



# POPULATION BRIEF

Trends in the Western U.S.

## The State of New Mexico

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 New Mexico. 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.

### Growth in New Mexico: Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan

The population of the State of New Mexico increased by 50 percent between 1980 and 2006, growing from 1,302,894 in 1980 to 1,954,599 in 2006. In 2006, over 40 percent of the New Mexico population lived in the Albuquerque Metropolitan Area. This four-county metropolitan area had increased from a population of 523,105 in 1980 to a population of 816,811 in 2006. The state's other three metropolitan areas grew rapidly as well. The population of Las Cruces (Dona Ana County) more than doubled, growing from 96,340 in 1980 to 193,888 in 2006. The Santa Fe Metropolitan Area (Santa Fe County) increased by 89 percent, from 75,360 in 1980 to 142,407 in 2006. The Farmington Metropolitan Area (San Juan County) grew from 81,433 to 126,473, an increase of 55 percent. Combined the state's 26 nonmetropolitan counties grew from 526,656 residents in 1980 to 675,020 residents in 2006, an increase of 28.2 percent (see Figure 1 and Table 1).

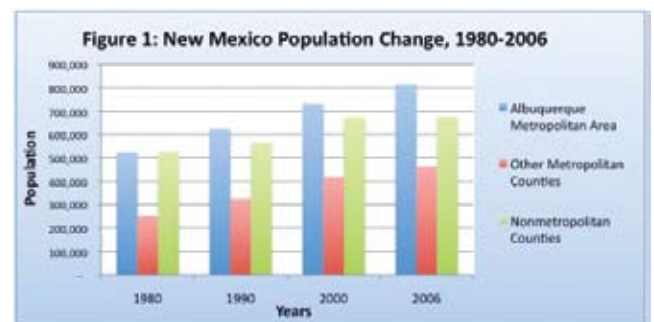
From Figure 2 it is apparent that the New Mexico population is concentrated in the central part of the state around Albuquerque. There are also substantial population centers in the northwest and southeast sections of the state with sparse

**Combined the state's 26 nonmetropolitan counties grew from 526,656 residents in 1980 to 675,020 residents in 2006, an increase of 28.2 percent (see Figure 1 and Table 1).**

populations in the northeast and southwest sections of the state. Population growth was apparent in the already population-dense areas of the state (Figure 3). There were eight nonmetropolitan New Mexico counties that experienced population declines between 1980 and 2006. Six of these counties (Colfax, De Baca, Guadalupe, Harding, Quay, and Union) were in the east-central or northeast parts of the state. The other two counties (Cibola and Hidalgo) were on the western edge of the state. Generally, population change occurred less in the eastern or plains portions of the New Mexico than in the other parts of the state.

### Minority Population Growth

In 1980, the population of New Mexico was 53 percent White, 37 percent Hispanic, and 8 percent Native American, with very small Black and Asian populations. During the



ensuing two decades, the White population increased by 18 percent, while the Hispanic population increased by 60.5 percent and the Native American population grew by 57.6 percent. As a consequence, by 2000, the New Mexico population was less than 50 percent (45.5) White and was 42.8 percent Hispanic. Between 1980 and 2000, 59 percent of the population growth in New Mexico was comprised of Hispanic population growth, while only 25 percent was due to increases of the White population (Figure 4).

### Income, Poverty and Education

In 2000, the median household income in the average New Mexico County was \$30,603. This was the lowest median household income in the Western Region except for Montana. More discouraging was that the average New Mexico County had the highest rate in the region of households that are living in poverty (20.5 percent). Making low incomes and high poverty rates even more problematic, there are some segments of the population that are doing much worse than others. Specifically, metropolitan households are doing much better economically than nonmetropolitan households and White households are doing much better than minority households. For example, the average White household in a metropolitan county earned \$41,966, compared to \$33,581 for the average White household in a nonmetropolitan county, \$30,519 for minority households in metropolitan counties and \$24,437 for minority households in nonmetropolitan counties (Figure 5). Thus, the average

minority household in a nonmetropolitan county earned only 58 percent as much as the average White household in a metropolitan county. Similarly, White and metropolitan households were much less likely to be in poverty than minority and nonmetropolitan households (Figure 6). The data presented in Figure 7 show poverty levels by family structure. The results are very demoralizing. While 10.8 percent of married-couple households in metropolitan counties were living in poverty in 2000, nearly one-half (45.4 percent) of female-headed households in nonmetropolitan counties were living in poverty. This is very troubling in a state where 14 percent of the households in the state are female-headed,

**18.7 percent of New Mexico adults have a college degree, which is a higher proportion than Alaska, Arizona, Idaho, and Nevada among western states.**

