



URBAN INVESTMENT  
STRATEGIES CENTER

KENAN INSTITUTE REPORT | FEBRUARY 2025

# THREATS TO OUR DEMOGRAPHY

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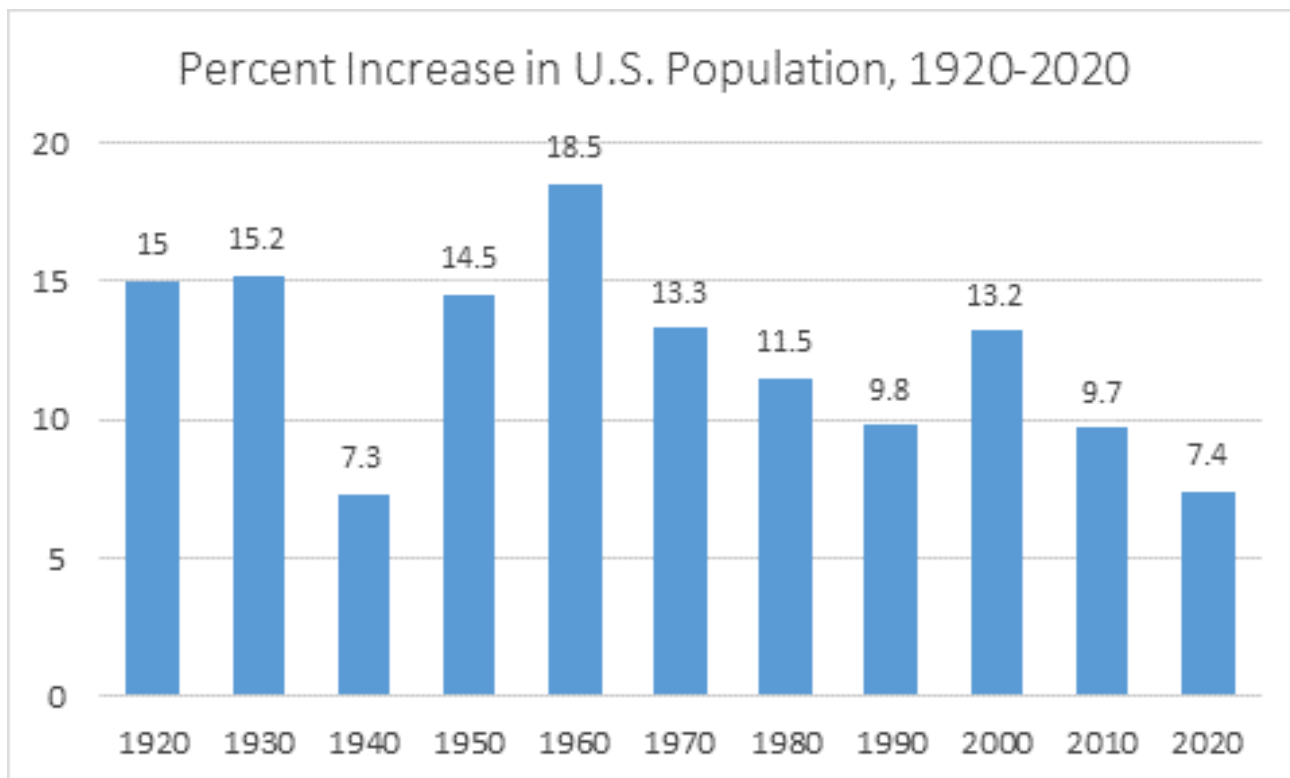
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# Threats to our Demography

White House Executive Orders on [immigration](#) and [diversity, equity, and inclusion](#) (DEI) highlight the need for reforms in both policy domains. But the current directives, owing to the well-documented [demographic turbulence](#) we are facing, threaten our nation's ability to [win the war](#) for talent and remain competitive in an ever-changing global marketplace.

We need a more humane and evidenced-based approach to immigration. Looking through the prism of the past 100 years, our national rate of population growth has been on a downward trajectory for the past six decades, as illustrated in [Figure 1](#). After peaking in 1960 (18.5%), the U.S. population growth rate has increased more slowly in every decade since. Strikingly, the U.S. population grew by only 7.4% between 2010 and 2020, which was the second slowest rate of growth in our nation's history behind the 7.3% growth rate during the Great Depression.

