

Labor force

The labor force is the number of people aged 16 or older who are either working or looking for work.

The labor force does not include active-duty military personnel or institutionalized people, such as prison inmates.

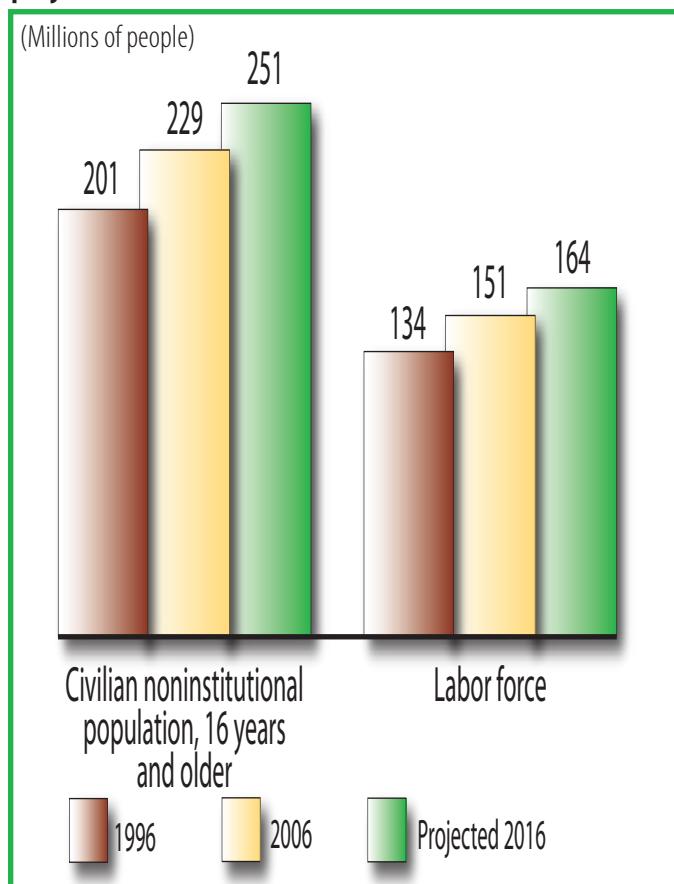
The size of the labor force depends on two factors. The first is the size of the total population, which is determined by rates of birth, immigration, and death. The second factor is the labor force participation rate—the percent of the total population that is working or actively seeking employment.

Labor force participation rates vary significantly between men and women and among different age, racial, and ethnic groups. Each group also has varying population growth rates. These variations change the composition of the labor force over time.

The charts that follow show how the labor force is projected to change among age groups, between men and women, among racial groups (Asians, blacks, whites, and others), and among ethnic groups (Hispanics and non-Hispanics of any race). These are the categories used by the U.S. Census Bureau, which produces the demographic data on which BLS projections are based. Some of the charts that show a distribution do not sum to 100 percent because of rounding.

As in previous years, the labor force is projected to grow more slowly than the number of jobs, but this is not an indication of a labor shortage. Instead, it reflects technical issues with the way the data are analyzed and the fact that some workers have more than one job.

