

# POPULATION BRIEF

Trends in the Western U.S.

## The State of Alaska

By Don E. Albrecht

### Overview

Rural development is the process by which the lives of individuals and families living in rural areas are improved. Effective rural development necessarily involves several components that include 1) good jobs that provide individuals and families the opportunity to earn and maintain a livable income; 2) a chance to complete an education and have lifelong opportunities to learn and improve one's circumstances; 3) and the opportunity to live a reasonably long and healthy life. Communities that effectively meet these conditions are likely to retain existing residents and attract new residents and thus experience population growth.

Additionally, effective rural development means that opportunities to obtain high-quality employment, complete an education, and live a long and healthy life must be available to all residents of the community, rather than only to certain segments of the population.

The first step in advancing an effective rural development program is to carefully assess baseline conditions. In response, the Western Rural Development Center (WRDC) is providing a set of population briefs that provide some of this baseline information. Each population brief will assess one of the components of rural development listed above. This brief examines population changes in Alaska. Each brief will explore overall conditions, and then examine the extent to which opportunities are available to all segments of the population by making comparisons on race/ethnicity, gender, family structure or geography. The geographic component will provide comparisons between metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas and will compare

the west with the remainder of the United States. Further, population briefs for each of the 13 states comprising the western region are developed that provide more detailed information on rural development issues. Data for these population briefs are obtained from the United States Census.

### The Last Frontier

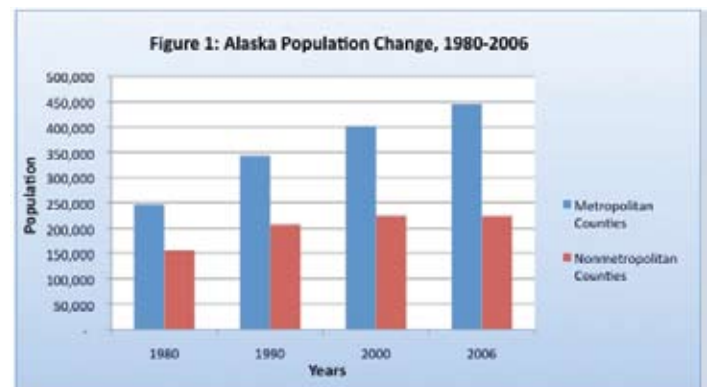
Geographically, Alaska is by far the largest state in the Union. With 663,267 square miles, Alaska comprises 17.5 percent of the total land area in the United States; is more than twice as large as the second biggest state, Texas; and is nearly four times larger than the next biggest state in the western region, California. Alaska also has by far the lowest population density in the country, at about one person per square mile. In contrast, the population density in New Jersey is 1,134 persons per square mile. With 670,053 residents (in 2006) Alaska has a smaller population than all of the states except Vermont, North Dakota and Wyoming. Vast untouched expanses of Alaska allow it to remain the "last frontier." In fact, large parts of Alaska are not organized into counties (called Boroughs in Alaska) and instead the Census Bureau and the State of Alaska have organized these regions into 'Census Areas' for counting purposes.

### Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan

In recent decades the population of Alaska has grown rapidly, increasing from 401,851 in 1980 to 670,053 in 2006, a 66.7 percent boost (Figure 1). Of western states, only Nevada, Arizona and Utah, had faster growth

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rates than Alaska. Two-thirds of Alaska residents live in the state's two metropolitan areas of Anchorage and Fairbanks. The population of the Anchorage Metropolitan Area grew from 192,247 in 1980 to 359,180 in 2006, an increase of 86.8 percent with more than one-half of the Alaska population living in this area. The population of Fairbanks grew from 53,983 in 1980 to 86,754 in 2006, an increase of 60.7 percent. As is apparent from Figure 2, the Alaska population is concentrated in Anchorage and Fairbanks, with the remainder of the state being very sparsely populated. The state's nonmetropolitan areas had population increases of 44 percent, growing from 155,621 in 1980 to 224,119 in 2006. Six boroughs or census areas had population declines, while the other 18 had population increases. In seven boroughs or census areas,



the population increased by 50 percent or more between 1980 and 2006. In the Kenai Peninsula, the population more than doubled, growing from 25,282 in 1980 to 52,304 in 2006 (Table 1). Figure 3 reveals that population growth is most extensive in the southern part of the state; however, there are extensive areas with missing data in Figure 3 because of changing boundaries and unorganized territories.

