

## America's newly diversified cities

The 2020 census shows 91 metro areas with a new majority of people living in mixed-race neighborhoods, bringing the total to 231.

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The Washington Post

Deep in the bowels of the nation's 2020 Census lurks a quiet milestone: For the first time in modern American history, most White people live in mixed-race neighborhoods.

This marks a tectonic shift from just a generation ago.

Back in 1990, 78 percent of White people lived in predominantly White neighborhoods, where at least 4 of every 5 people were also White. In the 2020 Census, that's plunged to 44 percent.

Large pockets of segregation remain, but as America's White population shrinks for the first time and Hispanic, Asian, Black and Native Americans fuel the nation's growth, diverse neighborhoods have expanded from urban cores into suburbs that once were colored by a steady stream of White flight from inner cities.

Across the 9,700 neighborhoods that became mixed in 2020, White population dropped by almost 300,000. Meanwhile, the number of Hispanics jumped by 1.5 million, the largest part of a 4.3 million increase in non-Whites in those neighborhoods.

This demographic shift has scrambled the nation's politics, introducing new groups of often left-leaning voters into typically conservative White-dominated enclaves, according to Chris Maggio, a sociologist at the University of Illinois at Chicago's Department of Criminology, Law and Justice.

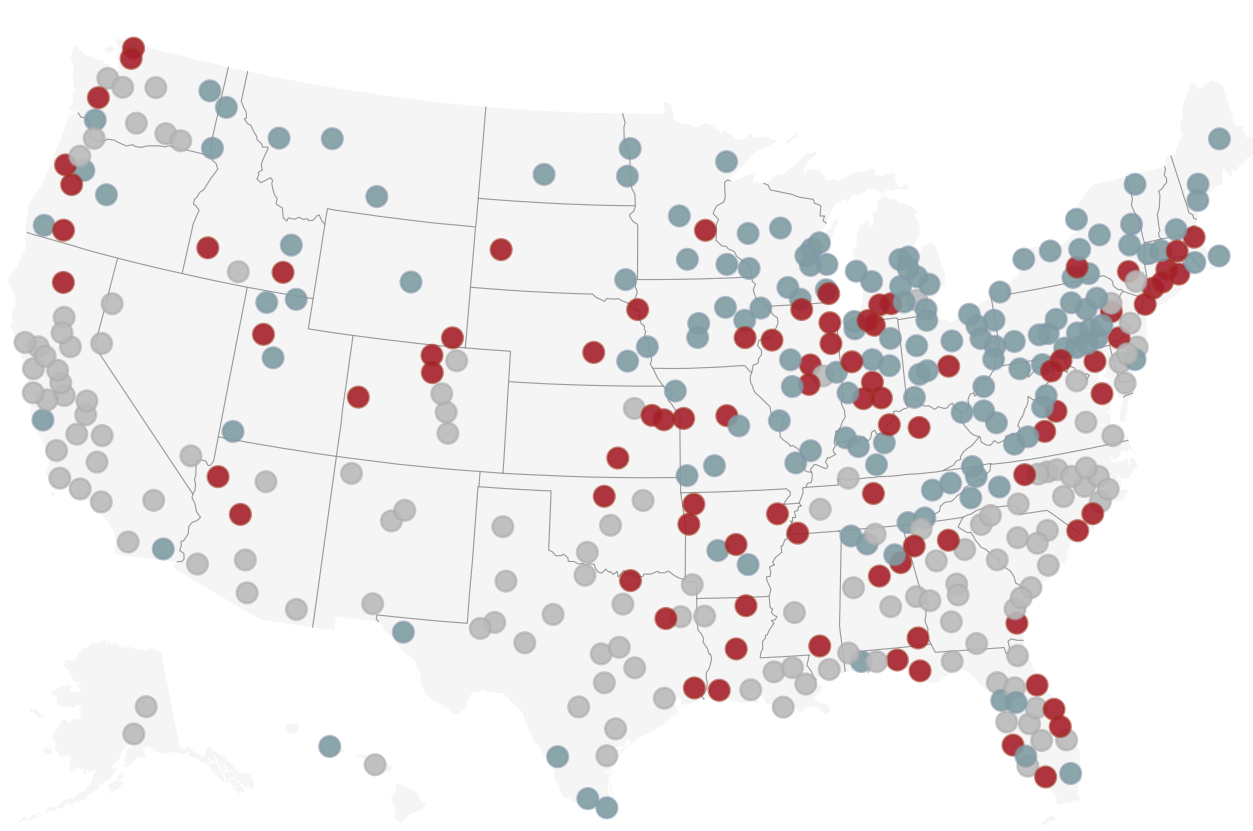
Maggio says the changes may be helping to stoke a backlash against immigration, especially among less-educated White voters, that has helped boost the political fortunes of former president Donald Trump. "Latino growth in particular is associated with increased Trump voting in places where there were few Latinos previously," Maggio said.

