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Demography of the Western States: Past, Present, and Future

Abstract: Heading west to seek gold, obtain religious freedoms, or settle their own piece of land are old and commonly told American stories. These stories, guided by the dreams of generations before us are the basis for the reality now playing out in the western US with its complex history and remarkable capacity for change. This chapter provides a description and analysis of the demography of all 13 western states. The demographic compositions of the western region as a whole and the US will also be observed, and compared to the other regions the Census Bureau has defined. These latter categories provide both a regional and a national baseline, respectively, on which to make useful comparisons. The focus of this chapter is therefore on Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

Keywords: demography; population; public policy; states; US; West.

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1 Introduction

Heading west to seek gold, obtain religious freedoms, or settle their own piece of land are old and commonly told American stories. These stories, guided by the dreams of generations before us are the basis for the reality now playing out in the western US with its complex history and remarkable capacity for change. The complexity and variation represented in the western states serve as the motive for this chapter. The framework adopted here is demographic. Demography is the study of populations, how they change, the components underlying these changes, the role of age, and socioeconomic distributions as well as geographic variation. Demographic patterns form the basis of the challenges and opportunities encountered by all, especially the government agencies responsible for

management of public policies. Accordingly, an awareness and understanding of these demographic forces are vital to effective policies and planning.

This chapter provides a description and analysis of the demography of all 13 western states. The demographic compositions of the western region as a whole and the US will also be observed, and compared to the other regions the Census Bureau has defined. These latter categories provide both a regional and a national baseline, respectively, on which to make useful comparisons. The focus of this chapter is therefore on Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. The states that make up the other regions can be seen in Figure 1.

An appreciation of the nature of population change that is relevant to policy makers and planners requires a time frame that considers the recent past but gazes intelligently into the near future. Our historical assessment generally starts in 1980, although some descriptions delve back to 1900. We begin with an examination of the West as a whole in comparison to the nation and provide an understanding of the population in each of the regional states. We follow this with several sections dedicated to important demographic issues: 1) age; 2) dependency ratios; 3) race and ethnicity in the region; and 4) the policy implications of these population changes.

2 The Sun Sets but the Population Rises in the West

Put simply, the West has experienced a population boom relative to the other regions of the nation during the 20th century. The US population in total grew from 76.2 million in 1900 to 308.7 million in 2010. As a region, the West began the 20th century as the least populated area of the nation, but has now surpassed the Northeast and the Midwest in size, with the South remaining the most populated region for several decades (see Figure 2). As of the 2010 Census, 71,945,553 people live in the West (US Census 2010).¹ This means that the West now contains approximately 23.3% of the US population, compared to just 5.4% in 1900, while the South contains 37.1%, up from 32.3%.

Another way to show this change is the mean center of population. The mean center of population, shown by Figure 3, is “the point at which an imaginary, flat, weightless, and rigid map of the US would balance perfectly if weights of

¹ The populations of the other regions in the US based on the 2010 Census are as follows: 114,555,644 in the South; 66,927,001 in the Midwest; and 55,317,240 in the Northeast.

