

Profile of the 65+ Population in the United States (Extended Abstract)

(For Submission to PAA_2004 Session 1302: Poster Session)

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The population of the United States has been aging throughout the 20th century, with the proportion of older people (aged 65 and over) in the total population increasing from 4.1 percent in 1900 to 12.4 percent in 2000. An aging population has implications not only at the personal level but also at the familial and societal level. Understanding the current state of this group of adults becomes imperative in order to predict the future needs for economic security, health and long-term care, and living arrangement of the older people, which will impact public policies as well as private sectors.

Using multiple sources including censuses, surveys, and findings from previous research and reports, this poster presentation provides a comprehensive profile of the 65+ population in the United States. We document trends in population growth, and examine other demographic characteristics, geographic distribution, and economic and social characteristics of the 65+ population. We focus particularly on the variations among race and ethnic groups by these characteristics.

Population Growth and Demographic Characteristics of the 65+ Population:

The population aged 65 and over has grown over 10 times from 3.1 million in 1900 to 35.0 million in 2000, and is projected to grow rapidly to 71.5 million in 2030, doubling the older population in 30 years due to the large numbers of Baby Boomers that will begin to turn 65 in 2011.

Chart 1. Current and Projected Population Aged 65 and Over: 1900 to 2050

Chart 2. Population by Age and Sex: 1960, 2000

Population aging varies by race and Hispanic origin. Using the percentage aged 65 and over among the total population as a measure of how old a population is, non-Hispanic Whites were much older than any other race and ethnic groups in 2000. Between 1990 and 2000, some race groups with relatively low fertility (e.g., Asians and non-Hispanic Whites) aged faster than others, while some groups with relatively higher fertility (e.g., Blacks and Hispanics) went through a “youthening” process.

Chart 3. Percentage 65 and Over by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1990 and 2000

As a crude measure of a country’s general support burden, the total support ratio for the United States was 70 in 2000, indicating that there were 70 dependents (people aged 0 to 19 and 65 and over) per 100 people aged 20 to 64. Non-Hispanic Whites had the highest older support ratio of 25.2, and Hispanics had a high youth support ratio of 68.7.

Chart 4. Societal Support Ratios by Race and Hispanic Origin: 2000

Geographic Distribution of the 65+ Population in 2000:

The nine states that maintained the largest older populations from 1990 to 2000 were also the most populous states, including California, Florida, New York, Texas, and Pennsylvania; however, states with the greatest proportion of older people are generally different from those with the greatest number, except for Florida and Pennsylvania.

Chart 5. Total Population Aged 65 and Over by State: 2000

The South and West regions experienced the largest percentage increase in population aged 65 and over between 1990 and 2000. The percentage change in state 65+ populations ranged from a decrease of 10.2 percent in the District of Columbia to an increase of 71.5 percent in Nevada.

The South and West regions also experienced the largest increase in their oldest-old population during the 1990s. Nevada and Alaska's 85+ populations more than doubled in the past decade.

Chart 6. Percent Change in Population Aged 65 and Over by State: 1990 to 2000

Social, Economic, and Other Characteristics of the 65+ Population:

The older population today is much better educated than their counterparts in the past. Over the past 50 years, the educational attainment of people aged 65 and over has been steadily improving. Today the older U.S. population is among the best educated in the world.

Chart 7. Percentage of the Population Aged 65 and Over with High School Diploma or Higher and Bachelor's Degree or Higher: 1950 to 2000

Older men are more likely than older women to be married and less likely to be widowed, and marital status of older people varies by race and Hispanic origin. In 2000, older Black men and women were less likely than corresponding Asian and Pacific Islander or non-Hispanic White men and women to be married and more likely to be widowed.

Chart 8. Percent Widowed of the Population Aged 65 and Over by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 2000

Older men are also more likely than older women to live with their spouse, but the proportion of women aged 65 and over residing with a spouse greatly increased in the last 20 years. Among race and ethnic groups, older non-Hispanic Whites are more likely than older non-Whites to live alone.

Chart 9. Living Arrangements of the Population Aged 65 and Over, by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 2000

Over time, Social Security has provided and continues to provide the largest share of aggregate income for the older population. In addition, it has also dramatically improved their economic status and helped to alleviate older population's poverty status.

Chart 10. Percent Distribution of Social Security Recipients Aged 65 and Over, by Relative Importance of Social Security to Total Income: 2001

Poverty rates for the 65+ population vary among race and ethnic groups and differ by sex. In 2000, older Whites were less likely than their Black and Hispanic counterparts to be poor. Considerably larger percentages of older women lived in poverty in 2000 compared with older men, and this gender difference was found in all racial and ethnic groups.

Chart 11. Percent of Population Aged 65 and Over in Poverty, by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 2000

In 2000, 9.5 percent of the 65+ population were foreign-born. European-born were still the largest group, but people born in Latin America and Asia nearly doubled their respective shares during 1990 and 2000, and together represented about half of the older foreign born.

Chart 12. Older Foreign Born by Region of Birth: 2000