



# THE CORPORATE SHOCK ABSORBERS

## The Evolving Role of Middle Managers

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MRA

Build Together. Lead Together.



# MIDDLE MANAGERS: THE CORPORATE SHOCK ABSORBERS

## PRESSURE FROM ABOVE



STRATEGY & TARGETS



HIGHER EXPECTATIONS



CHANGE INITIATIVES



BUDGET CONSTRAINTS



DO MORE  
WITH LESS

They absorb the pressure. They keep things moving.  
*They hold the organization together.*



## PRESSURE FROM BELOW



WORKLOAD & STRESS



QUESTIONS &  
FRUSTRATIONS



CAREER & GROWTH  
CONCERNS



CONFLICT & TEAM  
CHALLENGES



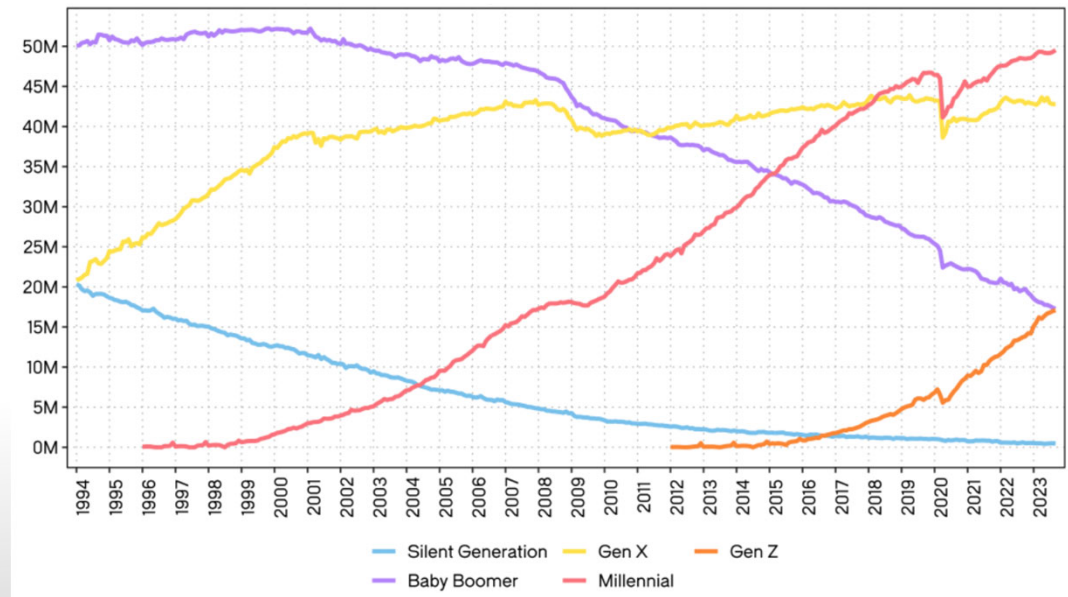
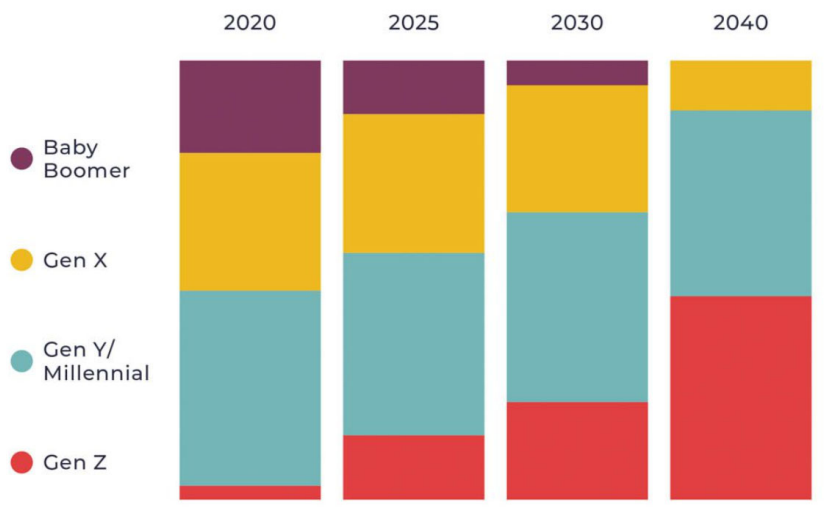
BURNOUT &  
DISENGAGEMENT

Build Together. Lead Together.