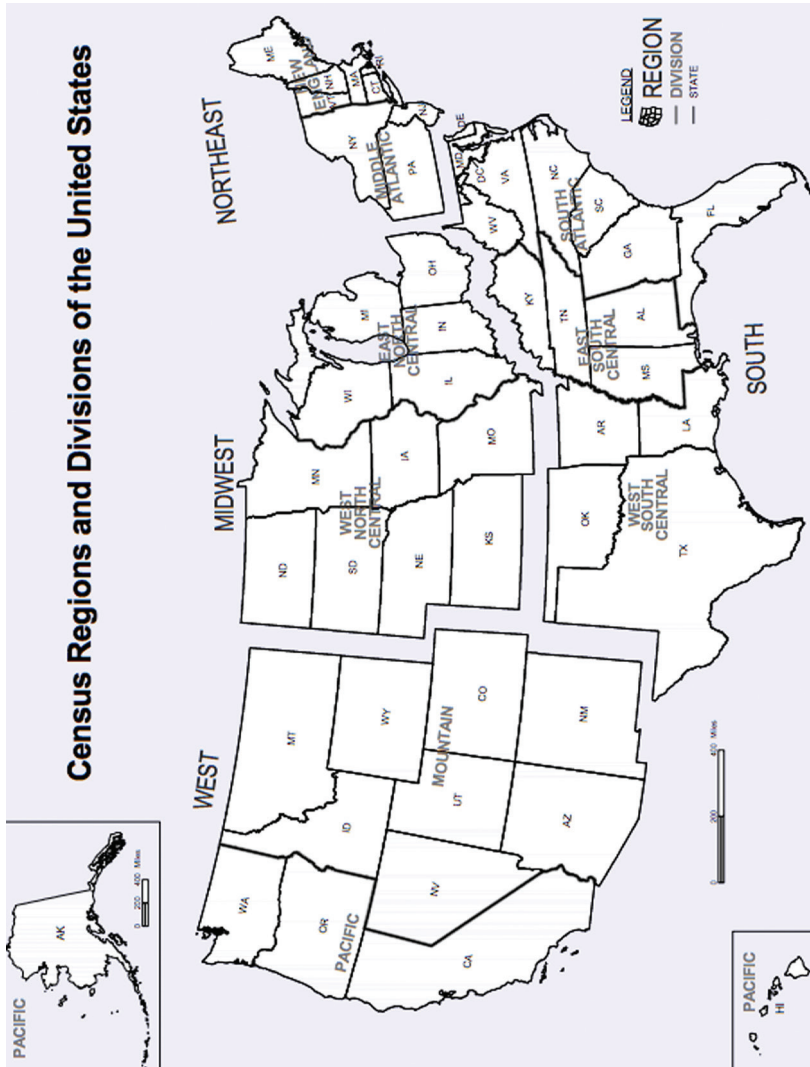


Figure 1: Census Regions.
Source: US Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, US Census Bureau.

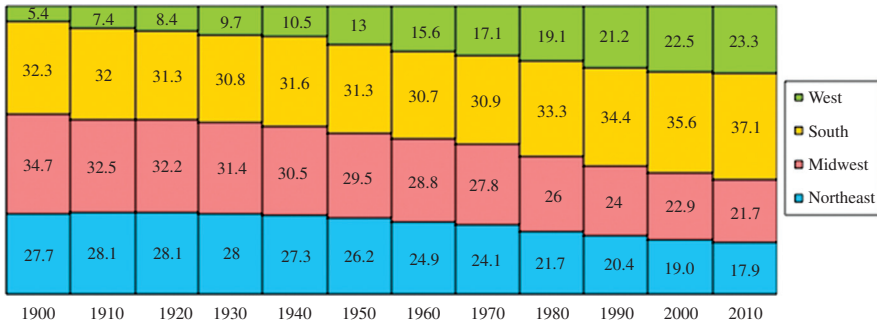


Figure 2: Population Distribution by Region (percent), 1900–2010.
 Source: US Census Bureau, Decennial Census of Population, 1900–2010.

identical value were placed on it so that each weight represented the location of one person on the date of the census.” In 2010, it was estimated that the mean center of population was in Texas County, Missouri, in the Midwest region.

2.1 Population Growth in the Western Region

Population growth in the West has consistently been higher than the US average, and in recent years has converged with the high population growth that has been seen in the South. The growth in these two regions has consistently outpaced the growth in the Midwest and Northeast, and in the US in general (Figure 4).

While the West has shown a steady increase in terms of its representation in the US population, this rise in numeric prominence masks important variations by state. Turning our attention to the period 1980–2010, Table 1 shows the variation in size and growth across the 13 states. Not surprisingly, California accounts for a disproportionate share of the western region, with its relative influence remaining relatively stable. Nevada and Arizona in particular have seen their proportionate representation rise, while the opposite is true for New Mexico, Montana, and Wyoming. Wyoming’s 2010 population of 563,626 makes it the least populous state in the US.

2.2 Population Mobility and the Impact on the West

The Brookings Institution noted in a recent report that migration between the states slowed to historic post-World War II lows. Two factors account for this

