Who We Are

Like the nation, St. Louis County is older, more racially and ethnically diverse, more suburban, and less traditional in its household types than it was in 2000. Unlike the nation, St. Louis County did not get bigger or experience a boom of Hispanics or other immigrants since the last census.

St. Louis County continues to be the most populous county in Missouri and the metropolitan region despite a slight population decline between 2000 and 2010. With nearly one million people, St. Louis County’s population is diverse in terms of age, race and ethnicity, and family composition, but these characteristics tend to be spatially concentrated in different parts of the county.

While St. Louis County’s median age continues to increase, there is a large generation of young people that will have a significant impact on future trends. St. Louis County continues to become more diverse and is home to the largest share of African-Americans in the region. Though small, the Asian and Hispanic communities are growing. Households in St. Louis County are getting smaller; the traditional nuclear family is now the minority; and there are more people living alone and without children.

St. Louis County is still the home to highly educated, professional and managerial workers with high earnings. However, disparities in household wealth exist, with poverty rates rising and low-income households concentrated in St. Louis County’s older, inner-ring communities.

Changing demographics have the power to shape communities. The population trends affecting St. Louis County will impact its economy, housing market, transportation system, and service delivery over the next several decades.
Population

Center of population for the metropolitan region

St. Louis County is the most populous county in Missouri, and the 40th largest in the United States. St. Louis County’s residents represent nearly 36 percent of the region’s 2.8 million population and nearly 17 percent of Missouri’s population.

Slight population decline

The population of St. Louis County peaked in 2000 with 1,016,300 residents, and for the first time decreased by 1.7 percent to 998,954 in 2010. In comparison, since 2000, the St. Louis metropolitan region grew 4.2 percent to 2.8 million. This increase is still less than the growth rate for the United States at 9.7 percent, which was primarily the result of immigrants and their children.

While St. Louis County continues to have a positive natural increase (more births than deaths), this number is decreasing as people have fewer children and the population ages. At the same time, net migration into the county (the number of people moving here minus people moving away) continues to decline.

Population growth and decline since 2000 was unevenly distributed throughout St. Louis County. The largest loss of population occurred in the I-70 corridor, the area surrounding Lambert-St. Louis International Airport due to residential buyouts, and in the inner-ring suburbs of North County. Population growth primarily occurred in West County.

Age

An aging population

St. Louis County’s median age is 39.9, and is higher than both the median age of the metropolitan area (38.2) and the United States (37.2). Generally, areas with higher median ages are concentrated in central-west and southwest areas of St. Louis County. These areas are typically established neighborhoods, and may also have nursing homes and retirement/assisted-living facilities.

The aging of the “baby boom” generation continues to change the age structure of St. Louis County.

Those born during the baby boom from 1946 to 1964 make up the largest demographic group in St. Louis County at 28.4 percent.
**Growing impact of Millennials**

The second largest demographic group in St. Louis County is the “Millennial” generation. Many Millennials are the children of the Baby Boomers, and are generally considered to be born between 1980 and 2000, which means they are between 12 and 32 years of age. In 2010, they made up 26.3 percent of the population of St. Louis County. Young populations are concentrated in North County and areas near universities, such as University of Missouri-St. Louis and Washington University.

**Race and Ethnicity**

**Near North County home to African-Americans**

Since 2000, the African-American population in St. Louis County has increased 20.5 percent. The African-American population is most concentrated north of Olive Boulevard and inside Lindbergh Boulevard. African-Americans represent 23.3 percent of St. Louis County’s population, nearly double the national average of 12.6 percent.

**Asians, a small but growing group**

After Whites and African-Americans, Asians are the largest racial group in St. Louis County. In 2010, the number of Asians in St. Louis County was 34,597, representing 3.5 percent of the population, slightly below the national average of 4.8 percent. Since 2000, the Asian population has increased by 53 percent.

**Hispanics also increasing**

The number of people who identify themselves as Hispanic (of any race) continues to increase. In 2010, their numbers totaled nearly 25,000, or 2.5 percent of the population. This share is well below the national average of 16.3 percent. While still a relatively small group, the number of Hispanics increased by 71.7 percent since 2000.
Changing Households

Households are getting smaller

In 2010, St. Louis County’s average household size dropped from 2.47 to 2.42, slightly below the average for the metropolitan area (2.46) and the United States (2.58). The two most common household types in St. Louis County are single-person households at 29.5 percent, and married couples without children at 28 percent. Combined, these two groups make up 57.5 percent of St. Louis County households.

Single-parent households are increasing

The increase in single-parent families is a trend seen across the nation, state and region. In St. Louis County, 66 percent of households with children are headed by married couples, down from 71 percent in 2000. Single-parent families with children under 18 increased from 23.3 percent in 2000, to 33.8 percent in 2010. Single-parent families are predominantly in the North County inner ring suburbs and the South County community of Lemay.

Married couples head 46.8 percent of all households in St. Louis County, and only 40.2 of those households have children under 18. This trend can be seen nationally as couples are marrying and having children later in life. Married-couple families with children are predominant in outer-ring suburbs, especially concentrated in West and Southwest County in the Parkway and Rockwood School Districts.

