Congress and the Year 2000: 
A Demographic Perspective on Future Issues 

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The research described in this report was supported by a grant from the Congressional Research Service, the Library of Congress.

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A RAND NOTE

N-3279-CRS

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Supported by the
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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This Note was prepared at the invitation of the Congressional Research Service, The Library of Congress, as part of its "Congress in the Year 2000" study. It provides an overview of forthcoming demographic trends and their implications.

The author thanks RAND colleagues Thomas K. Glennon, Ira S. Lowry, Anthony Pascal, and Helen Turin; and William Robinson and numerous CRS professional staff members, who all offered constructive comments.
SUMMARY

Demographic change continually reshapes the nation's political agenda, creating advocacy groups for new legislation and altering the consequences of existing laws. This Note has charted the demographic environment within which future congresses will function and the concerns that are likely to materialize.

THE DEMOGRAPHIC ENVIRONMENT AHEAD

1. Families' capacities to meet the needs of dependents will become increasingly narrow. The family settings in which children grow up will continue to pose enduring problems for social legislation that confronts inadequacies in prenatal care, childcare, and parenting.

2. A growing proportion of all workers will be at their potentially most productive ages. The aging of the labor force will strengthen national productivity and savings. The continuing influx of women, including mothers, should increase the proportion of all working-age adults who are income earners and taxpayers. The full realization of this potential productivity gain will depend on the strength of people's readiness, ability, and desire to work at various stages in their lives.

3. As young workers become scarce, entry-level labor markets will tighten further. Shortages of entry-level workers in the 1990s will intensify competition among employers, the military, and other institutions that draw on this labor pool and should result in further wage increases.

4. The schedules of American workers will grow more diverse as various alternatives to the standard 40-hour, five-day work-week emerge.

5. By the year 2000, proportionally more Americans will be members of a minority group. Each minority group will have growing political clout but will also continue to live in much the same areas as it currently does: Most Hispanics and Asians will be geographically clustered in only a few states; most blacks will be isolated residentially within the metropolitan areas in which they live.

6. Americans will live longer than ever before and elderly people will become far more numerous. This shift will be gradual in the next 20 years, followed by a period of
intensive change that will commence in the year 2011, when the first members of the baby-boom generation reach age 65.

7. The aging of the population will affect the lives of everyone. The prevalence of acute and chronic health conditions rises sharply at more advanced ages, and with them the nation’s Medicare bill. The limitations on routine activities of daily living, such as eating and bathing, that accompany those conditions can dramatically increase the need for long-term care. The greater number of elderly people and the rise in their life expectancy also mean that more of the "young elderly" (persons in their 60s and early 70s) will themselves have very old surviving parents.

8. At regional and local levels, rapid changes in population size will exacerbate infrastructure and human capital concerns. Growing areas will experience automobile traffic congestion and the need to replace or add to the infrastructure. Declining areas will experience a wastage of infrastructure and a loss of higher-quality workers.

FORTHCOMING ISSUES

Demographic changes may subtly shape policy issues and occasionally lend urgency to them. They may also widen or narrow margins for policy action. The following issues are illustrative of future congressional concerns that the demographic developments discussed here will precipitate.

1. The decade of the 1990s represents an Indian summer for the Social Security Trust Fund, a transitional period during which the large baby boom generation’s contributions as workers will boost the Fund’s size considerably. Starting in 2011, this favorable demographic context will begin to turn sharply unfavorable as the baby boom generation becomes eligible for Social Security. The Fund will have to squeeze more dollars out of a slowly growing or possibly shrinking workforce to pay benefits to the swelling number of retirees.

2. Demographic factors that are causing an increasing number of children to be brought up in poverty raise long-term concerns because the future competitiveness in the U.S. economy hinges directly on the productivity of today’s youth. Poverty among children curtails educational attainment, thereby reducing the children’s future productivity as workers. The issue of economic competitiveness will intensify the congressional focus on childhood poverty and its effect on future workforce quality.
3. As support structures within families narrow, issues of both child care and elder care will evolve and intensify. The needs of children in vulnerable or disintegrating family structures are already spilling over into the public sector and probably will increase, broadening the demand for various forms of early childhood intervention.
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I. INTRODUCTION

In 1982, this nation saw the birth of 3.7 million babies who will—if they stay in school long enough to graduate—make up the next century's first high-school graduating class, the class of 2000. One-fifth of them are nonwhite; one-tenth are of Hispanic origin. By age 18, the majority of these children will have spent at least part of their youth in a single-parent family—one of every five of them was born to a single mother. Nearly three in five of these children have a mother in the work force.

