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Madison Frazee-Bench

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, madison.frazee@unlv.edu

Caitlin J. Saladino

The Lincy Institute and Brookings Mountain West, caitlin.saladino@unlv.edu

William E. Brown Jr.

Brookings Mountain West, william.brown@unlv.edu

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TRAFFIC-RELATED PEDESTRIAN DEATHS IN THE SUN BELT REGION

Transportation & Infrastructure No. 5 | July 2020

Prepared by: Madison Frazee-Bench, Caitlin J. Saladino, and William E. Brown, Jr.

PURPOSE:

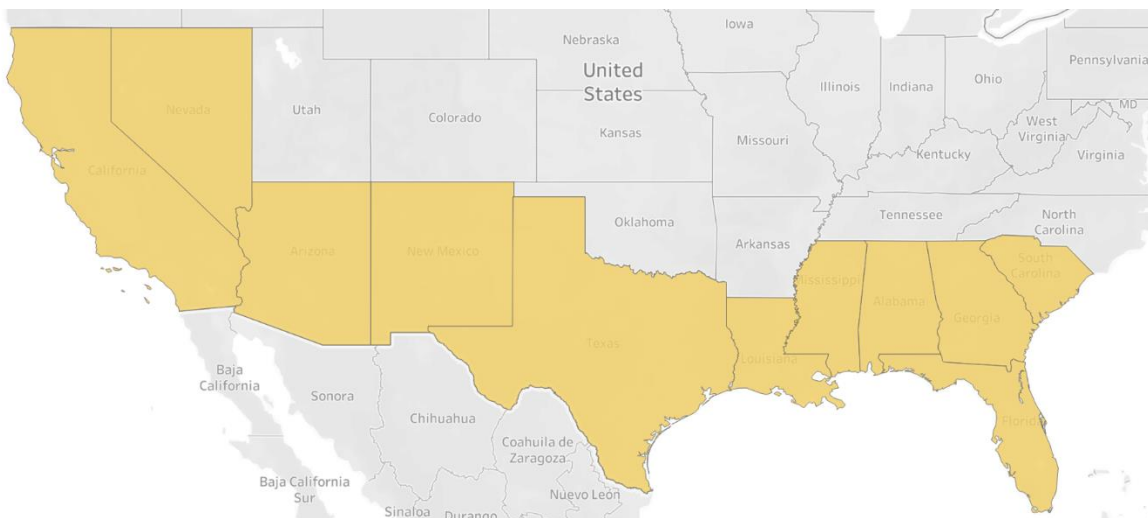
This Fact Sheet presents data from *Smart Growth America*¹ on the number of pedestrian fatalities in U.S. states and congressional districts. For the purpose of this fact sheet, the data included focus on the Sun Belt region between 2008 and 2017, highlighting areas with the highest rates of traffic-related pedestrian deaths.

ABOUT THE DATA:

The Smart Growth Initiative presents a “Pedestrian Danger Index,” (PDI) which is calculated from the crude rate of pedestrian deaths per 100,000 residents. Additional methods are applied to ensure that the deaths calculated from this measure are a result of poor infrastructure and not just an increased presence of pedestrians.

The Sun Belt is a particularly dangerous place for pedestrians, with high rates of pedestrian fatalities and PDI rates throughout the region. This Sun Belt is comprised of 11 states – Alabama, Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico, South Carolina, and Texas as highlighted in yellow in Map 1 below.

Map 1: Sun Belt States



KEY TAKEAWAYS:

1. Between 2008 and 2017, 49,340 pedestrians were killed in traffic-related incidents across the United States.
2. Nevada’s 1st Congressional District is ranked the 2nd most dangerous congressional district in the country for pedestrians.
3. People of color are more likely to be involved in a fatal crash while walking than white individuals.

¹“Dangerous by Design 2019.” (2019). Smart Growth America. Retrieved from <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/dangerous-by-design/>

Map 2 illustrates the rankings for pedestrian fatality in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The lighter yellow color represents states with lower PDI scores, noting that these states are safer for pedestrians. In contrast, the darker blue colors represent states with high PDI scores, indicating that the states are more dangerous for pedestrians.