AAIMZ

## A Little Bit of Background

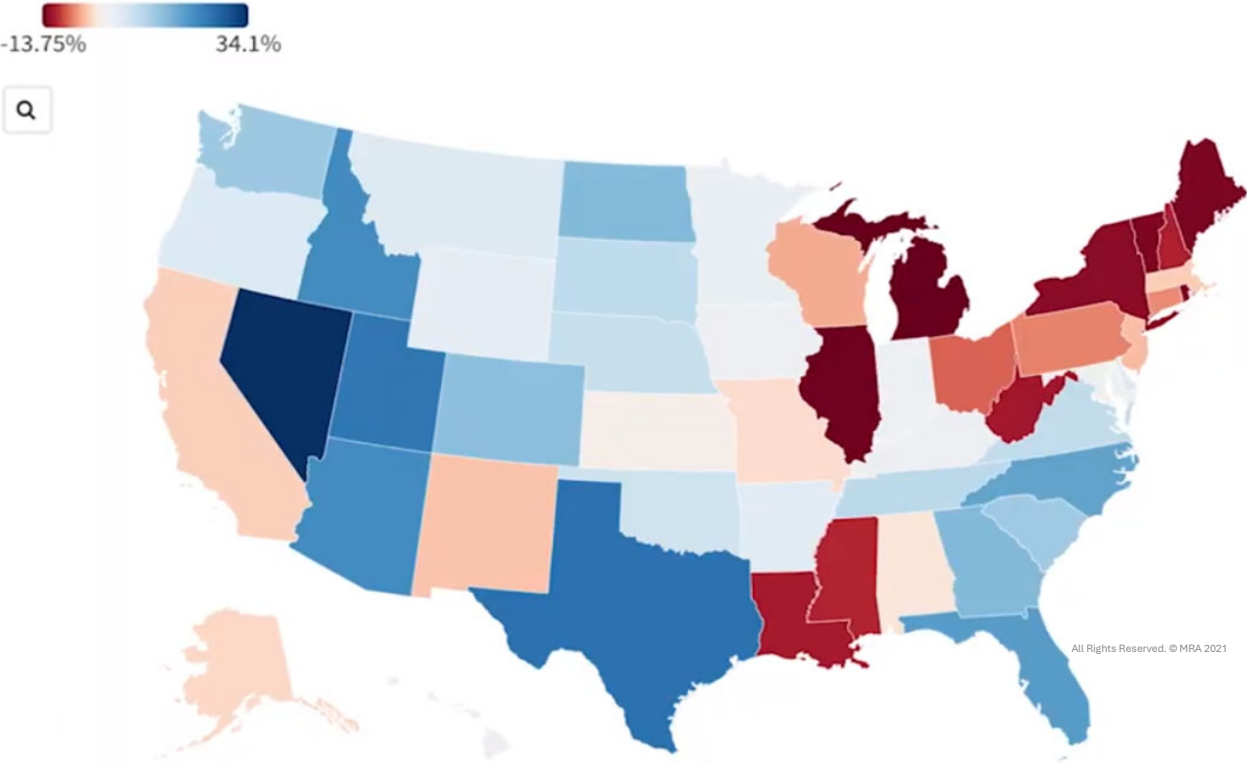
# Current Generations in the