The lives of children born in 1970—just one "childhood" ago—were markedly different from the lives of today's children. Fewer were born to single mothers or experienced life in a single-parent family in their youth. When they were in grade school, the majority of their mothers were full-time homemakers.

By early next century, the class of 2000 will be young adults and new members of the work force. They will compete within a global labor market, where verbal and mathematical literacy and intellectual skills will count more than ever.

By the time they have matured into their thirties, their payroll taxes will be supporting the Social Security benefits for the baby boom generation, the largest generation of Americans ever. The class of 2000 will turn 65 halfway through the next century. Their lifespan is projected to extend three years beyond the 82-year life expectancy of today's 65-year-olds.¹ This extension will add healthy and active years to many people's lives but burden some older people with additional years of costly ill health and functional impairment.

Like the flow of deep ocean currents, demographic shifts generate motion that is gradual but steady in direction and enduring in effect. They may subtly shape policy issues and occasionally lend urgency to them. The effects of such shifts endure in the redistribution of wealth and income across generations and regions of the country, in the characteristics of the poor, and in the changing relationships within families and between family members and the workplace. Demographic shifts also can widen or narrow margins for policy action. For instance, recruiting an all-volunteer military force is made more difficult by a shrinking number of young people.

This Note identifies the probable directions of change that will flow from population shifts over the next several decades and explores the potential effects on several areas of future congressional concern.

Section II reviews changes advancing on five fronts:

- The circumstances of children's families.
- The characteristics of the work force.
- The racial and ethnic makeup of local electorates.
- The aging of the population.
- The population's geographic distribution.

Section III delineates several broad areas that may be of future concern to Congress, illustrating some of the ways that demographic change may gradually reshape the policy issues of the day. Its typically steady and enduring advance can eventually undermine basic assumptions behind existing policies and programs; create or intensify lasting needs; narrow margins for policy action; and, in many instances, promote interest groups that force issues onto the national agenda.
II. WHAT LIES AHEAD

Peering ten years into the future, demographers project certain changes with confidence but regard other changes as foreseeable only in direction, not magnitude. Even uncertain projections, however, help to form images of the future, whose realization can be facilitated, hampered, or even prevented by public policy.

Underlying demographic pressures will promote interest groups around particular issues and also generate common national concerns. Therefore the scope of the projections considered here is national. The future they envision, of course, is based on an average of diverse regional and local experiences. Particular areas of the country may lead or lag behind, amplify or modulate the national trend, but can seldom escape its effects.

One such interest group—working parents with young children—has materialized because of the steady influx of young women into the workforce and because of changing economic conditions in which two incomes have become a necessity of middle-class life. Another group—working adults with frail elderly parents—is emerging as the changing structure of families affects their capacity to provide long-term care. The baby bust of the 1970s is creating, in the 1990s, demographically induced labor shortages that have fostered concerns within the business community over the increasing scarcity of qualified entry-level workers and a call for an overhaul of the public education system. Although the intensity and timing of these developments can vary across the nation, demographic shifts exert gradual but cumulative force on national social legislation and budgets. Eventually they reshape the nation’s political agenda.

RECONFIGURATION OF CHILDREN’S FAMILIES

One area of demographic change is the altered family circumstances of children. Families today are profoundly different from those of several decades ago. Barring a reversal of current trends, the year 2000 will be a time when:

• More than one out of every four children is born to an unmarried woman.
• More than two of every three children under age 6 has a mother who is employed outside the home.
• Fewer than three of every ten adolescents will have lived in a continuously intact family through all 18 years of their youth.