Population and labor force, 1996, 2006, and projected 2016

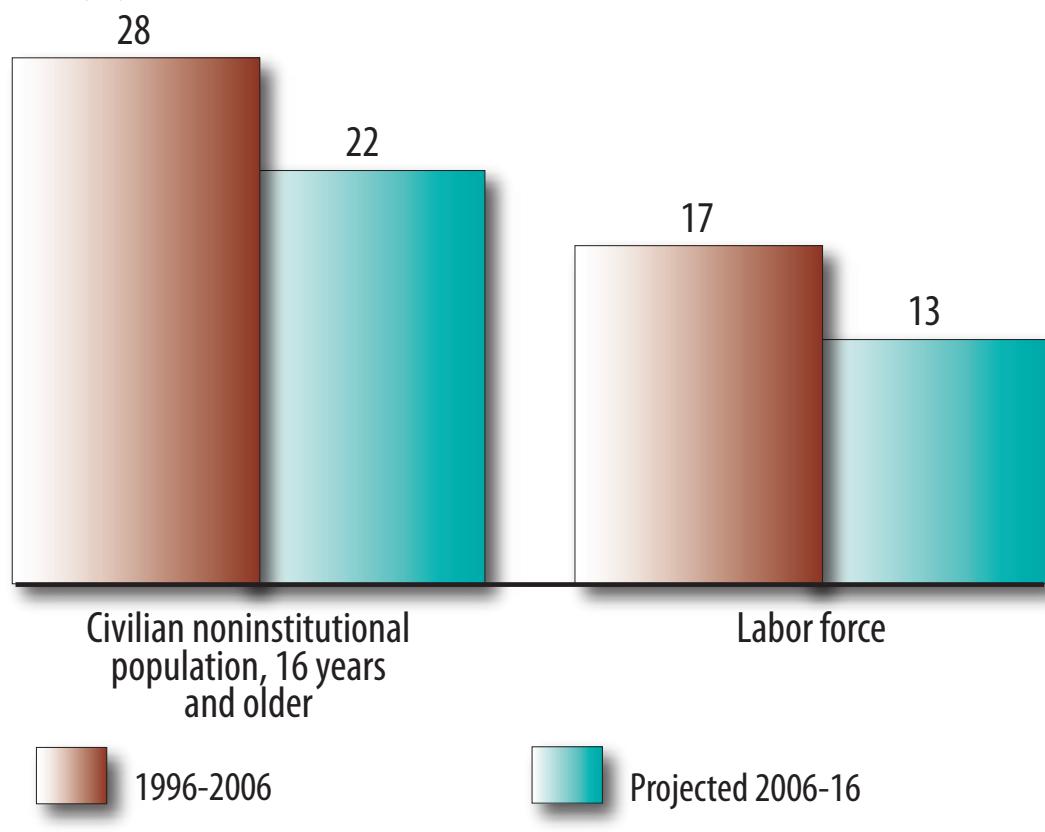


Both the population and the labor force are projected to continue growing steadily. By 2016, the number of people working or looking for work is expected to reach 164 million. That number excludes people who are active-duty members of the U.S. Armed Forces, are institutionalized, or are younger than 16 years of age.



Numeric growth in population and labor force, 1996-2006 and projected 2006-16

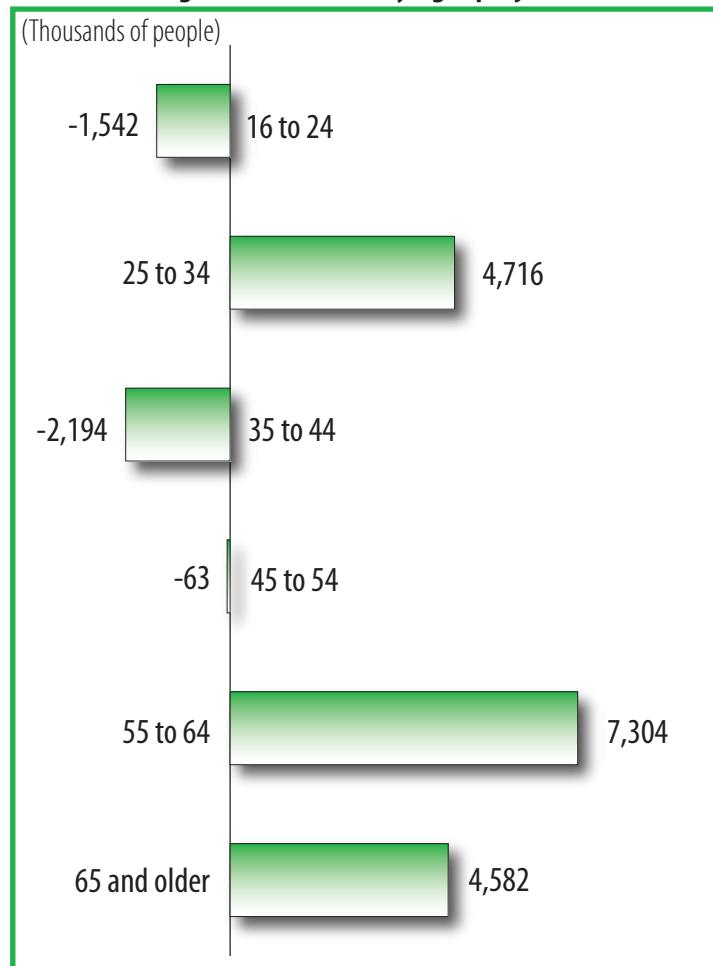
(Millions of people)



Between 2006 and 2016, both the population and the labor force are expected to increase less than they did during the previous decade.

