



Hibbs Outlook of East Texas

Hibbs Institute for Business & Economic Research

The “Gray Tsunami”: Aging Trends in East Texas

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East Texas is aging along with the rest of the nation. What has been referred to as a “gray tsunami” — the mass retirement of the Baby Boomer generation — is reshaping communities, economies and workforces across the country. As this generation enters retirement, the question for East Texas is not whether aging will matter, but how it will shape the region’s future.

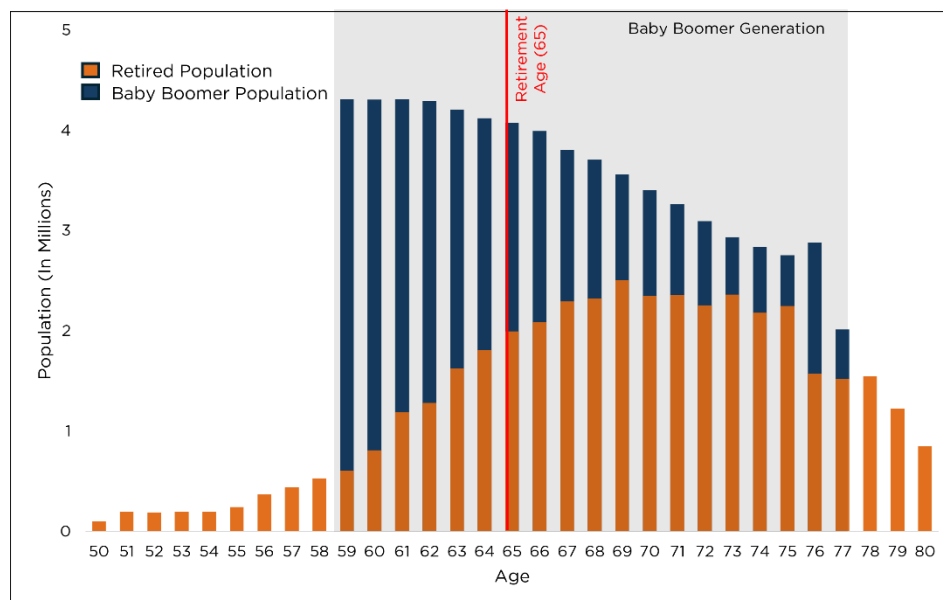
A Wave That Is Still Rising

Following the end of World War II, the U.S. experienced a historic surge in births. Between 1946 and 1964, more than 70 million Americans were born, creating the Baby Boomer generation that went on to shape modern labor markets and consumer trends.¹ Today, those Baby Boomers are between 59 and 77 years old, and their gradual exit from the workforce continues to redefine the U.S. economy.

Turning 65 is often seen as a milestone, signaling eligibility for Social Security and Medicare, but retirement timing varies widely.² In 2023, roughly 52% of the nation’s 67 million living Boomers were retired, while nearly half remained in the labor force. Among those under 65, only 28% had left the workforce, compared with 66% of those 65 and older.

Figure 1 illustrates this demographic shift, showing the number of retired Americans by age and where Baby Boomers fall within the broader 50-plus population. The shaded gray area represents the Baby Boomer generation, while the blue bars represent its entire population, and the orange portion indicates those who have already retired. The figure shows a steady rise in retirement beginning around age 60 and accelerating after age 65, marking the typical retirement threshold. This pattern suggests that the “wave” of retirement is still advancing, with many more Baby Boomers expected to leave the workforce in the coming years.

Figure 1. Retired Population in the U.S., Ages 50+ and Baby Boomer Population (2023)



Source: The Hibbs Institute estimates using the U.S. Census Bureau: IPUMS CPS (2023).

The Economics of Aging in East Texas

To understand how aging is reshaping East Texas, two measures stand out: the old-age dependency ratio and the elderly Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR). These indicators show how demographic shifts influence both the labor force and the broader regional economy.

The old-age dependency ratio is calculated by dividing residents aged 65 and older by those aged 16 to 64. In 2023, East Texas recorded an average ratio of 35.5, compared with 27.6 for Texas and 21.4 nationwide. In other words, for every 100 working-age residents, East Texas has about 36 seniors, reflecting a larger share of older adults than either the state or the nation. A higher ratio means fewer workers supporting more retirees, emphasizing the need for strategies that sustain labor supply and promote long-term economic growth.

Figure 2 shows how this ratio varies across East Texas. Blue bar counties have higher dependency ratios than the regional average, indicating a greater concentration of older residents. Wood (50.1), Marion (48.4) and Red River (47.1) stand out as retirement destinations, while Anderson (22.9), Titus (25.9) and Gregg (27.2) have younger populations and larger shares of working-age residents. This variation highlights how some counties are becoming retirement hubs, while others continue to rely on younger and more active workforces.

