

Center for American Progress



Lifting Up What Works

PolicyLink



# Toward 2050 in California

A Roundtable Report on Multiracial Collaboration in Los Angeles

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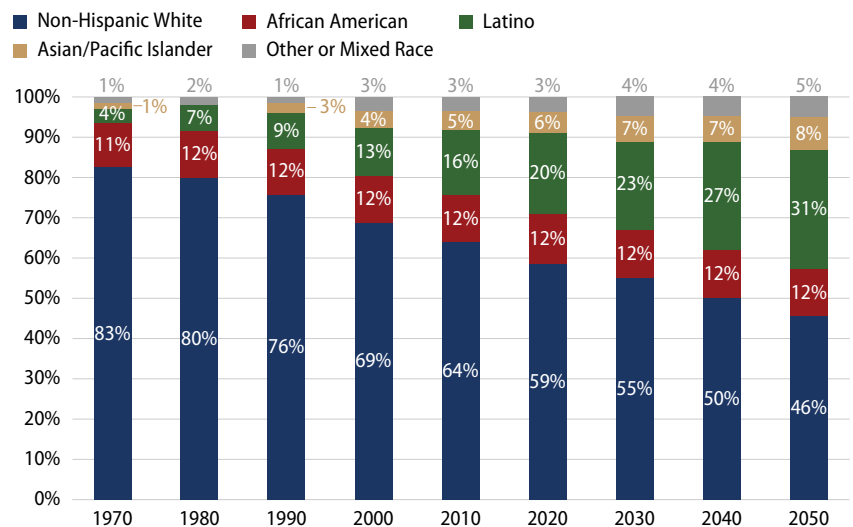
# Introduction and summary

As the United States prepares for a sizable demographic shift that will turn the country into a majority-minority nation by 2042, there are noteworthy communities across the country that have already experienced this transition and may hold lessons for the change that lies ahead. California in particular is a state made up of a number of such communities and has operated as a sort of bellwether for the rest of the nation's racial and ethnic demographic shifts for the past few decades.

The most recent U.S. Census Bureau data project that the country will no longer have a clear racial or ethnic majority by the year 2050, yet California reached this milestone more than a decade ago in 2000. (see Figures 1 and 2)

California has not only served as a bellwether for the demographic shift that the rest of nation will soon experience, but the state has also experienced some of the opportunities and challenges that may accompany such population change. The racial and ethnic disparities in education, health, and employment, for instance, have been on the forefront of California's progressive public policy agenda for decades, with the state's community leaders, advocates, and decision makers understanding that such disparities prevent the state from realizing its full potential.

**FIGURE 1**  
**U.S. changing demographics, 1970–2050**



Note: Other includes all persons who are not included among other groups shown, and includes non-Latinos who identify racially as being Native American or Alaska Native, some other race alone, or multiracial.

Source: PolicyLink/PERE analysis of Statistical Abstract of the United States (1970 and 1980); U.S. Census Bureau, decennial censuses (1990 STF3, 2000 SF3, and 2010 SF1); U.S. Census Bureau Population Projections, 2008 (2020–2050), adjusted using the results of the 2010 Census.

The rest of the United States faces these same types of disparities. If they are allowed to persist, the country will have arguably squandered one of its greatest assets and potential contributors to economic growth in the 21st century.

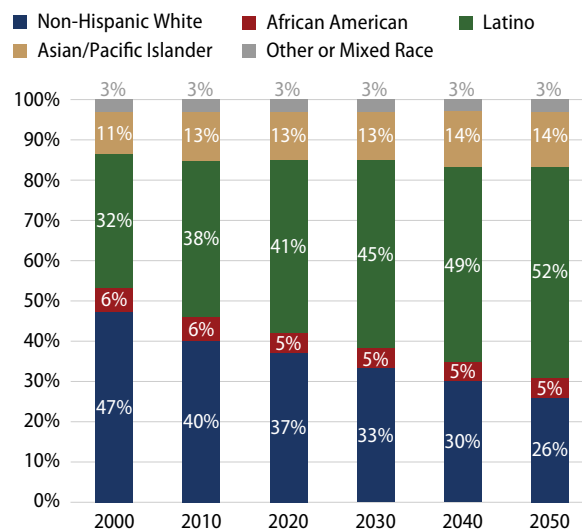
What lessons does California's experience with demographic change hold? Are there particular challenges that the population change presents? Have Californian communities developed any notably successful initiatives to turn such challenges into opportunities for the state's future?

It is in this spirit that the Progress 2050-PolicyLink partnership hosted its second event in a series of roundtable discussions focusing on demographic change in Los Angeles, California, in conjunction with the University of Southern California's Program for Environmental and Regional Equity, or PERE. Progress 2050—a project of the Center for American Progress—and PolicyLink—a national research and action institute advancing economic and social equity—formed a partnership to initiate a national conversation to explore a new vision of what America can and should be in 2050. The longer-term objective of this effort is to learn from local leaders which investments are needed to make sure our nation embraces its diverse future. We intend for these conversations to inform our policy agenda and ultimately craft policies that lift up communities of color and create a future in which all can prosper.

Roundtable participants included community activists, policy researchers, business leaders, and academics. (see attached list of convening participants on page 18 of this report) The range of their expertise was diverse, as they represented groups that focused on issues from labor to business development, from education to media representation.

We chose Los Angeles as a site for this discussion because of its substantial experience with demographic shifts, not only between its white and nonwhite populations but also within its communities of color. To underscore this point, from 1990-2010, the Latino and Asian/Pacific Islander populations of the city each increased by 32 percent, while the African American population decreased by 24 percent and the white population fell by 16 percent.<sup>1</sup> Along with these population shifts, Los Angeles has also forecasted major trends that the rest of the country has only just begun to experience, including:

**FIGURE 2**  
**California's changing demographics**  
Population projections by race/ethnicity



Note: Other includes all persons who are not included among other groups shown, and includes non-Latinos who identify racially as being Native American or Alaska Native, some other race alone, or multiracial.

Source: PolicyLink/PERE analysis of 1980-2010 decennial census data from CensusScope and American FactFinder, and 2020-2050 data from California Department of Finance, with projections data adjusted using the 2010 census.

- The “cultural generation gap,” which compares aging baby boomers at one end of the spectrum to the growing group of young people who are the most racially diverse generation the country has ever seen<sup>2</sup>
- The suburbanization of diversity and poverty

This change has at times been accompanied by tension—between the old and the young, between whites and nonwhites, and within communities of color—particularly as competition over increasingly scarce resources and employment continues to be framed as a zero-sum paradigm.

Yet Los Angeles does not only highlight problems that the rest of the country may soon face—it also offers solutions to these problems. In the report that follows, we provide an account of the conversation that took place at this city’s roundtable discussion and its particular focus on the important role that multiracial coalitions play in countering these anxieties. To be sure, while coalitions are thought to be effective at translating the growing numerical power of communities of color into actual political power, there are numerous kinds of collaboration—some proving more sustainable than others.

We begin our account with some demographic context about the state of California and the city of Los Angeles. We then move on to discuss coalition politics and their particular history in L.A., identifying some of the different multiracial coalitions that roundtable participants argued counteract the city’s reputation as a hotbed of interethnic strife.

Lastly, we recount some lessons in forging such coalitions that emerged from L.A.’s experience, which could hold value for the rest of the nation as we move closer to the day where there will be no clear racial or ethnic majority in the country.

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