

demography
+ diversity

Metropolitan Atlanta is the fastest-growing area in the nation, adding more than a **million people** in the last **seven years**. Each of these new residents impacts the Atlanta region in some way and there might be as many as four million more people here in the next 50 years. Whether it is deliberating how this growth impacts our energy consumption, our transportation and water systems, how we use our land or how an older and more diverse populace affects services like education and health care, the transforming nature of metro Atlanta demands forward thinking.

The Atlanta Regional Commission's Fifty Forward initiative is an ambitious visioning effort to delve into the critical issues that will shape metro Atlanta 50 years into the future.

This will be achieved through a series of public, open-house style forums held quarterly for the next two years, attracting the best national and international thinkers on a variety of key topics vital to the future success of metro Atlanta. Topics include sustainability, population and employment shifts, regional economic trends and future development patterns.



It's your future. Be heard.
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Fifty Forward co-chairs:

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Chattanooga Gas, Florida City Gas

Milton Little, Jr. , President,
United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta



The Changing Faces of the Atlanta Region. People make the place. And, all you have to do is look around to see the faces of our Atlanta region changing – literally, by the day.

When we ask what Atlanta of the future should be like, we are really asking who our citizens will be and how they will live, work and interact as part of a community. Future trends suggest that tomorrow’s residents will differ greatly from those of today.

We know that Atlanta is a fast-growing metropolis and this fact alone poses challenges in crafting a sustainable future. But, maybe even more significant to our future is how the makeup of our population will change in dramatic ways.

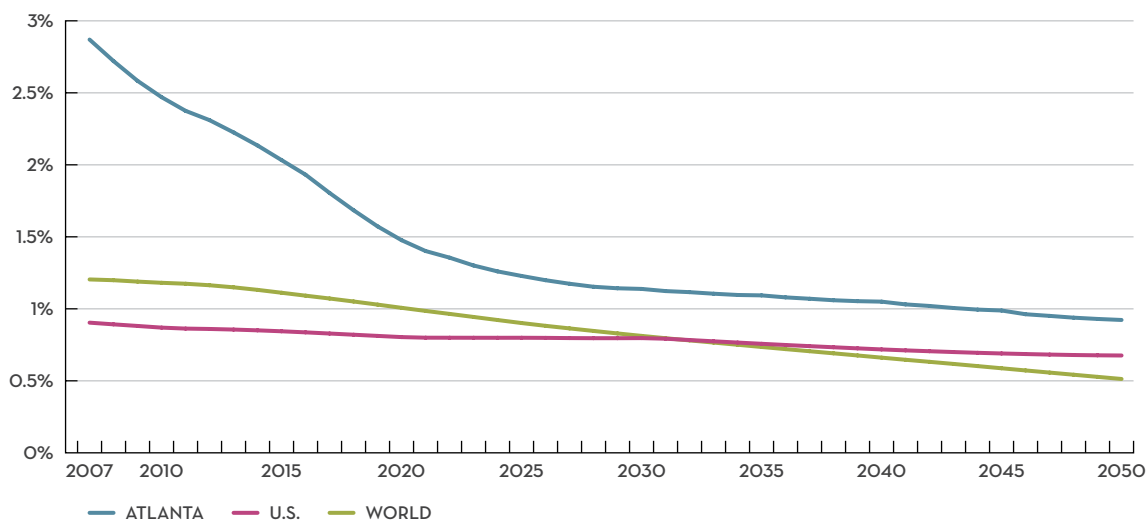
Consider this. Soon, there will be no majority racial/ethnic group. Our senior population will increase dramatically, while the largest group of young people since the baby-boomers will begin to dominate the workplace. The definition of “we” is changing in dramatic and exciting ways. Atlanta as an international hub is no longer a dream, but a reality. Our changing demography may be destiny, but we can choose how it shapes our community.

the atlanta region of tomorrow?

Think of Chicago today. Atlanta has been one of the fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the country for decades. We have added almost one million people in the last seven years alone. Some forecasters predict that Atlanta might have 9.5 million people by 2050, which represents more than four million more people than we have today. That number of folks also approximates the population of Chicago today. Remember, in the early 1980s when Atlanta surpassed the two million mark in population? What will the celebration be like in 40 or so years when we exceed nine million?

Local governments have been struggling to keep up with metro Atlanta's dizzying growth. Whether it's the halting traffic congestion because transportation infrastructure simply can't keep up, the difficulties in keeping sewage systems modern, the challenge of providing adequate water, building schools or preserving greenspace—local communities throughout the region already have their hands full, today. How will adding four million more people change that dynamic?