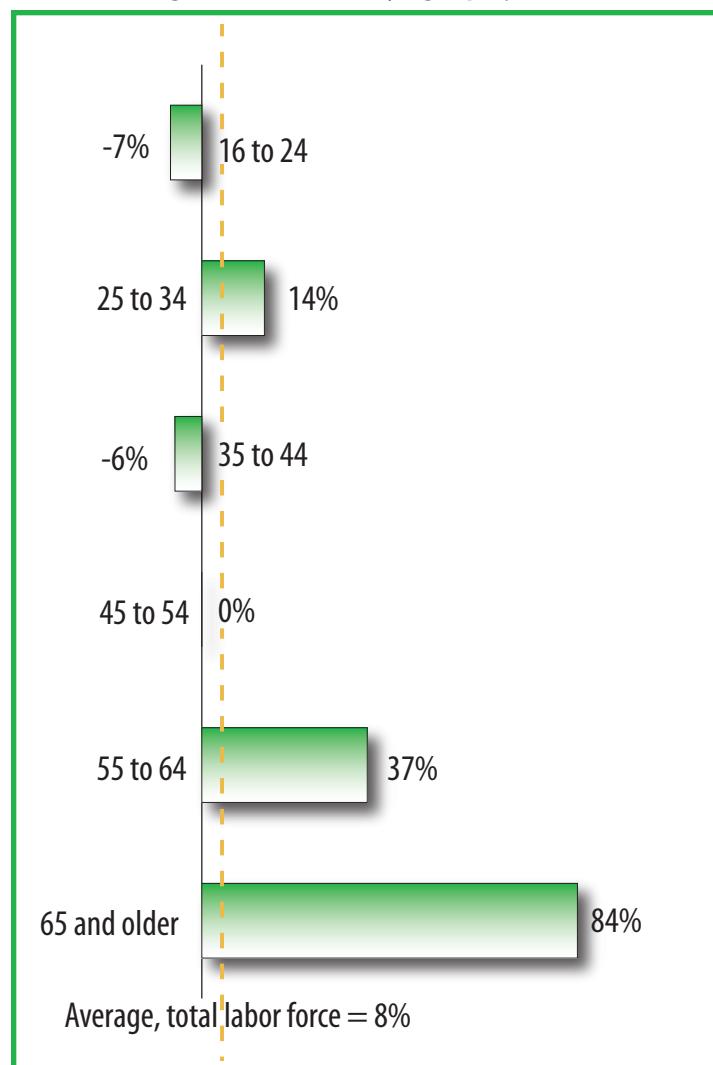
Labor force

Numeric change in labor force by age, projected 2006-16



As the baby-boom generation ages, the number of people in the labor force aged 55 to 64 is expected to increase by more than 7 million during the projections decade. The number of 35- to 44-year-olds is expected to shrink as the baby boomers shift to older groups.

