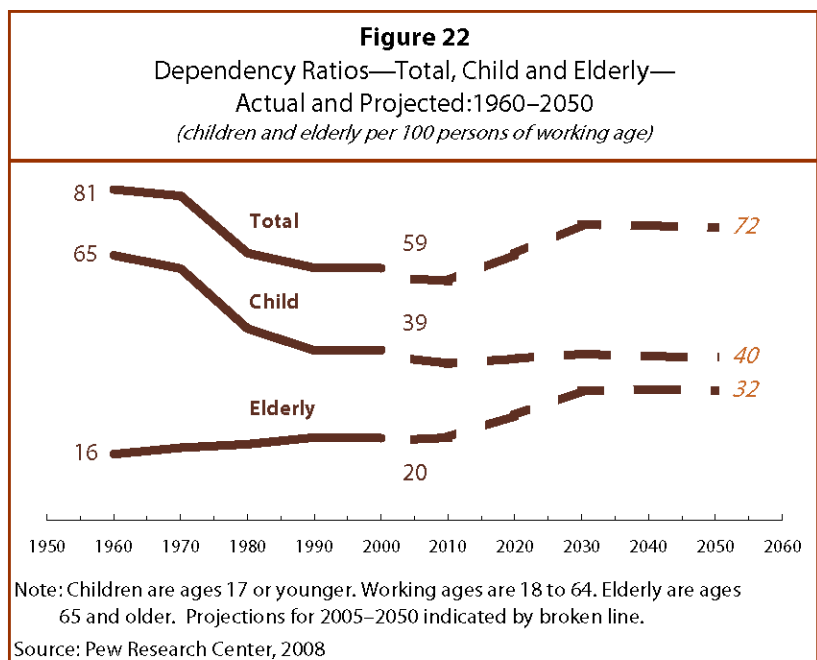
⁶ A true “dependency” ratio would compare workers with non-workers. Projections of this kind of ratio would require additional assumptions about future labor force participation levels.

youngest of the baby boomers turns 66. The elderly dependency ratio will level off at 32 elderly per 100 people of working age through 2050.

A very different pattern emerges with regard to the child dependency ratio. It is projected to be stable in coming decades, at about 40 children for every 100 people of working age. The major driver of this ratio is not the level of immigration but the average number of children per woman, which is projected to change little in the future.

To understand how fertility affects the child dependency ratio, consider that in the late 1950s, when women had an average 3.7 children, there were 65 children per 100 working-age Americans. By the mid 1970s fertility had dropped, and it has remained at about two children per woman for the past two decades.⁷ As a consequence the child dependency ratio dropped to 42 children per 100 people of working age by 1990.

The current dependency ratio is lower than it has been for decades. It was 81 in 1960, during the post-World War II baby boom, and has been declining since then. (Figure 22)



⁷ That rose to 2.1 in 2006, but it remains to be seen whether that increase will persist. The projections allow for that possibility.

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