### Minority Population Growth

In 1980, about three-fourths of the population of Alaska was White. Between 1980 and 2000, the White population increased by

38 percent. At the same time, the Asian population increased by 239 percent, the Hispanic population by 185 percent, the Black population by 56 percent and the Native American population by 51 percent. Native Americans are the second most numerous racial/ethnic group in Alaska. In 2000, the Native American population was 95,345 and comprised 16.1 percent of the total Alaska population. By 2000, the proportion of the state that was White had declined to 71 percent (Figure 4).

### Income, Poverty and Education

Household incomes in Alaska tend to be high. In 2000, the median household income in the average Alaska borough was \$46,842, which was the highest of any state in the Western Region. The percent of households in poverty was 13.1 percent, which was higher than poverty rates in Colorado, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Wyoming. Educational attainment levels are lower in Alaska than most states in the west. More than four out of five (82.9 percent) of Alaska adults have completed high school.

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This proportion is lower than Colorado, Montana, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. Alaska's proportion of college graduates (18.6) is lower than all states in the Western Region except Arizona, Nevada and Idaho. Figures 5 through 9 present data showing that some segments of the population are doing much better economically and educationally than others. Incomes for White households are much higher than incomes for minority households (Figure 5). Also, poverty rates are much higher for minority households than for White households (Figure 6). Data showing the relationship between household structure and poverty levels is