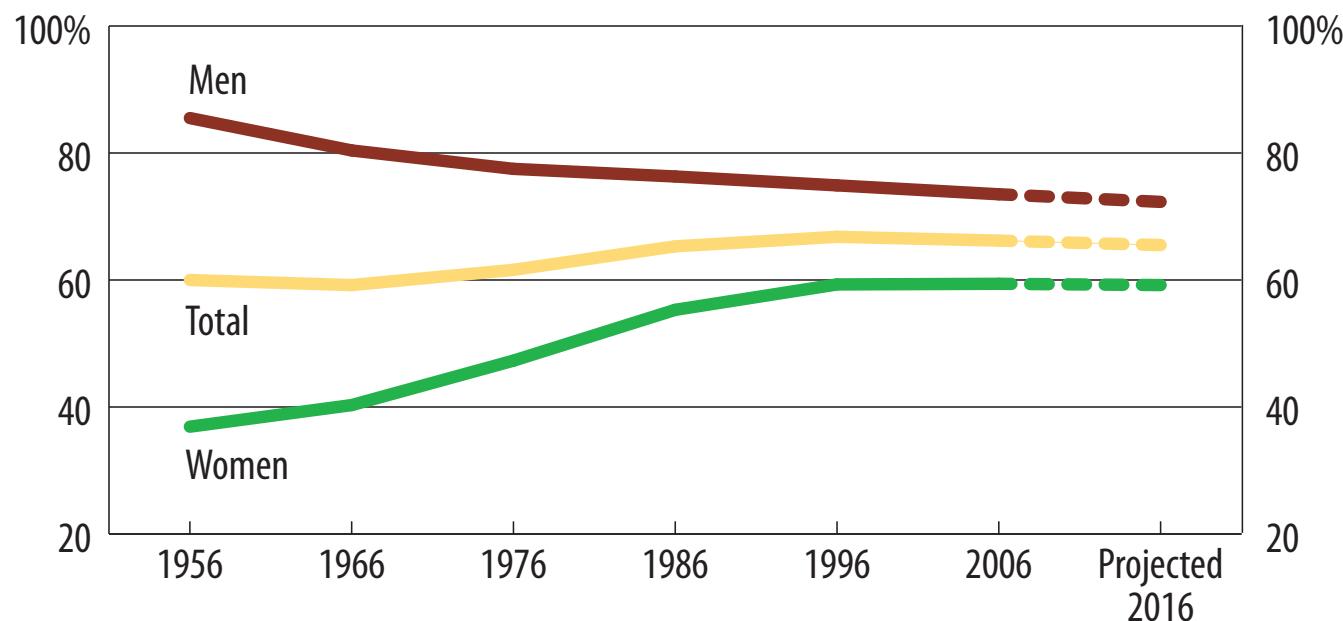
Percent change in labor force by age, projected 2006-16



Because of the growing number of healthy people aged 65 and older, the number of people in the labor force from this age group is expected to increase more than 10 times as fast as the total labor force.

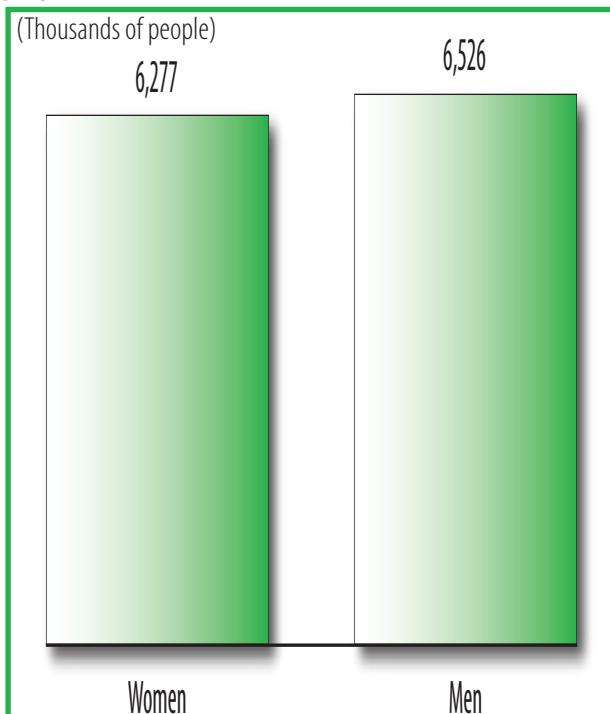
Labor force participation rate for men and women, 1956–2006 and projected 2016

(Percent of people in the labor force)



