



Looking Forward to an Aging America: Myths and Realities

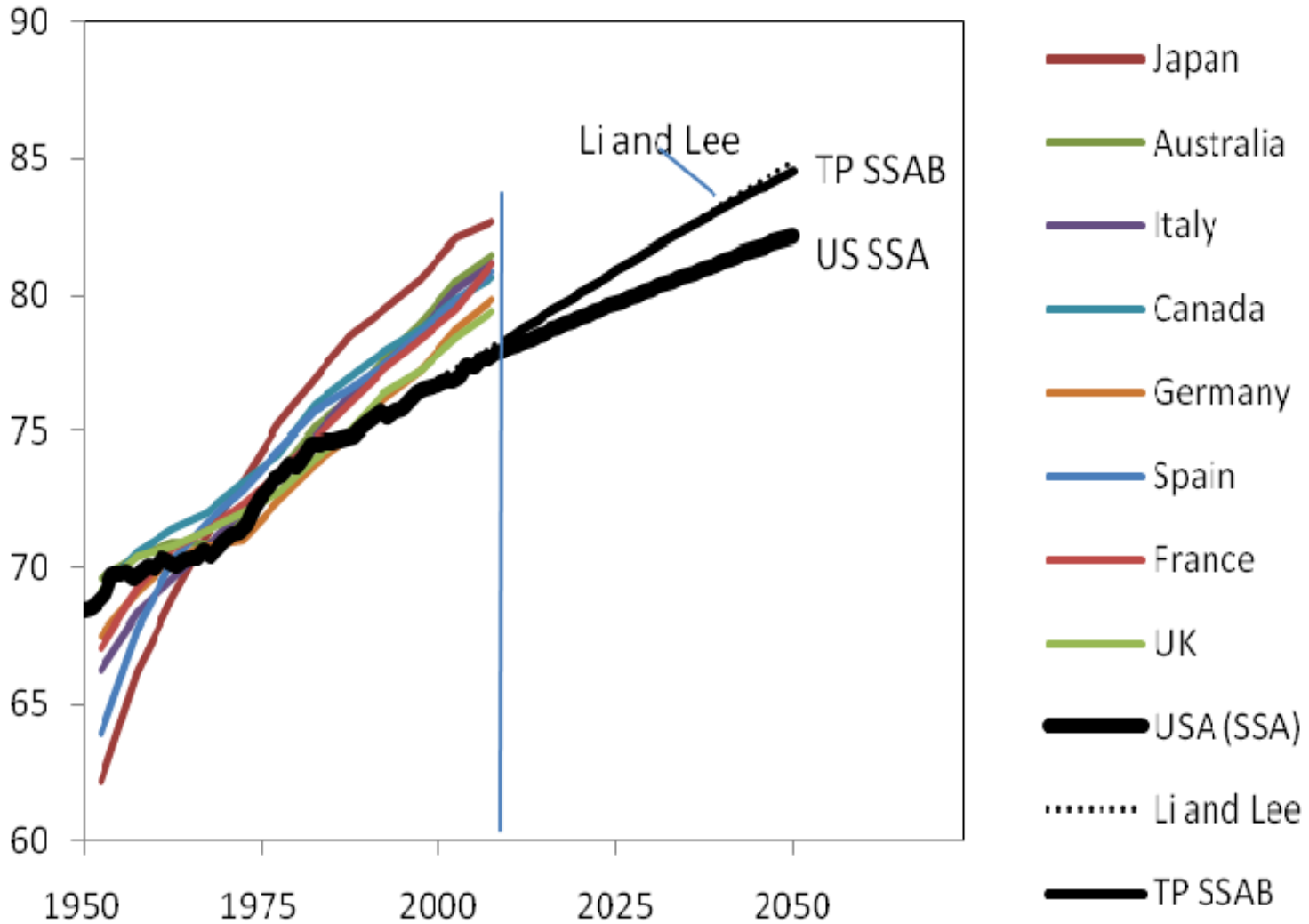
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Life expectancy