As of 1989, these trends have advanced further within the black than within the white community, but they are also increasing among whites (see Fig. 1). The majority of black children already live in single-parent families. The corresponding proportions for white children, while much lower, more than doubled between 1970 and 1989 to 19 percent. Among Hispanic children, close to one in three lived with only one parent in 1989. Among children who were born in 1980, as many as two of every three white

![Graph showing percentage of children living with one parent from 1970 to 1989 for Black, Hispanic, and White populations.](image-url)

**SOURCE:** U.S. Bureau of the Census.

**Fig. 1**—Trend in percentage of children under 18 who live with one parent, 1970-1989
children and 19 of every 20 black children will live in single-parent families at some time in their youth.\textsuperscript{1}

One reason why children's families are changing is that more of the women having children are not married. Nationwide, in 1988 unmarried women bore one million children, or 26 percent of all births that year, the highest proportion ever. Among black women, 63 percent of all births in that year occurred out of wedlock; among white women, 18 percent.

Another reason for this change is that original marriages no longer last a lifetime as they did in earlier generations. Among women in their late 20s and 30s, for example, 54–56 percent of original marriages are projected to dissolve (see Fig. 2).\textsuperscript{2}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chart}
\caption{Fig. 2—Percentage of first marriages projected to end in divorce, selected age groups}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{1}Hofferth, 1985. Other plausible projections imply levels only moderately different from these. See Bumpass, 1984; Martin and Bumpass, 1989; Norton and Glick, 1986.

\textsuperscript{2}These levels may be even higher, according to more recent data (Martin and Bumpass, 1989).
The paths leading children into single-parent family settings are distinctly different for blacks and whites. The majority of black children are born into them, whereas the majority of white children end up with one parent as a result of marital disruption (see Fig. 3). By 1988, 54 percent of all black children living with one parent had been born to a mother who never was married, whereas 72 percent of all white children had entered that state because their parents separated or divorced.

These demographic changes have wide-ranging importance for children today. Surely the most telling material indicator of that change is the rise in child poverty since the early 1970s. In recent years, the United States has managed to reduce poverty—but only among elderly people. For them, the results have been impressive, with the

![Graph showing family circumstances of children living with one parent, by race](image)

**Fig. 3**—Family circumstance of children living with one parent, by race
percentage of elderly people living in poverty falling from close to a third in 1968 to about 12 percent by 1988. Poverty among children, however, has grown worse (Fig. 4).\textsuperscript{3}

Another significant indicator is the increase in what has been labeled the "new morbidity of childhood": developmental delays, learning difficulties, and emotional and behavioral problems. The prevalence of emotional and behavioral problems, for example, varies from 8 percent among children in intact two-parent families to 19–24 percent among children in nonintact ones (Fig. 5).

Other indicators show an increasing number of children are disadvantaged even before they are born. The poor prenatal care their mothers received and many children's

\textbf{Fig. 4—Poverty now affects children most}

\textsuperscript{3}These trends have been recognized for some time. Samuel Preston called attention to them in his 1984 presidential address to the Population Association of America and subsequently in \textit{Scientific American} (see Preston, 1984). The recognition persists, as newly updated statistics reestablish the facts (for example, National Center for Children in Poverty, 1990).
Fig. 5—Prevalence of psychologically troubled children, by type of family

Prenatal exposure to drugs affect their physical health and cognitive development and degrade their eventual productivity as adults. The future needs of children that result from the actions of their parents, or inaction by society, will eventually make claims on public sector resources for maternal health care, intensive pediatric hospital care, daycare, antidelinquency and drug abuse programs, and other child-centered efforts.

Childhood also has been transformed by the absence of a full-time parent at home during the day. With two out of three mothers typically in the workforce, the need for supervision of children is imposing unprecedented demands on schools, public libraries, and other sources in the public sector, and also on employers and agencies in the private sector.
LABOR FORCE MAKEUP AND PARTICIPATION

Long-term shifts in the makeup of the labor force and in employment patterns constitute a second broad area of demographic change. The aging of the workforce as the baby boom generation advances into its middle and later working years will strengthen both national productivity and savings. Although the pace of growth in the workforce will moderate, a growing proportion of all workers will be at their potentially most productive ages. Additionally, a continuing influx into the workplace of young women, mothers of young children, and older women who have finished raising their families will boost the proportion of all working-age adults who are income earners and taxpayers.

The full potential of this productivity gain depends on the strength, or weakness, of people's readiness and ability to work at various stages in their lives, the expansion of opportunities for part-time and temporary employment, and other factors amenable to policy influence. For example, early retirement, before age 65, has become the norm among men. By age 62, nearly half of all males have withdrawn from the labor force; that is, they are neither working nor looking for work.\(^4\) Staying in the workforce, however, will be more attractive in the years ahead because of (1) tax, social security, and pension benefit incentives that encourage workers to extend their worklives rather than to retire; (2) a general tightening of labor markets that raises real wages; and (3) a broadening of employment options available to older persons who want to work (Herz and Rones, 1989).