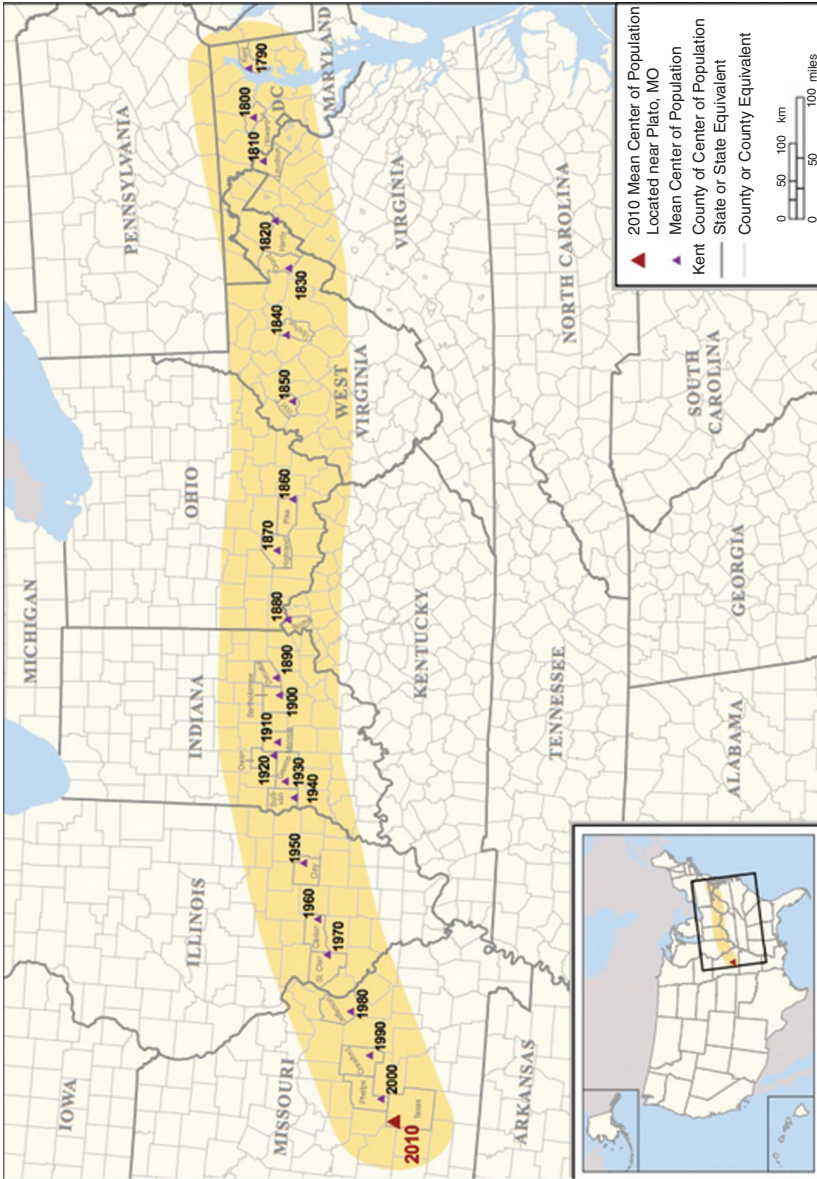


Figure 3: Mean Center of Population for the US, 1790–2010. Source: US Census Bureau, Geography Division.

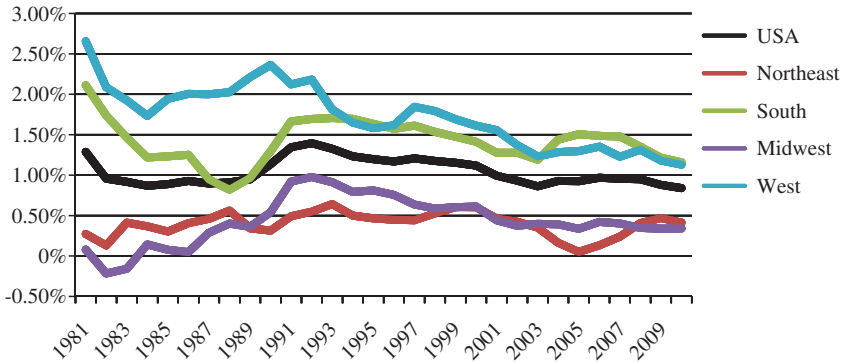


Figure 4: Population Growth Annual Percent Change 1980–2010.

Source: US Census Bureau 1980b, 1990, 2000, 2010.

slowing; the first is the Great Recession that began in 2007 and the second is the mortgage/housing crisis. Nevada, Arizona, and Florida had long been magnets for retirees drawn to their warm weather, but this trend slowed significantly as all three states were hit very hard by the mortgage crisis. Immigration from the colder Northeast to the South in particular slowed significantly.

The immigration trends emphasize the movement is less east to west, and more cold to warm. Warmer western states like Arizona and Nevada had high rates of in-migration, which was also true of warmer southern states like Texas and Florida. The colder western states, such as Idaho, Colorado, and Montana, did not experience significant in-migration (Frey 2010).

