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**HEY, DAD: FAMILY STILL MATTERS!**

by [Joel Kotkin](#) 06/16/2011



America is getting **older**. Those over the age of 65, which currently account for 12% of the population, are expected to make up 20% of the population by 2030. People are **marrying later**, and a growing group, though still a distinct minority, is choosing not to have children. So if there are proportionately fewer traditional households, do families still matter in determining how places and regions grow?

The answer is yes. Using Census data, with the help of demographer [Wendell Cox](#), we determined the regions in the U.S. with the biggest increases in children ages 5 to 17 (See table below). These family hot spots, which include Raleigh, N.C. (No. 1), Austin, Texas (No. 3) and Charlotte,

S.C. (No. 4), are also some of the country's **biggest job generators**. Many rank highly in the **fastest-growing cities in the U.S.** And seven of the ten leading regions for kids also have the fastest-growing **foreign-born populations**.

Take the region with the biggest increase in children, Raleigh. The North Carolina powerhouse experienced a nearly 50% jump in residents between ages 5 to 17 over the past decade. There are 70,000 more kids in the Triangle now than a decade ago. The region also experienced the second-highest overall population increase, the second-biggest surge in educated migrants and the third-highest job growth over the past two decades. It also ranked among those regions seeing the biggest jump in new immigrants.

Texas boasts many of the strongest economies in the country, which helps make it home to many of the leading metros for kids, including Austin (No. 3), Dallas (No. 7), Houston (No. 9) and San Antonio (No. 10). These areas have emerged as major magnets for migrants from both within the country and abroad. Dallas and Houston, for example, now get more immigrants per capita than Washington, Chicago or Boston.

The rest of our top ten areas for kids were superstars in employment and population growth during the early years of this decade. Despite tougher times, Las Vegas (No. 2), Charlotte, S.C. (No. 4), Phoenix, Ariz. (No. 5), Atlanta (No. 6) and Orlando, Fla. (No. 8) were all among leaders in overall population and also saw large increases in their numbers of immigrants.

One thing these regions share is affordable housing. Throughout the real estate bubble, housing prices in Raleigh, the Texas cities and Atlanta remained low. Today, prices have also plummeted in virtually all the other markets in our top ten, reinforcing their relative affordability.

A look at the bottom of the list also tells two stories. Some 28 of the 50 largest regions — we took out New Orleans due to the unusual circumstance of Hurricane Katrina — actually experienced an absolute decrease in the number of kids. Buffalo's youth population dropped by almost 30,000 — a 13.6% decline. Many of the other cities at the bottom of the list came from the familiar ranks of slow- or negative-growth Rust Belt cities, including Pittsburgh (No. 49), Rochester, N.Y. (No. 48) Cleveland (No. 47) and Detroit (No. 46).

Other areas losing youngsters included the nation's three legitimate megacities — Los Angeles (No. 44), New York (No. 38) and Chicago (No. 35) — as well as areas long associated with the migration of the "young and restless," including Boston (No. 37) and San Francisco (No. 36). Unlike young adults who move to Austin and Raleigh, the "young and restless" in these "hip and cool" centers may not hang around long enough to have children.

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Jobs certainly are a big factor. Like the Rust Belt towns, most of these areas have experienced stagnant job growth or even lost employment over the decade. Another reason young families aren't staying could be housing costs; all these cities rank among the most unaffordable in the nation. Even if you're a family with a job, or two, it's hard to raise the capital to make a down payment unless you have loads of stock in Google, or more likely, well-to-do parents.

Overall, the places with the absolute fewest kids ages 5 to 17 tend to be dense core cities. Children constitute [barely 1 in 10 residents](#) in the city of Seattle. The urban cores of San Francisco, Washington and Boston show similar low rates.

The few kids in these regions are mostly in the suburbs. The Seattle suburbs, for example, have [75% more kids than the city](#). This difference is driven both by growth in immigrants to more affordable, less dense suburban areas as well as the movements of people of child-bearing age out of the city.

So what do the numbers suggest about the link between families and regional dynamism? Some demographers and urbanists see the shrinking percentage of families as a sign of their increasing irrelevance to regional growth. One prominent demographer even called traditional families a kind of "endangered species," although an awfully large one given that they still number one in five households and constitute, with their kids, roughly 90 million people, or almost 30% of the population.

In reality families are unlikely to go the way of the Dodo. As the large millennial generation, born between 1982 and 2003, enters their late 20s and early 30s, they will naturally begin to spawn. Generational researchers [Morley Winograd and Mike Hais](#) have studied millennial attitudes and have found that these young adults are much more family-oriented than Gen Xers and even their own baby boomer parents. Some 85% plan on getting married, and some 77% are inclined toward having children of their own.

It's also critical to expand our definition of families. Once children leave their home, parents do not suddenly become footloose, fancy-free singles; they remain parents. Often they end up moving closer to their children, or sometimes the children make a "U-turn" to be close to Mom and Dad: Grandparents, after all, make excellent, and cheap, babysitters.

Of course, many of the more affluent and educated young adults will initially head to urban centers like New York, San Francisco or Boston as they seek potential spouses and begin their careers. But as they age, Winograd and Hais note, many of the older millennials want to establish roots in more affordable suburbs that are often closer to their work, especially ones with good schools. According to a survey by Frank Magid and Associates, a large plurality of millennials [name suburbs as their "ideal" place to settle](#), more so than earlier generations.