Some developments, such as changes in age structure, can be foreseen with near certainty. Others discussed below are problematic—that is, how fully they will materialize depends on how Americans respond to many unfolding developments.

Changes in Age Structure

Until recently, national labor markets were swamped with newly entering workers as the baby boom generation reached adulthood and a steadily rising proportion of young women joined the workforce. Labor markets have now digested this bumper crop of entry-level workers, and the outlook has changed (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1988).

\(^4\)The trend toward early retirement has been largely absent among women (although the concept of retirement here is more complex). For elaboration see Herz and Rones, 1989, footnote 1.
Two certain developments are tied to the age makeup of the population. As the 1990s progress toward the next century, the workplace will contain proportionally more middle-age workers and fewer young ones (Fig. 6). As the baby boom generation matures, the number of workers between the ages of 35 and 54 will increase to almost half of the workforce, up from 40 percent in 1988. The number of workers under 35 will decline. Measured absolutely, there will be 3.8 million fewer workers age 25 to 34 by the turn of the century than there were in 1988. Shortages of entry-level workers are also likely to become more widespread in the 1990s as the baby bust generation of the 1970s reaches working age, a development that will bring employers, the military, and other institutions into greater competition.

Entry-level labor markets have already tightened, and labor supply shortages have hit entry-level jobs, boosting hourly pay in certain localities and sectors of the economy. As the labor shortage progresses, it will force more and more employers to pay higher entry-level wages to attract skilled workers and devote more resources to train and

![Bar chart showing labor force age makeup: Projected changes between 1988 and 2000.](image)

Fig. 6—Labor force age makeup: Projected changes between 1988 and 2000
develop those with less skills. Alternatively, employers could change the structure of work to retain skilled older workers who might retire without an offer of a flexible or part-time schedule, or women with family responsibilities who might have to quit without such flexibility. Shortages of qualified workers may also coexist with a surplus of unqualified job seekers, especially among minorities who have not fared well educationally.

Changes in Gender Makeup

The makeup of the workforce in the decades ahead will reflect the continuing influx of younger generations of women. During the remainder of this century, women will constitute 63 percent of new entrants to the workforce.⁵ A comparison across generations provides clear evidence of the increased proportion of younger women who are working. Nearly three-fourths of women now in their early 40s are in the labor force, but when they were in their early 20s, only 50 percent were working (see Fig. 7). Among women currently in their early 20s, over 70 percent are already in the labor force, and their participation seems likely to surpass that of previous generations.

Varied Work Schedules⁶

Finally, the schedules of American workers have grown more varied as increasing numbers of them favor alternatives to the standard 40-hour, five-day work week. These alternatives reflect diversity within the workforce itself. Parents with preschoolers, semi-retired older workers, middle-aged workers caring for elderly parents, and others have established themselves in work situations offering schedules that accommodate their personal lives.

Although the majority of workers still maintain a 40-hour, five-day work week, other schedules are emerging. One is a simple, compressed work week—40 hours of work completed in less than five days—a schedule that men and women alike have come to adopt. Employment in such schemes increased about 4.5 times as fast as did total employment between 1973 and 1985. Another scheduling alternative involves compressing more than 40 hours per week within the confines of a five-day week or less, holding two or more days free for other activities. Yet another scheme being adopted

⁶The discussion and data in this section are drawn from Smith, 1986.
Fig. 7—Actual and projected generational changes in working lives of women involves spreading 40 or fewer hours of work over 5–1/2 or more days per week. Other alternatives include job sharing, a regular part-time schedule, and flextime, which stagger starting and stopping times for an eight-hour day over a 12-hour schedule.

The prevalence of alternative work schedules has not been projected into the future. These recent trends are indicative of further diversity in the 1990s as workers accommodate to changes in their family responsibilities and in the economy.