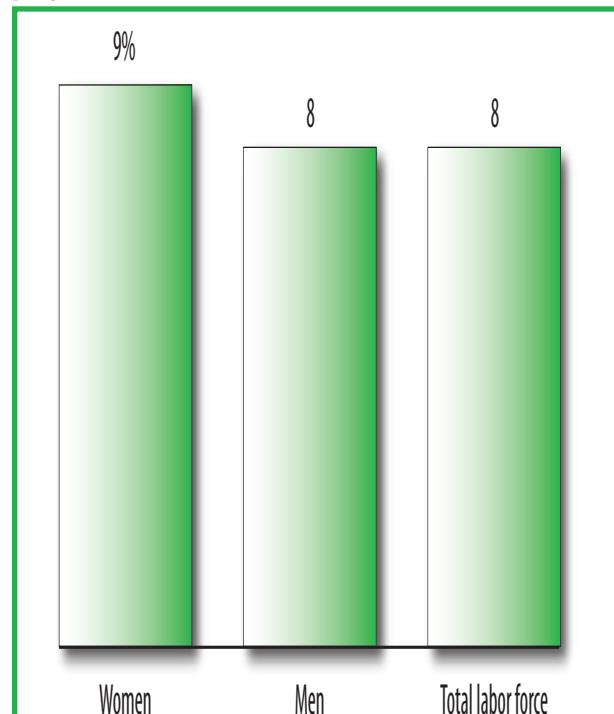
The labor force participation rate for women is expected to remain relatively flat while the men's rate declines, narrowing the labor force participation gap between the sexes. By 2016, about 59 percent of women and 72 percent of men are expected to be in the labor force.

Numeric growth in labor force for women and men, projected 2006–16



Between 2006 and 2016, the change in the number of men in the labor force will be greater than the change in the number of women...

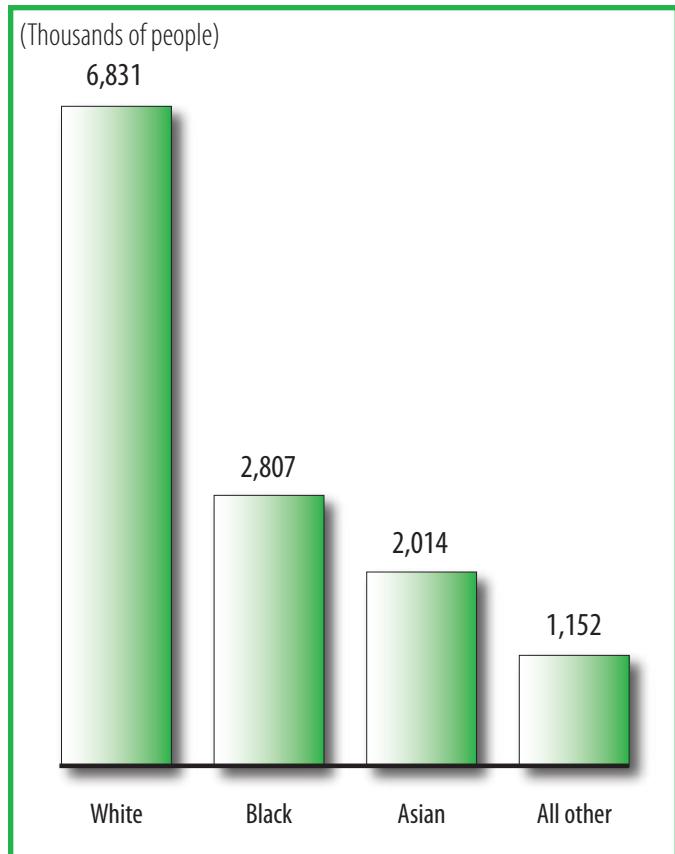
Percent growth in labor force for men and women, projected 2006–16



...but the number of women in the labor force is expected to grow faster than the number of men.

