



Our Changing State: Four Trends Transforming Tennessee's Population

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Who are Tennesseans? In *Our Changing State: Four Trends Transforming Tennessee's Population*, we provide a preliminary answer by drawing from a collaborative project of three prominent, national think tanks: the American Enterprise Institute, the Brookings Institution, and the Center for American Progress. Scholars from these ideologically diverse organizations came together to create the *States of Change: Demographics and Democracy* project.³ The project examines demographic changes in the United States relying on data from the United States Census, including both the decennial census and the multi-year American Community Survey.⁴ To forecast future demographic shifts, they rely on long-standing and well-validated models.⁵

The *States of Change* institutions sought to document who has called themselves Americans in the past and to project who will do so in the future. They also hoped to spark a “wide-ranging and bipartisan discussion of America’s demographic future.” In this report, we seek to contribute to that discussion by analyzing their findings as they relate specifically to Tennessee in order to understand the demographic evolution taking place in our state.

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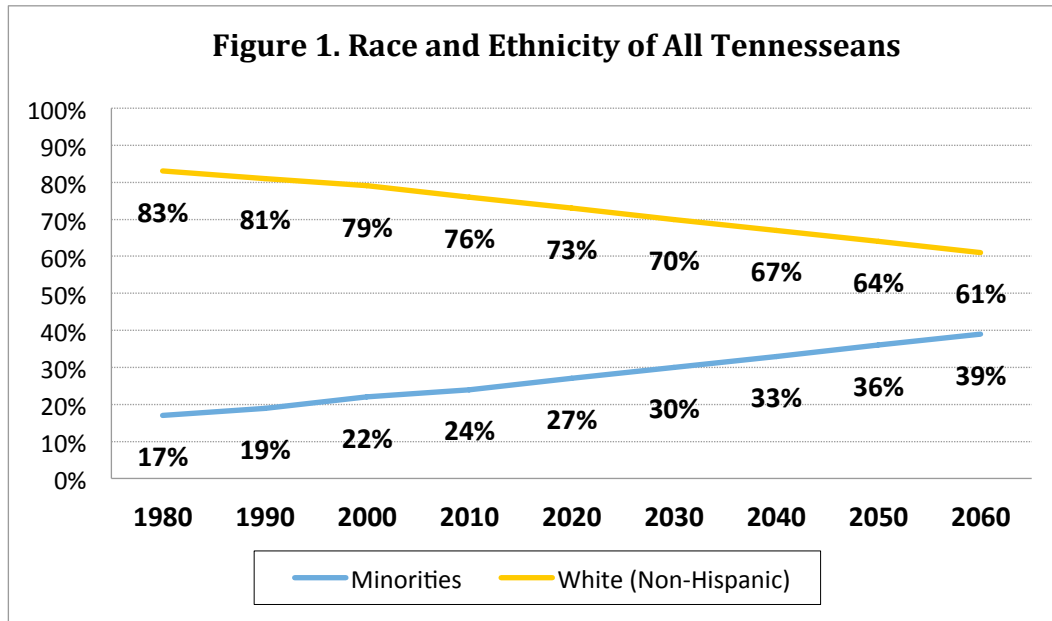
3 Available at: <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/SOC-report1.pdf>.

4 Demography is the study of characteristics of human populations. One field of demography focuses on the mathematical description of a specific population and estimation of population forecasts.

5 The authors rely principally on multiregional mathematical demographic models set forth in Andrei Rogers, *Introduction to Multiregional Mathematical Demography* (1975). See also Andrei Rogers & Frans J. Willekens, “A Short Course in Multiregional Mathematical Demography,” in *MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT: A MULTIREGIONAL COMPARATIVE STUDY* 355 (Andrei Rogers & Frans J. Willekens eds., 1986); Kao-Lee Liaw, “Spatial Population Dynamics,” in *id.* at 419.

Trend One: Tennessee's Population Will Grow More Diverse.

