
The Generational Future of Los Angeles: Projections to 2030 and Comparisons to Recent Decades

Executive Summary

This report reveals a dramatic generational change in the Los Angeles population. Comparing the last 20 years to the next 20 years, sweeping changes are found on many fronts. Explicit comparison to past decades highlights the magnitude of transition now under way. These include major changes in the immigrant origins of the population and rapidly slowing rates of racial and ethnic change. Of greatest importance are changes in the age mix of the residents, including shrinking numbers of children and dramatically higher numbers of seniors.

These demographic changes reverse some long-established trends and overturn old assumptions about Los Angeles and its residents. The reversals have already begun and can be observed in census data of 2010. But they are best understood when viewed over both a 20-year historical and 20-year future horizon.

Foresight on the current decade and coming years is drawn from detailed demographic projections newly developed after the 2010 census and presented in this report. The new Pitkin-Myers 2012 Generational Projections for Los Angeles are benchmarked to related projections completed in 2012 for California as a whole. This projection series, under development for more than a decade, includes details about immigrants and residents born in California that are not reported in other projections.

Ten major findings emerge from the 2012 Los Angeles generational projections. They reflect population dynamics whose changes may be surprising and which have very consequential impacts. (All data are for the greater Los Angeles population that resides in Los Angeles county.)

1. Continuing Low Population Growth. Much slower population growth is foreseen in these projections than was expected in the early 2000s. In fact, we now expect total population growth in each of the coming decades to resemble what was experienced in 4 of the last 5 census decades. The lone exception of high growth in the 1980s is increasingly viewed as an anomaly that has confused many observers about what is normal for a county as large and fully settled as Los Angeles.

2. Declining Number of Children. From 1990 to 2000, the number of children under age 10 had grown by 11.4%, but after 2000 the numbers of children turned steeply downward, falling 16.9% by 2010. The projection for the current decade is a further decline of 14.6% by 2020, with only a small further decline (4.0%) by 2030. Birth data show this decline commenced well prior to the onset of the recession in 2007, and in fact births in Los Angeles county in 2011 are fully 35% lower than in their peak year of 1990.

3. Annual Flow of New Immigrants is Plunging. Whereas the flow of new immigrants into Los Angeles soared upward in the 1970s and 80s, peaking in 1990 with a volume that is 234% higher than in 1970, after 1990 the inflow began to turn downward. In the last

AUTHORS

DOWELL MYERS,
JOHN PITKIN

SPONSORS

FIRST 5
LOS ANGELES

HAYNES
FOUNDATION

MARCH 2013

USC
Price

Sol Price School
of Public Policy

POPULATION DYNAMICS RESEARCH GROUP

decade the immigrant inflow has plunged to a level that is only 61% higher than in 1970. This drop-off has been much steeper in Los Angeles than in the whole of California.

4. Foreign-Born Peaked or Declining. What most distinguishes the Pitkin-Myers 2012 Generational Projections is the rich detail added about the immigrant or California-born origins of the population. The total foreign-born share of the Los Angeles population peaked at 36.2% in 2000 and is expected to remain stabilized at that level or slightly lower through 2030. This closely mirrors the trend foreseen for the whole of California. The expectation in earlier decades had been for a much larger foreign-born share in the population, although the 2001 edition of the Pitkin-Myers projections projected a leveling off, as has since occurred.

5. Long-Settled Foreign-Born. At the same time that the foreign-born have ceased growing as a share of the Los Angeles population, relatively fewer are newcomers and many more of the foreign-born will be long settled (20 or more years of residence in the U.S.). The share of local residents who are long-settled is expected to rise in 2030 to 22.5% of all foreign-born, compared to 17.3% in 2010 and 5.9% in 1990. Conversely, the share of foreign-born who are arrived in only the last decade is expected to fall from 9.2% in 2010 to 6.1% in 2030 (compared to 17.2% in 1990). The highpoint for the share that are newcomers was reached in 1990.

6. Rise of the Immigrant Second Generation. Barely 5% of children in Los Angeles are foreign-born, and yet the majority of children (60%) have immigrant parents. Thus a new second generation is being raised in Los Angeles, accounting for 21.5% of the local residents in addition to the 36% who are first-generation immigrants.

7. Slower Racial and Ethnic Change. Given the reduced rate of immigration, lower fertility, and slower overall population growth, the pace of racial and ethnic change is rapidly slowing. The growth of the Latino population was extremely rapid in the 1980s, increasing its share of Los Angeles residents by 10.2 percentage points, but that rate of increase sharply decelerated after 1990, so that the Latino share of the total population only rose 6.8 percentage points in the 1990s and even less, 3.2 percentage points, in the 2000s. Nonetheless, Latinos are still destined to

achieve a majority of the county's population, but that date has been substantially delayed from what might have been expected back in 1990. Los Angeles will continue in a prolonged period of racial balance when all groups are minorities.

8. A Soaring Senior Ratio. At the same time as children are declining in number, the ranks of those aged 65 and older are growing dramatically after 2011 when the baby boomers began aging past 65. Growth in the number of seniors in the coming 20 years amounts to 867 thousand in Los Angeles county, quadruple the growth in the previous 20 years (212 thousand). Meanwhile, with the ranks of young adults depleted by shrinking numbers of grown children, the ratio between seniors ages 65 and older and adults in prime working ages (25 to 64), is expected to rise dramatically. After remaining virtually constant in Los Angeles for 30 years at 18 or 19 seniors per 100 working age, the ratio is projected to soar from 18.7 in 2000 to 26.2 in 2020 and 36.4 by 2030. The senior ratio doubles in Los Angeles by 2030.

9. The Homegrown Revolution. The number of residents who are native-Californians is rising, as opposed to residents born in other states or immigrants from outside the U.S. These homegrown sons and daughters are already a majority of residents age 20 or younger and they are projected to play a rapidly growing majority role in the future of Los Angeles and California. That future will depend on children who are being raised here today, a smaller group than before, and a group that is the product of our state's education system.

10. A Rising Index of Children's Importance. Children already have taken on a dramatically increased importance, due to their fewer numbers relative to the greater social and economic burdens they will carry as adults. The Index of Children's Importance began to rise for children born in Los Angeles after 1985 (children who reached age 25 in 2010), for whom the Index stood at 1.00. When new children are born in 2015, the Index is expected to have reached 2.20, indicating that these children will carry twice the social and economic responsibility when they are grown as did children born before 1985.

The overarching conclusion reached in this study is that the 10 major dynamics of change require dramatic rethinking of old assumptions about Los Angeles. Through these data trends we come to

realize how greatly the generations depend on one another, and especially how much more Los Angeles will depend on its smaller number of grown children to replace the aging baby boomers. The boomers are beginning to retire from the most productive period of their lives, creating enormous replacement needs in the workforce, among the taxpayers, and in the housing market. The data presented here provide foresight on the epic transition ahead that deserves to be broadly shared. The future of the city, region and state will depend on how well we manage the inter-generational partnership that is so greatly magnified.