Annual Percent Change in Population—2007-2050



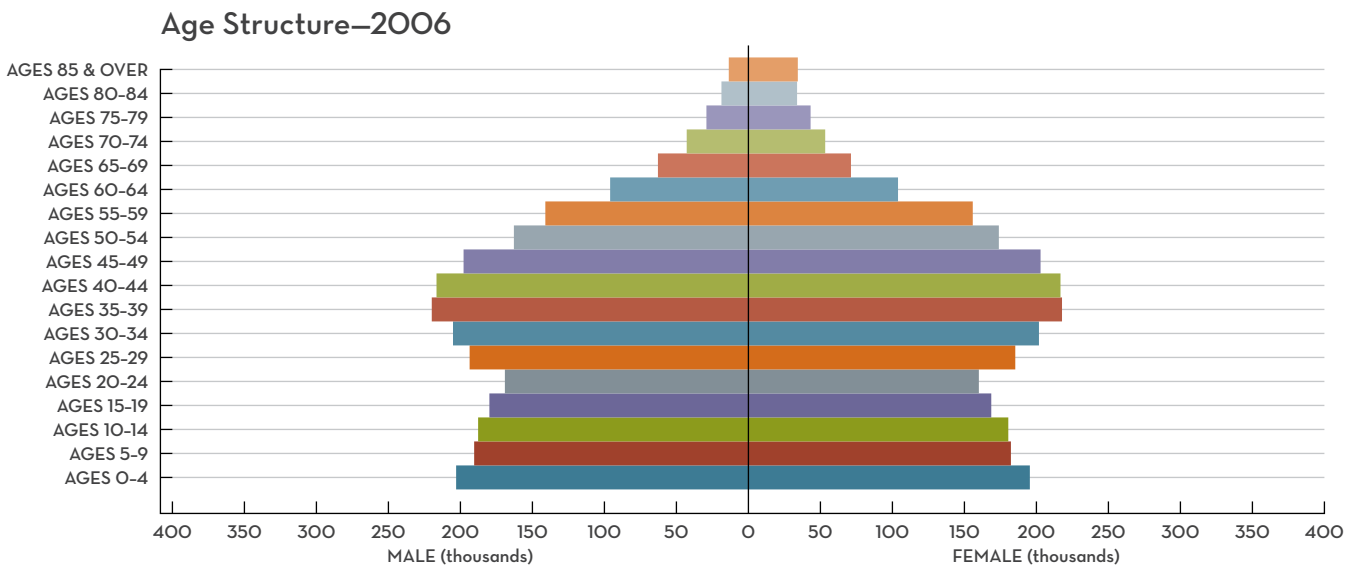
Metro Atlanta's year-over-year growth rate is expected to outpace both the U. S. 's and the world's each and every year between now and 2050, although the overall trends show slowing growth.

Source: REMI and U. S. Census Bureau. Note: These are not official ARC forecasts.

respect your elders...

There's going to be a lot more of them. Americans today are living about 20 years longer than they did at the beginning of the 20th century. Thus, during the post WWII years, the age structure looked similar to a pyramid—the young (at the bottom of the pyramid) outnumbered the old (at the top). Americans were living, on average, 68 years. Those born today are expected to live to almost 80. In essence, the demographic pyramids are turning into pillars.

In many ways, today's society is still organized with century-old life expectancies in mind. Pensions and Social Security work well when there are significantly more workers than dependents. Transportation systems and communities are designed with the younger worker, hence driver, in mind. Much of the current housing stock caters to younger families with children, although recent trends point to a renewed interest in urban living, with housing for the young, single professional. These changing demographic trends require us to think differently and reinvent the paradigm that has dominated thought for generations.

