



Toward 2050 in North Carolina

A Roundtable Report on the Changing Face of the Tar Heel State

Julie Ajinkya and Rachel Wilf May 2012

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About Progress 2050

Progress 2050, a project of the Center for American Progress, seeks to lead, broaden, and strengthen the progressive movement by working toward a more inclusive progressive agenda—one that truly reflects our nation's rich ethnic and racial diversity. By 2050 there will be no ethnic majority in our nation and to ensure that the unprecedented growth of communities of color also yields future prosperity, we work to close racial disparities across the board with innovative policies that work for all.

About PolicyLink

PolicyLink is a national research and action institute advancing economic and social equity by Lifting Up What Works.[®] Founded in 1999, PolicyLink connects the work of people on the ground to the creation of sustainable communities of opportunity that allow everyone to participate and prosper. Lifting Up What Works is our way of focusing attention on how people are working successfully to use local, state, and federal policy to create conditions that benefit everyone, especially people in low-income communities and communities of color. We share our findings and analysis through our publications, website and online tools, convenings, national summits, and in briefings with national and local policymakers.

Contents

1 Introduction and summary

4 Why North Carolina?

- 7 Changes in the aging population and multigenerational households
- 7 Changes in workforce needs

10 Demographic change offers Raleigh challenges and opportunities

- 10 Addressing the region's intertwined challenges of employment and education, or "edunomics"
- 14 Raleigh fights inter-communal division through coalitions
- 16 Intergenerational leadership prepares North Carolina for demographic change

19 Conclusion

20 About the Authors and acknowledgments

21 List of participants at the convening in Raleigh, North Carolina

22 Endnotes

Introduction and summary

The United States is rapidly approaching the point where there will no longer be any clear racial or ethnic majority—as soon as the year 2042. At the same time, the fastest-growing racial and ethnic groups were hit first and worst by the recent economic downturn and face persistent barriers to achieving the levels of education, health, and employment that our nation needs to succeed in the global economy. As the entire country undergoes this dramatic demographic transformation, leaders in government, business, philanthropy, and the civic sector must take steps now to prepare for our more diverse future.

In many communities, these demographic shifts are well underway: People of color are already the majority in four states and in more than 300 counties across the country. Community leaders working in these places may well have wisdom and relevant strategies to share with other communities as they prepare for similar population shifts.

It is in this spirit that Progress 2050—a project of the Center for American Progress—and PolicyLink—a national research and action institute advancing economic and social equity—partnered to hold a series of 2050 roundtables in communities that have already experienced aspects of this demographic shift. The roundtables are meant to help us learn from the experiences of these bellwether communities about what the rest of the country may have in store and what policy shifts are needed to ensure that our nation embraces its diverse future. This is the fourth report in a series documenting these roundtable discussions and describes a conversation that took place in Raleigh, North Carolina, in December 2011. The first of our roundtables was hosted in Arlington, Virginia (July 2011), the second in Los Angeles, California (October 2011), and the third in the San Joaquin Valley, California (October 2011).

The broader goal of the Progress 2050/PolicyLink partnership is to initiate a national conversation to explore a new vision of what America can and should be in 2050, when there won't be an ethnic majority in our nation. We intend for these

conversations to inform our policy agenda and ultimately lead to the crafting of policy that lifts communities of color and creates a future in which all can prosper.

At the Raleigh roundtable, as was the case at the preceding roundtables, the participants included community activists, policy researchers, business leaders, academics, and staff from elected offices. (See the attached list of convening participants on page 20 of this report.) The range of their expertise was diverse, spanning issues including—but not limited—to economic development, fair lending, financial security, education, incarceration, and civil rights.

We chose North Carolina as the site for this discussion because it is undergoing a massive population shift. Over the past 10 years, the state’s white population has increased by 12.5 percent, while the state’s African American population has increased by 17.9 percent, and the state’s Hispanic population has increased by a substantial 111 percent.¹ During this same time the state’s population has aged at a rapid pace, resulting in significant changes to both household and workforce composition. Additionally, North Carolina’s young population—which will increasingly determine the state’s housing markets and development patterns, as well as the strength of the workforce—now predominantly comprises youth of color.

These changes, particularly the youth dynamic, are projected to have significant implications on public policy matters in the state. Consequently, the number one question that roundtable participants discussed concerned what investments and strategies must be immediately put in place to ensure that this growing youth population is prepared to become the state’s future leaders, workers, voters, and homebuyers.

North Carolina was also selected because of its distinctive experience with the civil rights history of this country, which makes the fact that communities of color continue to face persistent inequalities and disparities all the more disconcerting. Most notably, the iconic Greensboro sit-ins of 1960 started by African American college students quickly spread to other cities across the state and placed enormous economic and political pressure on local businesses, eventually leading them to begin serving blacks. Several prominent African American North Carolinians also became national leaders in the civil rights movement, including Ella Baker of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Floyd B. McKissick of the Congress of Racial Equality, and Reginald Hawkins of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Mecklenburg Organization for Political Affairs. The state’s civil rights history and

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experience with youth activism in particular made an interesting backdrop for the roundtable discussion about increasing levels of diversity.

