

The Changing Demographic Characteristics of the Fastest-Growing
Metropolitan Areas

--A Comparison of 2000 & 2005 American Community Survey

By

Yun Zhou

Arizona State University

Abstract

The recent census shows the top 10 fastest-growing metropolitans in the nation were mostly located in the Southern and Western areas. These regions have seen unprecedented heterogeneous migration and immigration flows in recent years, and the urbanization of the arid regions. During the past decade between 1990 and 2000, out of the top ten fastest growing metropolitan areas, three contain populations of more than 1 million people. Las Vegas MSA, NV, ranked as the fastest growing metropolitan with a population increase of 83 percent. Phoenix MSA, AZ, the largest of the top-10 fastest growing metropolitan areas, increased its population by almost 1 million, an increase of 45.3 percent. Austin MSA, TX, the other metropolitan area with over 1 million populations, increased by 47.7 percent (Census 2000 Brief).

Since 2000, besides the nonnegligible importance of the growth of immigration, the fastest-growing metropolitan areas, especially Las Vegas, rely more heavily on domestic migration and natural increase (Frey, William, 2005).

Utilizing the latest 2005 American Community Survey (ACS), this paper examines the new demographic trends of these three fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the years following 2000. The paper asks whether domestic and international migrants from 2000 onward contribute very different characteristics to these metropolitan populations thus occupying different niches within these cities.

Preliminary examination of the 2000 and 2005 ACS data suggest considerable variation in the types of growth experienced in these three metro areas. From 2000 to 2005, Las Vegas MSA has experienced an increase in population of 24.7 percent, the largest rate of all metro areas. Phoenix MSA and Austin MSA have experienced 18.6 percent and 16.0% respectively. Both domestic migrants and international migrants contribute to the growing diversity of these cities. For all three metro areas, among the four major racial/ethnic groups, the Asian population increases the most between 2000 and 2005. These cities also share the distinction of having relatively small Asian populations despite rapid growth in the 1990s. By 2000, however, Asians contribute to the overall population growth. Results support Frey's (2005) report that the surge of population in Las Vegas metro does not mainly rely on immigration, but instead on a large influx of "domestic migration". Comparing with 2000, current age structures of these fastest-growing metro areas are more diversified across the racial/ethnic groups. For example, in Las Vegas Metro areas, Whites show a clearly upside-down pyramid, while Hispanics and Blacks show much younger

age structures. In Arizona, Hispanics show an obvious pyramid, very different from the upside-down pyramid of Whites.

The paper further examines social and economic characteristics of the new racial composition in both 2000 and 2005. Compared with 2000, both Blacks and Asians in all three metro areas demonstrate an increase in educational attainment by 2005. This implies that the new Asian immigrants and domestic migrants among Asians and Blacks have relatively higher educational attainment than the non-migrant origin populations in these metro areas.

In addition, as the population in these three cities increased from 2000 to 2005, the average household size among minorities decreased. But, for Whites in all three metros average household size increased. Phoenix, Arizona is in closer proximity to the US-Mexican border and has served as a traditional destination for migrants over time. Thus, non-family households among Hispanics have been common. However, Hispanics have seen decreases in household size, particularly evidenced by smaller non-familial households across the recent 5-year period. Among Asians, on the other hand, there has been an increase in non-familial household size but a decrease in family household size, which may partly reflect the composition of the newly arriving population.

Rapid population growth may also indicate rapidly growing local economies. This is evident by increases in household incomes. This paper will address the relative increase in incomes across the major racial and ethnic groups as well. As the number one fastest-growing metro area, Las Vegas has experienced a significant increase of median family income across all

racial/ethnic groups during the first-half of the 2000s, which may have resulted from the correlated impact of population growth and economic development.

In general, this paper will investigate the changing trend of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the top growing metropolitan areas. The research will employ demographic methods to compare the characteristics of new domestic migrants versus the new international migrants contributing to these growing populations. The 2005 population characteristics in these top popular metro areas show important shifts in composition due to changes in domestic and international migration. The paper will explore the changes in educational attainment, economic status, household size and residential segregation among all racial/ethnic groups divided by their migration status. The analyses should shed light on the extent to which young racial and ethnic minorities come to these metro areas attracted by the fast economic and social development, while more older Whites come to seek space and sun in these once-sleepy suburbs in Southwest (Times, Sep.19).