The elderly LFPR measures the share of seniors who remain employed or are actively seeking work. In 2023, about 29.4% of East Texans aged 65 and older were still in the workforce, which

is below both the Texas average (36.8%) and the national average (34.1%).

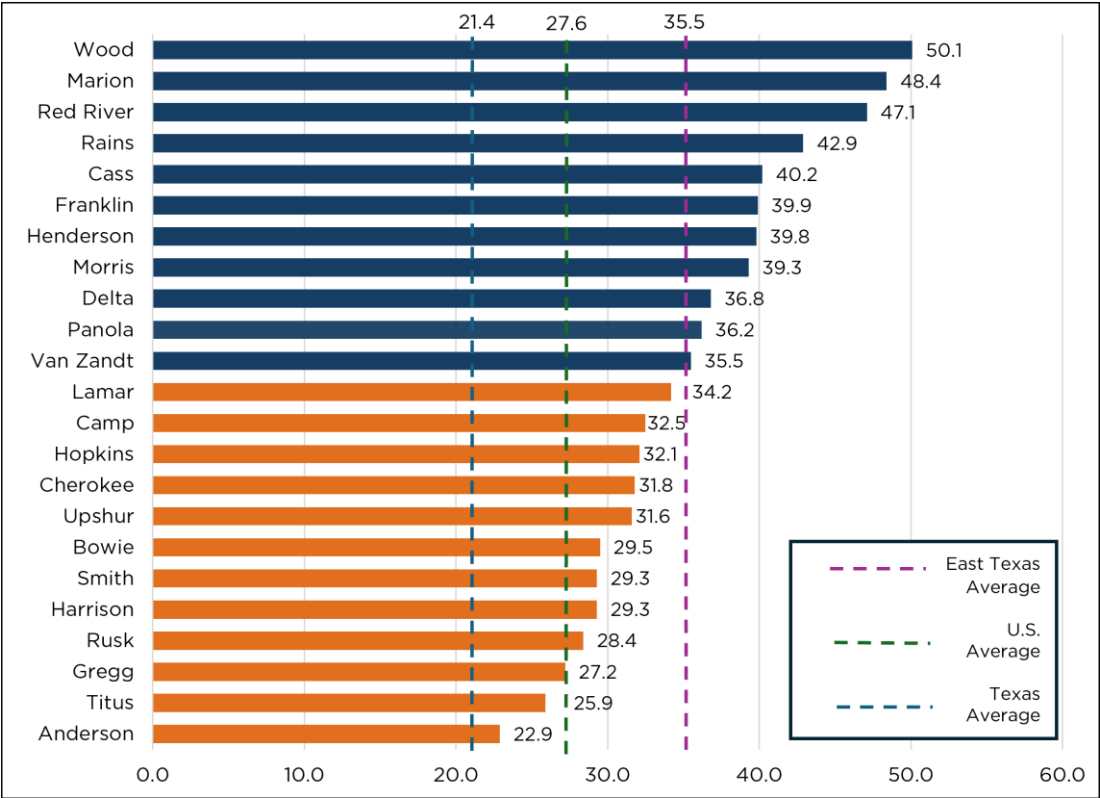
Figure 3 shows how participation rates vary across counties. Hopkins (38.6%), Gregg (37.5%) and Harrison (35.4%) have the highest rates (in blue), reflecting greater engagement among older workers. In contrast, Rains (23.6%), Cass (22.8%) and Morris (21.2%) show lower rates (in orange), suggesting that more residents there have the financial stability or personal means to retire fully.

This variation captures two dimensions of aging in East Texas. While many older adults continue to play an active role in the labor market, others enjoy the financial security to step away from work. Maintaining this balance helps preserve valuable experience within the workforce while supporting smoother retirements across the region.

Turning Challenge into Opportunity

The aging of East Texas presents both challenges and opportunities. With a proactive approach, the region can strengthen its workforce, enhance community resilience and turn demographic change into a source of progress. Flexible work options such as phased retirement, part-time roles and adaptable schedules could help older residents remain active in the labor force if they wish to continue working.³ Succession planning and mentorship programs could also pass valuable experience to younger workers, supporting business continuity as older employees transition into retirement.⁴

Figure 2. Old-Age Dependency Ratio in East Texas (2023)