We begin our account with some demographic context about the state of North Carolina and the Raleigh region in particular. We then move on to discuss the three prominent themes that roundtable participants raised from the region's experience in turning challenges into opportunities generated by the state's increasing levels of diversity:

- Addressing the intertwined challenges of employment and education, or what we term edunomics
- Fighting intercommunal division through coalitions
- Preparing for the state's future by investing in intergenerational leadership

Lastly, we recount and make the case that demographic change is coming, and it is in everyone's best interests to fully embrace this change, understanding why it is indeed a true opportunity for the entire country.

Why North Carolina?

Judith Bell, the president of PolicyLink, kicked off the roundtable with a quick overview of the demographic change that is underway in this country and described how the upcoming shift to becoming a majority-people-of-color country underscored the importance of preparing our entire population for the future. She explained that by the year 2018 about 45 percent of all jobs will require at least an associate's degree, yet we know that only 27 percent of African Americans, 26 percent of U.S.-born Latinos, and 14 percent of Latino immigrants hold an associate's degree. This leaves a serious disconnect between the skills our future workforce will require and the current qualifications that our growing populations possess. The pressing question, Bell argued, is what investments we need to make now to attain the education levels needed for the jobs of the future.

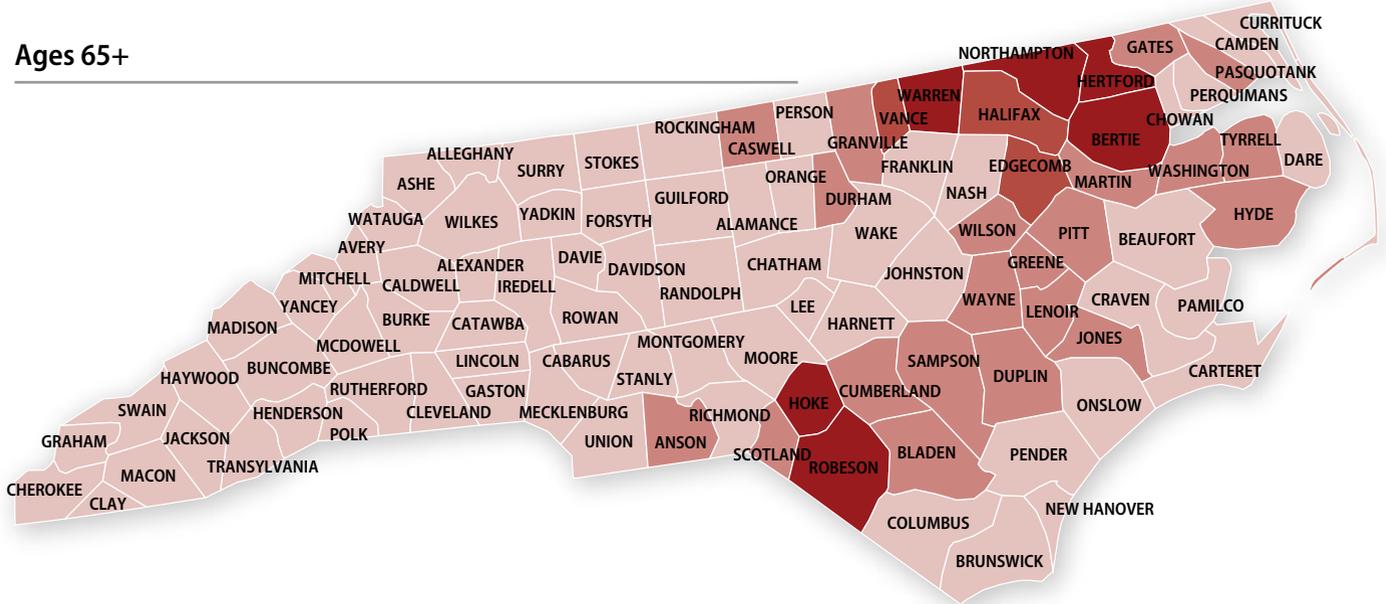
Bell explained that by 2019 the majority of youth in the United States will be youth of color. In North Carolina the change is already evident. The state's young population is predominantly made up of children of color while the elderly population is still predominantly white. Thus the question that Bell posed focuses on youth and asks what sort of investments we must make in this young population to make sure that they are prepared to take the reins of this country's future.

Bell also discussed how recent economic research shows that there is a positive relationship between equality and economic growth. Countries with greater across-the-board equality also experience longer-term and deeper economic growth, according to a recent International Monetary Fund study that found countries that were more equal in their income distributions had stronger and more sustained periods of economic growth. Research by Manuel Pastor, a professor of geography and American studies and ethnicity at the University of Southern California, and others has found that regions that are less segregated and have less concentrated poverty also perform better economically.² Accordingly, PolicyLink has been making the argument for a focus on equity as an economic imperative, most notably in a recent paper titled "America's Tomorrow: Equity is the Superior Growth Model."

