

Suburbs Are Graying Faster Than Big Cities

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America's suburbs, historically a haven for young families with children, are aging more rapidly than the nation's central cities as the first suburban generation grows older.

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Graphic

[Projected Growth of Population Age 65 and Older](#)

At the same time, there are early signs of a possible trend of wealthier and more educated older suburbanites moving to the cities.

Those findings in a report released yesterday by the [Brookings Institution](#), a nonpartisan research group, suggest that in most places, the fastest growth in elderly populations will result from the aging of baby boomers already living there, rather than from an infusion of retirees.

The over-65 population in Georgia is projected to rise more than 40 percent in the decade beginning in 2010 as residents grow older, but only 3 percent as a result of migration.

Florida still attracts the most elderly migrants. But the fastest overall

and Arizona, the slowest in Pennsylvania and New York.

The Brookings study forecast widening age disparities between cities and increasingly older suburbs by 2040 in, among other places, Chicago, Los Angeles and Philadelphia.

“Suburbs, which previously were considered youthful and family-friendly parts of America, will, as more seniors age in place, become a fast-graying part of our national landscape,” said William H. Frey, a Brookings demographer.

Around New York City, the proportion of people 65 and older in the suburbs surpassed the city’s share in the 1980s. The city itself remains a mecca for younger job-seekers, and the influx of foreigners and higher fertility rates among immigrants have also been a brake on the rising median age (which ranges from under 32 in the Bronx to nearly 41 in Nassau County on Long Island).

“New York was a leader in postwar suburbanization and is now leading the trend toward suburban aging,” Dr. Frey said. An earlier exodus of baby boomers, coupled with a continuing migration of older people, mean that the elderly population in New York State is expected to grow at a slower rate than in any other state from 2000 to 2040.

Dr. Frey said the extraordinary growth in the number of Americans from 55 to 64 will fuel a “senior tsunami” beginning in less than four years when the first baby boomers turn 65.

The greatest growth in the 55-to-64-year-old group has been in the West and in Sun Belt metropolitan areas (including Atlanta; Austin, Tex.; Las Vegas; Phoenix; and Raleigh, N.C.) — areas that, like the suburbs, were previously known for younger populations — and in New Hampshire and Vermont, which have lured mobile workers attracted by the scenic beauty and small-town amenities.

across the board, ranging from an increase of 80 percent in Arizona to a still robust 33 percent increase in New York.

Since 2000, the fastest growth in that population was registered in states that also recorded the most job growth. The slowest was in Rust Belt areas that had already hemorrhaged jobs.

The new demographics of aging present unique opportunities and challenges, both for the elderly and for their neighbors. While New York, Washington, Boston, San Francisco and Chicago, among others, may appeal to aging suburbanites, smaller cities and metropolitan areas are also marketing themselves as magnets for urban professionals ages 65 to 74, or “suppies,” many of whom are still working and who tend to be healthier and wealthier than other older people.

Dr. Frey said the increasing share of the elderly in the suburbs will place new demands on housing, health care, transportation and social services.