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 first brief will explore population changes in the western region. Other briefs will examine employment and income, education, and health and longevity. 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.

Changing Populations
Between 1980 and 2006, the 13 states of the Western region experienced population growth from 43.2 million in 1980 to 69.3 million in 2006, an increase of over 26 million people, or 60.5 percent. This growth rate far exceeded the 25.5 percent population growth experienced in the rest of the United States (see Figure 1). Eight of the 11 states with the fastest growing populations between 1980 and 2006 are located in the western U.S. and include Nevada, Arizona, Utah, Alaska, Colorado, Idaho, Washington and California (see Figure 2). Those states with the largest increase in the number of inhabitants are outlined in Figure 3 and five of the top eleven states were in the Western Region (California, Arizona, Washington, Colorado and Nevada).

Overall there is significant population growth occurring in the western U.S. but how are these changes represented in metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas.
and in counties? While the metropolitan areas in the West experienced especially rapid population increases (63.6 percent), the nonmetropolitan counties also encountered substantial population growth (36.8 percent).

In contrast, population growth rates in metropolitan areas in the rest of the United States were 30.9 percent and only 6.3 percent in nonmetropolitan areas. There was significant variation in population growth rates within the Western region. In Nevada, for example, the population increased from approximately 800,000 in 1980 to about 2.5 million in 2006, an increase of 212 percent. In Arizona, the population increased from 2.7 million to over 6.2 million, an increase of 127 percent. In comparison, growth rates were much lower in Montana and Wyoming (see Table 1). In many western counties the number of residents declined between 1980 and 2006 (see Figure 4). Counties with declining populations tended to be nonmetropolitan and located in the eastern or plains portion of the region.

### Minority Populations

The most striking aspect of population growth in the West was the extremely rapid growth of minorities, and especially Hispanic populations. During the two decades from 1980 to 2000*, the number of Hispanic residents in the West increased from 6.3 million to 15.3 million, an increase of over 9 million people or 145.1 percent. In comparison, the White population increased by only 5 million people or 15.7 percent.

In 1980, nearly three-fourths (73.9 percent) of the residents of the West were White. By 2000, the percent of the total population that was White had declined to 60.2 percent. Correspondingly, the Hispanic population increased from 14.5 percent of all residents in 1980 to 25 percent in 2000 (see Figure 5). In 1980, the population was more than 90 percent White in six Western states (Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming). By 2000 only two states (Montana and Wyoming) still had a population of more than 90 percent White.

In fact, in three states (California, Hawaii and New Mexico) by 2000 the population was comprised of more than 50 percent minorities.

### Hispanic Population

Although Hispanic population growth is pervasive throughout the West, it is much more extensive in some states in the U.S. than others. Figure 6 shows that in about two-thirds of Western counties the numbers of Hispanic residents more than doubled.

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![Figure 6](image-url)
between 1980 and 2000, and during the same time period it also doubled in all but four Western states (Hawaii, Montana, New Mexico and Wyoming). Numerical increases of the Hispanic population were most extensive in California (6.4 million), Arizona (851,215), Colorado (393,664), Nevada (339,409), Washington (318,555), New Mexico (288,559), Oregon (207,774), and Utah (139,960).

Asian, Native American and Black Populations
Between 1980 and 2000, there were also significant increases in the number of Asians, Native Americans and Blacks residing in the West. Most prominently, the Asian population increased from 2.2 million in 1980 to 5.2 million in 2000, an increase of 3 million people or 138.4 percent and was most extensive in California (2.4 million people). The Native American population increased by 374,040 people or 64.5 percent, while the Black population grew by 686,368 people or 31 percent. Between 1980 and 2000, the Asian population more than doubled in all but four states (Hawaii, Idaho, Montana and Wyoming).

Throughout the region about one-half of the population growth between 1980 and 2000 was attributable to growth in the Hispanic population (see Figure 7). In comparison, just over one-quarter of the growth was from increases in the White population, 16.5 percent from Asian population growth, and 3.8 percent and 2.1 percent, respectively, from increases in the number of Black and Native American populations.

The data in Figure 8 provide evidence that the population of the West is likely to become even more diverse in years to come. While about 60 percent of the people residing in the West are White, the White population tends to be older and have a lower birth rate. Consequently, in 2001, only 44.8 percent of the live births in the Western States were to White women. In contrast, the Hispanic population is younger and has a higher birth rate. Thus, while only 25 percent of the population is Hispanic, over 38 percent of the babies born were to Hispanic mothers. Compared to the remainder of the United States, the West has a higher proportion of Hispanic babies, and lower proportions of both White and Black babies.

Challenges and Opportunities
The transformation of Western populations is having significant consequences for communities, schools, the Land-Grant University System and others. For generations many Western communities have had few minority residents; however, as this data indicates, this is no longer the case. The
The influx of minorities presents communities and the Land-Grant University System with new challenges and opportunities. Successful communities are those that effectively integrate and utilize the talents and skills of all community residents and avoid racial or ethnic conflict. Effectively reaching out to these new residents and engaging them to participate in and contribute to their communities will be paramount to ensure their voices are heard and their needs met.

*2006 Population Estimates do not provide numbers by race/ethnicity. The most recent numbers on race and ethnicity are from the 2000 Census.

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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.

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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Each Population Brief includes a regional overview and a summary 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.

State Briefs in The Changing West series are available for:

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