More Tennesseans are racial and ethnic minorities today than were in 1980, when fewer than two out of 10 Tennesseans were minorities.⁶ One-quarter of Tennesseans were minorities in 2014, the most recent year for which observed data is available.⁷ Approximately one-third of the population will be minorities by 2040 and nearly 40% by 2060.⁸



Not only is Tennessee as a whole diversifying, Tennessee's minority population is diversifying too. The state's minority population was almost entirely black in 1980.⁹ In 2014, one-third of Tennessee's minorities were races or ethnicities other than black. By

⁶ The U.S. Census has asked, with variation, two questions that determine whether someone is a minority for purposes of this report. Respondents are asked if they are of "Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin." If they answer yes, then they are minorities. Respondents are also asked their race based on the following categories: White; Black or African American; American Indian and Alaska Native; Asian; or Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander. If a respondent picked a category other than white, they are identified as a minority. Thus, in this report, race and ethnicity are based on self-identification and are a social construct rather than a biological or anthropological one.

⁷ Due to rounding, totals may be slightly above or below 100.

⁸ In the past, the Census has not asked whether a respondent is Middle Eastern (for example, Lebanese, Iranian, Egyptian, Syrian, etc.). Middle Eastern respondents would likely have selected "White" from the answers available on the survey. The 2020 Census will include a new option for respondents to identify as Middle Eastern or North African (MENA).

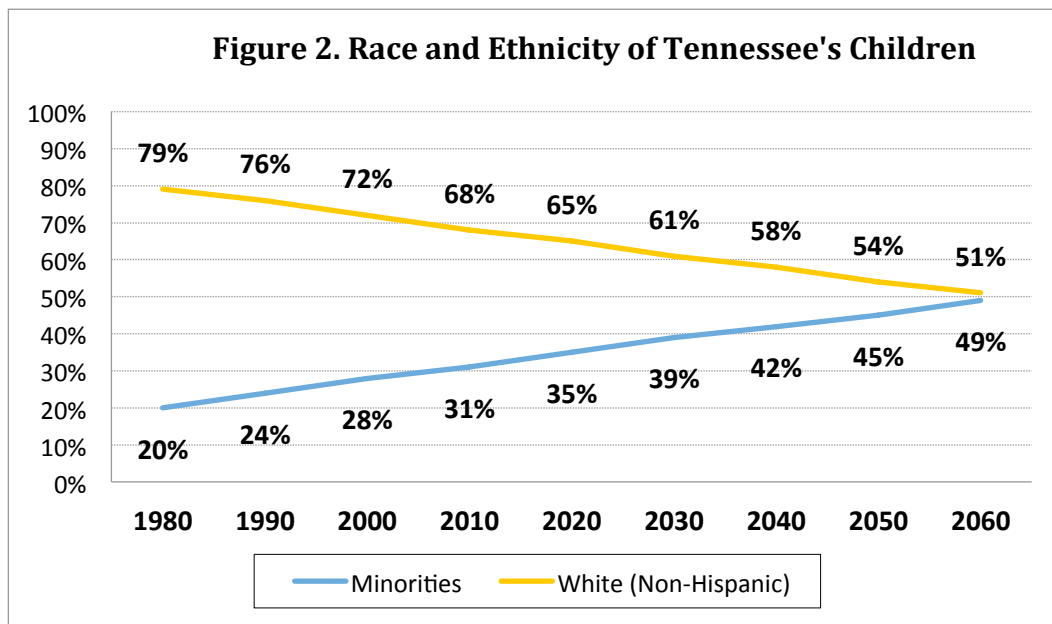
⁹ Black includes individuals identifying as black or African American.

2060, 46% of Tennessee’s minorities will be Hispanic, Asian or other ethnic or racial group.¹⁰

Tennessee has diversified at a slower rate than the United States as a whole. *States of Change* reports that whites accounted for 80% of all Americans in 1980 but only 63% in 2014. The authoring institutions project non-Hispanic whites will make up less than 44% of Americans by 2060. By comparison, Tennessee will still be majority non-Hispanic white in 2060.

Trend Two: Nearly Half of Tennessee’s Children Will be Minorities in 2060.