A recent Census report noted that the mover rate, defined as the percentage of the population that moved residences, whether to another state or within the same state, reached the lowest point ever recorded in 2011, and then increased by a small amount. The Census cited lasting effects from the recession in Fall 2007 and higher rates of homeownership as primary causes (Census 2012).

3 Age as Engine of Population Change: Age Distributions from 1980 to 2010

The size of populations and ages of its individuals reflects both the past and is the foundation for future opportunities and challenges. It is therefore important to consider a population's age distribution because it reflects central aspects about

Table 1: Population by Western State, 1980–2010.

	1980		1990		2000		2010	
	Population	Pct. of West	Population	Pct. of West	Population	Pct. of West	Population	Pct. of West
US	226,545,805		248,709,873		281,421,906		308,745,538	
West	43,172,000	0.93%	52,786,082	1.04%	63,197,932	0.99%	71,945,553	0.99%
Alaska	401,851		550,043		626,932		710,231	
Arizona	2,718,215	6.30%	3,665,228	6.90%	5,130,632	8.10%	6,392,017	8.88%
California	23,667,902	54.80%	29,760,021	56.20%	33,871,648	53.60%	37,253,956	51.78%
Colorado	2,889,964	6.70%	3,294,394	6.20%	4,301,261	6.80%	5,029,196	6.99%
Hawaii	964,691	2.23%	1,108,229	2.10%	1,211,537	1.92%	1,360,301	1.89%
Idaho	943,935	2.20%	1,006,749	1.90%	1,293,953	2.00%	1,567,582	2.18%
Montana	786,690	1.80%	799,065	1.50%	902,195	1.40%	989,415	1.38%
Nevada	800,493	1.90%	1,201,833	2.30%	1,998,257	3.20%	2,700,551	3.75%
New Mexico	1,302,894	3.00%	1,515,069	2.90%	1,819,046	2.90%	2,059,179	2.86%
Oregon	2,633,105	6.10%	2,842,321	5.40%	3,421,399	5.40%	3,831,074	5.32%
Utah	1,461,037	3.40%	1,722,850	3.30%	2,233,169	3.50%	2,763,885	3.84%
Washington	4,132,156	9.60%	4,866,692	9.20%	5,894,121	9.30%	6,724,540	9.35%
Wyoming	469,557	1.10%	453,588	0.90%	493,782	0.80%	563,626	0.78%

Source: US Census Bureau 1995, 2000, 2010.

its social structure and serves as a basis from which to think about future societal demands.

Every population has a fingerprint in terms of its age composition. Low fertility and low mortality states will have proportionately few children and many elderly while populations with high fertility and high mortality have a relative abundance of children and proportionately few aged individuals. At any moment in time, the links connecting births, deaths, and age structure can be changed as individuals and families migrate in and out of states.

Here we provide information on the differences and similarities in age composition, between the West as a region and the rest of the nation, during the years from 1980 through 2010. We structure the examination of the data by focusing on the proportion each state has in key age groups: <18, 18–64, and 65 and older.

Figure 5 shows the proportion of the population below 18 years of age from 1980 to 2010. The clearest impression from this figure is the high fraction of young children in the West, in relation to all other regions of the country, a reflection of the elevated fertility rates amongst westerners. This pattern changes from the 1980s, with births being fueled by the children of the Baby Boomers, to the 1990s with the so-called Baby Bust era. The 1990s also witnessed a rise in the fraction of preschoolers in California, a consequence of elevated fertility of the Hispanic population and other high fertility immigrant groups.

In the West, an estimated 25% of the population is under the age of 18. Several western states have high fertility rates, including Utah where 31.5% of the population is under the age of 18, the highest percentage in the nation. The second highest is Idaho (27.4%).

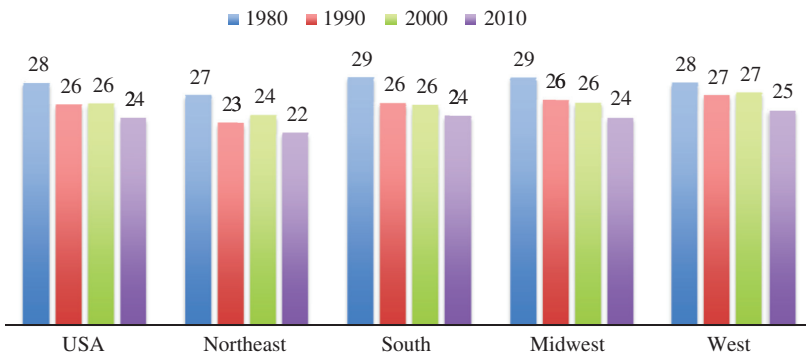


Figure 5: Percentage of Population 17 and Younger by Region.