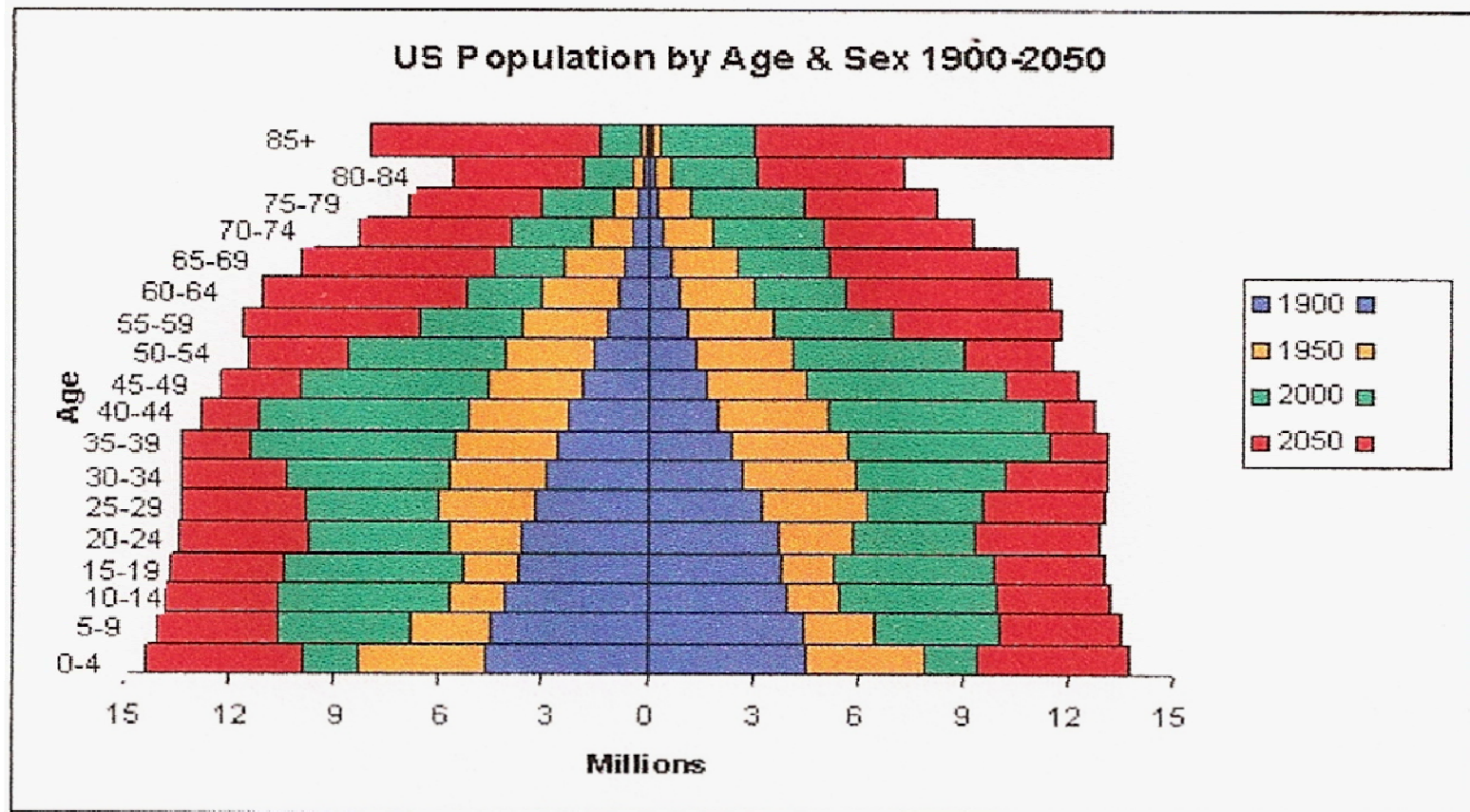
Source: UN 2009, SSA 2010, Li and Lee 2005, TP 2011

Myth # 1

America's aging society will be a transient demographic phenomenon caused by the Baby Boom.