RACIAL AND ETHNIC DIVERSIFICATION

By the year 2000, today’s politically salient minority groups—blacks, Hispanics, and Asians—will make up a slightly larger share of the total U.S. population than they do today. Blacks will increase from 12.3 percent of the population in 1989 to 13.1 percent
in the year 2000; Hispanics, currently 8 percent, will grow to 9.4 percent. Other races, primarily Asians, will increase from 3.4 percent to 4.3 percent.\footnote{U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1986, 1989.}

Far more important than these national shares are the distinctive regional and local patterns of population distribution. Hispanics and Asians are highly clustered in a few regions of the country. In 1989, 73 percent of all Hispanics lived in just California, Texas, New York, and Florida; in 1980, 49 percent of all Asian-Americans lived in just California and Hawaii.\footnote{U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990a; Gardner, Robey and Smith, 1985. The terms "Asian" and "Hispanic" delineate broad statistical reporting categories, not single racial or ethnic groups. Asian-Americans encompass populations as diverse as Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Filipinos, and Pacific Islanders. Likewise, Hispanics (who have the bond of a common language) come from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and increasingly from Central and South America. Some are recent immigrants and see their residence in the United States as impermanent; others have been citizens for generations.} Although Hispanic and Asian populations are concentrated regionally, they do not live in consistently segregated communities within those regions.

Blacks by contrast are more evenly distributed by region but are highly segregated from whites on a local residential basis. Approximately one-quarter of the nation's black population lives in hypersegregated urban environments, among them metropolitan Baltimore, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia (Massey and Denton, 1989).\footnote{"Hypersegregation" as measured by Massey and Denton refers to the multidimensional layering of segregation along five dimensions: (1) evenness, or the degree to which the percentage of minority members within residential areas equals the citywide minority percentage; as areas depart from the ideal of evenness, segregation increases; (2) exposure, or the degree of potential contact between minority and majority members, reflecting the extent to which groups are exposed to one another by virtue of neighborhoods in common; (3) clustering, or the extent to which minority areas adjoin one another in space, being maximized when minority neighborhoods form one large, continuous ghetto and minimized when they are scattered widely in space; (4) centralization, or the degree to which minority members are settled in and around the center of an urban area, usually defined as the central business district; and (5) concentration, or the relative amount of physical space occupied by a minority group; as segregation rises, minority members are increasingly concentrated within a small, geographically compact area (Massey and Denton, 1989, p. 373).} Immigrant populations also tend to live close to each other in defined neighborhoods.

Racial and ethnic diversification, and the distribution of different minority groups by region and within communities, will place increasing pressure on the basic institutions
of American society. The most visible changes should occur in five areas, identified by the Population Reference Bureau (1989, p. 11):

- School systems will be educating a more diverse student population, more of whom will lack basic English language and learning skills.
- Certain states and municipalities will be challenged to absorb immigrant groups into their local economies and address their social and cultural needs.
- Court systems will be called upon to resolve more minority disputes over affirmative action and voting rights.
- Minority populations will become more active in the political process, pressing for greater representation within all levels of government and within political party structures.
- Immigration policies will be refashioned in response to the need for a skilled labor force and to foreign political developments spurring mass international migrations.

Demographic change has already altered the racial and ethnic makeup of local electorates. The country we once called a great melting pot is now a racial and ethnic mosaic in which different peoples tend to keep their identities. It is made up not just of whites, blacks, and Hispanics but a multitude of nationalities and ethnic subgroups as well.

It is a mosaic that varies from city to city. In St. Paul and Missoula, it contains Hmongs from Southeast Asia; in Atlanta and Providence, Cambodians; in Des Moines and Sioux City, Tai Dam and Vietnamese; in Arlington, Virginia, Salvadorans and other Central Americans; in Hartford, Jamaicans, Puerto Ricans, and assorted Asian populations. California’s cities contain a dazzling array of nationalities and ethnic groups including Filipinos, Koreans, Vietnamese, Hmong, Armenians, and Japanese, along with Latinos and blacks.

As this human mosaic becomes more complex, it will transform not only the composition of the voting electorate, but eventually local governance. The social, economic, and cultural diversity of these national and ethnic groups should increasingly nullify any tendency they might have to combine forces into a unified "minority" voting
bloc. Instead, alliances will form and reform among different ethnic groups, demonstrating the many different ways to make a majority.

