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Urban & Suburban Population Growth in the Mountain West

Demography Fact Sheet No. 4 | August 2019

Prepared by: Elia Del Carmen Solano-Patricio, Caitlin J. Saladino, and William E. Brown, Jr.

PURPOSE

This Fact Sheet summarizes and adapts the findings of the Brookings Institution's report on population growth and loss in the nation's top 87 largest cities and top 53 metropolitan areas.¹ For the purposes of this Fact Sheet, the focus of the report is narrowed to 14 cities and 5 metropolitan areas located within the Mountain West region of the United States (Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah).

Population growth rate defined²: In demography, population growth is used informally for the more specific term population growth rate, and refers to the growth of the human population of the world.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

In the nine years since the 2010 national census, new data predicts annual city populations for the years 2010-2018. According to Brookings Institution demographer Dr. William H. Frey³, an analysis of the new population data shows that "[U.S.] states are experiencing [a] combination of city growth declines and higher suburban growth." However, the opposite is true for cities in the Mountain West.

1. Population growth rates have slowed in U.S. cities with populations over 250,000, especially in the largest cities. In the Mountain West, however, almost every major city experienced annual population growth since the last census year in 2010 (Salt Lake City, Utah was the only exception).
2. The largest metropolitan areas of the Mountain West, experienced suburbanization, or the "population shift from central urban areas into suburbs, resulting in the formation of (sub)urban sprawl⁴."

¹ The Brookings Institution's report can be accessed at: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2019/05/24/big-city-growth-stalls-further-as-the-suburbs-make-a-comeback/>

² "Population growth." *Definitions.net*. STANDS4 LLC, 2019. Web. 15 Aug. 2019. <https://www.definitions.net/definition/population+growth>

³ Dr. William H. Frey is Brookings Institution scholar and Senior Fellow of the Metropolitan Policy. He is an internationally regarded demographer, known for his research on urban populations, migration, immigration, race, aging, political demographics and his expertise on the U.S. Census.

⁴ Wikipedia contributors. "Suburbanization." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 13 May. 2019. Web. 15 Aug. 2019. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suburbanization#References>

MOUNTAIN WEST CITIES

City proper defined⁵: A city proper, or a municipality, is the area contained within city limits. A city proper is not limited to a city; it can describe the complete area of any locality that fits the definition.

Table 1 shows the annual population growth rates of 14 of the largest cities in the Mountain West (cities with populations over 200,000). The rates highlighted in blue represent the year of that city’s greatest growth rate. Of the Mountain West’s 14 largest cities, all 14 experienced population growth since the last census in 2010.

In terms of population growth, the Mountain West’s largest cities have ranked in the same order since 2010, with Phoenix, Arizona maintaining the lead both regionally and nationally.

In 2016-17, Henderson, Nevada (3.59%) enjoyed the highest growth rate of all major Mountain West cities since 2010.