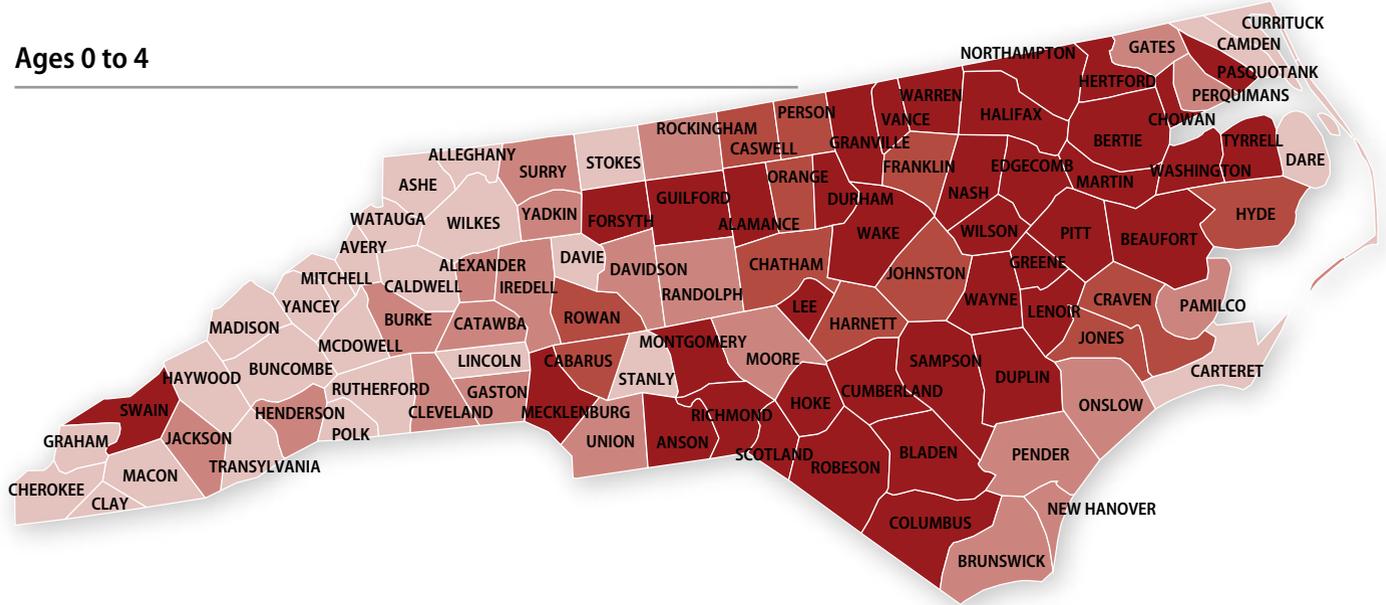
FIGURE 1
A new generation gap

The diverging demographics of seniors and youth

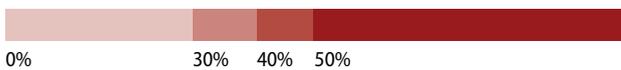
Ages 65+



Ages 0 to 4



Percent people of color by county

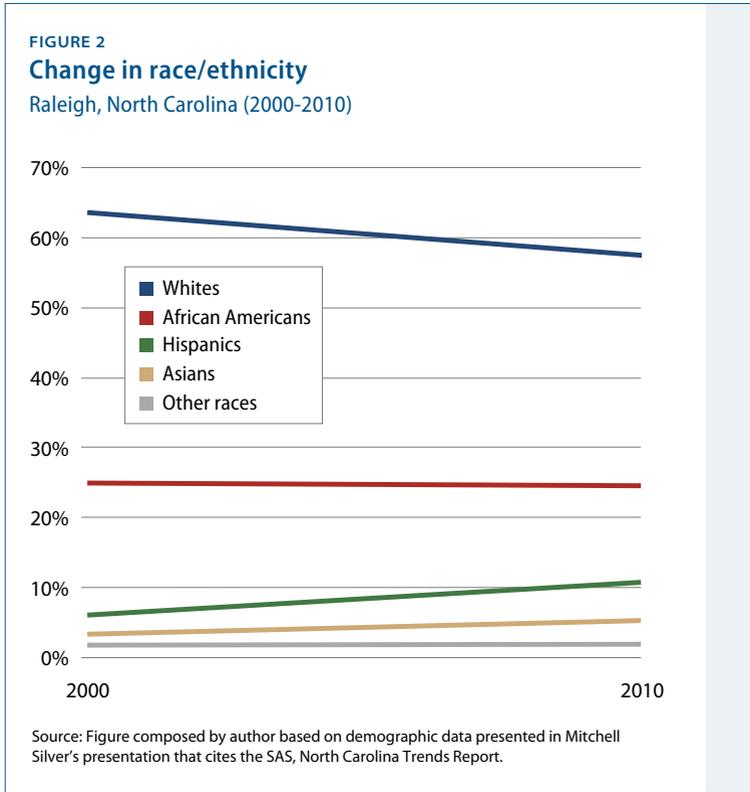


Source: Judith Bell's presentation at the roundtable discussion.
 Sources: 2010 Census (Summary File 1), Census TIGER/Line, NHGIS, and ESRI.

