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## Downtown Population Growth in Southwest and Mountain West Metros

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## DOWNTOWN POPULATION GROWTH IN SOUTHWEST AND MOUNTAIN WEST METROS

Demography Fact Sheet No. 11 | July 2020

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### PURPOSE:

Summarizing data from Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program’s May 2020 research brief<sup>1</sup> “big city downtowns are booming, but can their momentum outlast the coronavirus?,” this fact sheet includes an overview of population growth in downtown and metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) between 1980 and 2018 in the Southwest and Mountain West regions of the United States.

We focus on Mountain West states (Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, Utah, and New Mexico) in our analysis. In addition, we include the metros that comprise the Southwest Megapolitan Triangle<sup>2</sup> (Southern California, alongside Las Vegas, NV and Phoenix, AZ metropolitan statistical areas).

### ABOUT THE DATA:

Adie Tomer and Lara Fishbane of the Brookings Institution define downtowns as central business districts (CBDs) and a small outer ring surrounding the CBD.<sup>3</sup> CBDs were determined using 2010-vintage tracts that mirrored Central Business District designation from 1982. Tract geography varies, so a conversion tool was used to ensure data could be mirrored across multiple decades. Smaller outer rings were added to expand the 1982 CBD to reflect a larger swathe of downtown neighborhoods.

Only first-listed, primary cities determine downtowns for a given metro area. For example, the downtown region of the Las-Vegas-Henderson-Paradise MSA reflects the expanded CBD of the City of Las Vegas proper, and does not include suburban downtown areas like downtown Henderson.<sup>4</sup>

Data to measure population growth is derived from the 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2010 decennial census. In addition, population averages from the 2014-2018 American Community Survey are used to determine the 2018 population figure for each area.<sup>5</sup>

### KEY TAKEAWAYS:

1. The downtown population in all but two Mountain West and Southwest metros grew between 1980 and 2018; growth was led by San Diego, CA and Denver, CO.
2. Las Vegas experienced the largest MSA growth in the country (377%) between 1980 and 2018.
3. Of the metros included in this analysis, Las Vegas, NV, Riverside, CA, and Phoenix, AZ experienced the largest MSA growth; each are located within the Southwest Megapolitan Triangle. Despite their MSA growth, Las Vegas, Riverside, and Phoenix experienced moderate, or almost no growth in their downtowns.

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<sup>1</sup> Adie Tomer and Lara Fishbane, “Big city downtowns are booming, but can their momentum outlast the coronavirus?” Brookings Brief (Washington: Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program, May 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Nelson, Arthur, and Robert Lang. Megapolitan America. Routledge, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> CBDs are defined by the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago and the 1982 Census of Retail Trade

<sup>4</sup> MSAs are defined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget in conjunction with Census Bureau data

<sup>5</sup> See United States Census Bureau, “American Community Survey 2014-2018 5-Year Estimates Now Available,” 2019 (<https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2019/acs-5-year.html>).

**DOWNTOWN GROWTH VERSUS MSA GROWTH:**

Among 13 MSAs in the Mountain West and Southwest regions of the United States, 11 experienced downtown population growth between 1980 and 2018. Table 1 shows San Diego and Denver experienced downtown growth in excess of 186% and 168%, respectively. No other downtown in the Mountain West and Southwest Triangle grew by over 42% during the period between 1980 and 2018. Both Colorado Springs, CO (-3.09%) and Albuquerque, NM (-13.24) experienced decline in their downtown populations. Las Vegas experienced modest downtown population growth at 9.12%, while Phoenix experienced downtown growth at just 0.02%. Tucson, AZ downtown growth is approximately half the rate of downtown Las Vegas.

Table 1 also shows MSA population growth between 1980 and 2018. During this time, each of the Mountain West and Southwest Metros experienced significant MSA growth. Las Vegas (377.0%) Phoenix (199.5%) and Riverside (192.4%) led the region in MSA growth since 1980. Notably, Las Vegas’s MSA growth rate of 377.0% represents the highest growth rate in the country between 1980 and 2018. Both Phoenix and Riverside were also among the top 10 metros in the U.S. for MSA growth. However, as mentioned in the previous section, the downtown population growth rate of these metros was modest or virtually nonexistent.