TABLE 1: MAJOR MOUNTAIN WEST CITIES: ANNUAL GROWTH RATES, 2010-2018, RANKED BY POPULATION SIZE⁶

Rank	City	Population size 2018	Annual Growth Rates								Change from 2010 to 2018
			2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	
1	Phoenix, AZ	1,660,272	1.43%	2.03%	1.83%	1.91%	1.82%	1.81%	1.33%	1.55%	+14.85%
2	Denver, CO	716,492	2.84%	2.38%	2.24%	2.36%	2.83%	1.89%	1.27%	1.57%	+19.38%
3	Las Vegas, NV	644,644	0.35%	1.16%	1.07%	1.42%	1.57%	1.47%	1.38%	1.42%	+10.43%
4	Albuquerque, NM	560,218	0.97%	0.55%	0.45%	0.01%	0.11%	0.23%	0.09%	0.02%	+2.63%
5	Tucson, AZ	545,975	0.66%	0.22%	0.21%	0.36%	0.17%	0.38%	0.73%	0.77%	+4.97%
6	Mesa, AZ	508,958	1.52%	2.10%	1.73%	1.81%	1.84%	1.85%	1.90%	1.71%	+15.92%
7	Colorado Springs, CO	472,688	1.59%	1.26%	1.24%	0.91%	1.64%	2.08%	1.45%	1.62%	+13.51%
8	Aurora, CO	374,114	2.01%	1.94%	1.83%	2.06%	2.07%	0.91%	1.19%	1.87%	+15.08%
9	Henderson, NV	310,390	0.51%	1.77%	1.91%	2.24%	2.90%	2.61%	3.40%	3.59%	+20.43%
10	Chandler, AZ	257,165	0.16%	0.35%	0.94%	0.41%	1.16%	1.71%	2.32%	1.41%	+8.91%
11	Scottsdale, AZ	255,310	1.46%	2.00%	1.66%	2.23%	3.05%	2.86%	1.39%	1.49%	+17.45%
12	Reno, NV	250,998	0.62%	0.84%	0.91%	1.36%	1.72%	1.74%	1.91%	1.58%	+11.45%
13	Glendale, AZ	250,702	1.36%	1.89%	1.42%	1.32%	1.32%	1.16%	0.77%	1.13%	+10.58%
14	Salt Lake City, UT	200,591	0.93%	0.82%	1.03%	-0.14%	0.18%	1.28%	3.29%	0.01%	+7.59%

⁵ Wikipedia contributors. "City proper." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 3 Jul. 2019. Web. 15 Aug. 2019. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_proper

⁶ Adapted from William H. Frey analysis of U.S. Census Bureau population estimates released May 23rd, 2019

Figure 1 shows average growth rates for 14 of the largest cities in the Mountain West. According to William Frey, the highest national average population growth since the Great Recession was 1.21% in 2011-2012. Here, we see that the Mountain West average surpassed the national average in 2011-2012 and every year thereafter.

FIGURE 1: AVERAGE GROWTH RATES OF MAJOR MOUNTAIN WEST CITIES, 2010-2018⁷

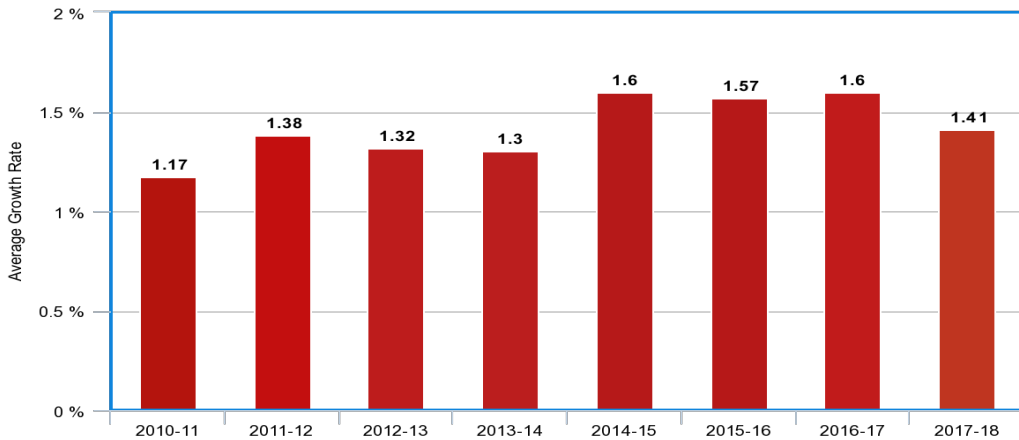
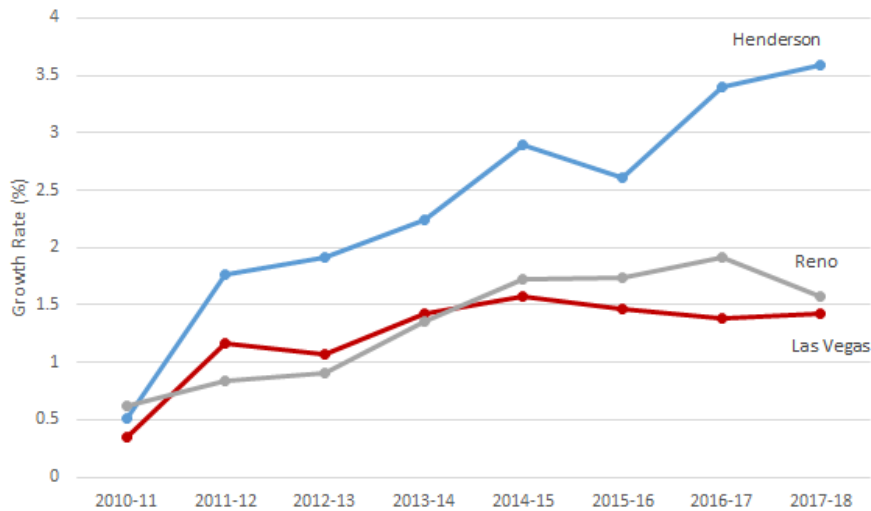