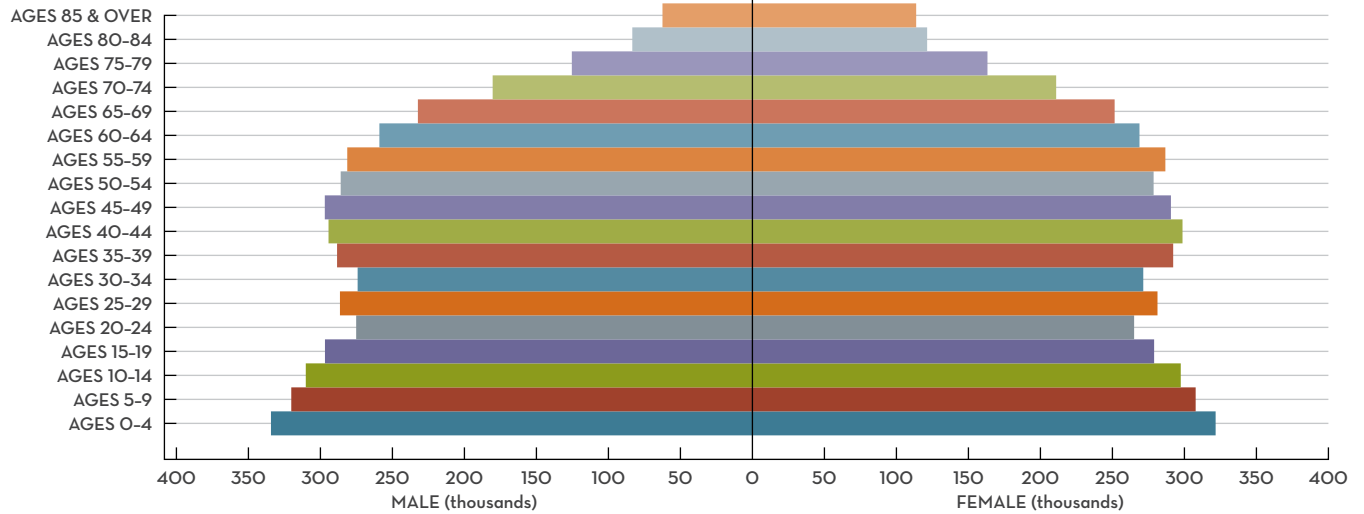


In 2006, the “bulge” in the middle represents metro Atlanta’s most populous age groups—those in the prime working ages. In this structure, workers (those age 20–64) outnumber those not in the labor force, with the latter being dependent on workers in some way—either directly through shelter and food costs, or indirectly through taxes for services like education and Social Security.

Source: REMI. Note: These are not official ARC forecasts.

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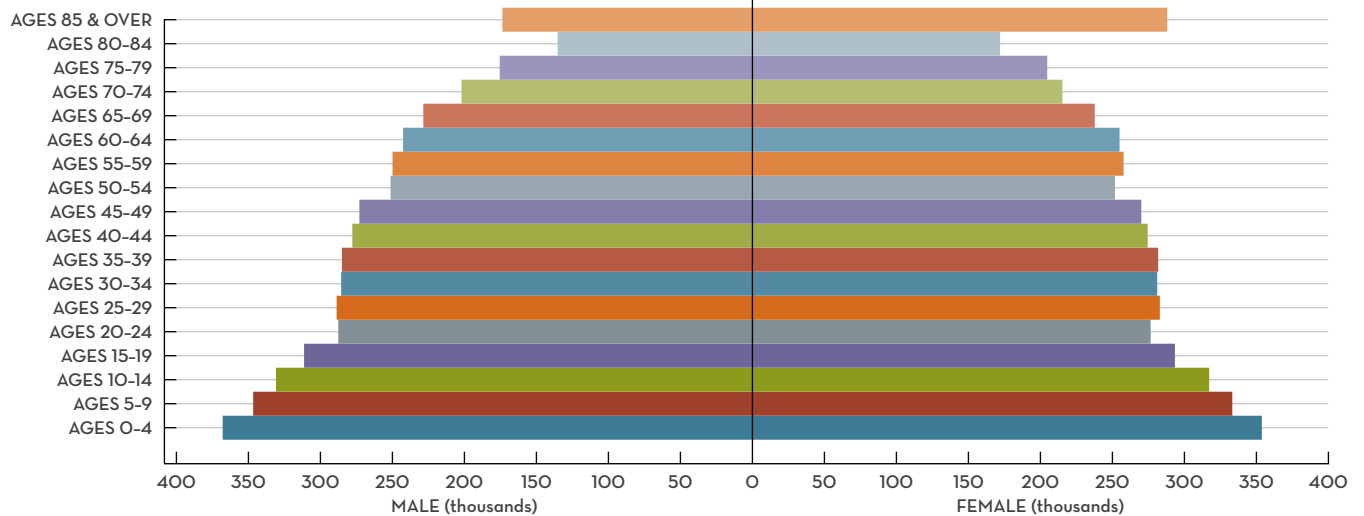
Age Structure—2030



Fast forward to 2030, and the structure might look more like a rectangular pillar, except for the very old at the top. There are roughly equal numbers of people in each age group, so the working-age groups no longer dominate.

Source: REMI. Note: These are not official ARC forecasts.