Workforce



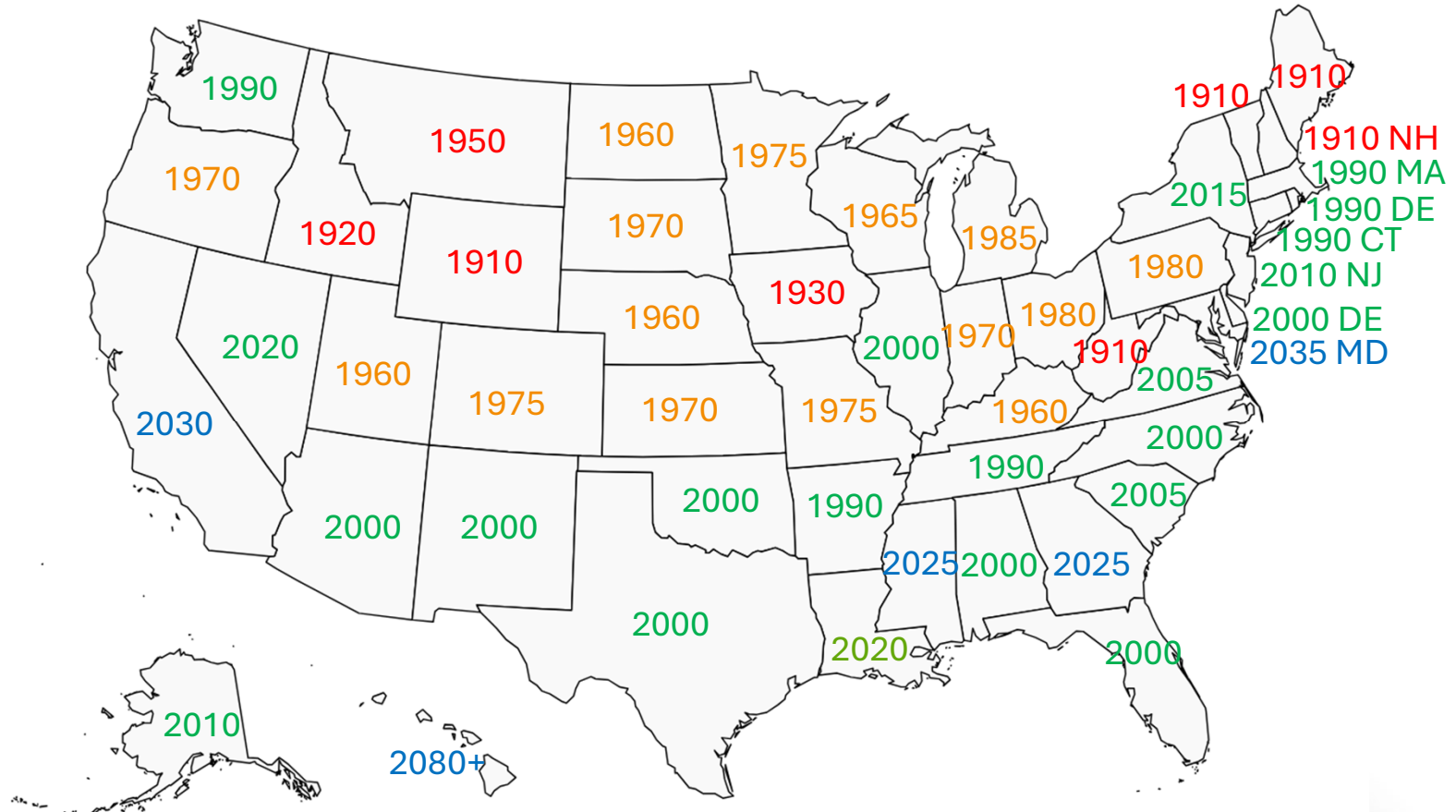
## A Little Bit of Background



# 2001-2021: Decline