Next Bell introduced Mitchell Silver, the chief planning and development officer and planning director for the City of Raleigh, North Carolina, who presented some North Carolina-specific demographic information to contextualize the afternoon’s discussion. Silver began his presentation by explaining that one of the most surprising elements of the upcoming demographic change, one that often gets overlooked, is that most of the growth over the next 50 years will be in the south and in the west. He explained that the Research Triangle (the name used to refer to the geographic region in North Carolina that includes the cities of Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill) alone is projected to grow by 1.2 million residents and by about 700,000 jobs over the next 20 years.³ Raleigh has grown from the 54th largest city in the country in 2005 to the 43rd largest city in 2011.⁴

He explained that over the past 10 years, North Carolina’s population has increased by 12.5 percent for whites, 17.9 percent for African Americans, and an incredible 111 percent for Hispanics. He reasoned that agricultural employment opportunities were the most likely cause for such disparate population growth in the region. Given the racial and ethnic breakdown of Raleigh (see Figure 2), Silver said one of the pressing questions that the region was likely to face was how the non-Hispanic white and black populations would react to the exploding Hispanic population. School diversity policies, he argued, would be particularly interesting to watch over the next couple of decades. Fittingly, a large part of the roundtable discussion following Silver’s demographic presentation did, in fact, address this issue.

Before concluding his opening remarks, Silver went on to describe two important demographic trends in the region—changes in the aging population and multigenerational households, and changes in workforce needs.



Changes in the aging population and multigenerational households

Both national and regional populations are aging quickly. Across the country, by 2030 one in five Americans will be over the age of 65.⁵ In North Carolina the percentage of residents over the age of 65 will increase by 124 percent from 2000 to 2030.⁶ In addition to the graying of the population, household composition is also quickly changing. By 2050 the overwhelming majority of households in the United States will be headed by single adults and will increasingly become multigenerational. The latter change has to do with an increasing number of 25–34-year-olds moving back in with their parents (this population increased by 25.5 percent from 2007–2011), as well as the parents of baby boomers and baby boomers themselves moving into their children’s households, due to either rising health care costs or their inability to take care of themselves as they age.

Silver argued that these changes will have serious implications for North Carolina residents. For instance, in regards to the aging population, the region will need more young workers to take care of its elderly residents, and the tax base for local government might face increasing challenges as seniors seek property tax relief due to their fixed incomes. When it comes to the changing composition of households, Silver worried that the different household structures will create a mismatch in the housing market—experts estimate that there will be an excess inventory of 22 million single-family homes by 2030 with no buyer market to purchase those homes.⁷ He also predicted that land-use patterns and the need for greater public transportation options would change as seniors realized they could no longer drive.

Changes in workforce needs

Silver also explained that the graying of the population is going to impact the region’s future workforce needs. The percentage of the population, for example, that is considered working-age (aged 18–64) across the country is projected to decline from 63 percent in 2008 to 57 percent in 2050. Moreover, 50 percent of the working-age population is projected to be made up of workers of color by 2039, with that number increasing to 55 percent by the year 2050.⁸ This will mean that the country as a whole will increasingly rely on a racially and ethnically diverse workforce to compete in a 21st century global economy.

Yet, the implications of these changes in workforce needs highlight the fact that current investments are failing to prepare the region's youth of color to comprise the workforce of the future. Silver explained that, despite being among the fastest growing groups, African Americans and Hispanics have the lowest educational attainment rates in the Raleigh region—25 percent and 17 percent, respectively. Thus, the main question that Silver's demographic presentation posed to roundtable participants was about what investments are currently needed to make sure that the region can improve its rates of educational attainment among its future leaders, workers, voters, and homebuyers to ensure a collective sense of prosperity for all.

The generation gap that Silver describes in both of the trends above—where the growing graying population is predominantly white, and the growing youth population is predominantly made up of youth of color—is a serious concern for the state, as it may create an intergenerational fight over resources. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2010 American Community Survey, 44.9 percent of North Carolina's under-18 population is made up of children of color. By comparison, only 34.8 percent of the state's population over age 60 is made up of people of color. What this means is that a significant percentage of the elderly population may feel disconnected with the younger population and resist investing in the latter's future.

Silver said that as residents begin to age in the region, they are starting to express a sense of reluctance to continue carrying the tax load because of their own limited resources. Educational funding was one of the clearest casualties of the state's recent budget negotiations; it has clearly suffered as a result of this decreasing pool of resources. The North Carolina Justice Center estimates that 19,215 students were impacted by the most recent budget cuts in June 2011. The cuts directly led to the loss of 915 teacher positions and 2,042 teaching assistant positions from the 2010–11 school year to the 2011–12 school year. Since 2009 North Carolina schools have heavily relied on \$1.6 billion in federal funding to supplement allocations from the state. Even with these extra resources, 16,678 public school positions have been eliminated since the start of the Great Recession in 2007.