Racial/ethnic diversification will be most advanced among younger people, especially school children, and will be highly localized in its expression. California affords an instructive illustration, given how far diversification has advanced there (Payne et al., 1988). Its three largest minorities—Hispanic, Asian, and black—constituted 40 percent of the population in the late 1980s. By the year 2000, these three minorities are projected to make up 48 percent of all Californians (and 60 percent of those under age 20). San Francisco County is projected to be 65 percent minority by the year 2000, with Asians the predominant group; Los Angeles County is projected to be 60 percent minority by then, with Hispanics the predominant minority.

Adding further complexity here is the fact that undocumented immigrants often form families and bear children, who, as U.S. citizens by birth, are members of "binational" families. Concentrations of such "binational" families in certain jurisdictions complicates the issue of access to social services and the definition of a "resident" (Chavez, 1988).

The growing presence of these minority groups nationwide also will be evident in the workplace, especially among young entrants to the workforce (see Fig. 8). During the remainder of the century, three of every five of the new entrants to the nation's labor force will be a member of a recognized ethnic or racial minority. Hispanics are projected to constitute 30 percent of these new workers between 1989 and 2000, blacks 18 percent, and Asians and other minorities 12 percent.

**POPULATION AGING**

In the future, there will be more older Americans who will live longer than ever before. The main effect of the aging of the population will be felt during a short period of intensive change that will commence in the year 2011, when the first members of the baby-boom generation will reach age 65.

In 1990, 31.6 million Americans are 65 or older, and they make up 12.6 percent of the nation's population (see Fig. 9). By the year 2025, when most of the 1946–64 baby-boom generation will have reached age 65, the elderly population will number 59.7

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10U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1989, Table 4.
million and constitute 20 percent of the nation's population. That share exceeds the proportion of elderly people in the state of Florida today—barely 19 percent. The extreme elderly, defined here as people 85 and older, constituted 10 percent of the 65-and-older population in 1989; they will increase to nearly 16 percent by the year 2010 and will peak at 24 percent by 2080.

Population aging will affect the lives of both the elderly and the nonelderly (see Cutler et al., 1990). Social Security taxes will rise, and more of the federal budget will flow to the elderly. The most palpable effects will be felt locally and within families, as chronic health problems and limitations on the routine activities of daily living increase the need for long-term care. Social Security and other federal entitlement programs distribute local dollars but not local care.

Rising life expectancy of the elderly means that more of the "young elderly" (persons in their 60s and early 70s) will themselves have very old surviving parents.
With some luck, such "two-generation geriatric" families will not run short of money. They will need care. How much care, and how it is to be provided, are questions shrouded today in demographic uncertainty.

One unknown is how much further life expectancy may rise. In 1960, an average 65-year-old person could expect to live 14.4 more years (see Fig. 10), a gain of 2.5 years since 1900. By 1989, the number had risen another 2.8 years, to a life expectancy of 17.2 more years or 82.2 years total. The gain over just that 29 years, then, exceeds the entire gain of the first six decades of the century. Improved access to medical care, new health care technology, life-style changes, and a widespread concern with physical fitness may have all played a part. Adults today are smoking less and exercising more, and these better health habits may bestow lasting benefits. Medical research also continues to find better ways to control the diseases associated with aging, such as cardiovascular disease and stroke.
Fig. 10—Past and projected increase in life expectancy at age 65

The life expectancy of elderly people has increased because of recent reductions in mortality in old age. Current projections of the Census Bureau and the Social Security Administration assume that those reductions cannot be sustained indefinitely at recently observed rates. If such projections are low, however, they will underestimate life expectancy and thus the number of elderly in our nation's population, and the proportion who will have survived to be extremely old or frail. The range of uncertainty is quite broad. As seen in Fig. 10, the difference between the Census Bureau's high and low mortality assumptions implies as few as 17.5 or as many as 19.9 additional years of life beyond age 65. It remains to be seen whether recent mortality declines will be sustained by advances in prevention and therapy or biomedical breakthroughs.\(^\text{11}\)

A second uncertainty is whether longer life expectancy will add healthy and active years to life, or mostly years of ill health and functional impairment. At present, there is

\(^{11}\text{See Guralnik, Yanagishita, and Schneider, 1988.}\)
no consensus on this point, but the uncertainty is a crucial one for legislators because of its bearing on the amount and duration of hospital care, long-term care, and home care future elderly people will require. Projections by Rogers, Rogers, and Belanger (1989) suggest that the more dependent elderly population (defined as those chronically limited in activities of daily living) will increase substantially faster than will the total elderly population through about 2010.