of Young People (<25)

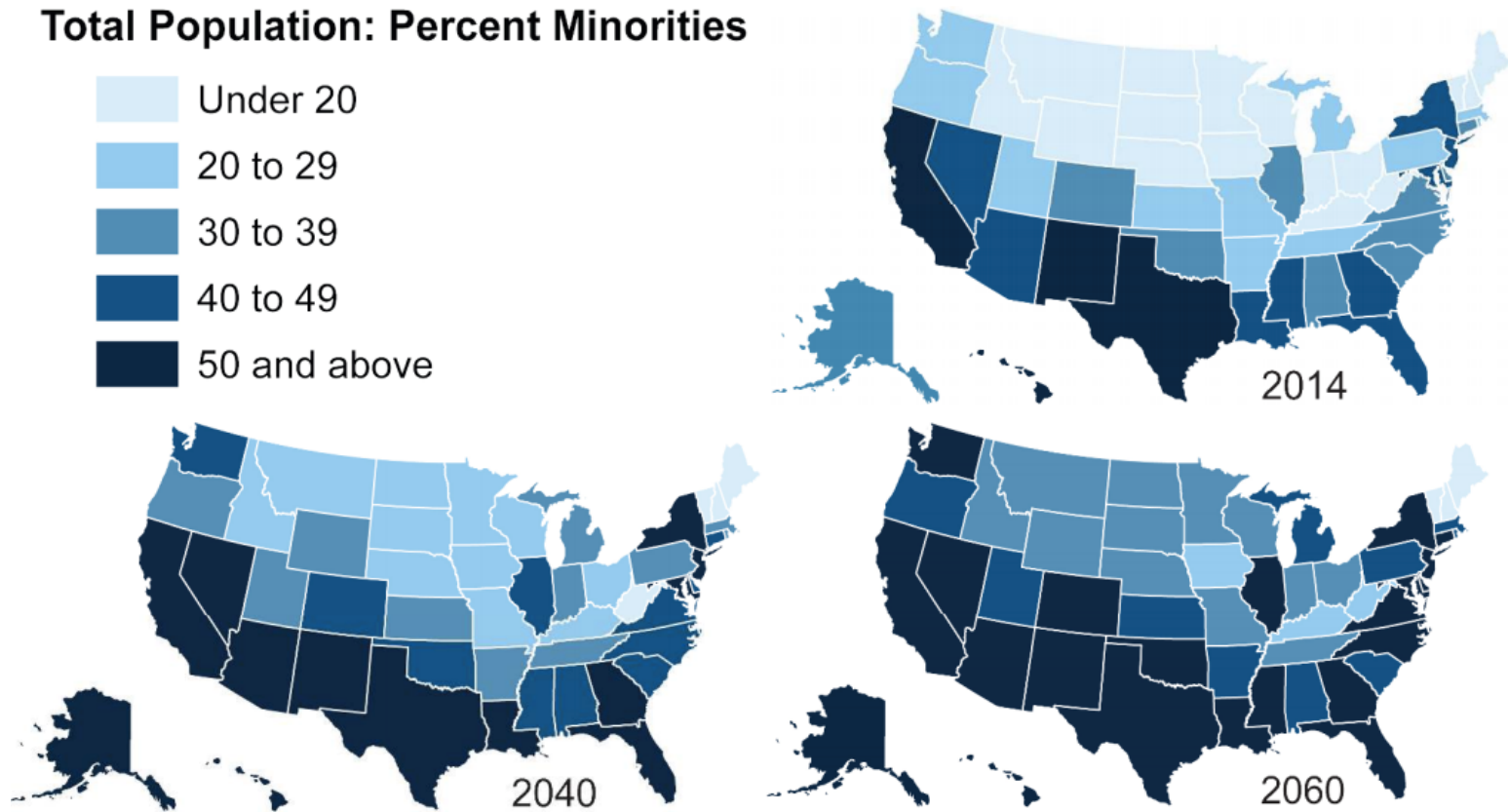
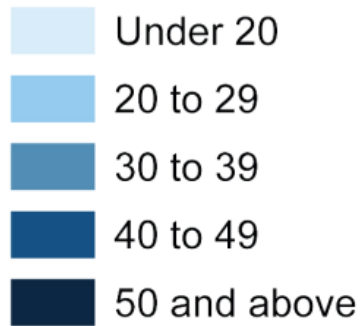