The racial and ethnic composition of this generation gap is mirrored by national trends as well—whereas 64 percent of the 65-years-and-older population was white in 2010, this number is projected to fall to between 45 percent and 48 percent by the year 2050. Dowell Myers, a noted demographer and professor of planning and development at the University of Southern California's School of Policy, explains the shortsightedness of the older population's reluctance

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to invest in the future of an increasingly diverse youth population—the more educated a child becomes, he argues, the better the job he or she qualifies for and the more money he or she is able to give back to society.⁹ In addition to being our future workforce and taxpayers, this youth population will also be our future leaders, voters, and homebuyers—all vital roles that will also increasingly affect the aging population. Silver compared this period of demographic change to previous periods in United States history where Americans have made sacrifices for the future and said that it is time once again to make a similar decision in the best interests of our entire country.

Demographic change offers Raleigh challenges and opportunities

The conversation was then turned back to Bell, who began the discussion by asking participants for broad reactions to these demographic facts about Raleigh's growth against a backdrop of larger national demographic changes. Participants agreed that increasing diversity in the region was a pressing concern and that the only real way to promote growth and prosperity in North Carolina was to create growth and prosperity for all of the various communities that reside in the state. Driven by the question of what investments were necessary to create this future growth, participants raised the following three main areas of concern:

- “Edunomics,” or the interaction between education and employment
- Cross-community coalition work
- Intergenerational leadership

Addressing the region's intertwined challenges of employment and education, or “edunomics”

One of the most prominent themes that participants raised in reaction to the presentation about changing demographics in the region was an issue referred to as “edunomics,” which encompasses the inextricable relationship between education and employment. It was noted that the region is experiencing challenges in both areas, but participants agreed that trying to determine which one—education or employment—should be tackled first was impossible. Instead, participants suggested that investments should be made in both areas to ensure that the region's youth receive the education they need to succeed in a rapidly changing workforce.

According to the Census Bureau, African Americans and Latinos have higher unemployment rates than non-Hispanic white residents in North Carolina—the unemployment rate in 2010 was 19.1 percent for African Americans and

14.6 percent for Latinos, while it was 10.5 percent for non-Hispanic whites. Additionally, 27.7 percent of African Americans and 33.9 percent of Latinos lived in poverty in North Carolina in 2010, while the rate was 11.8 percent for non-Hispanic whites.

In light of these glaring disparities, participants emphasized the importance of continuing to invest in workforce training programs that would close both employment and earning gaps. Patrick Graham with the National Urban League Central Cities emphasized the importance of inclusion to the economy—that is, making sure that the public understands that public investments in job opportunities for diverse communities do generate economic returns to the entire community. He cited the Urban League’s short-term training programs in what the organization calls 21st century skills. Specifically he noted a program that invests \$700,000 in helping African Americans and Latinos obtain national certification in broadband fiber optics and placing those individuals in jobs at companies such as Microsoft. Their research shows that this relatively small investment yielded an estimated \$7,490,000 in salaries in 2011, indicating that smart investments can generate large economic assets in the community—in the form of improved employment opportunities and earnings, which in turn allow residents to contribute back to economic growth in the region.

Research on the increasing levels of buying power of North Carolina’s communities of color underlines the arguments made by our roundtable participants that investing in diverse communities would benefit the entire region. According to a report released by North Carolina’s Institute of Minority Economic Development, from 2000 to 2010 the state’s African American community’s buying power increased from \$28 billion to \$44 billion. North Carolina’s Hispanic community’s buying power increased from \$5.1 billion to \$14.2 billion during that same 10-year period, while the state’s Asian American community’s buying power increased from \$2.9 billion in 2000 to \$6.9 billion in 2010.¹⁰

Turning from the issue of buying power, Gabriela Zabala from the North Carolina governor’s office moved the conversation to economic empowerment and focused on what she called the Latino community’s biggest challenge: the lack of economic development. She said it is a problem also experienced by the African American community in Durham. While many members of communities of color are entrepreneurs, many also lack the financial literacy and training needed to make their businesses prosper. Additionally, she said that banks fail to provide loans that would make Latino businesses more sustainable.

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The Latino Community Credit Union (also known as the Cooperativa Latina Credit Union), an organization represented at the roundtable, has served as a particularly successful model in expanding economic security to immigrant communities. The credit union primarily serves low-income individuals (95 percent), and its services are tailored to new immigrants, 95 percent of whom are Hispanic. It offers a free financial literacy program, which includes workshops on utilizing a financial institution, saving and budgeting, building credit, buying a vehicle, and purchasing a home. It also offers a wide range of affordable and accessible financial products, including deposit accounts, remittances, credit builder loans, credit cards, car loans, and mortgage loans.¹¹ The credit union is committed to providing economic opportunity for all, and its national award-winning work is a useful model that could be replicated elsewhere to improve the economic security of traditionally economically insecure populations.