The surprising uptick in the percentage of multigenerational households also suggests a growing role for extended families. Rather than shrinking, [household size](#) is beginning to grow again for the first time in decades.

According to the Pew Foundation, multi-generational households now make up [15% of households](#), up from 12% in 1980. If hard times continue this trend likely will accelerate. The percentage of single households has also started to flatten and has actually dropped among the elderly.

So what's the lesson here? Ignore the claims of pundits on right and left who long have predicted the demise of the family. The family will prove more important than ever in determining where people live, work and, especially, settle.

None of this suggests a reprise of the *Ozzie and Harriet* 1950s. As social historian Stephanie Coontz points out, that era was an outlier created by peculiar circumstances including the Depression and the Second World War, which suppressed child-bearing, followed by a huge and sustained economic boom. For most of our history, Coontz notes, family relations in America have been far less orthodox, with grandparents, aunts, uncles, divorced parents and even siblings raising kids.

Margaret Mead once wrote, "No matter how many communes anybody invents, the family always comes back." Those who have children, not those who do not, define and create the future. It's a lesson companies and economic developers would do well to learn.

## Fastest Growing Areas for 5-17 Year Olds

Rank		2000	2010	Change	% Change
1	Raleigh	143,369	214,124	70,755	49.4%
2	Las Vegas	248,469	349,636	101,167	40.7%
3	Austin	223,958	307,256	83,298	37.2%
4	Charlotte	243,784	329,495	85,711	35.2%

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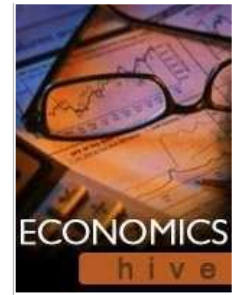
5	Phoenix	619,044	794,609	175,565	28.4%
6	Atlanta	813,107	1,016,643	203,536	25.0%
7	Dallas-Fort Worth	1,035,311	1,276,916	241,605	23.3%
8	Orlando	300,729	367,908	67,179	22.3%
9	Houston	988,463	1,190,078	201,615	20.4%
10	San	353,599	418,439	64,840	18.3%
11	Riverside-San Bernardino	756,033	893,468	137,435	18.2%
12	Nashville	235,779	278,122	42,343	18.0%
13	Indianapolis	293,728	332,189	38,461	13.1%
14	Denver	402,259	453,645	51,386	12.8%
15	Tampa-St. Petersburg	387,074	432,851	45,777	11.8%
16	Salt Lake City	210,272	232,331	22,059	10.5%
17	Columbus	297,323	327,153	29,830	10.0%
18	Washington	878,018	957,157	79,139	9.0%
19	Sacramento	361,875	390,940	29,065	8.0%
20	Oklahoma City	205,122	221,354	16,232	7.9%
21	Jacksonville	216,124	233,109	16,985	7.9%
22	Portland	356,220	381,928	25,708	7.2%
23	Louisville	212,078	224,638	12,560	5.9%
24	Kansas City	356,234	376,038	19,804	5.6%
25	Richmond	204,359	215,599	11,240	5.5%
26	Memphis	249,261	255,755	6,494	2.6%
27	Seattle	548,711	562,461	13,750	2.5%
28	San Jose	309,422	317,055	7,633	2.5%
29	Minneapolis-St. Paul	580,592	593,309	12,717	2.2%
30	Miami	870,894	881,916	11,022	1.3%
31	Birmingham	192,830	195,263	2,433	1.3%
32	San Diego	525,040	520,745	-4,295	-0.8%
33	Hartford	205,814	204,130	-1,684	-0.8%
34	Cincinnati	390,704	387,109	-3,595	-0.9%
35	Chicago	1,772,051	1,745,047	-27,004	-1.5%
36	San Francisco-Oakland	676,544	660,471	-16,073	-2.4%
37	Boston	751,049	726,366	-24,683	-3.3%
38	New York	3,269,939	3,144,025	-125,914	-3.9%
39	Milwaukee	292,713	279,371	-13,342	-4.6%
40	Philadelphia	1,074,283	1,023,024	-51,259	-4.8%
41	Baltimore	479,250	455,157	-24,093	-5.0%
42	St. Louis	528,319	493,153	-35,166	-6.7%
43	Virginia Beach	306,209	284,872	-21,337	-7.0%
44	Los Angeles	2,482,750	2,301,383	-181,367	-7.3%
45	Providence	281,358	257,614	-23,744	-8.4%
46	Detroit	869,661	784,176	-85,485	-9.8%
47	Cleveland	403,465	360,365	-43,100	-10.7%
48	Rochester	200,620	177,981	-22,639	-11.3%
49	Pittsburgh	406,762	353,740	-53,022	-13.0%
50	Buffalo	213,785	184,816	-28,969	-13.6%
51	New Orleans	261,362	195,664	-65,698	-25.1%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>28,485,719</b>	<b>29,560,594</b>	<b>1,074,875</b>	<b>3.8%</b>

Source: U.S. Census 2000, U.S. Census 2010. Analysis by Wendell Cox.

*This piece originally appeared at Forbes.com.*

*Joel Kotkin is executive editor of NewGeography.com and is a distinguished presidential fellow in urban futures at Chapman University, and an adjunct fellow of the Legatum Institute in London. He is author of [The City: A Global History](#). His newest book is [The Next Hundred Million: America in 2050](#), released in February, 2010.*

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