

# Research & Policy Brief Series

ISSUE NUMBER 51/DECEMBER 2012

## The Graying of the Empire State: Parts of New York Grow Older Faster\*

By **E.J. McMahon** and **Robert Scardamalia**, Empire Center for NYS Policy

The movement of people in and out of New York State (NYS) over the past two decades, including the combined effects of foreign immigration and domestic migration, has produced significant changes in the Empire State's age profile. Key trends between 1990 and 2010 included the following:

- The number of young adults (20 to 34-year-olds) dropped sharply in both upstate NY and downstate suburbs.
- New York City (NYC) was a magnet for young people, attracting 300,000 new residents age 20 to 34 years old between 2000 and 2010. However, many who came to the city as young adults in the 1990s left the city once they reached middle age in the following decade.
- Counter to the national trend, the population of children and teenagers decreased in all regions of NYS between 2000 and 2010, after growing at less than one-eighth the national rate during the previous 10-year period.

Due to a decline in fertility rates and the aging of the baby-boom generation, the nation as a whole got older between 1990 and 2010. NYS got older, too – but with striking regional variations. While the median age of the nation's population rose 4.3 years between 1990 and 2010, it increased by 1.9 years in NYC, 5.2 years in downstate suburbs, and 6.6 years upstate.

**Table 1: Median Age of Population**

	1990	2000	2010
All U.S.	32.9	35.3	37.2
New York State	33.8	35.9	38.0
New York City	33.6	34.2	35.5
Downstate Suburbs*	34.7	37.2	39.9
Upstate**	33.4	37.1	40.0

\* Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Westchester, Nassau and Suffolk counties

\*\* All counties north of Orange and Dutchess

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, RLS Demographics

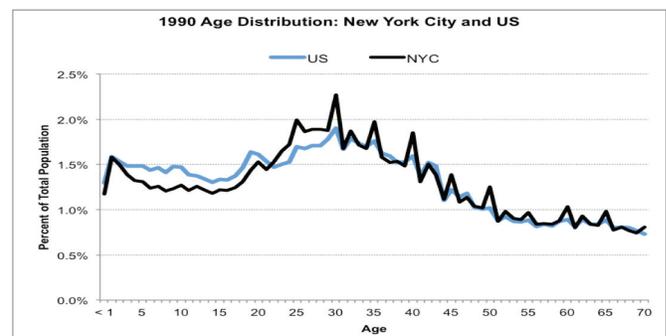
### Background

NYS lost nearly 2.9 million residents to other states between 1990 and 2010 – the biggest domestic migration outflow, relative to population, of any state during that 20-year period. An influx of foreign immigrants, mainly to NYC and its suburbs, reduced the state's net migration loss during that period to about 800,000 residents. As a result of these trends, NYS's share of the nation's population continued to decline. A state, region or community that attracts young people—and retains them as they build careers, businesses and families—is

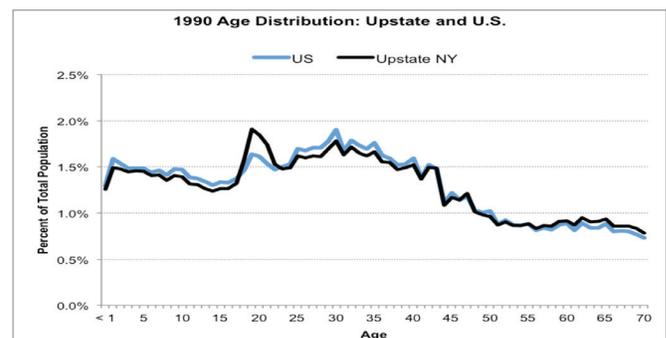
in a good position to build for the future. In an aging nation, youth is an especially valuable asset. But it is an asset that has been rapidly depleted in some parts of NYS.

### Migration Effects, Before and After

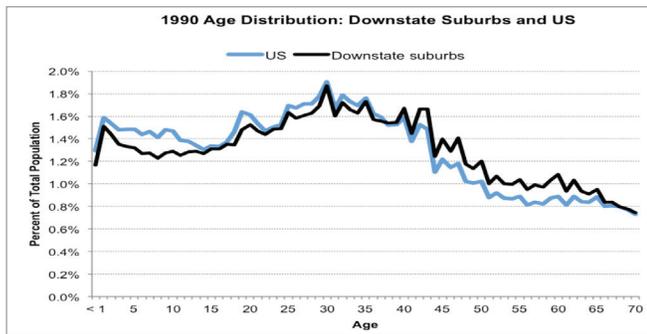
The following charts compare the age distribution of the U.S. population with the distribution in each of three major regional subdivisions of NYS in 1990 and 2010. If the age distribution in NYS and the U.S. had remained unchanged during this period, the charts would be identical. Instead, notable differences developed—reflecting the impact of gains from foreign immigration and losses due to net domestic migration. (NOTE: All charts exclude residents above age 70.)



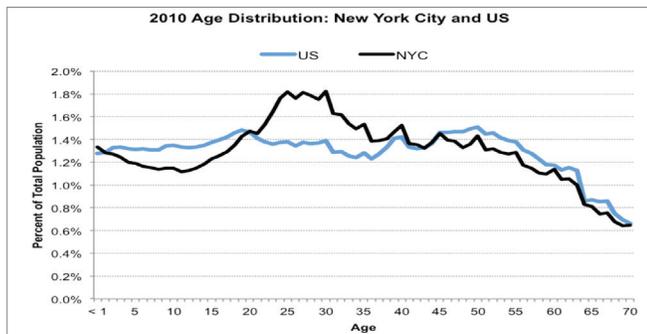
In 1990, New York City had fewer children and teens but more young adults than the national average.