More broadly, a new majority of all Americans, 56 percent, now live in mixed neighborhoods where neither White people nor non-Whites predominate — double the figure that lived in mixed neighborhoods in 1990, according to a Washington Post analysis of census data. By racial group, 56 percent of White Americans live in mixed neighborhoods, as do 55 percent of Hispanic Americans, 57 percent of Black people and 70 percent of Asian people.

William H. Frey, a Brookings Institution senior fellow and author of the book "Diversity Explosion," traces the trend to sharply increased immigration from Latin America and Asia during the 1990s, as more Latinos and Asian Americans began to disperse to the suburbs and elsewhere. "This dispersion continued more dramatically in the 2000s," Frey said. "Also in the 2000s, for the first time, more Black Americans lived in suburbs than cities."

To highlight the changing circumstances of White Americans, we're using a conservative definition of mixed. Here it means that no single race, or even all non-Whites together, make up 80 percent of the neighborhood population. A more traditional measure of diversity, which treats each racial group separately, finds similar trends and rankings, albeit at slightly different levels. Some of the swiftest

■ New 2020 majority in mixed neighborhoods ■ Existing majority ■ Others



Note: Time comparisons are based on present metro boundaries. "Others" have no mixed majority.

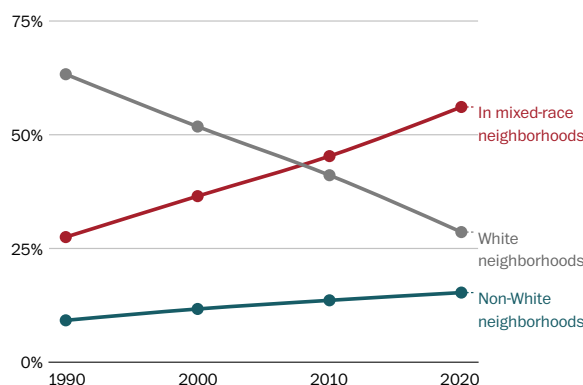
Source: Census Bureau

DEPARTMENT OF DATA / THE WASHINGTON POST

# How mixed-race neighborhoods quietly became the norm in the U.S.

### The mixed majority

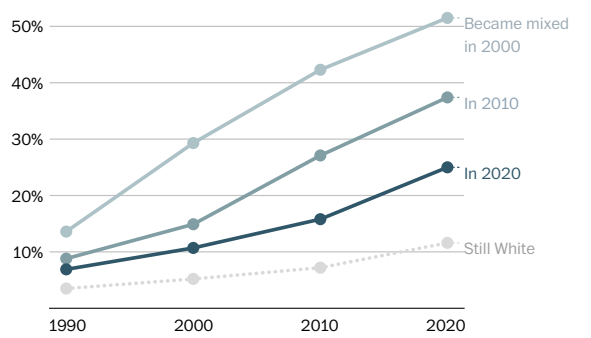
Percentage of Americans who live in each neighborhood type



Note: People in mixed neighborhoods, neither 80-plus percent White nor 80-plus percent non-White  
Source: Census Bureau DEPARTMENT OF DATA / THE WASHINGTON POST

### When neighborhoods become mixed, they keep diversifying

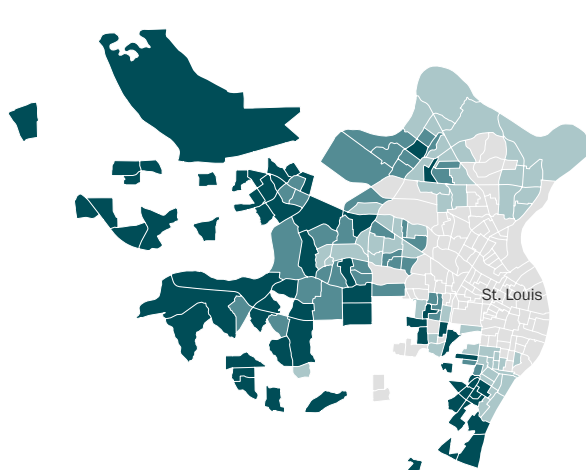
Share of tracts that are racially mixed, colored by the decade they stopped being predominately White