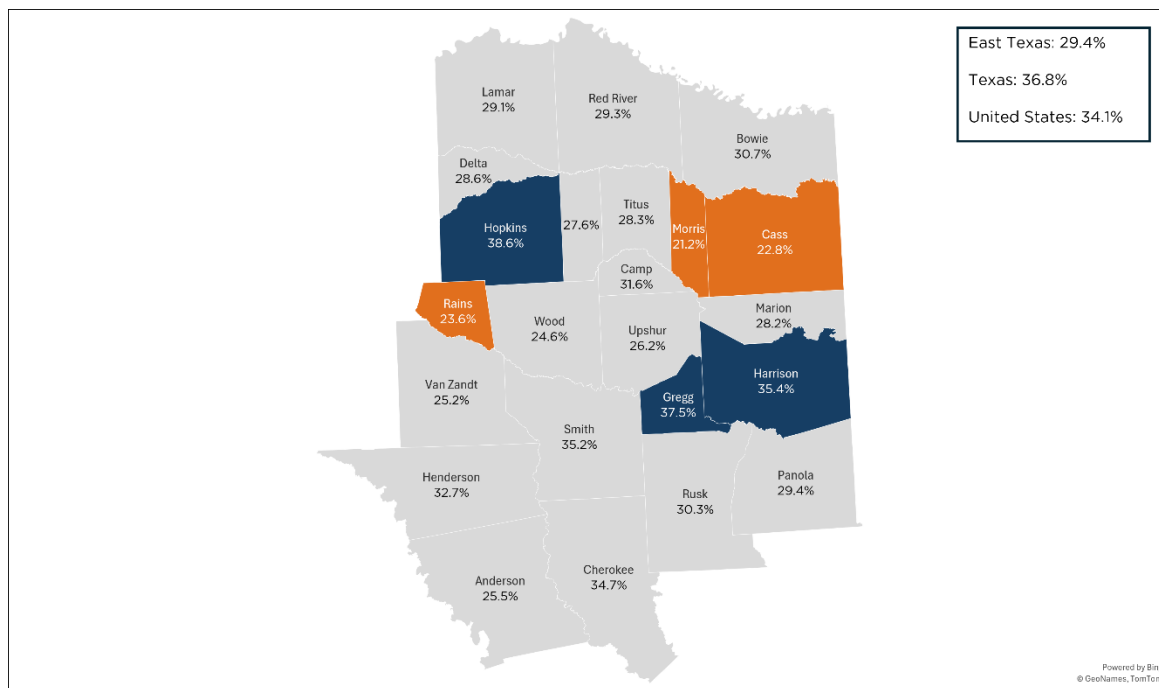


Counties with higher senior participation should also assess housing, transportation and healthcare access to ensure that residents who want to retire can do so comfortably. Together, these strategies can support older adults while preparing East Texas for a more balanced and adaptable economy.

By recognizing the strengths and needs of its aging population, East Texas can transform the “gray tsunami” into a wave of opportunity — one that preserves experience, promotes inclusion and sustains growth across the region.

This information was also featured in the December/January issue of TYLER TODAY Magazine. Visit bluetoad.com/publication/?i=857826&p=182&view=issueViewer to read the article for free.

Figure 3. Age 65+ Labor Force Participation Rate in East Texas (2023)



Source: The Hibbs Institute estimates using the U.S. Census Bureau ACS 5-year estimates (2019-2023).

End Notes

¹ Giattino, C. 2024. The “baby boom” saw a sharp rise in the fertility rate in the United States. <https://ourworldindata.org/data-insights/the-baby-boom-saw-a-sharp-rise-in-the-fertility-rate-in-the-united-states>

² Ovaska-Few, S. 2018. How 65 became the default retirement age. <https://www.journalofaccountancy.com/issues/2018/mar/how-65-became-default-retirement-age>

³ Occupational Health and Safety. 2024. Adapting Business Practices for an Aging Workforce. <https://ohsonline.com/articles/2024/07/05/adapting-business-practices-for-an-aging-workforce.aspx>

⁴ International Association of Accounting Firms. 2025. Workforce Strategy for an Ageing Population. <https://www.inaa.org/workforce-strategy-for-an-ageing-population>

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Hibbs Outlook: The “Gray Tsunami”: Aging Trends in East Texas (December 2025)



In fall 2024, the **Hibbs Institute for Business and Economic Research** launched the Hibbs Internship Program — an intentional investment in cultivating the next generation of regional researchers and leaders. The program provides undergraduate students with hands-on experience in economic analysis, allowing them to engage with real-world data and contribute to applied research focused on East Texas.

One of the program's first participants, **Pedro Gallardo**, played a key role in this project. Reflecting on his experience, he shared:

"As a lifelong resident of East Texas, I'm incredibly grateful to participate in research that will benefit the community that I've lived in all my life. It means a lot to me to produce information for the people of East Texas. As I see news headlines about aging and retirement in the nation, I realized that there is little information about how those trends affect the region. My hope is that my research will bring awareness about how we can strengthen our community in times of demographic transition."

Pedro's perspective brings the heart of this project into focus. His experience shows how economic research gains meaning when it speaks to the realities of the people who live and work in East Texas. As the region faces aging and demographic change, his work reminds us that these trends are not abstract. They shape families, workplaces and the future of local communities. Understanding them is the first step toward building opportunities that support stability and prosperity for everyone who calls East Texas home.