Age Structure—2050



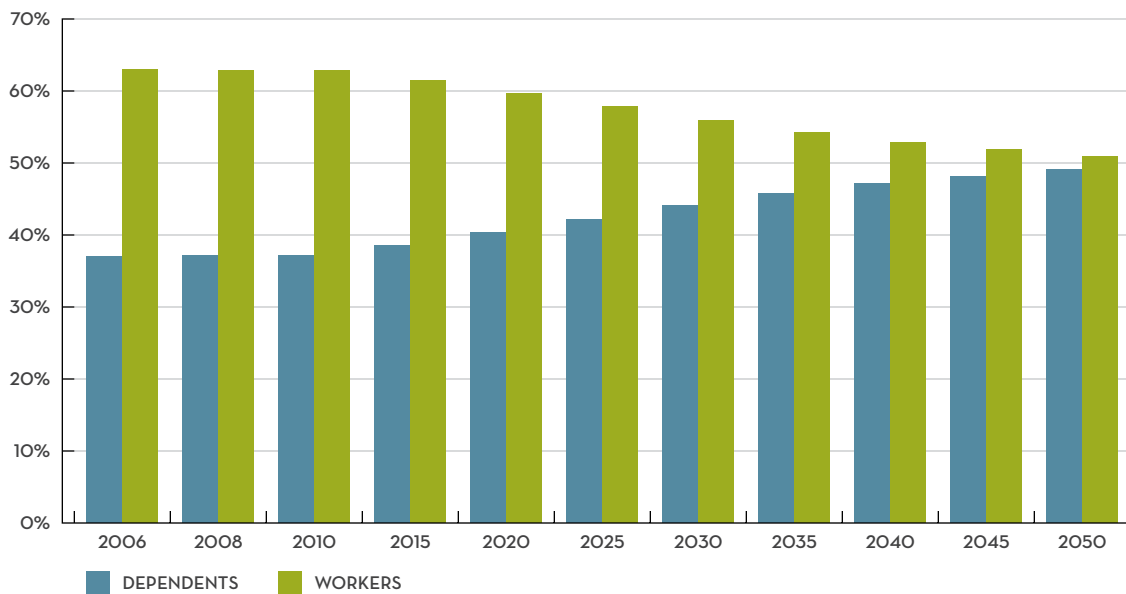
Finally, by 2050, the structure might be both top-heavy and bottom-heavy, with the very young and the very old being the most populous groups. While it's easy to see the differences visually, what does it mean for how society in 2050 might be organized?

Source: REMI. Note: These are not official ARC forecasts.

children really are our future

By now, we've all heard about the potential impacts the 76-million strong baby-boomer generation might have once they retire and leave the workforce. Concurrent with the graying of society is the emergence of another large group of people—called alternately Generation Y, the “Echo Boom” or the “Millennials.” Estimated at about 79 million, this group will be the parents and grandparents of the future. So when we talk of “pyramids” versus “pillars,” what we really are saying is there will be more older and younger people in the future, with the working-age groups being squeezed. Today, there are 10 workers for every six dependents—those 19 and younger and those 65 and older. In 50 years or so, that ratio will almost be one to one.

Dependents and Workers



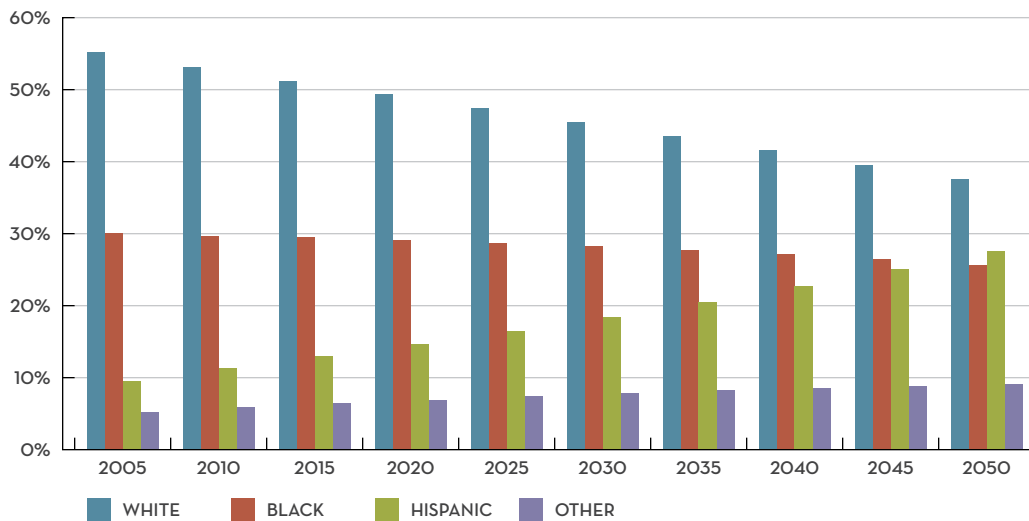
In 2006, approximately 63 percent of Atlanta's population was age 20 to 64, considered prime working ages, and only 37 percent of the population did not work and thus was dependent in some way on the working population. By 2050, it is expected that the numbers of workers and dependents will be roughly equal.