Notably, the Sun Belt region has a troubling trend of high pedestrian fatality rates. Researchers attribute this to the sprawling growth patterns that occur in the southern United States. Due to the type of urban design and infrastructure present – longer blocks and highways that cut through majority-minority neighborhoods – pedestrian fatalities occur at higher rates in this region.²

Map 2: Pedestrian Fatality Rankings by State⁸

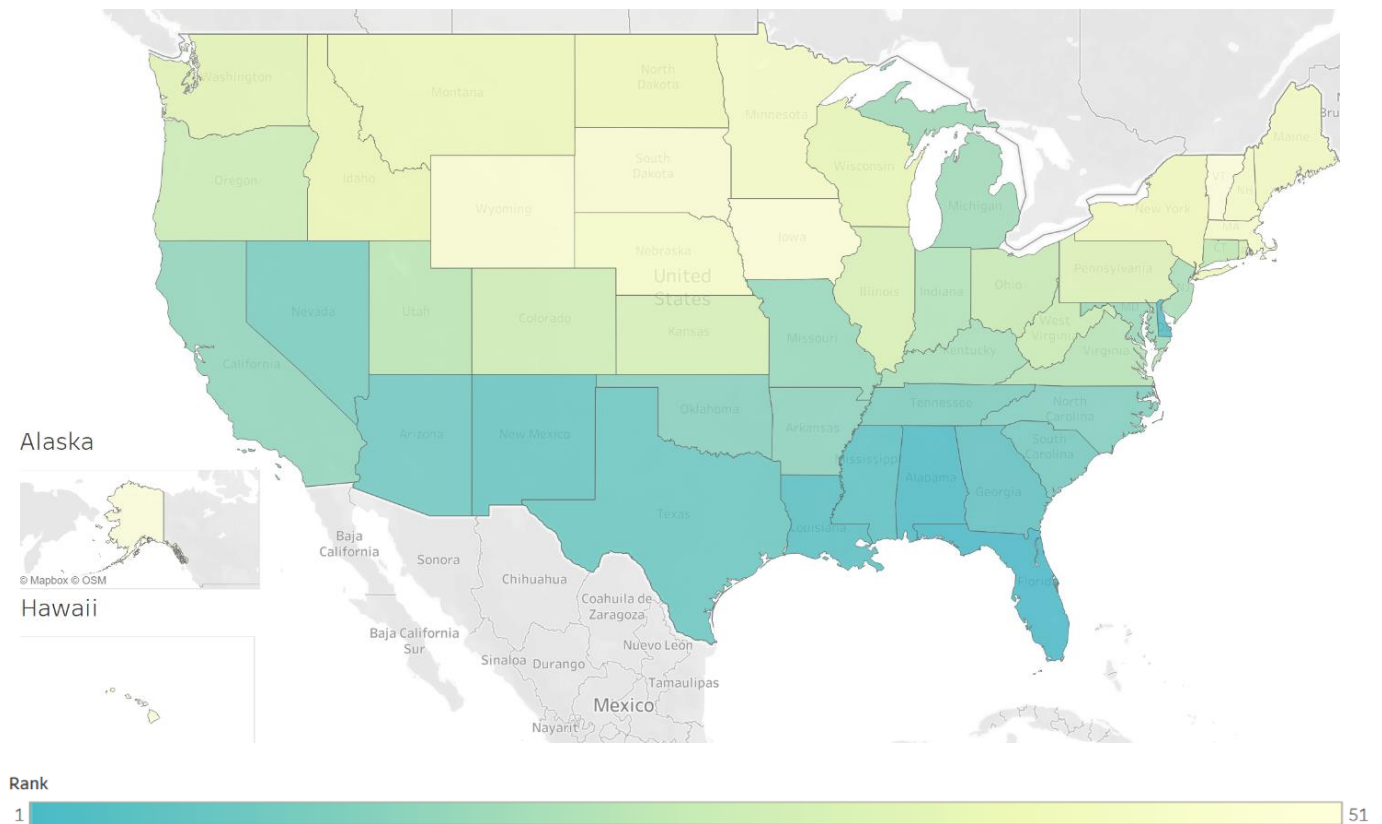


Table 1 shows that all 11 Sun Belt states appear within the top 16 most dangerous states for pedestrian fatalities. Florida is the most dangerous state for pedestrians with an average pedestrian death rate of 2.73 per 100,000 residents. Although Nevada is ranked 11th for pedestrian fatalities, the Silver State is not far behind Florida at 2.12 pedestrian fatalities per 100,000.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