# Population looks like the U.S. in . . .



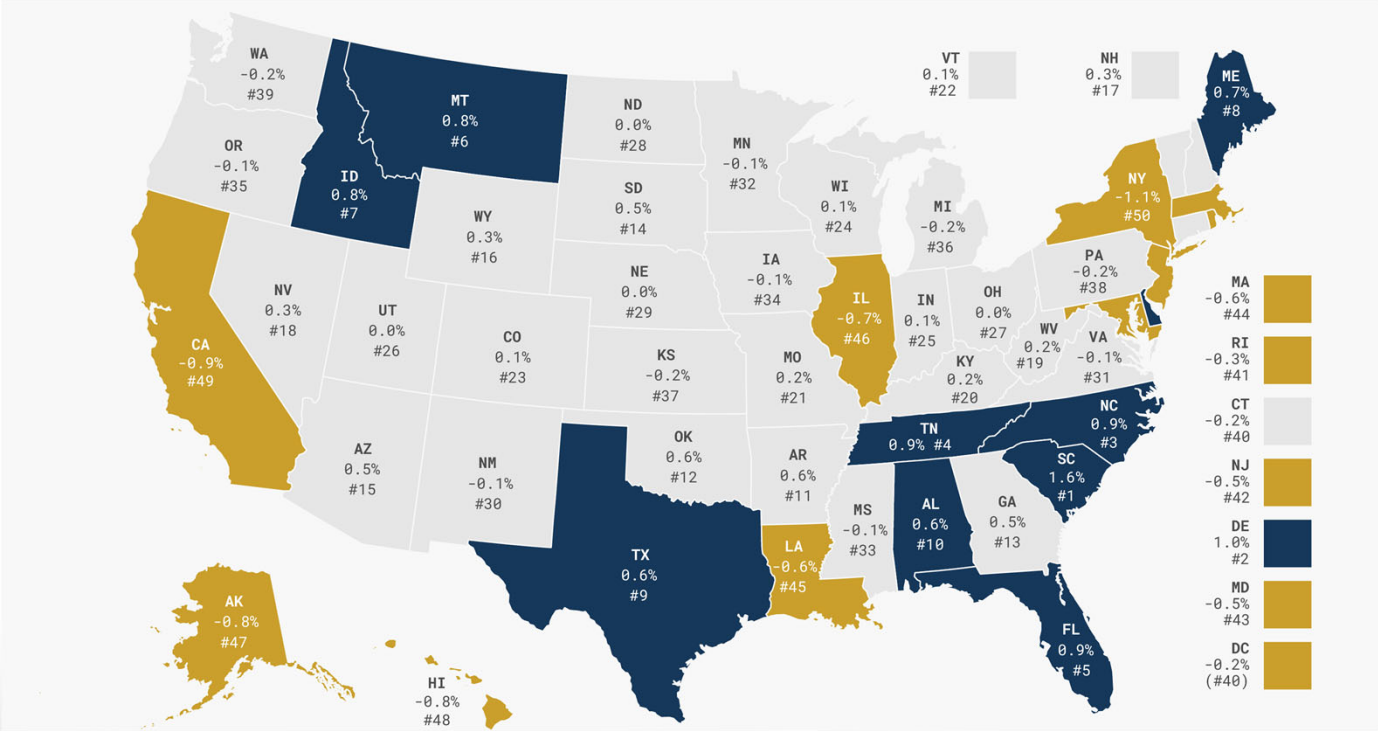
U.S. Census Bureau 2020, MRA 2024

## Total Population: Percent Minorities



Source: American Enterprise Institute and Brookings Institution.