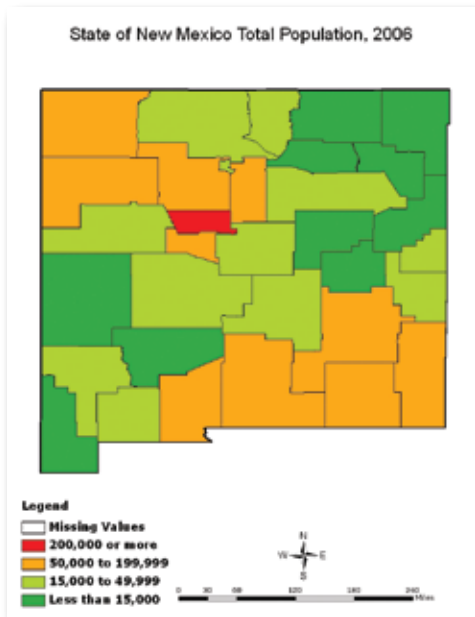


Figure 2

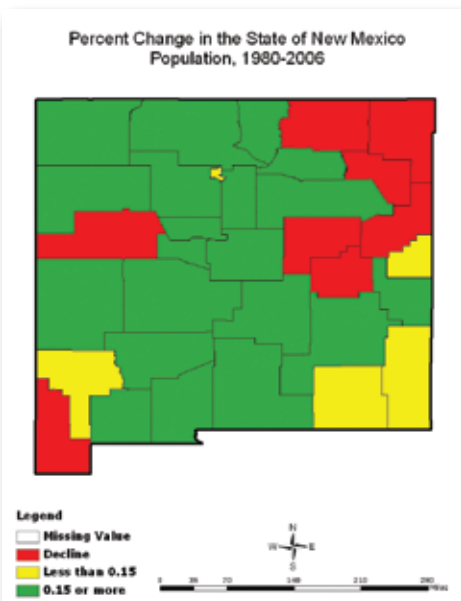


Figure 3

Table 1: Population change for Metropolitan and Nonmetropolitan Counties in New Mexico, 1980 - 2006

	1980	1990	2000	2006	Change 1980 - 2006	
					Total	Percent
State Total	1,302,894	1,515,069	1,819,046	1,954,599	651,705	50.0
<b>Metropolitan Areas</b>						
Total	776,238	949,253	1,147,424	1,279,579	503,341	64.8
<b>Albuquerque</b>						
Total	523,105	623,210	729,649	816,811	293,706	56.1
Bernalillo County	419,700	480,577	556,678	615,099	195,399	46.6
Sandoval County	34,799	63,319	89,908	113,772	78,973	226.9
Torrance County	7,491	10,285	16,911	17,551	10,060	134.3
Valencia County	61,115	69,029	66,152	70,389	9,274	15.2
<b>Las Cruces</b>						
Dona Ana County	96,340	135,510	174,682	193,888	97,548	101.3
<b>Farmington</b>						
San Juan County	81,433	91,605	113,801	126,473	45,040	55.3
<b>Santa Fe</b>						
Santa Fe County	75,360	98,928	129,292	142,407	67,047	89.0
<b>Nonmetropolitan Counties</b>						
Total	526,656	565,816	671,622	675,020	148,364	28.2
Catron County	2,720	2,563	3,543	3,476	756	27.8
Chaves County	51,103	57,846	61,382	62,474	11,371	22.3
Cibola County	30,347	23,794	25,595	27,481	-2,866	-9.4
Colfax County	13,667	12,925	14,189	13,514	-153	-1.1
Curry County	42,019	42,207	45,044	45,513	3,494	8.3
De Baca County	2,454	2,252	2,240	1,991	-436	-18.9
Eddy County	47,855	48,605	51,658	51,815	3,960	8.3
Grant County	26,204	27,676	31,002	29,792	3,588	13.7
Guadalupe County	4,496	4,156	4,680	4,365	-131	-2.9
Harding County	1,090	987	810	718	-372	-34.1
Hidalgo County	6,049	5,958	5,932	5,087	-962	-15.9
Lea County	55,993	55,765	55,511	57,312	1,319	2.4
Lincoln County	10,997	12,219	19,411	21,223	10,226	93.0
Los Alamos County	17,599	18,115	18,343	19,022	1,423	8.1
Luna County	15,585	18,110	25,016	27,205	11,620	74.6
McKinley County	56,449	60,686	74,798	71,875	15,426	27.3
Mora County	4,205	4,264	5,180	5,151	946	22.5
Otero County	44,665	51,928	62,298	62,744	18,079	40.5
Quay County	10,577	10,823	10,155	9,155	-1,422	-13.4
Rio Arriba County	29,282	34,365	41,190	40,949	11,667	39.8
Roosevelt County	15,695	16,702	18,018	18,291	2,596	16.5
San Miguel County	22,751	25,743	30,126	29,325	6,574	28.9
Sierra County	8,454	9,912	13,270	12,669	4,215	49.9
Socorro County	12,566	14,764	18,078	18,240	5,674	45.2
Taos County	19,456	23,118	29,979	31,832	12,376	63.6
Union County	4,725	4,124	4,174	3,801	-924	-19.6

which is the highest proportion of all the states in the Western Region.

