



Progress 2050

New Ideas for a Diverse America

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Introduction and summary

The results of the 2010 U.S. Census project that the racial and ethnic makeup of the United States will undergo dramatic changes over the next few decades. In particular, by the year 2050 there will no longer be any clear racial and ethnic majority because the most rapidly growing number of residents in our nation today are of Hispanic and Asian descent.

This demographic shift will hold important policy implications, particularly if current racial and ethnic disparities in education, employment, health, and other social services continue. If we do not ensure the success of the most vulnerable among us moving forward, then we will prevent the United States from fully capitalizing on the global economic advantages we can derive from our increasingly diverse population.

In short, we need to chart a course toward 2050 that underscores American ideals of fairness, equity, and opportunity, recognizing that our country's greatest strength has always been our people.

Why Progress 2050 and why now

The United States is undergoing a remarkable and profound demographic shift. Today, in eight states across our union, the majority of children are children of color. This by itself is not significant, but what is worth noting is that the very communities that are growing are the ones that are experiencing significant obstacles and disparities. Sadly, this too is unsurprising. For too long we have been watching the racial and ethnic disparities in education, employment, health, and wealth widen.

We know the stories well. Communities of color suffer from high dropout rates, economic insecurity, and lack of health care while wealth gaps rise to record highs between whites and communities of color—the largest gap, in fact, since the government began publishing such data. We know so much about these challenges

in part because of the comprehensive work by groups that focus on closing these gaps and in part due to the work of demographers who outline the urgency of reducing these disparities before we reach a point in American history when communities of color together make up a numerical majority.

But there is a pressing need today to analyze the implications of the demographic change for local and national policy. We need to better understand how local communities are managing these changes in the face of daunting obstacles so that ultimately we can outline a positive vision of what our country could look like in 2050 if we truly work to close the gaps that exist over the next 40 years. Doing so will enable our nation to harness the full talent and drive of all our people. Progress 2050, a project of the Center for American Progress, seeks to do just that by:

- Working with the Center’s policy teams to create a more informed and inclusive policy agenda
- Exploring the implications of this demographic change for our economic, political, and cultural landscape
- Fostering a localized dialogue about the challenges and opportunities of diversity in communities across our country
- Helping craft a policy framework and narrative squarely focused on the opportunities of diversity for the future prosperity and well being of our nation

Without open and frank discussion about the opportunities and challenges of diversity, anxieties about where our country is headed combined with the coming demographic change may generate more division and disturbing stories that counter the fundamentals of American democracy. We as a nation have been down this road before many times as wave upon wave of new immigrants, new Americans, arrived on our shores—often to face brutal discrimination and hardship. We triumphed each time, sometimes after many decades of discrimination, enabling the latest generations of Americans to assimilate and thrive, breathing new life into our economy and our democracy. But the stakes are even higher today.

Today, discrimination abounds. Escalation in voter suppression tactics. Hate crimes. Anti-immigrant sentiment. And a general sense across the country that our federal, state, and local governments and social and economic institutions are failing to provide the leadership needed to move us meaningfully beyond the economic crisis of the Great Recession.

Progress 2050 is uniquely positioned to counter these challenges by offering an alternative. Certainly a progressive voice is needed now. We cannot allow the conversation about the future of this country to be dominated by voices on the right who advocate a very narrow definition of the American ideal. The demographic shift is a reality we must accept and embrace. And a clear vision of where we want our country to be in 2050 and how to get there is urgently needed.

Working in collaboration with progressive and civil rights organizations, Progress 2050 will help devise that path forward.

Why the Center for American Progress?

CAP and its sister organization, the Center for American Progress Action Fund, are uniquely positioned to provide this analysis and shape this vision. We are armed with deep expertise across a range of issues. We boast a reporting and communications arm with a proven track record of driving the progressive agenda. And our influential external outreach teams know their way around Capitol Hill and statehouses around the country, working with an array of progressive allies. All of these mechanisms enable Progress 2050 to move our ideas in ways other organizations cannot.

By having an organization of CAP's influence delve into the area of demographic analysis, we will lift up and add weight to issues that often get shoved into separate policy silos. Moreover, it is crucial that the progressive movement have a proactive and affirming voice on the issues that communities of color care about, not only because communities of color are inherently progressive but because the progressive agenda needs the active support of communities of color.

This paper's main objectives are to describe the demographic changes our nation will experience over the next four decades and to argue that a progressive vision is urgently needed to ensure we take advantage of diversity as one of our greatest assets. We will also outline the work that Progress 2050 has already undertaken—both in collaboration with CAP's policy teams and in collaboration with other organizations inside and outside the Beltway—and draw a map of where we want to go in the future.

We believe it is important to raise awareness about serious disparities in communities of color, but we also firmly believe that these negative stories can and should be turned around to formulate a positive vision of where we want our country to be in the year 2050.

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The Center for American Progress is a nonpartisan research and educational institute dedicated to promoting a strong, just and free America that ensures opportunity for all. We believe that Americans are bound together by a common commitment to these values and we aspire to ensure that our national policies reflect these values. We work to find progressive and pragmatic solutions to significant domestic and international problems and develop policy proposals that foster a government that is “of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

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