Figure 2 shows the 3 largest cities in Nevada and their population growth rates over time.

FIGURE 2: POPULATION GROWTH IN NEVADA CITIES, 2010-2018⁸



⁷ Source: U.S. Census Bureau population estimates released May 23rd, 2019

⁸ Ibid.

MOUNTAIN WEST METROS

Metropolitan statistical area defined⁹: A metropolitan statistical area, sometimes referred to as a metro area or commuter belt, is a region consisting of a densely populated urban core and its less-populated surrounding territories, sharing industry, infrastructure, and housing. A metro area usually comprises multiple jurisdictions and municipalities: neighborhoods, townships, boroughs, cities, towns, exurbs, suburbs, counties, districts, states, and even nations like the eurodistricts.

Table 2 shows the annual population growth rates of 5 of the largest metros in the Mountain West. The Growth Rates in blue represent upticks in population in suburbs and primary cities between 2011 and 2012. The growth rates in red represent upticks in population in suburbs and primary cities between 2017 and 2018.

TABLE 2: MAJOR MOUNTAIN WEST METROS: GROWTH RATES IN 2011-2012 AND 2017-2018¹⁰

Region/Metropolitan Statistical Area	Metropolitan Area Population 2010	Metropolitan Area Population 2018	Growth Rates, 2011-2012		Growth Rates, 2017-2018	
			Primary City Growth	Suburb Growth	Primary City Growth	Suburb Growth
1. Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, AZ MSA	4,192,887	4,857,962	2.04%	1.59%	1.58% ^v	2.47% [^]
2. Denver-Aurora-Lakewood, CO MSA	2,543,482	2,932,415	2.05%	1.66%	1.6% ^v	1.19% ^v
3. Las Vegas-Henderson-Paradise, NV MSA	1,951,269	2,231,647	1.34%	1.46%	2.11% [^]	2.29% [^]
4. Salt Lake City, UT MSA	1,087,873	1,222,540	0.82%	1.69%	0.01% ^v	1.72% [^]
5. Tucson, AZ MSA	980,263	1,039,073	0.22%	0.79%	0.77% [^]	1.52% [^]

Of the Mountain West’s 5 largest metropolitan areas, all 5 experienced population growth since the last census in 2010.

From 2011 to 2012, population growth was higher in the suburbs than in the primary cities of metros in Nevada, Utah, and parts of Arizona. The opposite was true for Colorado’s largest metro and the Phoenix area in Arizona.

From 2017 to 2018, however, suburb growth superseded city growth for all 5 of the Mountain West metros.

⁹ Wikipedia contributors. "Metropolitan area." Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 10 Aug. 2019. Web. 15 Aug. 2019. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metropolitan_area#cite_ref-2

¹⁰ Adapted from William H. Frey analysis of U.S. Census Bureau population estimates released May 23rd, 2019