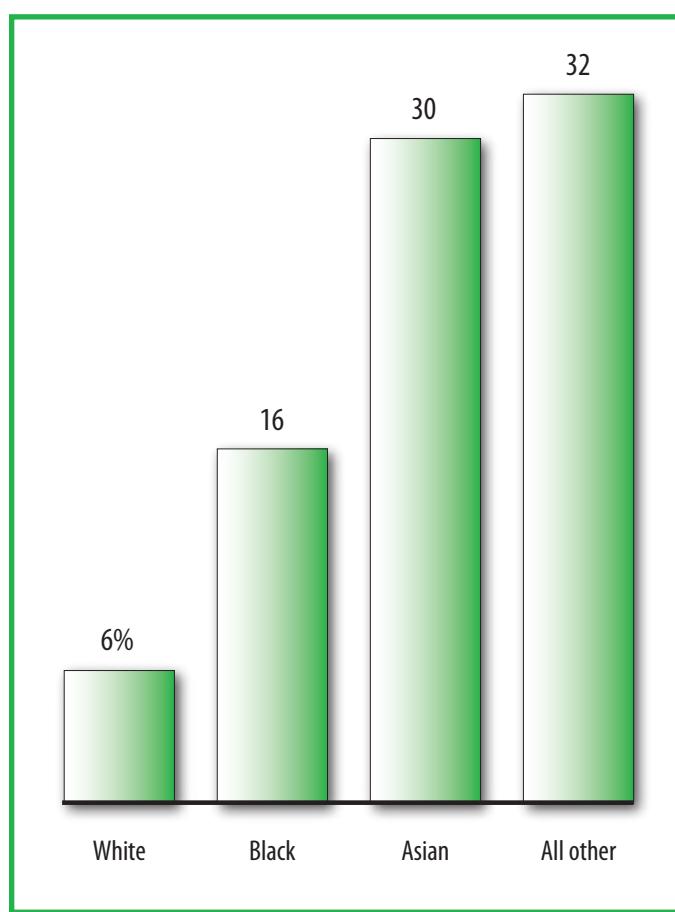
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Numeric growth in labor force by race, projected 2006-16



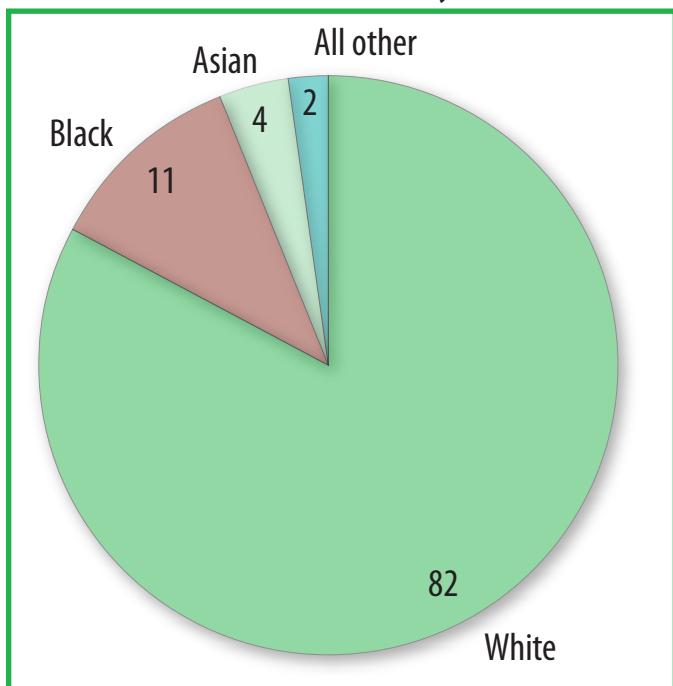
Whites are projected to account for more than half of all labor force growth over the 2006-16 decade. The “all other races” category includes American Indians and Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders, multiracial individuals, and any other people who do not identify themselves as white, black, or Asian.

Percent growth in labor force by race, projected 2006-16



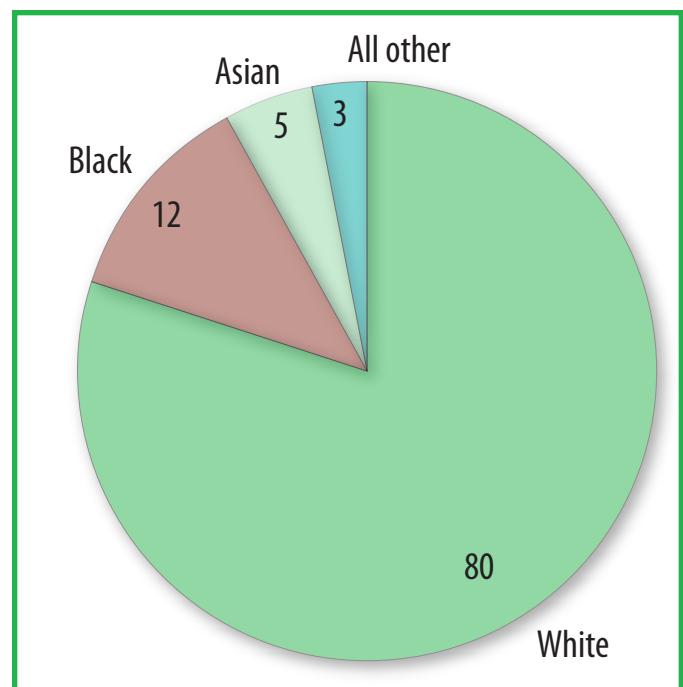
The rate of labor force growth for workers in the “all other” racial category is expected to be faster than that for workers in any other group.