Numerous participants pointed out that these economic concerns could not be discussed without simultaneously addressing education in the region. Specifically, participants pointed to a school diversity debate that has taken place for the past few years in Wake County, North Carolina, as an example of diversity ultimately being valued in the school system and different factions of the community rallying together in support of integration.

In 2010 the Wake County School Board did away with the “diversity policy” that had been in operation in the county since 2000. The policy had considered income as a primary factor in assigning students to schools with the goal of limiting the proportion of low-income students in any school to no more than 40 percent. The approach received national acclamation, as student performance rates soared, particularly African American and Hispanic students’ test rates, and it seemed to underline numerous studies that showed the academic benefits of economically diversifying schools.¹²

In 2009, however, a newly elected bloc of four Republican members on the school board flipped its composition from eight to one in favor of busing, to five to four in opposition.¹³ The school board debate became a partisan division between those members who supported the diversity policy and the new members who advocated for “neighborhood schools or community assignment zones,” where students would attend schools in close proximity to their address—in effect, concentrating low-income students in low-income schools.

While many people thought that the 2009 election was a referendum on ending busing to achieve school diversity, Mitchell Silver explained that the 2011 election proved that residents valued both diversity and Wake County’s national reputation as an outstanding school system. Civil rights leaders came together with business leaders, parents, and teachers in nonpartisan alliances to fight in support of diversity. Candidates backed by diversity supporters swept four of the five contested seats and the board chairman, Ron Margiotta, who had led the effort to dismantle the diversity policy plan, was defeated—denying Republicans a majority on the school board.¹⁴

Silver argued that this debate gave the community an opportunity to examine its values and, in the end, a significant majority expressed their support for diversity in the school system. He was particularly appreciative of the difficult conversations he heard people having about race as a result of this debate (because of the high number of low-income students of color)—a conversation he said was difficult to have and that most people avoided, but one that this community took head on.

Chris Fitzsimon from the public think tank NC Policy Watch agreed that the election ended up being an election around the future of the public school system in Wake County. He saw the Wake County debate as a microcosm of the larger debate playing out in the North Carolina legislature, where a tea party faction is trying to push for vouchers and private, for-profit schools at the expense of investing in public education. He applauded the diverse, grassroots coalition made up of groups such as the NAACP, a number of Wake County schools, and committed mothers of students, who went to every board meeting and relentlessly sent out press releases to garner support for integration.

Still, Fitzsimon argued, as much as the integration policy had been admired for its impact on student performance, the debate highlighted the county’s ongoing educational disparities and suggested that the school system was still not improving the performance of African American students, in particular. According to a 2010 report on Wake County’s educational disparities, significant gaps still affect Hispanic students, as well. In the 2008–09 school year, while 89.2 percent of white students performed at or above grade level on the End-of-Grade reading comprehension test, only 51 percent of Hispanic students and 52 percent of African American students performed at the same level.¹⁵ Similarly, while 94.5 percent of white students performed at or above grade level on the End-of-Grade math test, only 72.6 percent of Hispanic students and 66.6 percent of African American students reached the same level.¹⁶ While diversifying the county’s schools had certainly improved rates, Fitzsimon argued that the job was far from over.

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Participants agreed that the debate's main strength was in the coalition work that it promoted among groups that usually do not come together. A mass demonstration march in Raleigh in support of integration was incredibly diverse. It not only brought racially diverse groups together, it also brought together the old, the young, and advocates for education and for economic development.

Raleigh fights inter-communal division through coalitions

Roundtable participants raised the general need for coalition building outside of the school diversity debate, as well. In particular, as demographics change in the community, participants worried that different communities of color would have difficulty finding common ground. One participant, for instance, identified divisiveness within communities of color as an obstacle to forward-thinking policy changes. Another participant agreed and specifically identified conflicts between African Americans and Latinos in the Raleigh-Durham metro area as a challenge that will have to be faced and overcome as the area's population continues changing.

These worries were corroborated by a 2006 Pew Research Center poll that reported African Americans from Raleigh-Durham felt particularly hard-hit by the surge in immigration in the state. Specifically, the poll reports that 29 percent of African Americans in the region reported losing a job or having a family member who lost a job to an immigrant worker, 57 percent favored reducing legal immigration, and 58 percent favored deporting undocumented immigrants. These regional numbers were higher than national levels for African Americans on the same issues.

Another roundtable participant, Lisa Chun, an immigration attorney from the North Carolina Justice Center, expressed concern that the state legislature was considering passing anti-immigrant legislation similar to laws that have taken effect in both Arizona and Alabama. In the case of North Carolina, at the time of the roundtable in December, a new committee was in the midst of being formed by state lawmakers to examine North Carolina's role in immigration policy. In the committee hearings that were held following our Raleigh roundtable, state legislators have been investigating the effects of immigration programs in other states. One element of that investigation is to determine how lawmakers in other states have pushed efforts to create "attrition through enforcement"—policies that aim to make life so unbearable for undocumented immigrants that they "self-deport" back to their homelands. The committee is also investigating the cost of undocumented immigration to the taxpaying residents of North Carolina.