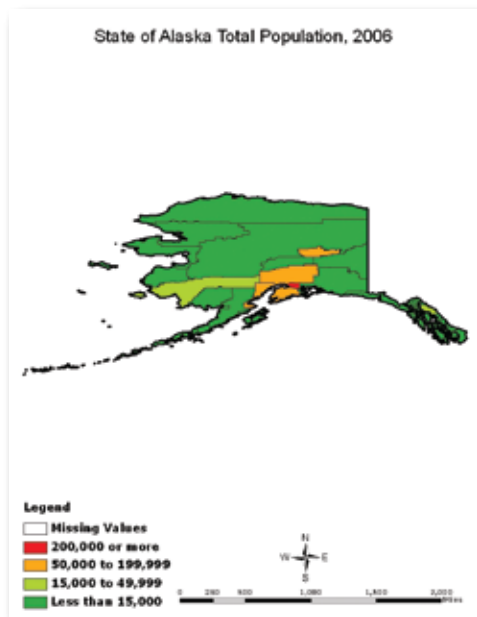


Figure 2



Figure 3

	1980	1990	2000	2006	Change 1980 - 2006	
					Total	Percent
<b>State Totals</b>	401,851	550,043	626,932	670,053	268,212	66.7
<b>Metropolitan Areas</b>						
Total	246,230	343,741	402,445	445,934	199,704	81.1
<b>Anchorage</b>						
Total	192,247	266,021	319,605	359,180	166,933	86.8
Anchorage Municipality	174,431	226,338	260,283	278,700	104,269	59.8
Matanuska-Susitna	17,816	39,683	59,322	80,480	62,664	351.7
<b>Fairbanks</b>						
Fairbanks North Star	53,983	77,720	82,840	86,754	32,771	60.7
<b>Nonmetropolitan</b>						
Total	155,621	206,302	224,487	224,119	68,498	44.0
Aleutians East	2,563	3,941	2,697	2,647	84	3.3
Aleutians West	5,205	8,001	5,465	5,239	34	0.7
Bethel	10,999	13,656	16,006	17,147	6,148	55.9
Bristol Bay	1,094	1,410	1,258	1,042	-52	-4.8
Denali	-	-	1,893	1,846	-47*	-2.5
Dillingham	3,260	4,012	4,922	4,970	1,710	52.5
Haines	1,680	2,117	2,392	2,257	577	34.3
Juneau City	19,528	26,751	30,711	30,737	11,209	57.4
Kenai Peninsula	25,282	40,802	49,691	52,304	27,022	106.9
Ketchikan Gateway	11,316	13,828	14,070	13,384	2,068	18.3
Kodiak Island	9,939	13,309	13,913	13,072	3,133	31.5
Lake and Peninsula	1,356	1,668	1,823	1,548	192	14.2
Nome Census	6,537	8,288	9,196	9,245	2,708	41.4
North Slope	4,199	5,979	7,385	6,608	2,409	57.4
Northwest Arctic	4,831	6,113	7,208	7,511	2,680	55.5
<b>Prince of Wales</b>						
Outer Ketchikan	3,822	6,278	6,146	5,688	1,866	48.8
Sitka City	7,803	8,588	8,835	8,920	1,117	14.3
Skagway-Hoonah-Angoon	3,478	4,385	3,436	3,100	-378	-10.9
Southwest Fairbanks	5,676	5,913	6,174	6,773	1,097	19.3
Valdez-Cordova	8,348	9,952	10,195	9,872	1,524	18.3
Wade Hampton	4,665	5,791	7,028	7,580	2,915	62.5
Wrangell-Petersburg	6,167	7,042	6,684	6,096	-71	-1.2
Yakutat City	-	-	808	689	-119*	-14.7
Yukon-Koyukuk	7,873	8,478	6,551	5,844	-2029	-25.8

\*Change from 2000-2006 only

outlined in Figure 7 and the differences are extensive. While 4.4 percent of White households in metropolitan areas were living in poverty in 2000, 28.4 percent of minority households in nonmetropolitan areas were living in poverty. Figures 8 and 9 present data indicating that there is a strong relationship between educational attainment and race/ethnicity. Figure 8 shows that more than 90 percent of Whites have completed high school, compared to 81.5 percent of the minority residents of metropolitan areas and 73.8 percent of the minority residents of nonmetropolitan areas. It is evident that White Alaskans are much more likely to be college graduates than minority Alaskans (Figure 9). Thus, 27.4 percent of metropolitan