Source: REMI. Note: These are not official ARC forecasts.

international atlanta

Drive through any major corridor in Gwinnett, Cobb, DeKalb or Clayton counties, and it's easy to see that one of the primary drivers of metro Atlanta's recent growth has been an influx from those abroad. The U. S. Census Bureau estimates that some 20 percent of the new residents Atlanta gained since 2000 come from those born abroad. Given the growth we've already experienced from the foreign-born population, coupled with the fact that those born abroad tend to have higher birth rates, the immigrant population is expected to grow faster than the "native" population, with or without continued in-migration. This means there will not be a majority racial/ethnic group in the future.

Share of Total Population—2005-2050

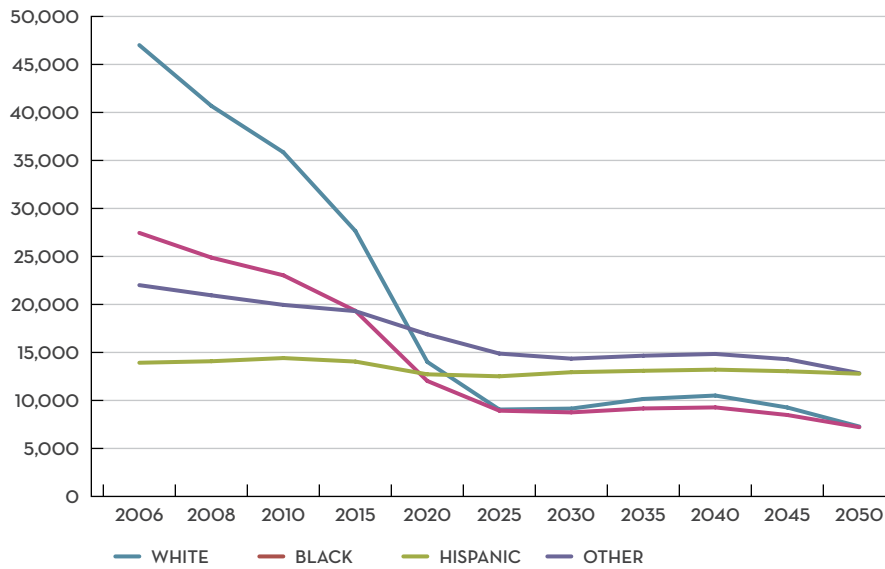


In 2005, Whites accounted for approximately 55 percent of the total population in metro Atlanta. By 2050, it is expected that Whites' share of the total population will drop to about 38 percent, while the Hispanic share is expected to increase from around 10 percent in 2005 to 28 percent in 2050.

Source: REMI. Note: These are not official ARC forecasts.

Population expands in two basic ways: Natural increase (births minus deaths) and net in-migration (in-migration minus out-migration). Due primarily to the labor force swelling from natural increase, net in-migration is expected to slow significantly for all racial and ethnic groups, particularly Whites, from about 100,000 migrants in 2006 to approximately 20,000 migrants by 2050.

Net In-Migration By Race/Ethnicity

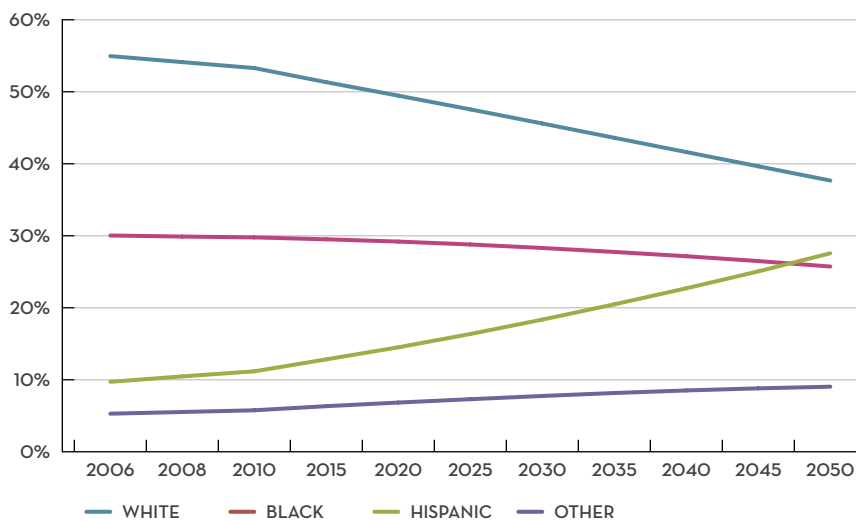


Net in-migration trends are expected to be essentially the same in the future, with a significant drop expected in net in-migration from Whites over the next decade or so. In fact, it is expected that beginning sometime near the year 2025 and continuing through 2050, net in-migration from Hispanics and those belonging to “other” racial and ethnic groups like Asians will outstrip net in-migration from Whites and Blacks.

Source: REMI. Note: These are not official ARC forecasts.

