Racial and Ethnic Composition of the Child Population

Between 1980 and 2011,

the percentage of Hispanic children in the United States more than doubled from nine percent to 24 percent, and is projected to increase to more than one-quarter (27 percent) of the child population by 2020.

Importance

The United States has a long history of ethnic and racial diversity in its population. That diversity has accelerated in recent decades, a trend which is expected to continue into the future.

Race and ethnicity have important implications for culture, identity, and well-being. Children of different races and ethnicities often show large variation in well-being, including health, mortality, school performance and attainment, and access to family and community resources.[1] These and other disparities are also evident in adulthood.[2]

According to the National Research Council, race is a social category determined both by genetically transmitted physical markers (skin color, hair texture, and so on), and by the "individual, group, and social attributes" associated with those characteristics. Race is distinguished from "ethnicity," which does not include physical characteristics as part of its definition.[3]

Over time, the federal government has changed the way it defines and measures race. All race and ethnicity information is now based on individuals' self-report (or, in the case of children, that of their parent or other responsible adult). However, a key feature of the most recent revision allows survey respondents to identify themselves as being of more than one race. Additionally, ethnicity has been defined as an attribute distinct from race. Thus,
individuals with Hispanic/Latino ethnicity may be of any race. This new classification was used in the 2000 Decennial Census, and has since been implemented in all federal surveys and administrative data collection efforts.[4]

Trends

From 1980 to 2000, the percentage of non-Hispanic white children in the U.S. population fell from 74 to 62 percent. (Appendix 1) Between 2000 and 2010, the percentage of children who were non-Hispanic white only (following the new classification system used in the 2000 decennial census, in which respondents were given the option of identifying with multiple race categories) declined from 61 to 54 percent, and is projected to decline to 51 percent by 2020. (Figure 1)

The percentage of the child population that is non-Hispanic black has stayed relatively constant, at about 15 percent since 1980, and it is expected to decline only slightly, to 13 percent, by 2020. However, because of changes in the race categories used by the Census Bureau, estimates for 2000 and later years are not directly comparable with earlier estimates. (Figure 1)

The proportion of children who are of Hispanic ethnicity has been growing steadily, from nine percent in 1980 to 24 percent in 2011, and is projected to be 27 percent in 2020. (Figure 2) In 2010, 68 percent of Hispanic children were of Mexican origin, which was 16 percent of the total child population. Nine percent of Hispanic children in the US were of Puerto Rican origin, six percent had a Central American origin (mainly Salvadoran, at 2.5 percent, and Guatemalan, at 1.6 percent), and four percent had a South American origin.
Among Asians, the largest origin groups in 2010 were Asian Indians alone (21 percent of Asian children), Chinese (20 percent), Filipinos (15 percent), Vietnamese (12 percent), and Koreans (nine percent). About six percent of children that were Asian alone were of mixed ancestry. (Appendix 3)

According to data from the 2010 Census, children of a single race constituted roughly 94 percent of the child population, a decrease of two percent compared with the 2000 census. Among children who were identified as being of more than one race, the majority (four percent of all children) were white combined with one other race, with two percent identified as white and black, one percent identified as white and Asian, and 0.6 percent as white and American Indian or Alaska Native. (Appendix 2)

State and Local Estimates


Estimates from the American Community Survey are available for states, counties, congressional districts, metropolitan areas, cities, and census tracts, at http://factfinder2.census.gov/

International Estimates
None available.

Related Indicators

• Number of Children: [http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=number-of-children](http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=number-of-children)


Data Sources


• Data on multiple races and ethnicities for 2010: Table QT-P1: Age Groups and Sex. 2010 Census Summary File 2. Available on American Factfinder at: [http://factfinder2.census.gov](http://factfinder2.census.gov)

Raw Data Source

All estimates in Table 1 are from the Census Bureau’s Population Projections and Estimates Branch, based on models that draw on many data sources.

Estimates for race and Hispanic subgroups that use data from the 2000 Decennial Census can be calculated (for 1990-2001) using the bridged race estimates available from the National Center for Health Statistics, [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/about/major/dvs/popbridge/popbridge.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/about/major/dvs/popbridge/popbridge.htm)

Estimates based on the 1990 Census are available from the Census Bureau at [http://eire.census.gov/popest/estimates.php](http://eire.census.gov/popest/estimates.php)

Appendix 1: Percentage of Children Under Age 18, by Race and Hispanic Origin, Selected Years, 1980-2011 and Projections, 2020-2050

Endnotes