Figure 1

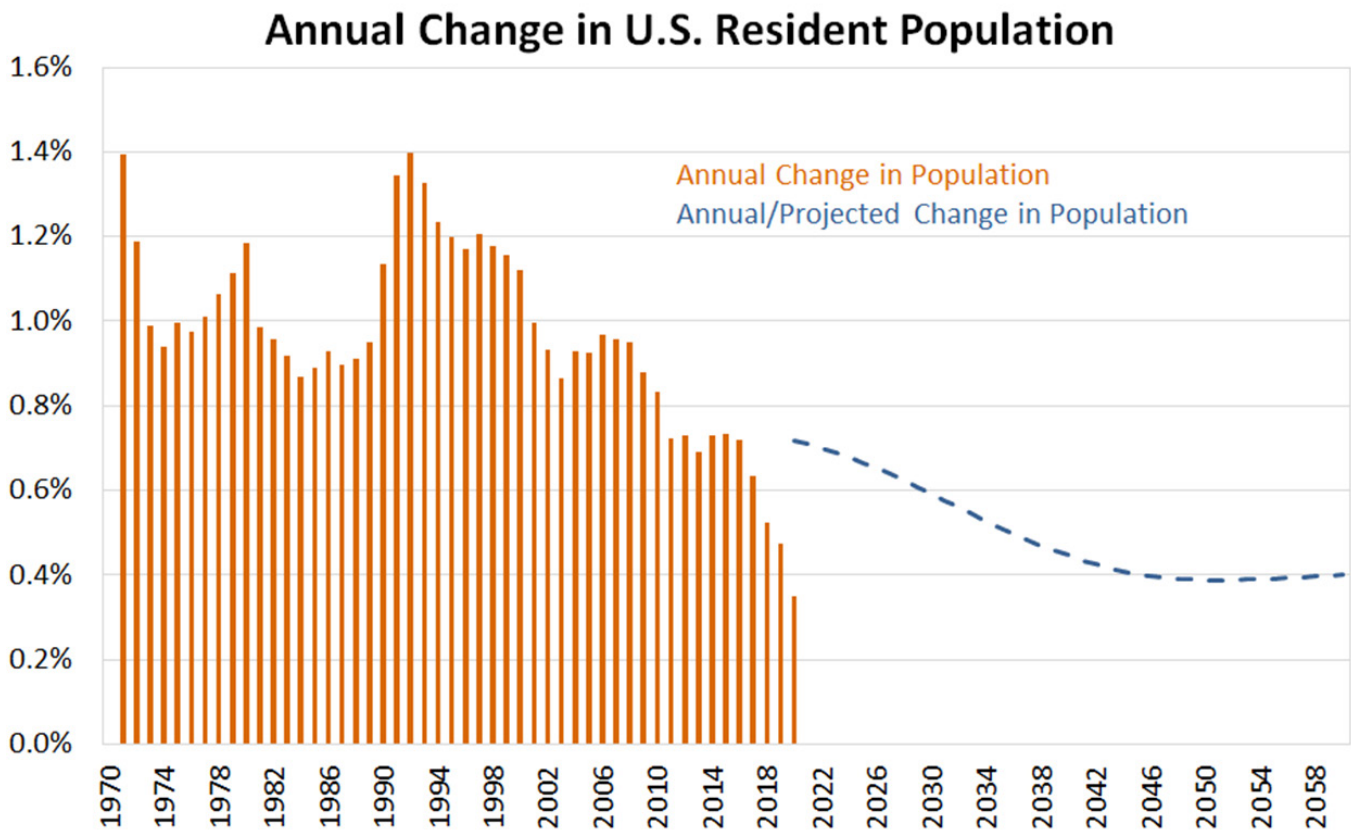


Source: [Bahrapour, Stevens, Blanco, and Mellnik, 2021](#).

Our slowing rate of population growth threatens our capacity to mobilize the requisite talent to propel business development and economic growth. And looking ahead the [Census Bureau](#) projects that the U.S. population will continue to grow at a slower rate between now and

2058, as Figure 2 from the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis illustrates, absent a steady flow of immigrants and retention of movers from abroad that currently help fuel U.S. economic growth and prosperity.

Figure 2



NOTES: The actual change in population is as of Dec. 22. The projected change is as of April 16 and displays the actual change from 1970 through 2019.  
 SOURCES: Census Bureau and Haver Analytics.

Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis

This slowing rate of population growth spanning multiple decades and projected to continue well into the future, as we have shown [elsewhere](#), is driven in part by declining fertility, non-Hispanic white population loss, normal age-related mortality, and premature deaths of despair, especially among prime working age males. Critically, the U.S. fertility rate has been below the replacement level

required to maintain a stable population since 2008; the non-Hispanic white population has declined by 7.2 million since 2010; and deaths due to lethal violence, suicide, and substance-abuse disorders has claimed the lives of well over 1 million since the late 1990s.