Tennessee will continue to see rapid gains in ethnic and racial diversity in coming years because population growth will come disproportionately from minorities. One way to see this is by looking at the race and ethnicity of Tennessee’s children.¹¹ Two striking patterns emerge: the relative diversity of children as compared to adults and the nature of that diversity.



10 Other ethnic or racial group includes individuals identifying as Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, American Indian, Alaskan Native, or multiracial.

11 Children include individuals younger than 18 years old.

Children as a group are more diverse than adults. That is, the relative proportion of children who are non-Hispanic white is smaller than the proportion of adults who are non-Hispanic white. In 2014, 67% of children were non-Hispanic white compared to 77% of adults. In 2030, those numbers will decline to 61% and 73%, respectively. The rate of change is greater for children than for adults. Experts predict that nearly half of Tennessee children will be minorities in 2060, compared with 36% of adults.

We have seen and should continue to see a dramatic increase in the number of children who identify as Asian, Hispanic, and/or other races and ethnicities. In 2014, seven percent of Tennessee children were Hispanic and five percent were Asian or other non-white and non-black races and ethnicities.¹² Those numbers are expected to at least double by 2060.

Trend Three: Tennessee's Population is Graying.

Tennesseans as a whole are steadily growing older. From 1980 to 2014, seniors grew from 12% to 16% of our population.¹³ At the same time, children declined from 27% to 23% of our population. Those trends will continue so that seniors will outnumber children in the state in 2050 (22% of Tennesseans will be seniors, while 21% of Tennesseans will be children).

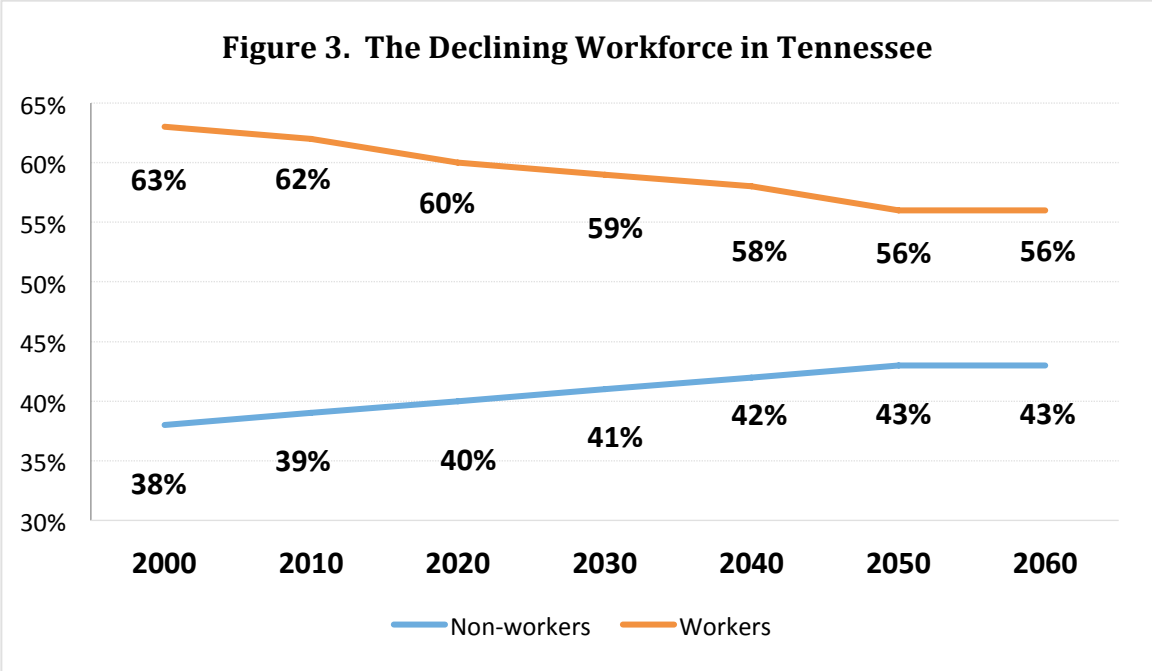
The aging of Tennesseans means that our workforce will shrink.¹⁴ The percentage of our population that is working will drop from 63% in 2000 to 60% in 2020 and will continue to decline every decade until it reaches 56% in 2050.¹⁵ Tennessee will go from 1.7 workers supporting one non-worker in 2000 to 1.3 workers supporting one non-worker in 2050.