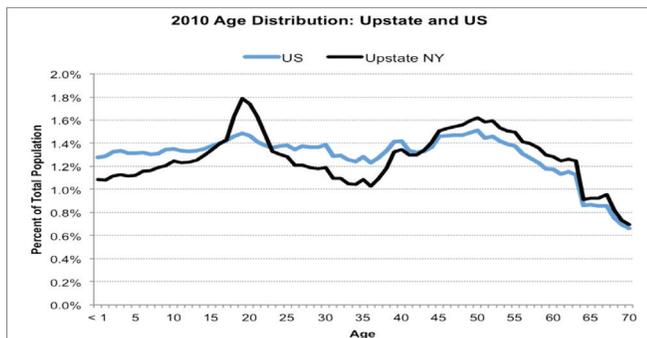
Upstate New York's age distribution closely tracked the nation's in 1990. The main deviation from the national norm was a larger percentage of residents in their late teens and early 20s, reflecting the region's exceptionally large concentration of colleges and universities.



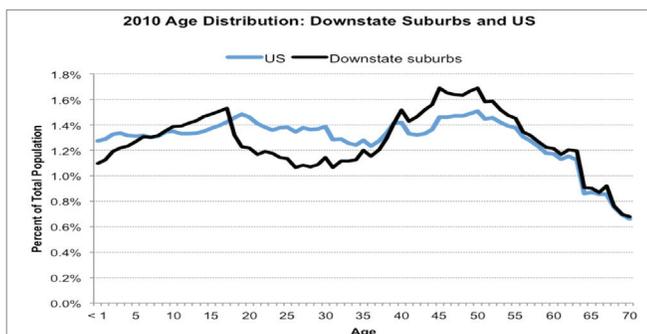
The downstate population was noticeably less youthful, more middle-aged than the nation's as of 1990.



By 2010, the differences were much wider, and the city's middle-aged population was noticeably below average.



The exodus of young adults from upstate after 1990 opened a noticeable gap between the region and U.S. in this category by 2010. With even fewer young people settling in the region, upstate's population of children also fell more sharply, while the middle-aged share increase.



By 2010, downstate's young adult gap had grown larger than upstate's – as did the middle-age bulge.

## Aging Implications

The relative youthfulness of a region's population is in many ways an important precursor of future economic growth. Unfortunately, with the notable exception of NYC, NYS got older faster than the rest of the country between 1990 and 2010. The graying trend has been especially pronounced in the upstate region. In 1990, the median age of upstate residents was just above 33, close to the national median and slightly below the medians for downstate and New York City. By 2010, the upstate median age had risen to 40, and the region's population included significantly fewer children, teens and young adults than the national average. Census data indicate that most of the people migrating from upstate NY to other parts of the country between 1990 and 2010 were children or young adults at the start of this 20-year period.<sup>1</sup> Presumably, they moved elsewhere in search of economic opportunities their home region was failing to produce. A similarly sharp decrease in young adults occurred in New York's downstate suburbs.

There has been one bright spot in this picture. Reversing the trend of the previous decade, upstate actually gained 70,000 residents in the 20-24 age bracket from 2000 to 2010 – a nearly 17 percent jump, which was significantly higher than the rate of increase in either NYC or the nation as a whole. This increase appears to have been due mainly to a surge in undergraduate enrollment at the region's colleges and universities, which at least temporarily attracted tens of thousands of young people to upstate from other regions and states.

Upstate's main hope for reversing its long-term decline is to create enough jobs to hold onto more of its recent bumper crop of college graduates. Unfortunately, the early indicators aren't good. Higher education enrollment is expected to drop by the end of the decade.<sup>2</sup> And while the economy has begun to recover from the recession, the 1.3 percent average annual rate in private sector job growth upstate over the past two years has been less than half the rate of growth during the 1990s—which wasn't enough to prevent an exodus of young adults during that decade. Unless the upstate region can somehow attract more young workers and their families, its population of children and young adults will continue to spiral downward. And its future outlook will grow even dimmer.

<sup>1</sup>A longer, more detailed version of this article first appeared on the Empire Center for New York State Policy's website on August 16, 2012. The original article may be viewed at: <http://www.empirecenter.org/pb/2012/08/migration3081612.cfm>

<sup>2</sup>For example, between 2000 and 2010, the upstate region experienced a net migration loss of 163,391 people in all age groups. The number of upstate residents born between 1976 and 1990, who were aged 10 to 24 as of the 2000 census, dropped by 130,426 by the time the 2010 census was taken, equivalent to about 80 percent of the region's total decline due to out-migration during that period.

<sup>2</sup>In a 2009 report, the state Education Department projected a nearly 17 percent drop in statewide enrollment in higher education between 2008 and 2019, following a 19 percent gain between 1997 and 2008. See "An Overview of Higher Education in New York State" at [www.highered.nysed.gov/oris/overview.pdf](http://www.highered.nysed.gov/oris/overview.pdf)