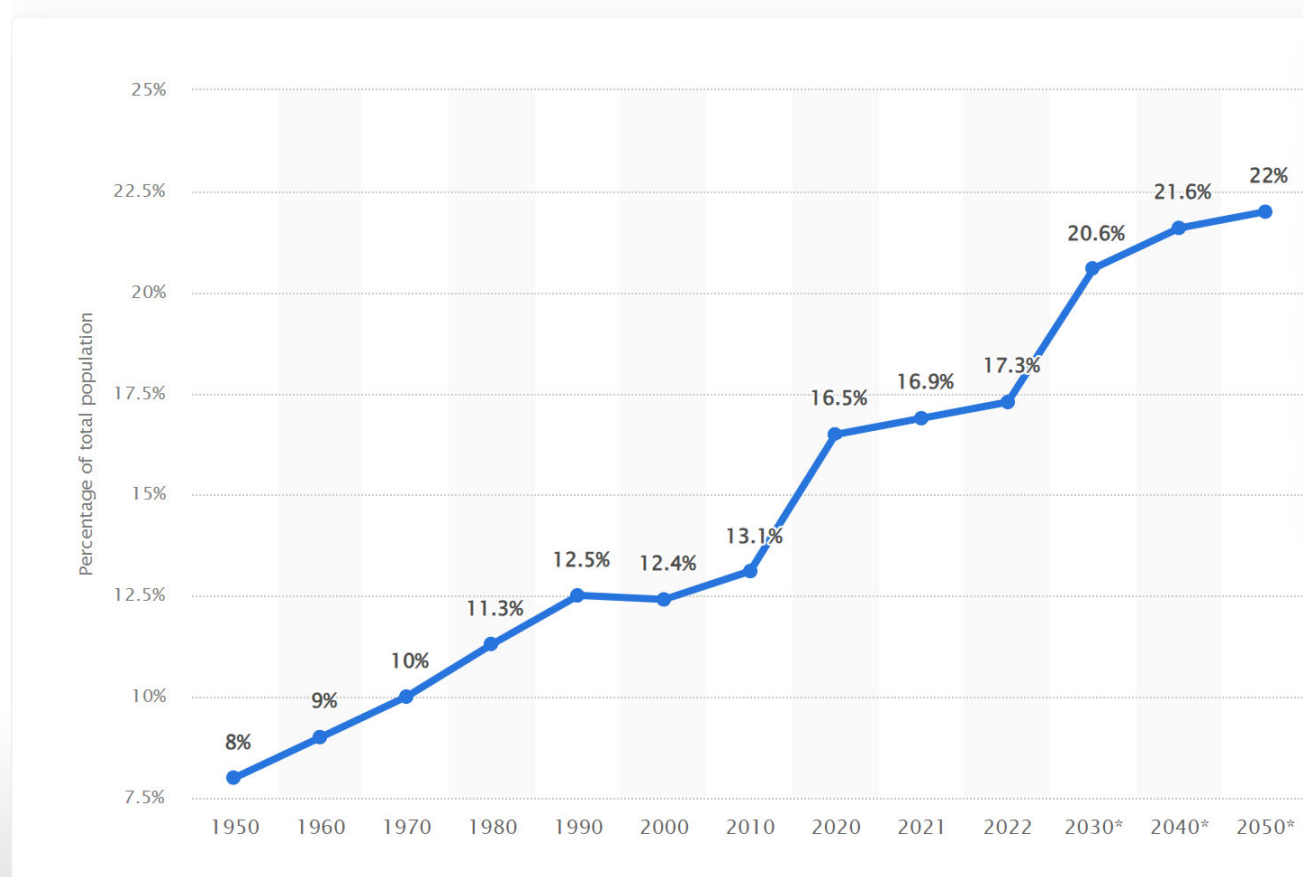
# State Migration 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau; chart Tax Foundation