Growth from natural increases will play a more prominent role for the future of metro Atlanta, and these trends differ greatly, depending on race and ethnicity. For example, in 2006, 55 percent of the population that was here because of natural increase (i. e. they were here in 2005) was White. By 2050, that share is expected to decline to approximately 38 percent.

Percent of Population Accounted for by Natural Increase



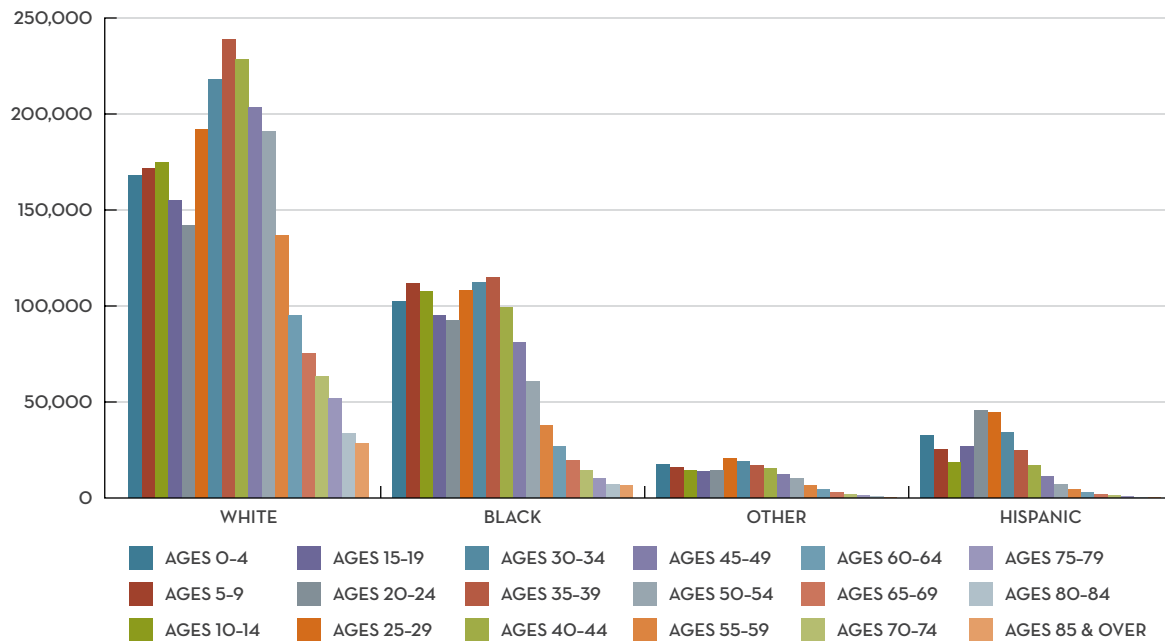
Depending on which race or ethnicity, trends in how natural increases affect the population vary significantly. Shares for Whites and Blacks go down; shares for Hispanics and “Other” go up.

Source: REMI. Note: These are not official ARC forecasts.

mosaic of cultures, both old & young

So, it's not just that metro Atlanta is growing, it's that we will be growing in different ways over the next 50 years compared to the previous 50. And it's not just that the trends show we are getting older, younger and more diverse, it's that these trends differ greatly depending on race and ethnicity. In 2050, it is expected that Whites will account for roughly half of all people 65 and older. Conversely, in 2050, it is expected that Hispanics will account for roughly 43 percent of all people 19 and younger.