A third uncertainty involves the traditional support structures within family units (which are, and will probably remain, central to long-term care of elderly persons in the community). In the past, adult daughters were traditionally the ones who provided elderly parents with home care. Today's smaller families, however, eventually will disrupt this custom. Baby boomers, having produced so few offspring, will have few adult children to fill the caregiver role when they grow old next century. Moreover, these prospective caregivers—women now in their 20s—typically hold jobs already, leaving little time for those traditional home responsibilities. Intercohort trends strongly suggest that at least four-fifths of women now in their 20s will be in the labor force when their parents reach old age. Few will be inclined to quit a paying job to become an unpaid caregiver to an elderly parent if any other alternatives exist.

A final uncertainty is where the pressures of these developments will be felt. That will depend on how the national phenomenon of an aging population diffuses spatially, in terms of timing and intensity (Morrison, 1990). In future decades, the elderly population will increase (at least relative to the rest of the population) in most communities. That increase will be highly variable at state and local levels, with widely differing consequences from place to place because elderly migration operates like a giant parabolic mirror, collecting distinctive types of individuals from everywhere and concentrating them in certain places. Retirees who are healthier and more prosperous tend to move to certain areas with equable climates, such as Arizona. Other areas, such as Mississippi and western Pennsylvania, tend to lose young adults seeking better employment opportunities; those who stay tend to be older, often poorer, people who "age in place."

Will the future needs of an aging population intensify in "sunbelt" communities in direct proportion to the number of elderly who congregate there? Or will needs intensify disproportionately among the elderly who accumulate in economically stagnant

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communities as their relatives (and future caregivers) move away? By the year 2000, policy issues may concentrate more sharply on the circumstances surrounding elderly people's lives in distinct types of settings. The ensuing consequences for dependency in old age will matter to the elderly and their families, to the communities where they live or take up residence, and to those who design national policies to strengthen the fit among all three.

GEOGRAPHIC SHIFTS

The migration of retirees is but one facet of a broader area of demographic change involving migratory shifts of economically active persons among regions and communities. Broad regional movements of population often show year-to-year continuity. Such movements are difficult to predict, however, for specific areas within those regions, because unforeseeable developments often alter the long-term economic fortunes of individual areas. For example, in the late 1970s sharply rising energy prices initiated a prolonged boom in Texas, Oklahoma, and other energy-rich states that attracted a major influx from other states. That ended when global energy prices fell. In 1988, a major drought disrupted the agricultural economies of many farm-belt states, spurring outward migration.

Especially noteworthy are migrations out of or into the nation's nonmetropolitan areas, and the broad regional settings that may shape their economic destinies. After years of population decline, the 1970s was a decade of economic vitality and sudden population growth in many small, formerly stable communities. By the mid-1980s, however, coinciding downturns in agriculture, manufacturing, and mining and energy were producing widespread rural economic distress and decline. Job growth slowed, and high rates of unemployment became more pervasive. The generalized decline of the rural population resumed: By 1990, over half the nation's 2,383 nonmetropolitan counties had lost population during the preceding decade, compared with only one-fifth (460 counties) in 1980.

Many nonmetropolitan communities will again gain new residents and experience population growth during the 1990s. Their growth will come about both through population centralization, a process in which free-standing cities grow at the expense of

surrounding towns, and through metropolitan spillover, in which ever-widening zones of satellite communities spring up on the outer rural fringes of existing metropolitan areas. Although the pattern of growth will vary by region, the likely consequences should be similar in all growing areas: automobile traffic congestion (Pisarski, 1987), and replacements or additions to the infrastructure (U.S. Congressional Budget Office, 1988; Gakenheimer, 1989). Declining areas, both metropolitan and nonmetropolitan, will experience a downward economic spiral, a wastage of infrastructure, and a loss of higher-quality workers, leaving behind others who may be undereducated and underskilled for future job needs.
III. FORTHCOMING ISSUES

Demographic changes such as those discussed here will gradually reshape the nation's political agenda, creating advocacy groups for new legislation and altering the consequences of existing laws and policies. Demographic changes have influence on today's legislative issues—Social Security financing, dependent care, and health insurance, for example—and also help shape other issues—suburban traffic congestion and the aging urban infrastructure, for example—that are likely to intensify in the 1990s and call for legislative action.