Age Pyramid - U.S. Population

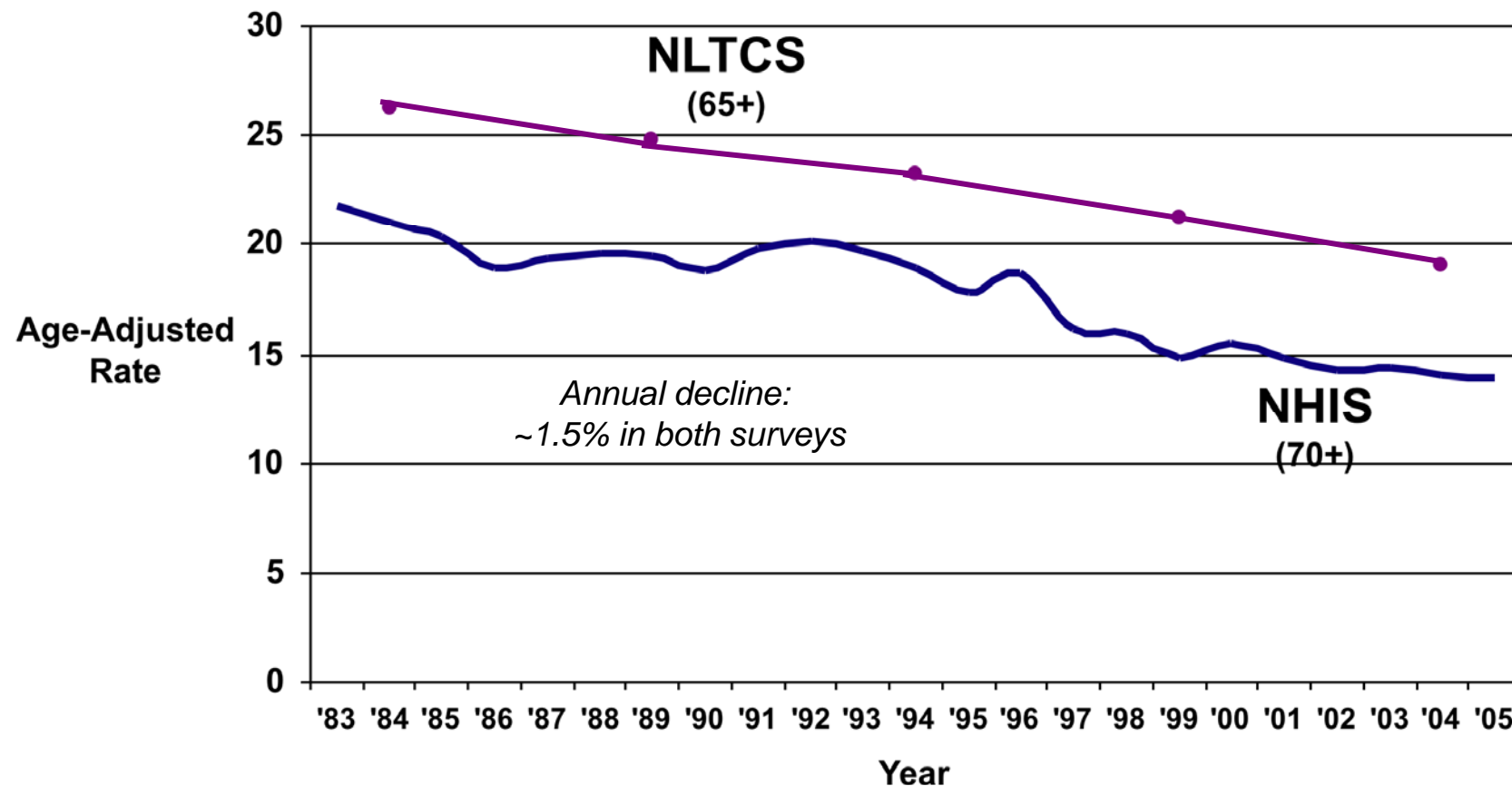
1900 - 2050