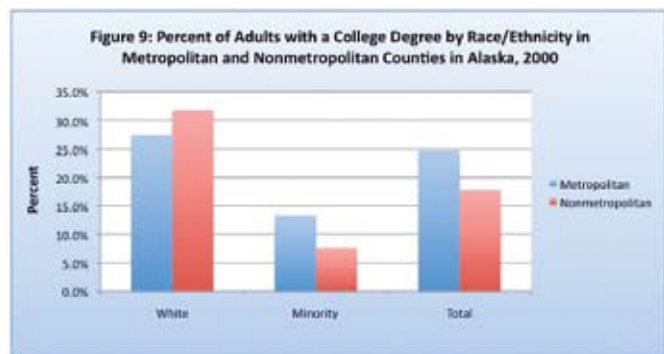
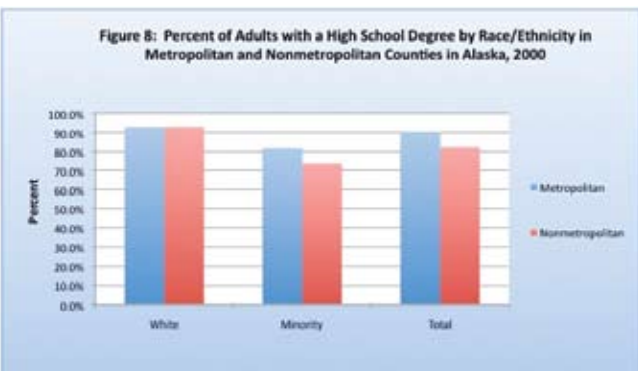
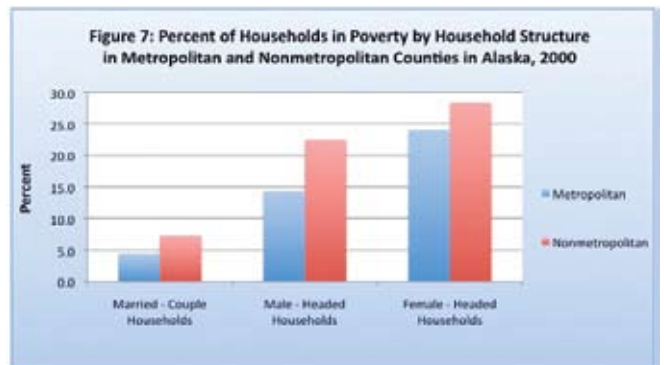
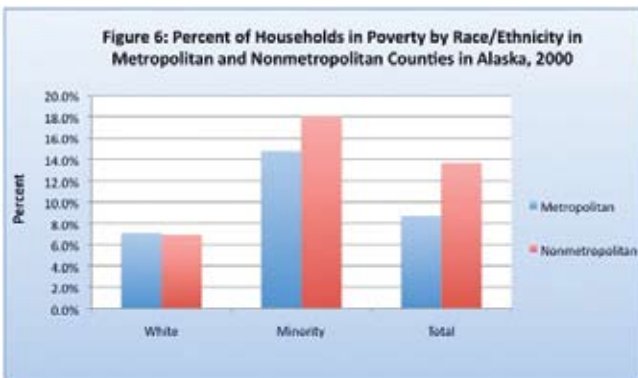
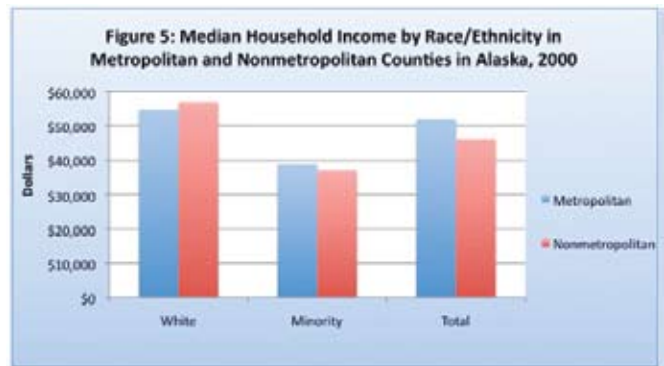
White residents and 31.8 percent of nonmetropolitan White residents were college graduates, compared to 13.3 percent of metropolitan minority residents and only 7.6 percent of nonmetropolitan minority residents.

**Conclusion**

Providing programs and services to a widely dispersed clientele represent significant challenges to Alaska policy makers and development specialists. Reaching all segments of the population and doing so in an era of tremendously high energy costs make this challenge even more difficult. ●

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## About the Briefs

Published by the Western Rural Development Center

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The Population Briefs provide information on the population trends in the western U.S. They are intended to provide both basic information and, when combined with the data tables on the WRDC website, more detailed information for further analysis and application.

The series of Population Briefs will include population trends in the western U.S. related to minorities, natural amenities, education, employment/labor, health, fuel usage, and more. Each topic will include a regional overview and then one brief focused on each of the 13 states in the WRDC's region. The briefs will also include data, where available, related to the population trends in the four western U.S. Territories.

The Population Briefs are available in PDF format on the WRDC website (<http://wrdc.usu.edu>) under 'Publications' and in paper format through the WRDC offices via email to [wrdc@usu.edu](mailto:wrdc@usu.edu).

## Data

Data for this series is obtained from the U.S. Census of Population for 1980, 1990, 2000, and, where available, 2006. Data is reported for all persons for whom race/ethnicity was reported.



The Western Rural Development Center (WRDC) is one of four regional centers funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Services (CSREES) to strengthen the capacity of local citizens to guide the future of their rural communities. Each of the four Centers link the research and extension capacity of regional land-grant universities with local decision-makers to address a wide range of rural development issues.

The WRDC also receives substantial support from several Utah State University units including Cooperative Extension, the Agricultural Experiment Station and the College of Natural Resources.

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There is a Population Brief for each of the 13 states in the Western Region, and when available, one brief on each of the four U.S. Territories in the region.

To access the state briefs visit 'Rural Resources' on the WRDC website at <http://wrdc.usu.edu>.

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