Note: We count a census tract as becoming mixed when the White share of the population drops below 80 percent.  
Source: Census Bureau DEPARTMENT OF DATA / THE WASHINGTON POST

### When St. Louis neighborhoods became racially mixed

■ In 2020 ■ In 2010 ■ In 2000 ■ Other mixed and non-White areas



Note: Mixed neighborhoods are neither 80-plus percent White nor 80-plus percent non-White  
Source: Census Bureau DEPARTMENT OF DATA / THE WASHINGTON POST

### When Charlotte neighborhoods became racially mixed

■ In 2020 ■ In 2010 ■ In 2000 ■ Other mixed and non-White areas



Note: Mixed neighborhoods are neither 80-plus percent White nor 80-plus percent non-White

change came in Oklahoma. In 1990, fewer than a third of Sooners lived in mixed-race neighborhoods; 15 states had higher rates. By 2020, 93 percent of Oklahomans lived in mixed-race neighborhoods — the highest rate in the nation.

A soaring Hispanic population powered the diversification of the Sooner State. It grew more than fivefold from 1990 to 2020 as newcomers rushed to work in food-

processing plants, farms, feedlots and construction sites throughout the state.

But Kay Decker, professor emerita of sociology at Northwestern Oklahoma State University, pointed out that a subtler force is also in action. The state's Native Americans, many descended from the Southeastern and Midwest tribes that were forcibly removed to the state, have become more likely to report their heritage.

"Back when my great

grandmother was young, even if you were American Indian, you didn't say you were," Decker said. "If you could pass for White, you would pass for White."

"Those people are finally, in many respects, recognizing that it's okay to claim their heritage," she said.

And indeed, our analysis shows the share of Oklahomans claiming multiple racial backgrounds almost doubled

from 2010 to 2020. And in Oklahoma, more than any other state, people reporting multiple racial backgrounds are likely to claim Native ancestry as one of them.

Washington and Oregon also saw extraordinary transformations. The once-White Pacific Northwest states drew diverse newcomers from around the nation and world to their emerging tech-fueled metropolises. In both states, the Hispanic pop-

ulation has more than quadrupled since 1990, while the Asian population has more than tripled.

Racially mixed neighborhoods continue to be less common in small towns and rural areas, and are increasing the most in the suburbs. Across large metro suburbs and medium metros, the share of people in racially mixed neighborhoods jumped by double digits over the past decade to 59 percent.

Because of their large populations, those changing suburbs can influence close elections when their votes shift. In the presidential swing state of Georgia, for example, the rapidly diversifying Atlanta suburbs played a key role in President Biden's 2020 victory. The suburban vote shifted toward Democrats by almost 214,000 votes, and Biden won the state by 12,000. Michigan and Wisconsin saw similar shifts.

The fastest-diversifying metro areas were the Northern California rodeo hot spot of Redding and the well-touristed eastern Poconos outpost of Stroudsburg, Pa. In both cities, every single resident lived in a predominantly White neighborhood in 1990 — now just 15 and 17 percent do, respectively.

The neighborhoods that transitioned from White to mixed over the past three decades often follow the path of population growth as it moves from city center to suburban rings around superstar cities like Washington, D.C., Atlanta and Minneapolis.

There are some exceptions to the declining White trend, especially in neighborhoods dotting dozens of inner cities. There, urban redevelopment has gone hand-in-hand with increasing White populations, while Black residents and other non-Whites have been slowly displaced.

When we say neighborhoods, we mean census tracts, which typically hold about 3,800 people. We created our tract data by rolling up even smaller block-level estimates to fit 2020 census tract boundaries, so that we could compare individual neighborhoods over time — something that's not usually possible given the constantly shifting outlines of official census tracts.

We chose 80 percent as a threshold for a mixed-race neighborhood, where non-Whites begin to have a noticeable presence. Although mixed neighborhoods can still have a White majority, our analysis showed that threshold to be a tipping point that's often followed by steady diversification.

In tracts that first became mixed in the 2000 and 2010 censuses, non-White population has continued to grow on average by double digits since. Neighborhoods that first became mixed in 2010 now average 37 percent non-White, and those that became mixed in 2000 now tend to be majority non-White.

Frey, the Brookings demographer, said age and race patterns point to more diversity ahead in growing neighborhoods.

"Not only are minorities growing faster than Whites in most parts of the country, but the younger segment of the population — those who make up most movers — are exceptionally diverse," Frey said. "The 2020 Census shows that for the first time, minorities comprise more than half of the under-age-18 population — which suggests that most movers in future decades will be people of color."