Myth # 2

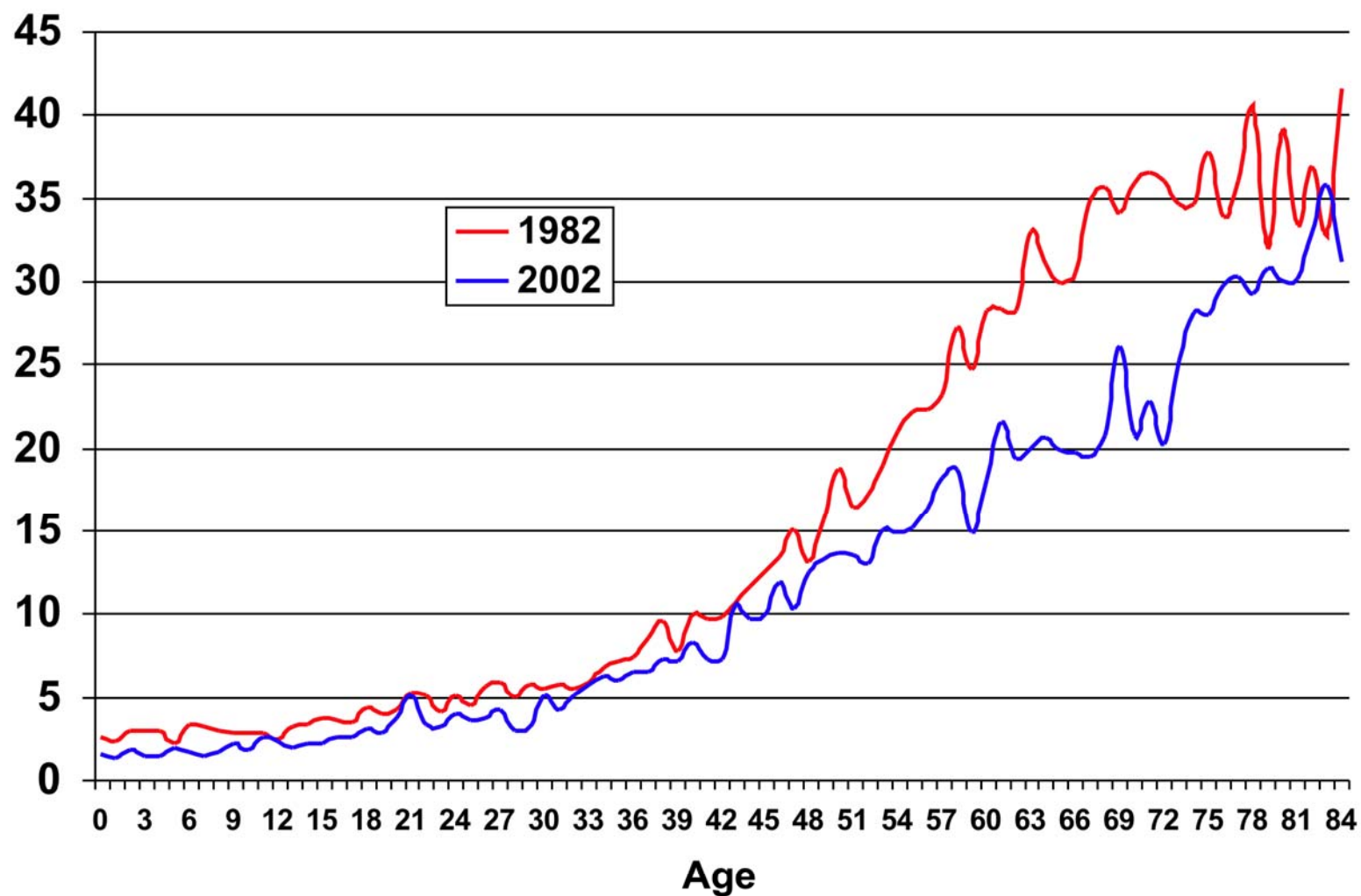
To be old is to have diminished capacity.