Percent distribution of labor force by race, 2006



Whites made up more than 82 percent of the labor force in 2006.

Percent distribution of labor force by race, projected 2016

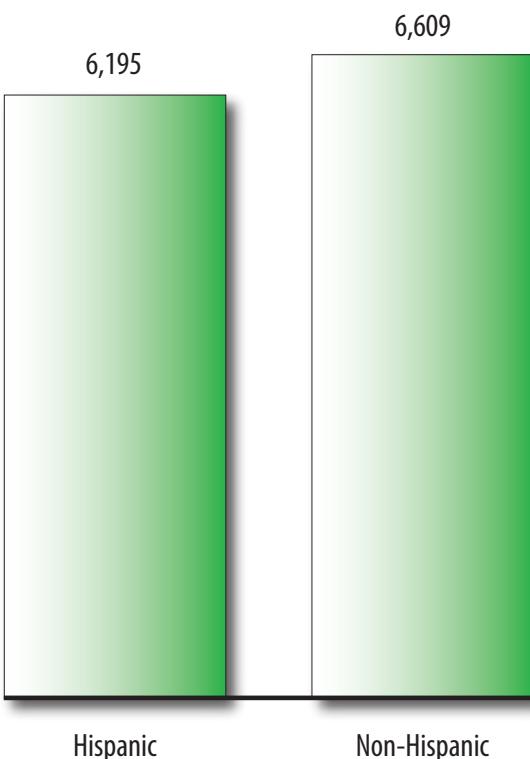


Although whites will continue to be the largest racial category in the labor force, other racial groups are projected to make up 20 percent of the labor force by 2016.

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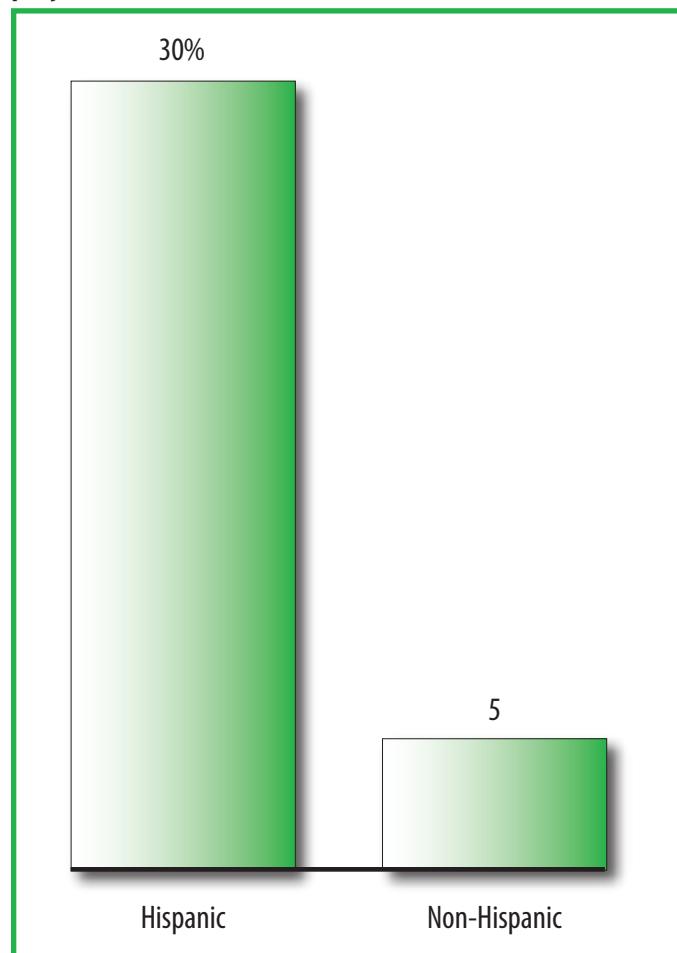
Numeric growth in labor force by ethnic origin, projected 2006-16