**Table 1: Downtown and MSA Growth in the Southwest and Mountain West**

<b>MSA<sup>6</sup></b>	<b>1980-2018 Downtown Growth (Aggregate)</b>	<b>1980-2018 MSAs Growth (Aggregate)</b>
<b>San Diego-Chula Vista-Carlsbad, CA</b>	186.84%	76.6%
<b>Denver-Aurora-Lakewood, CO</b>	168.31%	95.9%
<b>Provo-Orem, UT</b>	41.57%	176.6%
<b>Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA</b>	40.25%	40.9%
<b>Salt Lake City, UT</b>	36.18%	84.2%
<b>Ogden-Clearfield, UT</b>	26.90%	99.0%
<b>Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA</b>	17.50%	192.4%
<b>Bakersfield, CA</b>	15.05%	124.8%
<b>Las Vegas-Henderson-Paradise, NV</b>	9.12%	377.0%
<b>Tucson, AZ</b>	4.62%	94.5%
<b>Phoenix-Mesa-Chandler, AZ</b>	0.02%	199.5%
<b>Colorado Springs, CO</b>	-3.09%	127.8%
<b>Albuquerque, NM</b>	-13.24%	76.5%

**GROWTH IN LAS VEGAS:**

Despite the fact that the Las Vegas MSA population grew at the fastest rate in the nation, Downtown Las Vegas ranked 52nd in the nation for downtown population growth between 1980 and 2018. The Las Vegas MSA has seen consistent growth since 1980, yet it has slowed in the past two decades, most notably between 2010 and 2018.

<sup>6</sup> MSAs are listed in order of highest to lowest downtown population growth.

Table 2 shows how the growth of downtown Las Vegas has fluctuated over time. Between 1980 and 2000, the population increased by approximately 4,000 residents, but shrank by 754 residents between 2000 and 2010 (equivalent to a 3.12% decrease). Since 2010, negative growth in downtown Las Vegas has accelerated, falling by approximately 3,500 residents, or 14.89%. Moderate growth in downtown Las Vegas and significant expansion of population in the Las Vegas MSA are shown in ten-year intervals between 1980 and 2018.

**Table 2: Population Growth in Las Vegas, NV, 1980 to 2018**

Variables	Downtown Population	Percent (%) Change, Downtown	MSA Population	Percent (%) Change, MSA
Population 1980	18,250	N/A	444,837	N/A
Population 1990	20,847	14.23	720,612	61.99
Population 2000	24,151	15.85	1,351,614	87.56
Population 2010	23,397	-3.12	1,927,872	42.63
Population 2018	19,914	-14.89	2,121,660	10.05

Table 3 shows that between 1980 and 2000, downtown Las Vegas grew by over 32%. However, between 2000 and 2018, downtown Las Vegas decreased in population by 17.54%, wiping out most gains made in the prior two decades. In aggregate, between 1980 and 2018 downtown Las Vegas grew by 1,664 residents, or 9.12%. As the downtown experienced single to double digit growth and decline since 1980, the Las Vegas MSA saw consistent triple digit growth every two decades.

**Table 3: Las Vegas Downtown and MSA Aggregate Change, 1980 to 2018**

	Downtown	MSA
1980-2000 (Aggregate Change)	32.33%	203.84%
2000-2018 (Aggregate Change)	-17.54%	167.53%
1980-2018 (Aggregate Change)	9.12%	376.95%

**GROWTH IN PHOENIX:**

The growth of Phoenix is similar to that of Las Vegas. Between 1980 and 2018, Phoenix experienced one of the highest MSA growth rates in the nation, most of which occurred between 1980 and 2000. Table 4 shows the downtown population of Phoenix hovered between 55,000 and 62,000 residents over the past 4 decades. Population grew at less than 6% between 1980 and 2000 and decreased by nearly the same amount between 2000 and 2018.

**Table 4: Population Growth in Phoenix, AZ, 1980 to 2018**

Variables	Downtown Population	Percent (%) Change, Downtown	MSA Population	Percent (%) Change, MSA
Population 1980	59,154	N/A	1,540,816	N/A
Population 1990	55,428	-6.30	2,183,052	41.68
Population 2000	62,672	13.07	3,189,204	46.09
Population 2010	56,078	-10.52	4,136,809	29.71
Population 2018	59,168	5.51	4,614,466	11.55

In aggregate, the population of downtown Phoenix remained virtually unchanged since 1980, adding just 14 residents between 1980 and 2018. This is equivalent to a 0.02% increase, as seen in Table 5. It is worth noting the low growth in downtown Phoenix experienced simultaneously with explosive MSA growth in the suburban region.

**Table 5: Phoenix Downtown and MSA Aggregate Change, 1980 to 2018**

	Downtown	MSA
1980-2000 (Aggregate Change)	5.95%	106.98%
2000-2018 (Aggregate Change)	-5.59%	89.50%
1980-2018 (Aggregate Change)	0.02%	199.50%

**GROWTH IN RIVERSIDE:**

Since 1980, Riverside has experienced growth rates similar to Las Vegas and Phoenix. Table 6 shows Riverside added a net total of 3,727 downtown residents since 1980. Downtown growth between 2010 and 2018 was negative between 1990 and 2000 (-10.75%) and again between 2010 and 2018 (-1.76%). Between 1980 and 1990, the Riverside MSA population experienced its largest increase of approximately 65,000 residents (. In 2018, Riverside had 2,500 residents less than its peak population in 1990.