Research confirms these demographic disruptors have created a **demographic depression** in the U.S. workforce—a shortage of native born talent to fill critical roles in our economy. This, in turn, has enormous implications for marriage and family formation, K-12 and higher education enrollment, homeownership, and consumer purchasing power for other goods and services as well as the future viability of social safety net programs like Medicare and Social Security.

Our nation would be in even worse shape demographically were it not for the recent influx of immigrants. On average, according to Census Bureau’s annual population estimates, the U.S. population has grown by 2.1 million annually over the past four years (2020-2024). International migration, as Figure 3 shows, accounted for 83% of this net population growth during this period, which underscores the pivotal role immigrants are playing and will have to continue to play for the nation to grow and prosper.

Figure 3: International Migration as a Share of U.S. Net Population Growth, 2020-2024

Year	Share	Absolute Population Change
2020	32.1%	61,984
2021	72.0%	522,040
2022	88.3%	1,917,561
2023	82.2%	2,798,910
2024	84.3%	3,304,757
2020-2024	83.4%	8,596,252

Source: <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/2020s-national-total.html>

In addition to driving U.S. population growth, immigrants propel innovation and fill critical labor needs in our economy, including the difficult, dirty, and dangerous jobs, known as the 3D, that Americans do not like to do. They rebuild and breathe new life into economically distressed urban, suburban, and rural communities and generate new employment opportunities for American workers through their consumer purchasing power. They also create export marketing opportunities for U.S. businesses through their remittances to family in their home countries. Moreover, immigration is an age-selective process, meaning far more young people of childbearing age than older adults relocate to the U.S., which has implications for fertility-driven future population growth.

Under current demographic conditions, ending birth right citizenship, as has been proposed, will constrain future population growth and worsen the **impending enrollment** cliff we are currently facing in both K-12 and higher education, reducing along the way the talent pool available to promote prosperity in the years ahead.



Similarly, instead of hastily dismantling DEI programs and policies, we urgently need to take proactive steps to identify, inventory, and scale evidenced-based best practices and programs that embrace and successfully manage our nation’s growing diversity if we are to effectively develop, nurture, and retain the talent required to drive innovation, fill pressing labor needs, and create viable and safe communities as places to live, work, play, and do business. We must maintain a commitment to evidence-based diversity best practices because our population is simultaneously “browning” and “graying.”

Largely due to immigration but also white population loss, people of color--American Indians/Alaskan Natives, Asians, Hispanics, Native Hawaiians/Other Pacific Islanders, and people self-identifying as mixed race--are driving U.S. population growth. Because the non-Hispanic white population declined by 5.1 million between 2010 and 2020—a historic first for our nation--these groups, collectively, accounted for 100% of U.S. net population growth in the last decade (22.7 million). And between 2020 and 2023, people of color, as Figure 4 shows, continued to drive U.S. population growth (3.4 million) as the non-Hispanic white population experienced further decline (-1.9 million) during this period.

Figure 4: U.S. Population Change by Race/Ethnicity, 2020-2023

Decline			Growth		
Absolute Number	Percent	Race/Ethnicity	Percent	Absolute Number	
		All Races	1.0%	3,387,962	
		Not Hispanic	0.1%	395,180	
-1,935,901	-1.0%	· White			
		· Black	1.4%	595,822	
		· American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.9%	20,798	
		· Asian	5.7%	1,120,799	
		· Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	4.8%	30,038	
		2 or more Races	7.4%	563,684	
		Hispanic	4.8%	2,992,782	

Source: <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/2020s-national-detail.html>

Some have asserted that this demographic shift, popularly characterized as the **browning of America**, reflects a concerted effort to replace whites in our nation. However, because we are also an aging nation, it is hyper-critical that we reject such conspiracy theories and instead embrace and nurture our emergent demographic diversity. A large segment of the U.S. population is aging out of the workforce at the rate of 10,000 per day (the 81 million boomers born between 1946 and 1964) and older adults (65+) are living, on average, six years longer today than their counterparts did in 1935 when the Social Security program was established. Combined with declining fertility, these two demographic developments—aging boomers and extended longevity of older adults—contribute to what is commonly referred to as the **graying of America**.

Disaggregating U.S. population change by strategic age groups, as shown in Figure 5, illustrates the impact of these demographic forces on the U.S. total population, the working-age population, the future talent pipeline of pre-school age and school age populations, and older adults. Between 2020 and 2023, the older adult population grew far more rapidly (8.8%) than the total population (1%) and both young working adults (1.5%) and prime working age adults (1.5%). Principally reflecting the **deteriorating status of the American male**, the number of mature age workers declined (-2.1%) during this period and so did the pipeline of pre-school age (-3.9%) and school age (-1.2%) talent—the workforce of the future.

