

Demographic Trends in the 20th Century

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While the metropolitan population grew rapidly during the century, most of that growth occurred in the suburbs, with little change in the percentage of population living in central cities.

Metropolitan areas accounted for a growing proportion of the U.S. population over the course of the century. In 1910, less than a third (28 percent) of the total population lived in metropolitan areas, but by 1950, more than half of the U.S. population lived in metropolitan areas. In 2000, the metropolitan population represented 80 percent of the U.S. resident total of 281.4 million people (see Figure 1-15).

The highest percentage increase in metropolitan population growth occurred from 1920 to 1930, when metropolitan areas grew by 52 percent. The lowest metropolitan percentage growth occurred from 1980 to 1990, when metropolitan areas grew by 14 percent.

Metropolitan areas include two parts: central cities and suburbs.¹⁴ From 1910 to 2000, suburbs accounted for most of the growth of metropolitan areas.

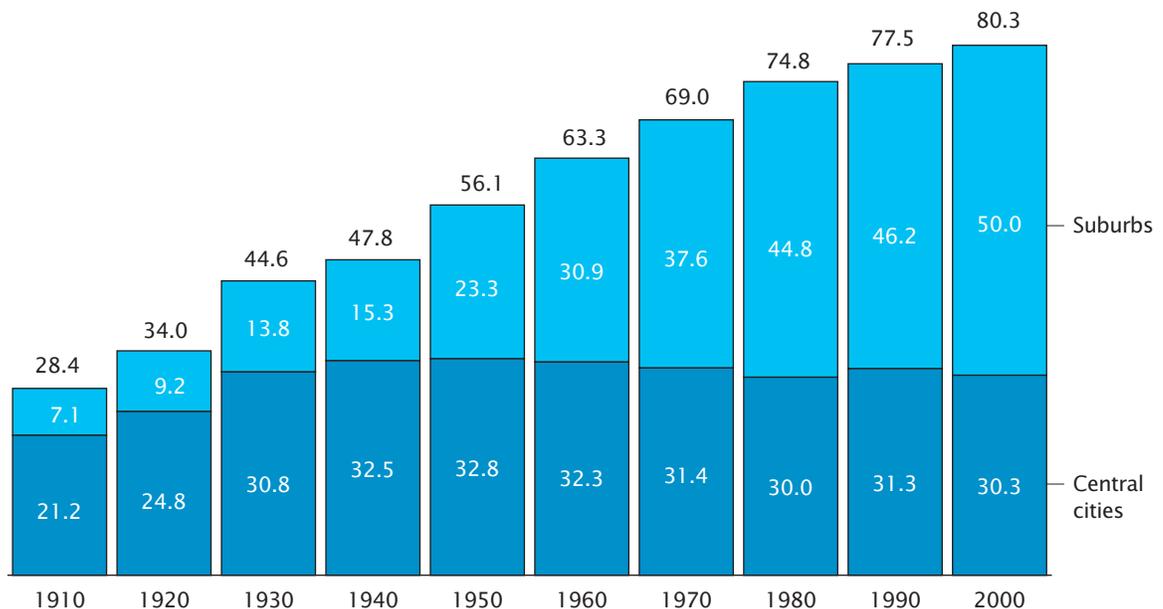
From 1910 to 1960, the population of central cities accounted for a larger proportion of the total population than the population living in suburbs. For example, in 1910, 21 percent of the total U.S. population lived in central cities, while only 7 percent of the population lived in suburbs.

From 1910 to 1930, both central cities and suburbs grew rapidly. Growth in the 1930s continued, but at a slower pace. From 1940 onward, suburbs accounted for more population growth than central cities and, by 1960, the proportion of the total U.S. population living in the suburbs (31 percent) was almost equal to the proportion of the population living in the central cities (32 percent).

From 1940 to 2000, the proportion of the population living in central cities remained relatively stable, while the suburbs continued to grow substantially. By 2000, half of the entire U.S. population lived in the suburbs of metropolitan areas.

¹⁴ For the definitions of metropolitan, central city, and suburb, see the Glossary.

Figure 1-15.
Percent of Total Population Living in Metropolitan Areas and in Their Central Cities and Suburbs: 1910 to 2000



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, decennial census of population, 1910 to 2000.