

Mapping the Cultural Generation Gap: Baby Boomers, Immigrants, and Families in Massachusetts, 2005-2009

Purpose: One of the greatest challenges facing the planning profession is its ability to engage in planning that considers both the needs of today's demographics and anticipates future needs that will result from projected demographic shifts. The U.S. is projected to experience a majority/minority shift by 2042 with whites in the minority and native-born and immigrant communities of color in the majority. Baby boomers are also projected to retire within the next two decades. In addition, trends projections produced by the Brookings Institution, a policy think tank, indicate that many communities in the country are facing or will face a "cultural generation gap" – the phenomenon of communities with high concentrations of both baby boomers and immigrants – particularly immigrants with school-aged children. The occurrence of these two major demographic shifts is likely to have major social and political implications.

Methodology

This analysis used demographic data to identify communities in Massachusetts for which greater investments can be made in immigrant integration, civic education, and public education. These "priority investment areas" can benefit from targeted community planning and education funding initiatives that will also advance community cohesion, long-term benefits-focused fiscal decisions, and immigrant integration. American Community Survey 2005-2009 estimates data by census tract was used to provide a snapshot of where baby boomers aged 55+, immigrants, and families are concentrated in the Commonwealth. Data on per pupil expenditures from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary education was also used.

A census tract was defined as having a high concentration of a population if 25 percent or more of the tract consisted of that population. Through overlays of data on baby boomers aged 55+ immigrants, families, income, and school per pupil expenditures, communities in which there exists a "cultural generation gap" – or the potential of such a gap – were identified. Communities meeting the criteria were identified as "priority investment areas". The analysis also examined whether there was any correlation between low per pupil expenditures and the population of people aged 55+, as data has shown a possible correlation between these two variables. Techniques used in the analysis include field calculator, select by attribute, summarize, table join, Excel queries, layer overlays, and scoring.

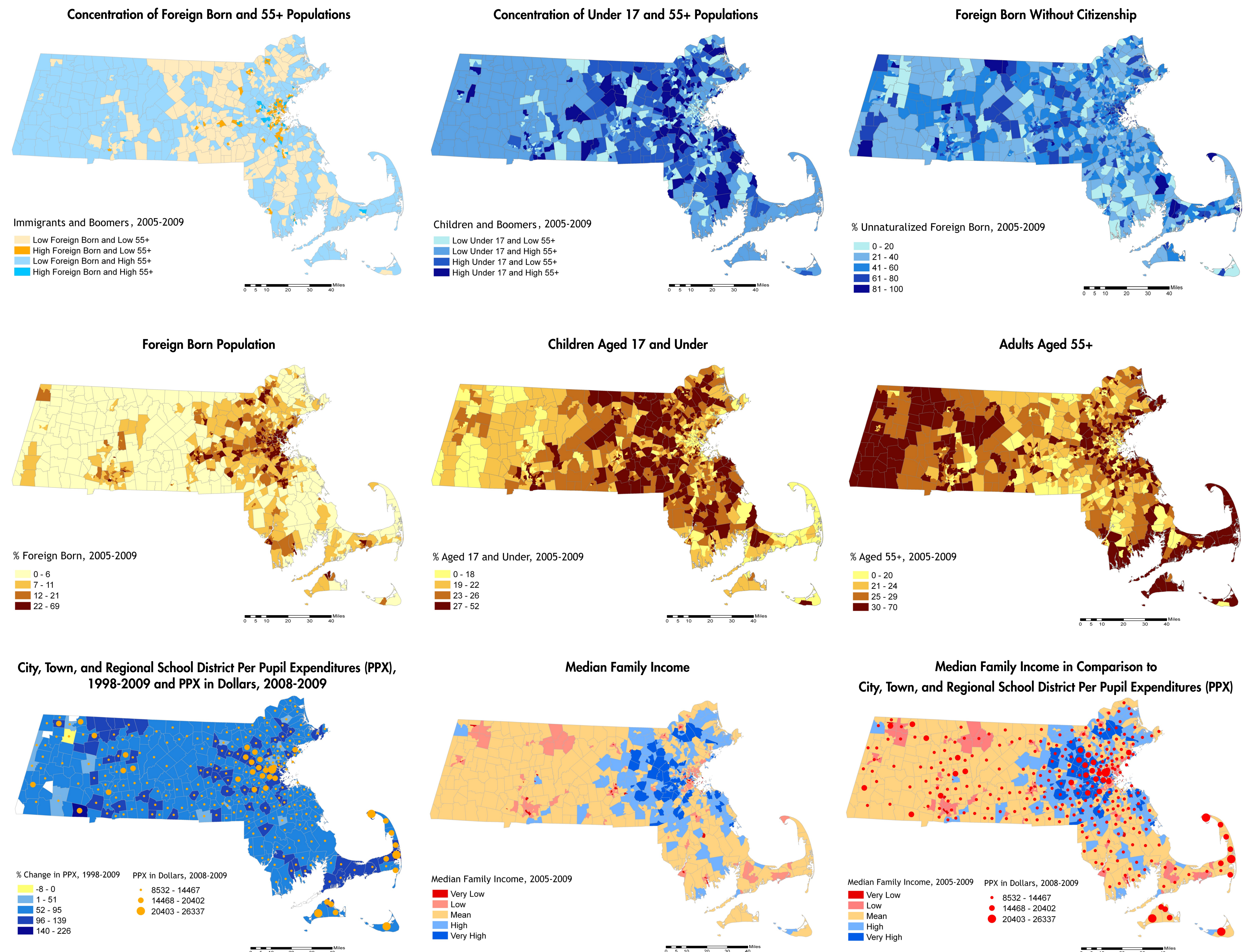
Results

Over a dozen priority investment areas have been identified, which reflect high concentrations (25 percent +) of any two combinations of the following demographic groups: immigrants, people aged 55+ and families. Select findings from the analysis:

- Communities with high immigrant, high 55+, and high linguistically isolated populations are concentrated within and immediately surrounding the I-495 beltway and in southeastern Mass.
- Communities with high numbers of families with children under 17 and high 55+ populations are dispersed throughout the Commonwealth, however many are located in Western Mass.
- Communities that have high populations of children under 17, immigrants, and people aged 55+ are located in the northeastern part of the state in the Boston area and in areas farther north and south of Boston.

Ideas for Future Research

Continued research on this topic can compare 2005-2009 estimates data to 1990-2000 Census data to identify places where change in the studied variables has occurred at a rapid rate. If certain communities have experienced a large shift over the last five years as opposed to change that has occurred more steadily over two decades, it may suggest that these regions are experiencing more social conflict, which may also have had an adverse effect on municipal funding allocation decisions and local politics. An analysis can also be done using Census population projections data in order to examine projected changes at a regional or national scale. By proactively identifying priority investment areas, planners and municipalities can better plan for the future and manage the forthcoming majority/minority shift with targeted resources and processes that can help ensure immigrants and their children's success.



Cartographer: Jennifer Sien Chin, UEP '11
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Projected Coordinate Frame: North American Datum 1983
Source Data: American Community Survey 2005-2009 Estimates by Census Tract
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Per Pupil Expenditures, 1998-2009