**Table 6: Population Growth in Riverside, CA, 1980 to 2018**

Variables	Downtown Population	Percent (%) Change, Downtown	MSA Population	Percent (%) Change, MSA
Population 1980	21,293	N/A	1,536,889	N/A
Population 1990	27,786	30.49	2,561,007	66.64
Population 2000	24,799	-10.75	3,230,022	26.12
Population 2010	25,467	2.69	4,199,384	30.01
Population 2018	25,020	-1.76	4,493,679	7.01

As seen in Table 7, Riverside’s downtown grew by 17.5% while the MSA expanded by 192.40% between 1980 and 2018. The MSA growth of Riverside is slightly less than that of Phoenix (7.10%). Riverside had the greatest relative downtown growth but least robust MSA growth of the three Southwest Triangle cities.

**Table 7: Riverside Downtown and MSA Aggregate Change, 1980 to 2018**

	Downtown	MSA
1980-2000 (Aggregate Change)	16.47%	110.17%
2000-2018 (Aggregate Change)	0.89%	63.97%
1980-2018 (Aggregate Change)	17.50%	192.40%

Figure 1 shows the Phoenix downtown region remained nearly unchanged in population between 1980 (59,154 residents) and 2018 (59,168). Of the three downtown regions shown in Figure 1, Riverside (yellow) saw the largest increase (17.50%) in its downtown population between the years of 1980 and 2018, increasing from 21,293 residents to 25,020 residents. Downtown Las Vegas experienced the smallest population increase and moderate growth (9.12%).

**Figure 1: Population Downtown Las Vegas, Phoenix, and Riverside, 1980 – 2018**

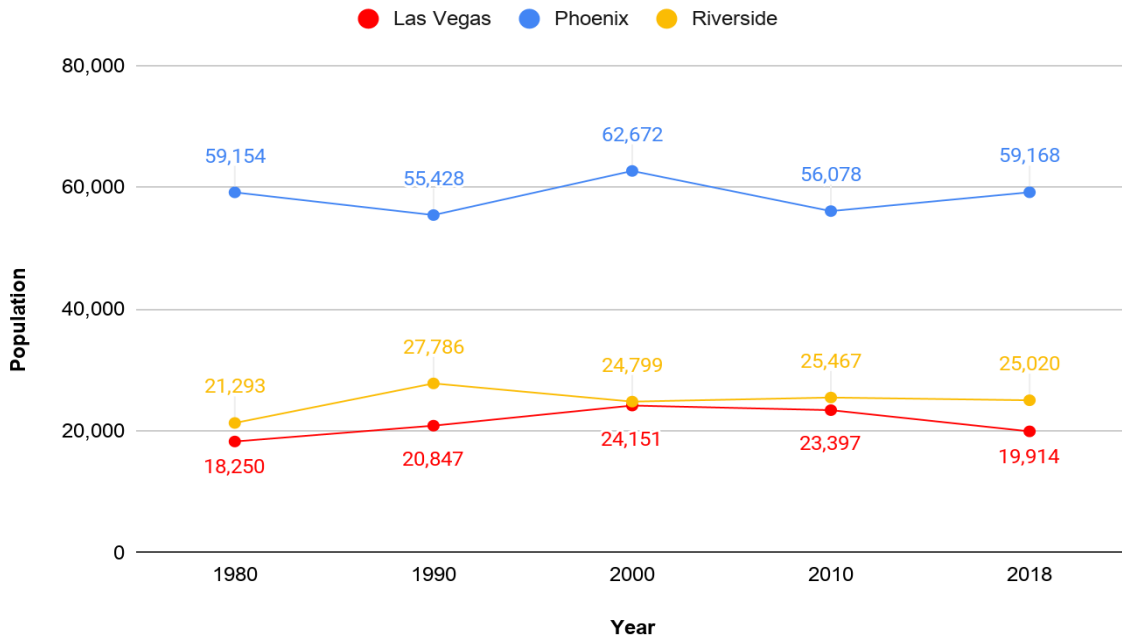


Figure 2 displays MSA growth for Las Vegas, Phoenix and Riverside. Although Las Vegas has the smallest population in both 1980 and 2018 (444,837 and 2,121,660) compared to Phoenix and Riverside (approximately 1.5M and 4.5M), it experienced the fastest rate of growth (377%). The growth of Riverside and Phoenix is almost parallel in terms of both consistency and total population.

**Figure 2: Population in Las Vegas, Phoenix, and Riverside MSAs, 1980 - 2018**