The demographic forecasts and images of the future that legislators rely on are based on long-range assumptions, which may be surrounded by a considerable degree of uncertainty. Take, for example, future fertility rates and life expectancy in old age. The long-range assumptions held about their future course shape contemporary views on the financial solvency of such major entitlement programs as Social Security. For this reason, demographic assumptions require careful and constant scrutiny.

Demographic changes thus both intensify concern about existing issues and generate new issues, even as margins for policy action narrow. The following examples illustrate these points.

SOCIAL SECURITY FINANCING

The decade of the 1990s represents an Indian summer for the Social Security Trust Fund, a transitional period during which the large baby boom generation's contributions as workers will boost the Fund's size considerably. Starting in 2011, when the first of this generation reaches age 65, however, this favorable demographic context will begin to turn sharply unfavorable. As the baby boom generation enters retirement and becomes eligible for Social Security, the Fund will have to squeeze more dollars out of a slowly growing or possibly shrinking workforce to pay benefits to the swelling number of retirees.

The size of the future workforce will be influenced by current fertility rates, the future labor force participation rates of different groups, immigration policy, and many other variables. How long retirees continue to receive Social Security benefits is
dependent on their future life expectancy, which could increase more than existing forecasts now foresee. As the population ages, if mortality is delayed by medical advances, and if the workforce is smaller than expected, the income needs of the elderly may increase more than federal planners now envision and outstrip the ability of workers to support them.

By the year 2000 the first members of the large baby boom generation will be close to retirement, narrowing the margin for policy action. The 1990s, therefore, should be a period for refining policy options and making choices about how to cushion the Social Security Trust Fund from this forthcoming demographic imbalance, which is certain to occur but may be more severe than is currently assumed.

TODAY'S POVERTY AND TOMORROW'S WORKFORCE

Changing economic conditions affect the overall poverty rate from year to year, but over the long term, demographic shifts are more influential, shaping both trends in poverty and the characteristics of those classified as poor.\(^1\) Over the past three decades, two distinct demographic factors have reshaped the face of poverty: marital disruption and single childbearing. The increase in the proportion of families headed by a lone parent and of children living in such families has elevated the overall poverty rate, especially among children. Children’s poverty has also come to be concentrated in families headed by women. By 1989, well over half (57 percent) of all poor children lived in fatherless families, compared with less than a quarter (24 percent) of their 1959 counterparts.\(^2\)

The demographic etiology of poverty, compounded by inadequate prenatal care and nutrition, creates marked racial and ethnic differences in poverty rates. In 1989, 44 percent of black children and 36 percent of Hispanic children were poor, compared with only 14 percent of white children (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990b).

These high rates of poverty among contemporary minority children are worrisome now, and they also raise long-term concerns because poverty among children curtails educational attainment, and thus affects children’s future productivity as workers. The quality of the nation’s future workforce and its future competitiveness in the world economy will depend heavily on the future productivity of today’s youth (Committee for


ACCOMMODATING FUNCTIONAL CHANGES IN FAMILIES

American families have changed profoundly in the past two decades, and those changes have affected various functions families used to perform. As a result, social legislation now confronts a drastically altered background: Single women bear children; parents divorce; elderly family members reside separately from their adult children; and most working-age adults are employed, leaving no one available to care for young children or aging parents. Family members’ responsibilities to one another are hard to define and strengthen through legislation when it is based on views of what the family used to be but no longer is.

The demographic transformations that have already occurred have narrowed many families’ capacities to meet the ongoing needs of their dependent members. For example, one of every six pregnant women fails to get adequate prenatal care. When marriages end, fathers often become distanced from their children and cease to provide economic support. As more mothers enter the workforce, fewer adults remain at home to care for young children or ailing parents.

Future social legislation intended to reinforce families will have to accommodate these functional changes. As support structures within more families narrow, issues of dependent care, both child care and elder care, are likely to intensify. The needs of children in vulnerable or disintegrating family structures are already spilling over into the public sector and probably will increase, broadening the demand for various forms of prenatal and early childhood intervention, from foster care to Head Start programs.
REFERENCES