Source: US Census Bureau 1980b, 1990, 2000, 2010.

Figure 6 shows the percent of each region that is between the ages of 18–64. This is colloquially known as the “working-age” group. This age segment is essentially responsible for providing the services that assist those above 64 and below 18 years. A high percentage of working-age people give a state a strong economic foundation to provide necessary services.

The West region in general has approximately 63% of its residents between 18–64, the working portion of the population. The state of Utah has the smallest percentage of population in the 18–64 age range (57%). Hawaii has the largest percentage of the population in this range of all western states with 68% (see Figure 7).

Figure 8 shows the percentage of people in each region that are 65 or older. People over age 65 are generally considered to need services provided by the younger members of society, and a persistently high percentage of people above this age could be a drain on a state or region. As shown by the chart, this percentage is increasing in every region in the country. In the West, 12% of the population is 65 years of age or older.

Variations in age distributions can be usefully summarized by considering the median age of each region in the US. Given the increasing population of the West relative to the other three major Census regions (South, Midwest, and Northeast), a feature of high fertility and/or high net immigration, it is not surprising to observe that the West has the youngest median population (see Figure 9). Younger populations are, after all, the segment of the population that can have children and the most likely to migrate.

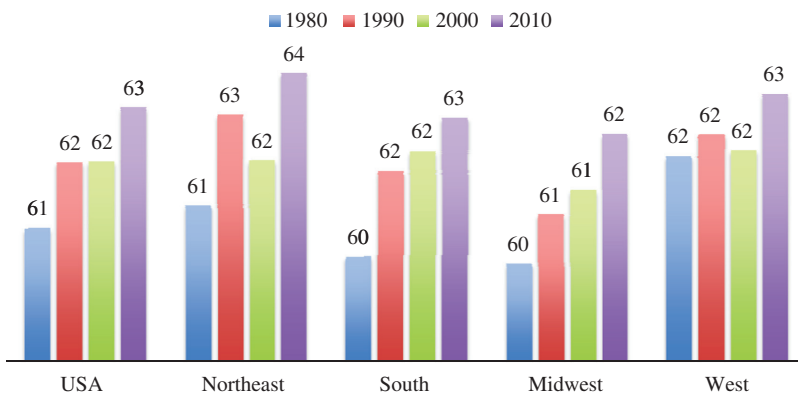


Figure 6: Percentage of Population 18–64 by Region.
Source: US Census Bureau 1980b, 1990, 2000, 2010.

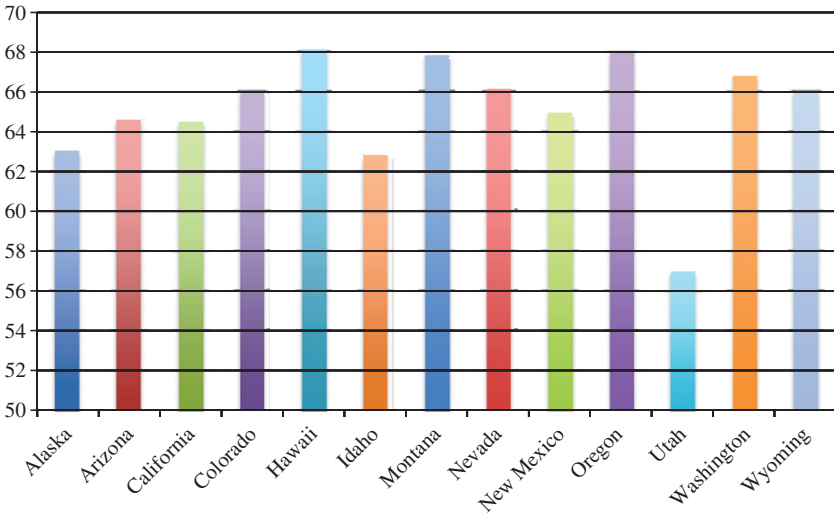


Figure 7: Percentage of Population Between 18–64, 2010.
Source: US Census Bureau 2010.