Education

Education levels exceed state and nation

Education levels of St. Louis County residents continue to be higher than state and national levels, especially in the percentage of college graduates. According to 2005-2009 American Community Survey Estimates, the percentage of persons with a Bachelor’s degree or higher was 38.5 percent, compared to 24.6 percent in the State of Missouri, and 27.5 percent in the United States. St. Louis County’s highly-educated residents are concentrated in the central-west corridor, south of Page Avenue and north of Interstate 44. In these areas, the percent of people with a Bachelor’s degree or higher is between 66 and 82 percent.
Occupation

Managers and professionals live in the central corridor

Persons in managerial and professional occupations comprise 84 percent of workers residing in St. Louis County as compared to 77 percent nationwide. Managerial and professional workers tend to live in the central-west corridor, south of Page Avenue and north of Interstate 44. Management, professional and related occupations include educational workers, social service occupations, health care technicians and computer occupations, as well as business, financial, legal, medical, engineering and architectural professionals. As a group, they tend to be highly educated, receive higher salaries, and live in areas with high housing values.

Blue-collar workers in North and South County

Blue-collar occupations involve physical work, such as manufacturing and construction. Blue-collar workers reside in high concentrations in North County and in parts of South County. These concentrations are in areas with good access to major manufacturing employment centers. Persons in blue-collar occupations comprise 16 percent of workers residing in St. Louis County as compared to 23 percent nationwide. Areas with a high percentage of blue-collar workers tend to be areas of lower median income since blue-collar occupations are typically paid less than managerial and professional workers.

Income and Poverty

Countywide income measures high

The median household income for St. Louis County according to 2005 - 2009 American Community Survey Estimates was $57,502, and is higher than the metropolitan statistical area, Missouri and United States. However, within the region, St. Charles County has the highest median household income at $70,077. Within St. Louis County, 11 percent of households earn $150,000 or more, compared to 8 percent in the metropolitan statistical area, 5 percent in Missouri, and 8 percent in the United States. Higher income earners are concentrated in the central-west corridor.
**Rising poverty rates**

Although St. Louis County’s median household income is high, an estimated 9.6 percent of residents are living in poverty. Of the persons living in poverty, 13 percent are children and 6 percent are senior citizens. Concentrated areas of poverty include the inner-ring suburbs of North County, the I-70 corridor, and Spanish Lake. In these areas, the median household income is generally less than $35,000, and the percentage of people living in poverty ranges between 25 and 49 percent.

**POPULATION BELOW POVERTY**
St. Louis County, Missouri

Source: 2005-2009 American Community Survey Estimates

April 2012
Looking Ahead - Why Demographic Change Matters

The impact of demographic trends is already in play in St. Louis County – from the increase in new senior housing developments, to shifting retail preferences, to crowded schools in one part of the county to vacant schools in another. The question is not whether demographic changes will occur, but when they will happen and how significant they will be. In the future, St. Louis County must pay attention to four important demographic trends: 1) a declining population 2) the aging of its population, 3) the rise of the Millennial generation, and 4) increasing and concentrated poverty.

Stemming population loss

In 2010, St. Louis County experienced its first drop in population after decades of steady growth. Not unexpectedly, this decline came as the result of lack of developable land, declining birth rates, an aging population, and a steady forty-year trickle of more residents moving out than into St. Louis County. If conditions stay the same, it is expected that the trend of population loss, although slow, will continue. As populations shrink, typically, so do local economies, housing markets and tax dollars. St. Louis County then is faced with the question of how to attract new residents and retain its current residents. What is local government’s role in this endeavor? St. Louis County must assess which economic and quality of life factors will make a difference in stemming population loss.

Responding to generational change

Two of the most important trends in St. Louis County are the aging of the Baby Boomers and the rise of the Millennial generation. These two generations account for 55 percent of St. Louis County’s current population. Together, the impact of these two groups will shape future housing, transportation, retail, and service delivery choices. The oldest Baby Boomers, who began turning 65 years old in 2011, are retiring or planning for retirement and the question is “will they stay in St. Louis County?” And if they do, will they downsize, relocate nearby, or choose an entirely different kind of community to live in than their current place of residence? As they age, Boomers will put demands on transit and health services, impact the job market as they retire, and potentially spend less as they downsize and live on fixed-incomes; and, the question is “are we prepared?”

As significantly as the Baby Boomers have shaped community trends, the impact of the Millennial generation is expected to be just as powerful. Trends and studies are showing that young adults of the Millennial generation share many of the same lifestyle preferences as the Baby Boomers. They may live alone or are married without children, prefer smaller housing...
that is close to amenities, identify with urban neighborhoods and/or strong suburban centers, and use transit. Looking ahead, are St. Louis County communities attractive to Millennials? Is there enough housing diversity to meet their needs? Is the job market and quality of life here strong enough to attract and keep the Millennial generation in St. Louis County?

**Addressing poverty and disparity**

While St. Louis County is home to highly-educated and high-income workers, the number of people living in poverty continues to increase, even as the overall population decreases. While St. Louis County’s poverty rate is lower than the regional rate, the sheer size of the county’s population translates into 96,000 of its residents living in poverty. More importantly, much of St. Louis County’s poverty is concentrated geographically and disproportionately affects African-Americans. Concentrated poverty has serious implications for communities, including safety, quality of education, health of its residents, stability of its neighborhoods, and resources available for services. If St. Louis County is going to thrive and prosper as a whole, it must help all of its citizens attain greater levels of wellbeing by increasing prosperity and closing the gaps of disparity. How to make progress toward these goals and garner resources are questions of serious magnitude. What policies, strategies, and services are most effective given the constraints of resources and jurisdictional differences, and the complexity of the issue?