Most Recent Evidence on Late-Life Disability: Rates Continue to Fall

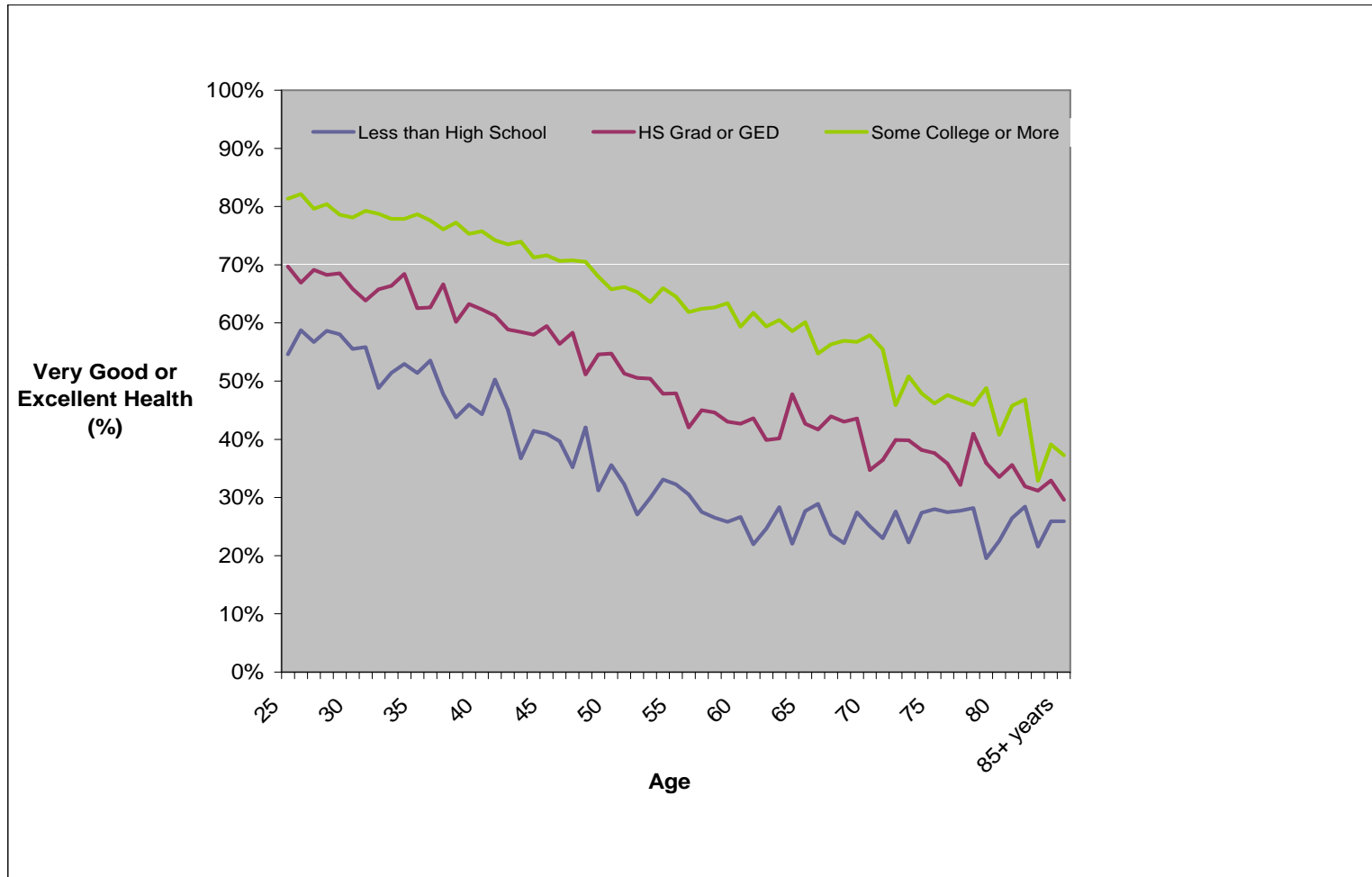


Sources: NLTCS, Manton, Gu, & Lamb (2006); NHIS, Schoeni, Freedman, Martin (2006)

Percent in Fair/Poor Health by Age and Year: NHIS



Relationship Between Education and Functional Status



Source: Authors' calculations from the National Health Interview Study.

Myth # 3

**The key age group in an aging society
is the elderly.**

Myth # 4

Intergenerational political warfare is inevitable in an aging society.