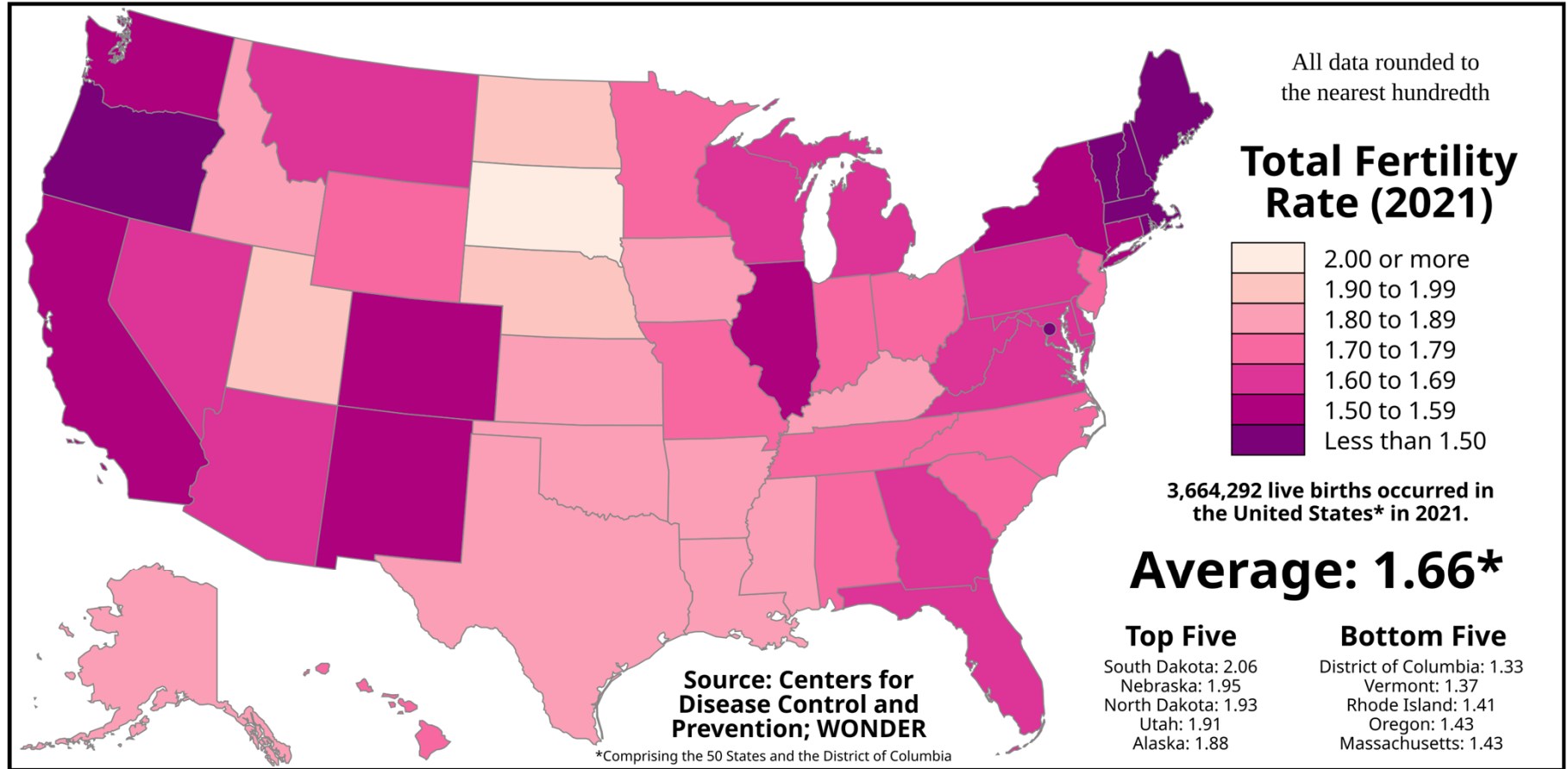
# Percent of US Population 65+

## 1950-2050



Source: Statista

# Fertility Rates



# Missouri

**Seniors (65+):** Fastest-growing demographic. By 2030, Missourians aged 65+ projected to be **more than 20%** of the population, an 87% increase from the year 2000.

**Children (Under 18):** As of 2025, children account for approximately **22%** of the population, but overall share of the population is declining

**Young Adults (25-44):** This group saw a decline in the early 2010s but is projected to see a modest 5% increase between 2000 and 2030, ultimately representing about **25%** of the population.

Source: US Census Bureau; State of Missouri

# Dealing With Change

Workplace Flexibility

Generational Diversity

Artificial Intelligence

A New World Order

# The New Role of the Hiring Manager

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Diversity and Inclusion Advocate

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Employer Brand Ambassador

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Remote Work Facilitator

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Technology Adoption Leader

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Data-Driven Decision Maker

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Skills Assessor and Matcher

---

Candidate Experience Champion

---

Continuous Learner and Innovator

---

Collaborative Internal Partner

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Conflict resolver

# The Hardest Job in the Company

*A middle manager starts the day:*

Explaining a new executive mandate

Handling an employee conflict

Covering for a vacant role

Learning a new AI tool

Managing burnout on the team

Being asked to “do more with less”