Table 1: Sun Belt State Pedestrian Danger⁴

Rank	State	Pedestrian Fatalities	Avg. Annual Pedestrian Fatalities per 100,000	2019 Pedestrian Danger Index (PDI)
1	Florida	5,433	2.73	182.0
2	Alabama	841	1.74	145.0
4	Louisiana	1,047	2.25	125.0
5	Mississippi	551	1.84	122.7
6	Georgia	1,782	1.76	117.3
7	New Mexico	537	2.58	117.3
8	Texas	4,831	1.79	111.9
9	Arizona	1,503	2.23	111.5
10	South Carolina	1,144	2.37	107.8
11	Nevada	601	2.12	101.0
16	California	7,127	1.84	68.2

Table 2 shows that 9 of the 10 most dangerous Congressional districts for pedestrians are located in the Sun Belt region. Nevada’s 1st Congressional District is the second most dangerous district in the nation for pedestrians. Although this district includes the Las Vegas Strip and the surrounding area, the equation to calculate the PDI controls for places with high levels of pedestrian traffic, like the number of tourists typically found on the Strip.

Table 2: Top 10 Most Dangerous Congressional Districts for Pedestrians, 2008 – 2017⁵

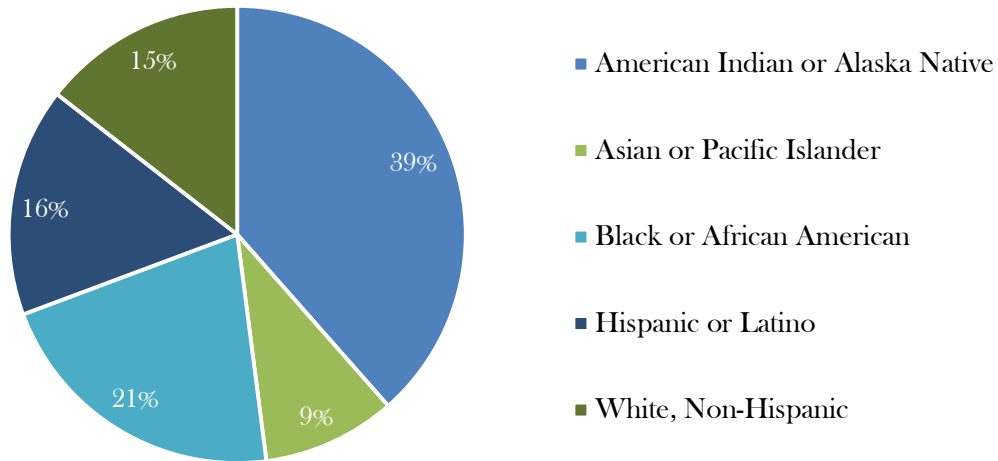
Rank	Congressional district	Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA)	Pedestrian fatalities	Pedestrian fatality rate per 100,000 people
1	Arizona: 7 th district	Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale	344	4.48
2	Nevada: 1 st district	Las Vegas-Henderson-Paradise	287	4.19
3	South Carolina: 6 th district	Charleston-North Charleston	270	4.05
4	Florida: 24 th district	Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach	292	3.98
5	Florida: 13 th district	Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater	275	3.87
6	Florida: 5 th district	Jacksonville	272	3.79
7	Texas: 35 th district	San Antonio-New Braunfels	279	3.59
8	Michigan: 13 th district	Detroit-Warren-Dearborn	235	3.43
9	Florida: 10 th district	Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford	261	3.42
10	Florida: 6 th district	Deltona-Daytona Beach-Ormond Beach	245	3.36

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

Pedestrian fatalities do not affect communities equally. Data show that people of color are disproportionately victims of fatal pedestrian-involved car accidents. In fact, the Smart Growth America report cites a study conducted by the researchers at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) that finds drivers are less likely to stop for a pedestrian if they are a person of color.⁶ Further, lower-income communities and older individuals are at an increased risk while walking. Figure 1 below denotes this discrepancy.

Figure 1: Relative Pedestrian Danger by Race and Ethnicity⁷



⁶ Coughenour, C., Clark, S., Singh, A., Claw, E., Abelar, J., & Huebner, J. (2017). Examining racial bias as a potential factor in pedestrian crashes. *Accident Analysis & Prevention*, 98, 96-100

⁷ (2019). "Dangerous by Design 2019." Smart Growth America. Retrieved from <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/dangerous-by-design/>