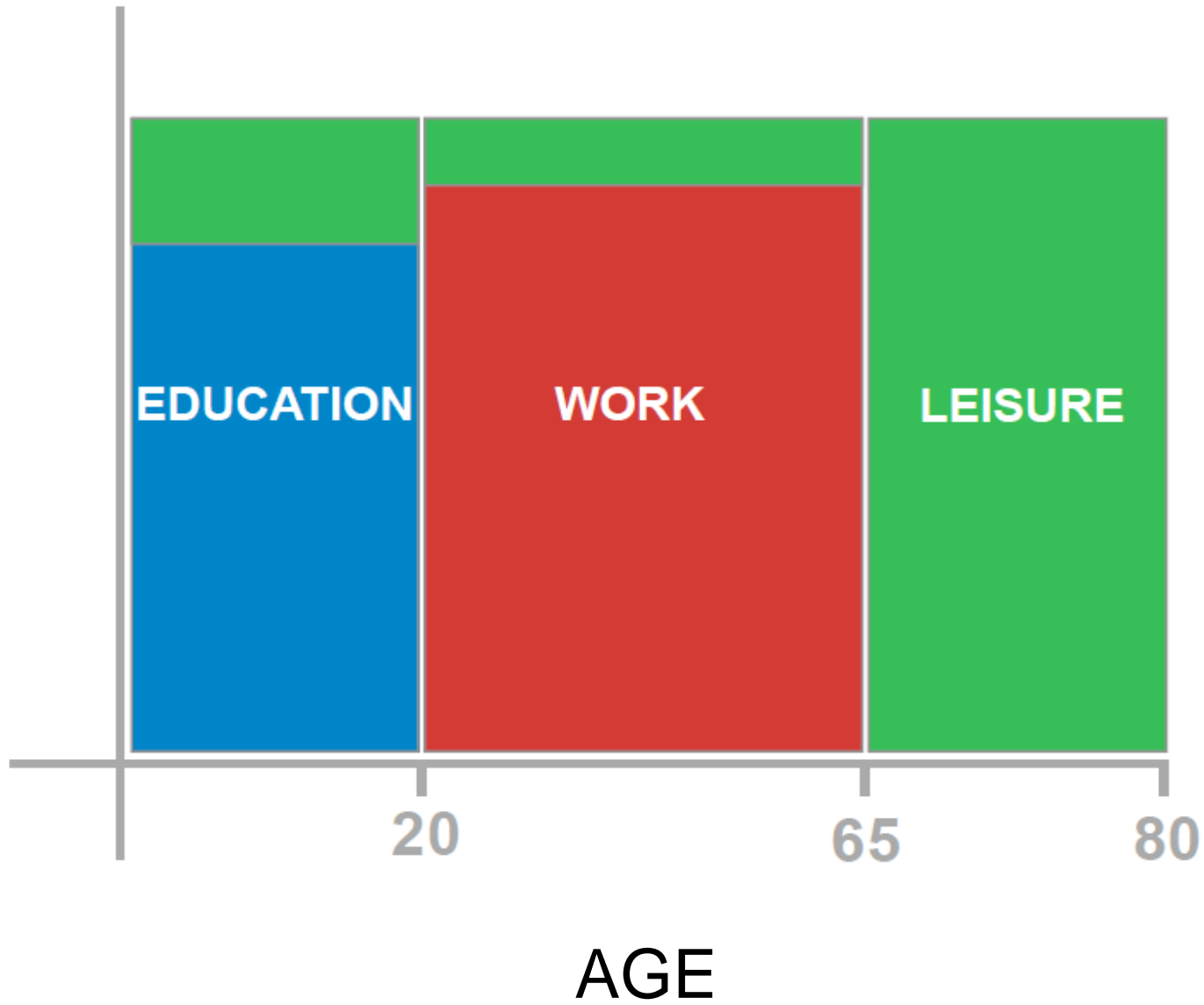
Myth # 5

Policy makers must choose between investments in youth or the elderly.