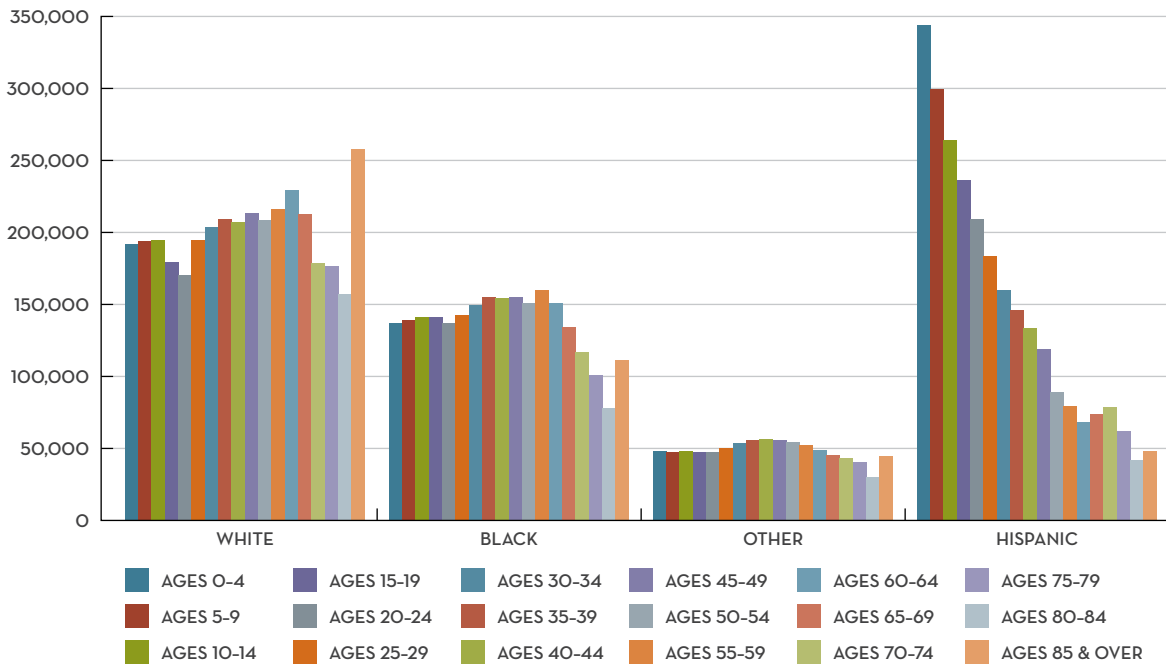
Age Structure by Race/Ethnicity—2000



In 2000, the basic age structure for each race or ethnicity is shaped similarly, with spikes in the prime working age groups, followed by steep declines in the older age groups.

Source: REMI. Note: These are not official ARC forecasts.

Age Structure by Race/Ethnicity—2050



Compare these with the expected age structures in 2050. The “shape” of the age structures change—numbers in each group even out, except for the very old. The story is radically different for Hispanics, however. The age structure for Hispanics looks very much like what the age structure looked like for the United States as a whole in the early to mid 20th century, with population in the youngest age groups far surpassing the oldest age groups.

Source: REMI. Note: These are not official ARC forecasts.

bowling alone and other implications

Leaders of metro Atlanta 50 or 60 years ago saw that demographic trends were changing and planned accordingly. They saw a much bigger Atlanta region with loftier aspirations. They built what would become the world's busiest airport, an extensive highway and transit system, Buford Dam and Lake Lanier and progressively embraced civil rights to support their vision of the Atlanta region of the future.

Leaders of today are also gazing into the future. Demography gives us clues as to the course we are on, but it is up to us create the path. Robert Putnam, author of "Bowling Alone," conducted a massive study of civic engagement. The results are startling, and not in a good way. He found that the greater the diversity in our communities, the less likely it is for those citizens to be actively engaged. They vote less, they volunteer less, they give to charity less and, perhaps most significantly, they trust each other less. In addition, one recent study (www.volunteeringinamerica.gov) found that both Georgia (43rd out of 51) and Atlanta (31st out of 50) already rank low in rates of volunteerism.

Given that our population will continue to diversify in the future, what are some actions we can take today to ensure that we don't choose to "bowl alone?"

How do we need to think differently about community building and the obligations and expectations of resident stakeholders in this increasingly global environment?

Just the numbers of people expected to be here in the future, regardless of the composition, will place great strains on our local governments to provide both basic services and those amenities that make a "place" a "home."

Where will all the new people live?

Will the greenspace and virgin lands of today be the subdivisions and malls of tomorrow?

Will Atlanta be like other large metro areas where the cost of housing is so prohibitive that it forces those with little means into particular areas and certain ways of life?

Given that fuel costs are likely to continue to rise, are we still going to design our communities in auto-oriented ways? Will the differing age structure of the future require more and different types of transit services?

Our changing age structure portends more “dependents” and fewer workers. Again, it’s not just that we are growing older, but it is also that we are growing younger. Those in the middle, those who have had the traditional responsibility of caring for both the old and the young, are being squeezed.

Is the traditional notion of retirement – that we should encourage older workers to retire to allow a new wave of younger workers into the labor force – a relic of 20th century thinking?

How should society be organized to ensure the “dependents” of the future prosper along side the workers?

The large numbers of “Millennials” today interact with society in very different ways than earlier generations. They are of the digital age and grew up with personal computers, cell phones, MP3 players and electronic money. They are connected instantly to a dizzying array of information, entertainment, goods and services. This will alter today’s idea of governance. Government will be more transparent, and citizens will be able to react, in force, very quickly to any government action, all of which should lead to greater accountability.

Will our local, state and national governments adapt to new ways of citizen involvement or will younger citizens become more disaffected and disinterested in public affairs?

Several studies, including recent ones from the U. S. Census Bureau and the Georgia Department of Community Health show that disparities exist today among the races in income, education and health.

Are we going to allow those to persist going forward?

Could the keys to richer civic engagement lie in addressing and solving these problems?