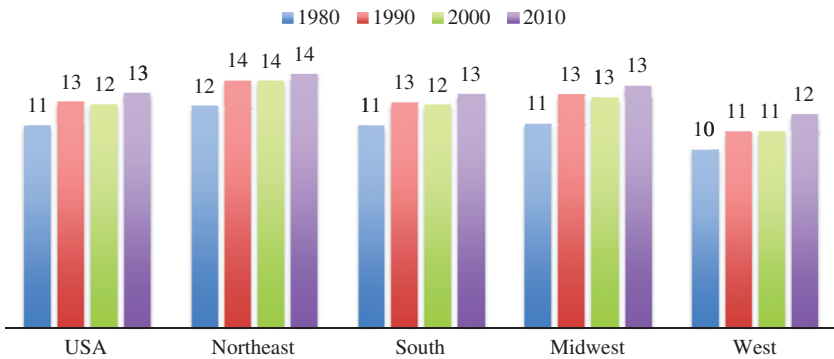


Figure 8: Percentage of Population 65 and Over by Region.
Source: US Census Bureau 1980b, 1990, 2000, 2010.

4 Dependency Ratios

The working population, those between ages 18 and 64, not only supports themselves, but also support the youngest and the oldest members of the population. This burden is often quantified by using dependency ratios. Dependency ratios

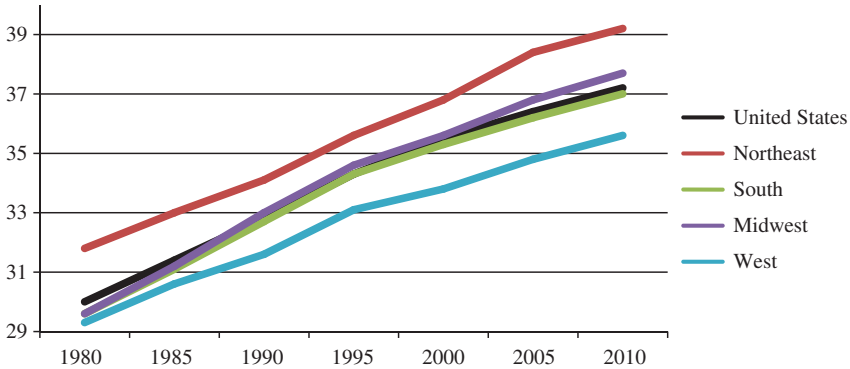


Figure 9: Medium Age by Region, 1980–2010.

Source: US Census Bureau 1980b, 1990, 2000, 2010.

are simply a ratio of the number of “dependents” (young or old) to the number of working aged individuals in a population. By convention, this is reported as the number of dependents per 100 working-age individuals. Dependency ratios indirectly measure the challenges or opportunities faced by a population with respect to their young and old members. These ratios are indirect in the sense that dependency is based solely on age without regard to an individual’s economic or health status, or level of independent living. Given that the limitations of the dependency ratios are approximately true for most populations, much can still be learned about a population through comparisons with other populations.

The dependency ratio for the US in 2010 was 0.590. The West had a slightly lower dependency ratio (0.582). The individual states that comprise the West region show the variation that exists. It is important to note that there are two types of populations lead to higher dependency ratios: 1) those with high fertility rates and young overall populations; and 2) those with older populations. For example, Utah’s total dependency ratio of 0.68 means that there are 68 non-working age persons for every 100 working age person (Table 2). This is caused in part by the high fertility rates and overall younger population .

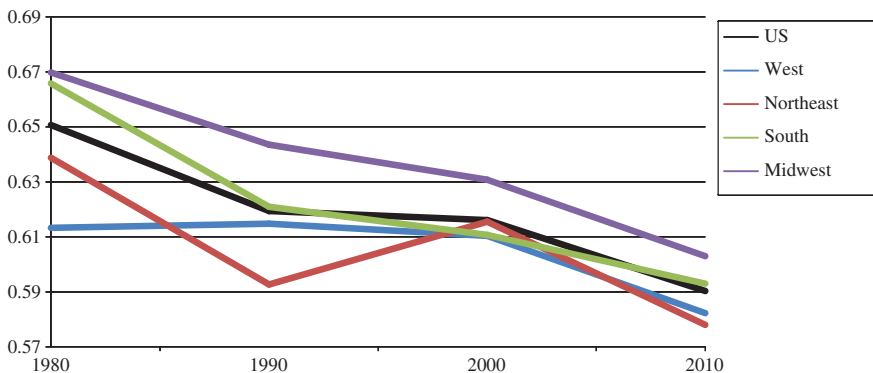
The dependency ratios shown in Figure 10 are combinations of two types of dependency: those below 18 who cannot provide for themselves, and those over 65 who may require care. The numbers reported are simply the number of non-working age persons (younger than 18 and older than 65) per working-age persons (between age 18 and 64).