(Thousands of people)



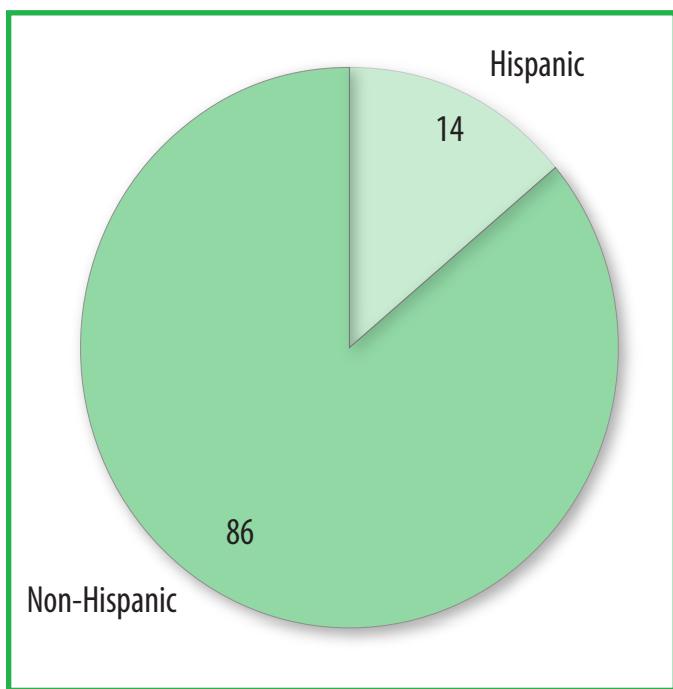
The number of Hispanic workers is projected to increase by more than 6 million between 2006 and 2016, accounting for almost half of total labor force growth.

Percent growth in labor force by ethnic origin, projected 2006-16



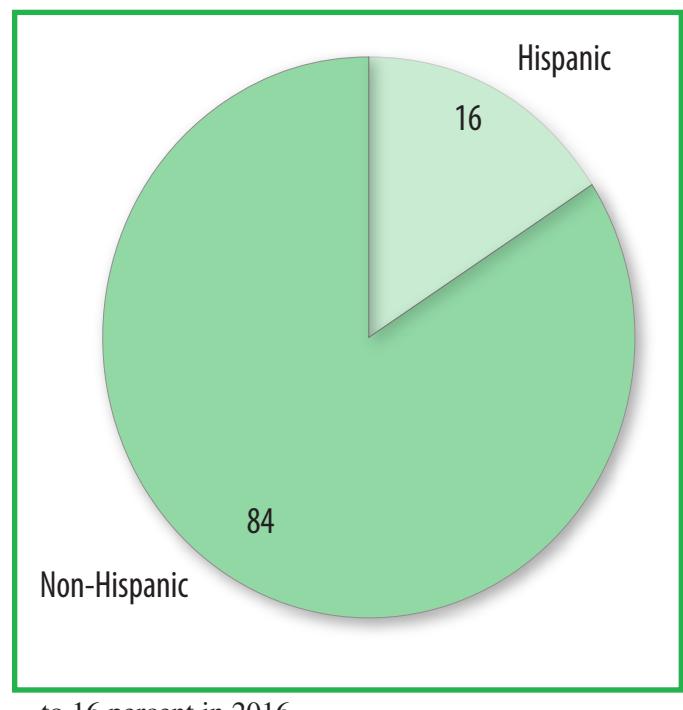
The Hispanic labor force is expected to increase by 30 percent, a growth rate 6 times as fast as that of non-Hispanic workers over the projections decade...

Percent distribution of labor force by ethnic origin,
2006



...increasing the Hispanic share of the labor force from 14 percent in 2006...

Percent distribution of labor force by ethnic origin,
projected 2016



...to 16 percent in 2016.