With diverse populations swelling the labor force of the future, what implications might this place on our educational system? Today, for example, foreign-born populations, particularly Hispanics, are much less likely to have a high school degree and are much less likely to go to college.

What educational changes are needed to ensure metro Atlanta’s economy can compete globally 50 years from now?

Is the way we are designing communities today appropriate for the Atlanta region of tomorrow? How will the prevailing planning concepts of today change going forward?

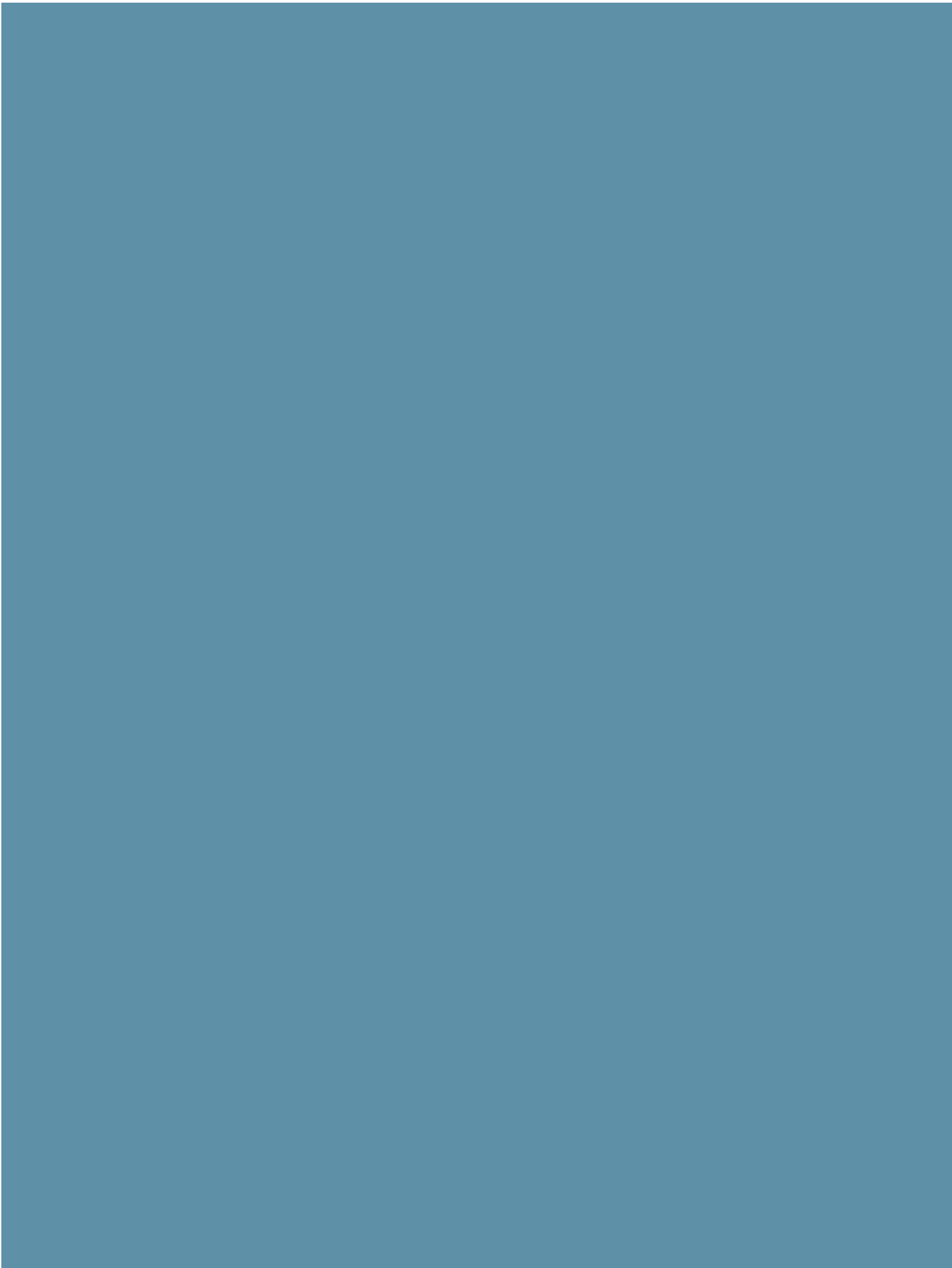
How will we adapt our transportation system to meet the needs of older adults who may no longer be able to drive or of international populations accustomed to greater access to public transportation?

With longer life expectancies, what does that mean for health care costs and provision?

These are just a few of the issues requiring deliberation and action. Dramatic changes will occur, and maybe these changes won’t happen exactly like those posited here, but we will look a lot different tomorrow than we do today. And, we get to choose how that shapes us.

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