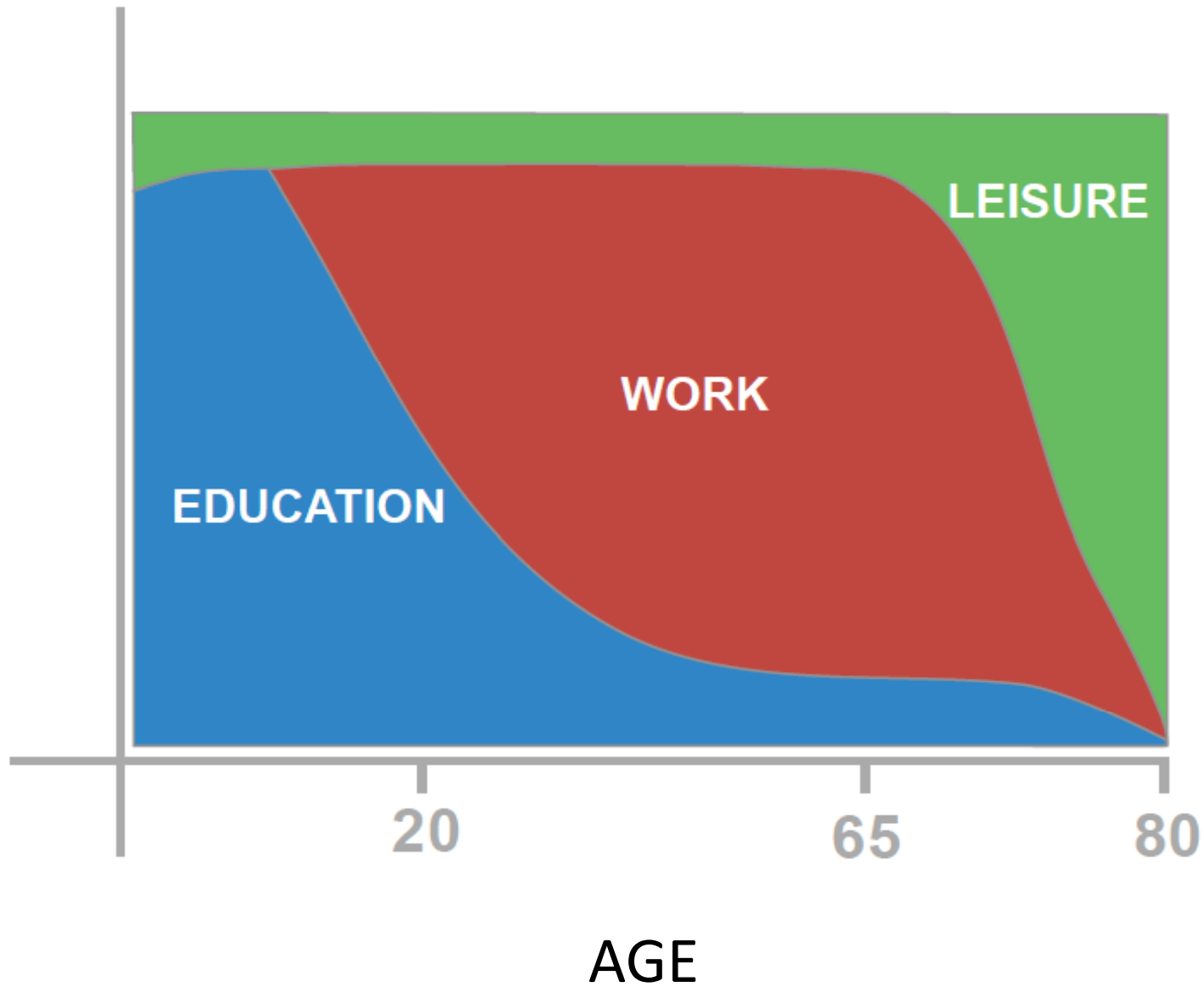
Myth # 6

The principal problems of an aging society relate to Social Security and Medicare/ Medicaid.

Traditional Life Course



Idealized Life Course



Myth # 7

The 'problem' of an Aging Society in the United States can be fixed through increased immigration.

Myth # 8

Old workers must leave the workforce to make room for younger workers.

What would failure look like?

- **Wider gaps in opportunity, education and wellness between the “haves” and the “have-nots”**
- **Lack of capacity to meet societal demand for goods and services**
- **Failure to benefit from the potential contributions of a very large, experienced, healthy older population.**

Strategies for policy development

- Long-term perspective
- Gradual implementation with attention to unintended adverse social effects
- Multiple interventions and targets - employers, local and national governments (labor, education and taxation policies)
- Involvement of private sector
- Intergenerational and multigenerational tactics

Do we need the equivalent of an
“environmental impact statement” for
assessment of the possible
consequences of all new policies on
the function of an aging society?