# They absorb

- Pressure from executives
- Frustration from employees
- Customer expectations
- Constant change
- Technology disruption
- Cultural tension



***Organizations often rise or fall not  
on executive strategy, but on  
whether middle managers can  
successfully translate strategy into  
reality***

# The Workplace Has Fundamentally Shifted

- Hybrid and remote work
- AI and automation
- Generational workforce differences
- Skills shortages
- Rising employee expectations
- Faster pace of change



# Employees Expect More From Managers

- Coaches
- Mental health supporters
- Technology adopters
- Career advisors
- Conflict mediators
- Change leaders



# Executives Need More From Managers

- Execute strategy quickly
- Maintain culture
- Drive engagement
- Increase productivity
- Reduce turnover
- Implement change initiatives



***Middle managers didn't just inherit more work — they inherited more emotional labor***

# What a Shock Absorber Does

- Absorbs impact
- Stabilizes movement
- Protects the system
- Keeps operations functioning during turbulence



# From Above They Receive

- Strategic pressure
- Budget constraints
- Change initiatives
- Productivity demands
- AI adoption requirements



# From Below They Receive

- Burnout
- Resistance to change
- Career concerns
- Workload complaints
- Trust issues
- Generational tensions



***Executives create the message.  
Employees react to the message. Middle  
managers live in the middle of the  
reaction.***

# New Roles of Today's Middle Manager



## **Change Translator**

Helping employees understand the “why”

## **Culture Carrier**

Employees experience culture through their manager more than corporate values posters

## **AI and Technology Integrator**

Driving adoption, Managing fear of automation,  
Teaching new tools

# The New Roles of Today's Middle Manager



## **Workforce Retention Stabilizer**

Managers are the #1 influence on retention

## **Mental Health and Burnout Monitor**

Spotting exhaustion early, Balancing empathy and accountability

## **Cross-Functional Connector**

Breaking down silos

# The Risks of Ignoring This Reality

**Middle Manager Burnout**  
**Manager Turnover**  
**Culture Breakdown**  
**Failed Change Initiatives**



***Employees don't experience  
organizations primarily through  
CEOs***

***They experience organizations  
through their direct manager***

# What HR Must Do Differently

## Redesign Manager Development

Move beyond compliance and performance reviews

Move toward coaching, difficult conversations, EI, AI, change management

## Simplify the Manager Role

Clarify priorities

Eliminate competing initiatives



# What HR Must Do Differently

## **Give Managers Better Tools**

Real-time workforce data

Leadership resources

## **Measure Manager Health**

Span of control, engagement, fatigue

## **Create “Manager Support Systems”**

Peer groups, coaching, mentoring



# The Future of Middle Management

## **Middle Management Is Not Disappearing**

AI may automate tasks

But human leadership becomes more valuable

## **The Role Is Becoming More Human, Not Less**

Empathy, adaptability, judgment, trust

## **Organizations That Win**

Invest in managers, simplify complexity, build leadership pipelines



***In today's workplace, middle managers are not the middle layer of the organization — they are the connective tissue holding it together.***

# What You Can Do For Middle Managers



## **Clarify Priorities Relentlessly**

Middle managers are often overwhelmed by competing initiatives coming from multiple directions.

## **Reduce Administrative Burden**

Many managers spend too much time on reporting, approvals, and systems instead of leading people.

## **Train Managers for the Job They Actually Have**

Most managers were trained for yesterday's workplace.

# What You Can Do For Middle Managers



## **Give Them More Decision-Making Authority**

Empower managers to solve problems locally

Reduce excessive approval layers

Allow flexibility in team management

Encourage judgment instead of rigid compliance

Trust managers to adapt policies when appropriate

# What You Can Do For Middle Managers

## **Create Peer Support Networks**

Prevent isolation through peer mentoring and collaboration.



## **Involve Managers Earlier in Change Initiatives**

Too often, managers learn about changes at the same time employees do.

## **Rebuild the Leadership Pipeline**

Many employees no longer want management roles because they see managers overwhelmed.

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# THANK YOU