12 This figure includes children who identify as more than one race.

13 Seniors are individuals who are 65 years old and older.

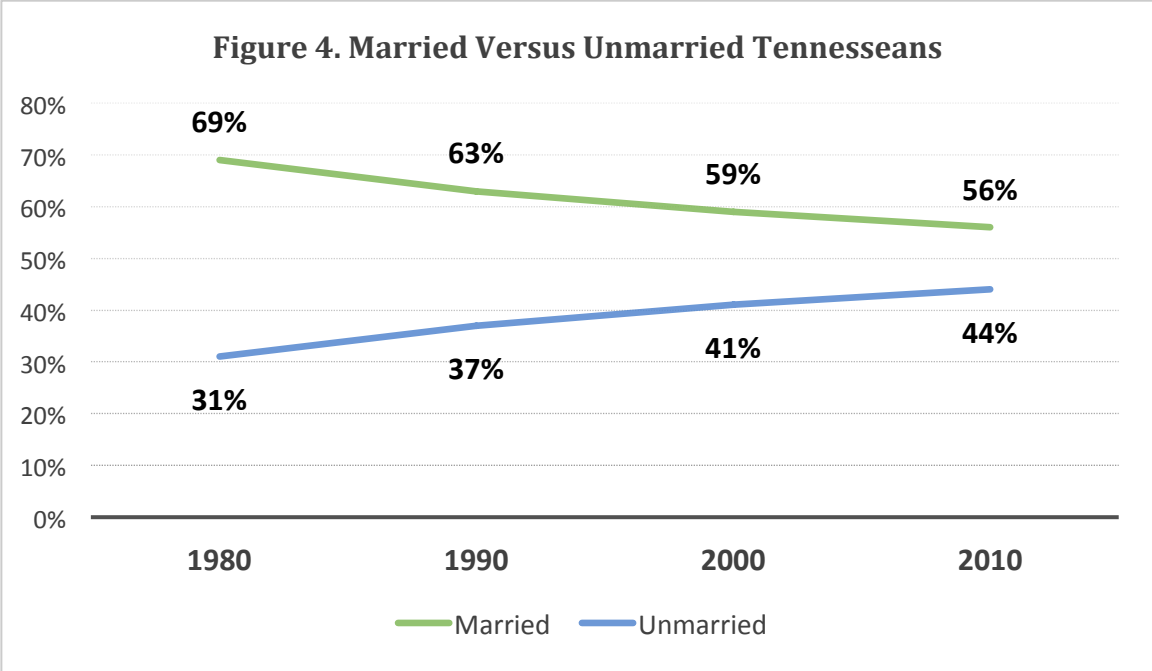
14 Working age population is defined to mean people between ages 18 and 65. Non-working age population includes all people under 18 and all people 65+.

15 Economists refer to this as the "dependency ratio": the non-working age population compared to the working age population. The lower the number, the fewer non-workers depend on workers. If the number exceeds 1, then the state/country has more dependents than workers. Tennessee will move from a .60 dependency ratio in 2014 to a .77 dependency ratio in 2060. The ratio of workers to non-workers is the inverse dependency worker.



Trend Four: Fewer Tennesseans are Getting Married

Tennesseans, like Americans generally, are less likely to be married today than they were in 1980. More than two out of three adult Tennesseans were married in 1980. But every decade since, the relative number of marrieds has declined. Today, Tennesseans are almost equally likely to be unmarried as married (45% unmarried compared to 55% married).



Conclusion

Who are Tennesseans? The answer, it turns out, depends on *when* you ask. Our population continues to change in its race and ethnicity, education, age, and marital status. The changes in the past and forecasted changes in the future are important considerations in any public policy decisions we make today.