Yet these programs have been shown to be impractical and expensive to states,¹⁷ and research shows that most unauthorized immigrants are already considered ineligible and therefore do not receive most government services. Yet Chun worried that the current anti-immigrant hostility spreading around the country was also present in North Carolina's research triangle area. The previously mentioned Pew poll justified this concern, reporting that 84 percent of Raleigh-Durham's African American population believed that police should be required to check for immigration status during traffic stops—a higher percentage than the 67 percent of whites who agreed this should be a requirement.¹⁸

Participants also discussed how divisions have arisen between communities of color and the gay and transgender communities in the region. For instance, one participant observed that African American support for gay and transgender rights may be lacking in the region, but it has nothing to do with the black community not favoring gay rights—after all, no one gets up in the morning and wants to be discriminated against twice, he argued. Instead, he speculated that the lack of support stems from frustration with the gay community—a community that calls for black support when the rights of the gay and transgender community are threatened but who otherwise fail to support civil rights struggles based on racial disparities.

Another roundtable participant agreed that there is often a misperception among members of the gay, lesbian, and transgender community that communities of color will not support gay and transgender issues because they believe that most members from this community are white, ignoring the significant percentage of gay community members of color. The participant who originally raised the issue, however, disagreed that this was the reason and restated his previous explanation for division between the two communities—lack of mutual support across group issues. In response, the participant who spoke from the gay, lesbian, and transgender perspective said he was committed to working with the social justice and the human rights community, and that his group was interested in developing coalitions. In fact, the gay community just recently started working closely with the NAACP, joining the Historic Thousands on Jones Street, or HKonJ, rally and march that brings together nearly 100 North Carolina social justice and community development organizations to show their solidarity on diverse issues.

The HKonJ movement was mentioned a number of times by participants as a strong example of the type of coalition work that is beginning to bridge these intercommunal divisions. The movement, which refers to the fact that the North Carolina House of Representatives is located on Jones Street, was founded in

2007. The coalition currently focuses around an annual march and is organized in part by the NAACP, promoting a diverse range of issues, including health care, voting rights, collective bargaining, immigrant rights, and quality public education.¹⁹ The march draws together members from nearly a hundred civil rights and social justice groups and is a proud example of the region's ability to fight common struggles by building coalitions across diverse communities.²⁰

Together NC is another such coalition that participants cited as a successful example of communities working across issues. This coalition comprises a number of nonprofits across the state seeking to block cuts to the state's budget in response to the recession. Fitzsimon described Together NC as a coalition of organizations "of all stripes and ethnicities."

Together NC's approach is to push lawmakers to continue making wise spending choices (investing in crucial areas of the state's economy and infrastructure), while at the same time urging them to reconfigure the revenue collection system so that it treats all of North Carolina's citizens more equitably. Members of the organization include El Pueblo, Inc. (a statewide advocacy and public policy organization oriented around the Latino community), the North Carolina Latino Coalition, the North Carolina Minority Support Center (recently renamed The Support Center), and the North Carolina NAACP.²¹

Anita Earls, founder of the Southern Coalition for Social Justice, underlined the importance of these coalitions and said that black-brown coalitions have developed in the state with a shared understanding of common struggles. She explained, "I have voting rights clients who integrated their local library back in the '60s and '70s, who then were voting rights plaintiffs to get a black on the local county commission, and now are learning Spanish and running an afterschool program where they're bringing in Latinos as well as African American students. So there's a recognition that their struggles, [and the struggles of] the new populations coming into the state, those struggles mirror the struggles of their lifetimes. ... there's kind of a recognition that we can broaden the civil rights movement to a human rights movement and bring in lots of people in our advocacy."

Intergenerational leadership prepares North Carolina for demographic change

Roundtable participants also discussed the importance of intergenerational coalition work in addition to the multiracial, multi-issue coalition efforts outlined

earlier. Patrick Graham from the National Urban League Central Cities argued that youth engagement is vital to the region's future. He noted that an extraordinary number of young people were actively engaged in the 2008 presidential election in large measure because they found then-candidate Barack Obama's message to be compelling and charismatic, along with speaking to their generation's needs. Yet three-and-a-half years into the Obama administration they helped to elect, Graham says young people have failed to translate their electoral engagement into engagement with North Carolina's educational and economic structures. Part of this drop-off in energy, he argued, has to do with elder community members and leaders of civic groups talking in a manner and tone geared toward an older demographic, which fails to appeal to the needs of young people.