Figure 5: U.S. Population Change by Age, 2020-2023

Decline			Growth		
Absolute Number	Percent	Age	Percent	Absolute Number	
		All Ages	1.0%	3,387,556	
-750,715	-3.9%	Pre-school age (0-4)			
-644,633	-1.2%	School Age (5-17)			
		Young Adult Workers (18-24)	1.5%	463,424	
		Prime Working Age Adults (25-44)	1.5%	1,353,266	
-1,799,180	-2.1%	Mature Workers (45-64)			
		Older Adults (65+)	8.8%	4,795,800	

Source: <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/2020s-national-detail.html>.

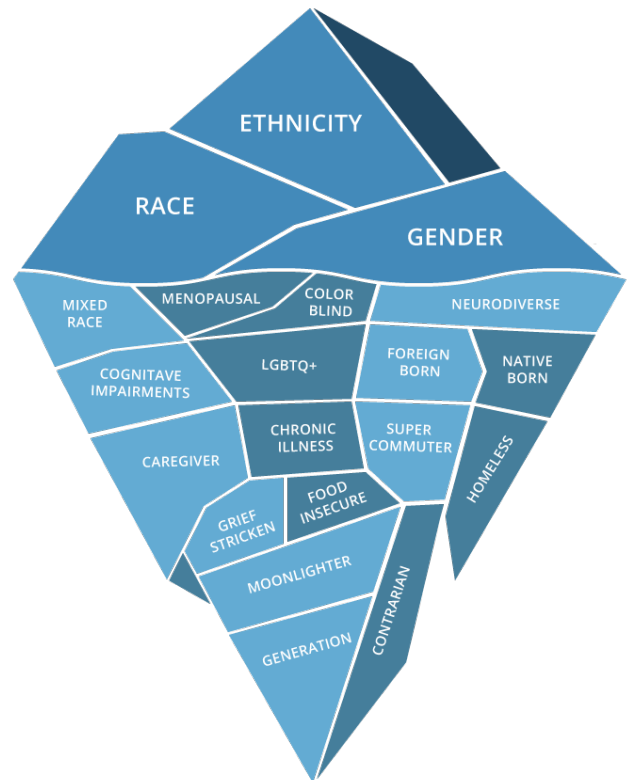
What this means is the U.S. has an **old age dependency** problem: the growth of the working age population (18-64) is not sufficient to generate the tax revenue and other resources required take care of our burgeoning older adult population and there is a diminishing pipeline of pre-school age and school age talent to support social safety net programs in the future due to declining fertility. Given this scenario, failing to embrace and leverage our immigration-driven demographic diversity for competitive advantage, including creating a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who have not broken the law, could spell disaster for our nation.

Plainly, our population is far more diverse today--not only in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and sex orientation, but also family structure, living arrangements, and financial wellbeing—and often face a more complex set of challenges than prior generations of Americans. In some instances, COVID-19 might have exacerbated existing challenges and added new ones, including residential dislocations due to the escalating cost of housing; loss of wages that supported family and education pursuits; additional care-giving responsibilities; and cognitive impairments and other health challenges that make learning and work difficult, if not impossible, without accommodations.

To effectively develop, nurture, grow, and retain the talent we need to support a robust economy and to create an America where everybody feels like they **belong**, we must look beyond the visible aspects of our demographic identities, such as race, ethnicity, and gender. Like the 90% of a freshwater iceberg that is submerged beneath the water surface and therefore invisible to the naked eye, we must strategically leverage our inherited and acquired traits and experiences that may not be visible but in reality, define who we are—individually and as a nation.

Selected examples of such characteristics that are prevalent in the U.S. population and workforce, defined as **iceberg demographics**, appear in Figure 6. Focusing on these and other less visible diversity traits force us to recognize and appreciate the overwhelming commonalities present in our nation’s populace and empowers us to embrace the ties that bind us together while dispensing of the “isms,” stereotypes, and phobias that drive us apart. The proactive steps required to leverage our nation’s iceberg demographics are outlined [here](#).

Figure 6: Iceberg Demographic Schema



Source: <https://kenaninstitute.unc.edu/commentary/shaping-north-carolinas-future-with-jim-johnson/>

## **Key Takeaway**

Given the disruptive demographic trends we are facing in this country, we need an all-hands-on deck approach to both human and workforce development to remain globally competitive. If we are to build upon and expand America's greatness, we must not only recognize the critical role that immigration must continue to play but also leverage evidenced-based best practice diversity policies, programs, and procedures as a form of enlightened self-interest.



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