About three-fourths (75.9 percent) of the adult population in New Mexico has completed high school. Among western states only Arizona and Hawaii have lower percentages of their population with high school degrees. Also, 18.7 percent of New Mexico adults have a college degree, which is a higher proportion than Alaska, Arizona, Idaho, and Nevada among western states. There are major differences in educational attainment levels by race/ethnicity. Nearly 90 percent of Whites have completed high school, compared to less than two-thirds of minorities (Figure 8). Similarly, 32.9 percent of the White residents of metropolitan counties have a college degree, compared

to 26.9 percent of the White residents of nonmetropolitan counties, 10.7 percent of minority residents of metropolitan counties and only 9.1 percent of the minority residents of nonmetropolitan counties.

**Health**

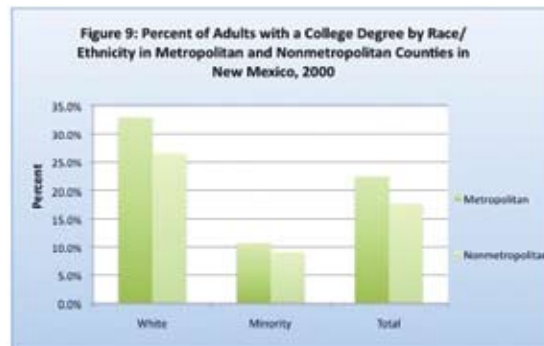
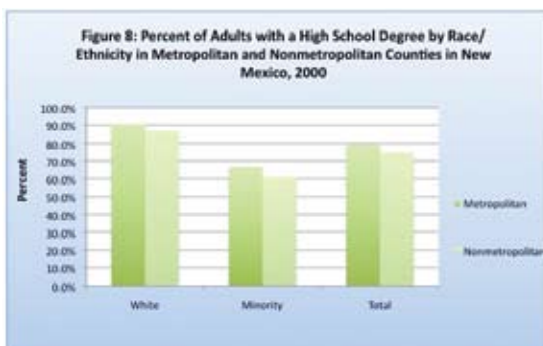
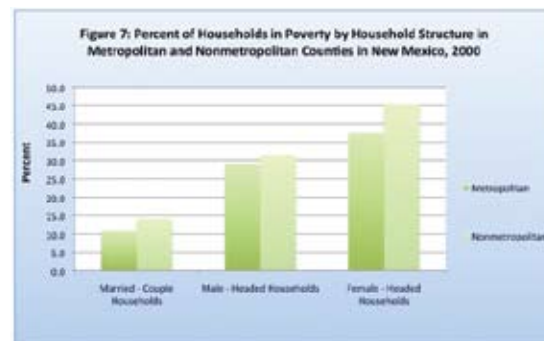
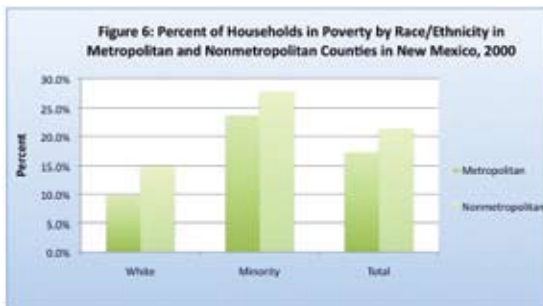
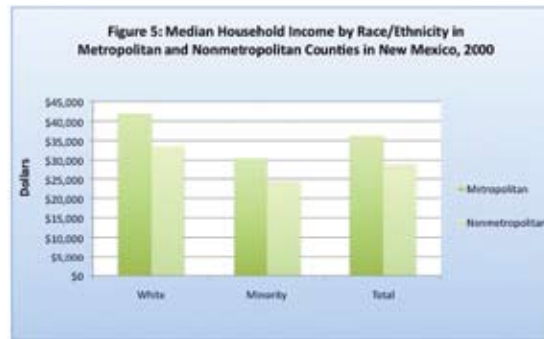
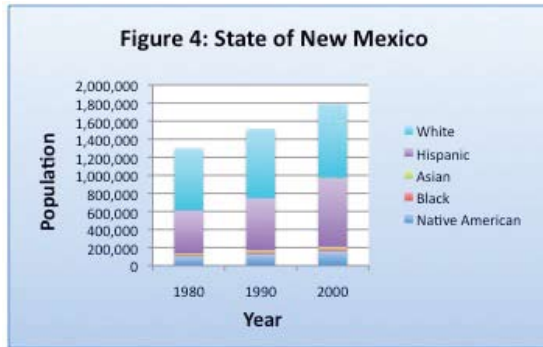
Other significant problems confronting New Mexico include a very high teenage fertility rate and the fact that nearly one-half of the babies born in the state are born to an unmarried woman, instantly creating a female-headed household with all of the attending problems. In addition, over one-fourth of New Mexico residents do not have health insurance.

**Conclusion**

New Mexico policy makers and development specialists face a number of significant challenges. Low incomes and high poverty rates, especially among minority populations are especially daunting. These problems are exacerbated by high teenage pregnancy rates, high proportions of female-headed households, and large numbers of households that are not protected by health insurance.

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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.

## Our commitment to the environment

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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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