According to the North Carolina Civil Health Index, North Carolina's population aged 16–24 is indeed the least civically engaged of any group in the state, mirroring national trends. While 55 percent of the state's youth aged 18–24 voted in the 2008 election, this peak in youth voter turnout did not continue during the 2009 election cycle, when youth turnout in municipal elections fell back to the low levels of the pre-2008 municipal races.²² Further, according to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, voter turnout among North Carolinians aged 18–29 in the 2010 midterm elections was 23.5 percent.²³

Mitchell Silver, while agreeing with Graham that young people need to become more galvanized because they are the region's future, nonetheless pointed out a fact that is often overlooked when talking about this young generation: They are volunteering more than any previous generation. Silver said that young people are willing give back to their communities but noted there is a condition—they require a sense of purpose. If issues such as education and land use can be communicated to this generation with a sense of purpose, the chances are high that young people will be motivated to act, said Silver. The question then becomes, according to Silver, how to communicate a sense of purpose behind all of the work that roundtable participants represent.

Yet it also appears that this generation of young people might be building social capital in new and innovative ways that the traditional metrics of voting and organization membership are unable to measure. Online-interest-driven communities such as new forms of social and digital media may in fact be helping diverse groups of young people to connect with one another and develop social capital. Research suggests that encouraging young people to use technology to develop meaningful connections with their peers might lead to more civic engagement.²⁴

While 55 percent of the state's youth aged 18–24 voted in the 2008 election, this peak in youth voter turnout did not continue during the 2009 election cycle, when youth turnout in municipal elections fell back to the low levels of the pre-2008 municipal races.

Additionally, a number of organizations represented at the roundtable have actively involved youth in the process of making change. The Urban League of Central Carolinas organizes “[The Urban League Urban Youth Empowerment Program](#),” which provides an educational and training bridge for at-risk youth. The Cooperativa Latina Credit Union has an award-winning “[Culture of Saving](#)” program aimed at increasing youth financial literacy, which is one of three pilot projects that focus on three distinct age groups to encourage a culture of savings across multiple generations. The National Conference of Community and Justice of the Piedmont Triad is recognized widely for its award-winning [ANYTOWN](#) summer leadership institute and the follow-up ANYTOWN Anytime programs that develop youth leaders as powerful change agents and champions of diversity and inclusion in their schools and communities. Additionally, the North Carolina governor’s office has a [Youth Advocacy and Involvement Office](#) that offers opportunities for leadership development and experiential education that aims to teach students about civic participation by encouraging their involvement in government.

Melvin Montford, a roundtable participant from the A. Philip Randolph Institute, introduced an initiative that he believed held promise in cultivating not only youth leadership but that also addresses some of the racial and ethnic disparities in educational attainment that Wake County’s integration debate raised. The program is run by Carolina College Advising Corps/University of North Carolina AmeriCorps and connects local university and college graduates with local high school students, where the older students serve in advisory roles for the younger students. For instance, Montford visited a high school in Durham that hosted recent University of North Carolina graduates as visiting advisors. In addition to building upon schools’ limited budgets, where often only one advisor is burdened with counseling hundreds of students on career possibilities, this program enables students who have actually made it through college themselves to counsel younger students about their future higher-education opportunities.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that the North Carolina roundtable conversation was meant to focus on the local experience of the state’s residents with demographic change, participants were eager to make the connection between their experiences and the demographic shift that the rest of the nation will soon experience. In particular, participants were concerned with formulating an inclusive narrative that incorporated all of the concerns that were raised through their discussion—from employment and educational disparities to finding common ground across different communities and issues to investing in the youth population as our nation’s future.

Some participants believed that this narrative needed to focus on fairness and inclusiveness to make sure that our country would provide opportunities for all and not just a select few. Other participants thought that making an argument for investments in education and workforce-development efforts must be framed within an overarching commitment to keeping our country competitive in the global economy of the future. Regardless of which national narrative participants advocated for, the underlying lesson was the same: Demographic change is coming, and it is in everyone’s best interests to understand why it is a true opportunity for the entire country.

About the Authors

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List of participants at the convening in Raleigh, North Carolina:

Melvin F. Montford	A. Philip Randolph Institute
Pat McCoy	Action NC
Kevin Rogers	Action NC
Sarah Preston	American Civil Liberties Union of North Carolina
Abigail English	Center for Adolescent Health and the Law at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
Mark Dorosin	Center for Civil Rights at the University of North Carolina
Keith Corbett	Center for Responsible Lending
Kristen Smith	Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chamber of Commerce
Erika Bell	Cooperativa Latina Credit Union
Luis Pastor	Cooperativa Latina Credit Union
Carl Rist	Corporation for Enterprise Development
Stuart Campbell	Equality NC
Jada Drew	Guilford College
Susana Jerez	Latin American Coalition
Colin Austin	MDC: Equity and Opportunity
Dr. Patrick Graham	National Urban League Central Cities
Brigette E. Rasberry	NC Association of Community Development Corporations
Carley Ruff	NC Housing Coalition
Andrea Harris	NC Institute of Minority Economic Development
Lisa Chun	North Carolina Justice Center
Chris Fitzsimon	NC Policy Watch
Anna Lee	Working Films
Gabriela Zabala	North Carolina's governor's office
Anita Earls	Southern Coalition for Social Justice
Susan Feit	The National Conference for Community and Justice of the Piedmont-Triad
Roberto G. Quercia	University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

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