When the percentage of young and old people is large in relation to the number of working age residents, the state faces important policy and budgetary challenges.

Table 2: Total Age-Dependency Ratio among Western States.

State	2000	2010
US	0.616	0.590
West	0.610	0.582
Alaska	0.565	0.518
Arizona	0.657	0.647
California	0.611	0.571
Colorado	0.545	0.546
Hawaii	0.604	0.579
Idaho	0.661	0.661
Montana	0.637	0.598
Nevada	0.576	0.578
New Mexico	0.656	0.624
Oregon	0.601	0.576
Utah	0.686	0.682
Washington	0.585	0.558
Wyoming	0.607	0.574

Source: Howden and Meyer 2011.

**Figure 10:** Dependency Ratios of Census Regions: 1980–2010.

Source: US Census Bureau 1980b, 2000, 2010.

For example, Utah's total dependency ratio of over 0.68 is higher than any other state in 2010, and is substantially higher than the national dependency ratio of 0.59. While the West is slowly aging, it is doing so more slowly than the nation. Accordingly, the region will continue to face challenges supporting its younger dependents, primarily through the costs of public education, but there will be a slow but steady increase in services demanded by the increasing numbers of the elderly.

5 Race and Ethnicity in the West

The populations comprising the West represent considerable heterogeneity, not only by age, but also by race and ethnicity. While the idea of the melting pot has been with us for many decades, it remains crucial for appreciating the current and changing population dynamics in the West. The US Census Bureau asks the population to define themselves by both race and ethnicity. While race and ethnicity are related concepts, the concept of ethnicity is rooted more in ideas of social grouping, shared nationality, and cultural and traditional origins, whereas race is rooted in the idea of biological classification.

5.1 Hispanic/Latino Populations

The Census' ethnicity distinction, currently, is simply between Hispanic/Latino and Non-Hispanic/Latino. The Census Bureau estimates that 16.4% of the US population in 2010 was Hispanic/Latino. This was an increase from the 2000 Census when the Hispanic/Latino population was estimated to be 12.5% of the US population (see Table 3).² Every state in the country saw an increase in the percentage of this population from 2000 to 2010. In the West, the Hispanic population grew from 24.3% of the population in 2000 to 28.6% by 2010. This makes the West the only region in the US where the Hispanic population is above the national average of 16%. Notably, New Mexico's Hispanic/Latino population (46.3%) is the highest in the nation.

As noted earlier in the chapter, the West has grown at a faster pace than the rest of the nation. Of central importance is the role played by Hispanics and how their presence has grown and will be a source of much of the expected change in the region going forward. While the West includes some of the highest fertility states in the nation, partly based on religion (such as members of the LDS Church), it also serves as the site for considerable growth arising from high fertility and immigration of Hispanics.

While there has been growth in the Hispanic/Latino population in the West, it has not kept pace with growth in other regions. According to the Census, in 2010, 41% of all Hispanics in the US lived in the West, down from 43.5% in 2000. Growth in the South and Midwest has been particularly high, with the Hispanic population growing by 57% in the South and by 49% in the Midwest. South

² Note that it is likely that Hispanic populations were undercounted in the 2010 Census (El Nassar).

Table 3: Hispanic and Non-Hispanic Distributions: Western States, the West as a Region, and the US, 2000 and 2010.

	2000		2010	
	Not Hispanic or Latino	Hispanic or Latino	Not Hispanic or Latino	Hispanic or Latino
US	87.50%	12.50%	83.60%	16.40%
West	75.7	24.3	71.4	28.6
Alaska	95.9	4.1	94.5	5.5
Arizona	74.7	25.3	70.4	29.6
California	67.6	32.4	62.4	37.6
Colorado	82.9	17.1	79.3	20.7
Hawaii	92.8	7.2	91.1	8.9
Idaho	92.1	7.9	88.8	11.2
Montana	98	2	97.1	2.9
Nevada	80.3	19.7	73.5	26.5
New Mexico	57.9	42.1	53.7	46.3
Oregon	92	8	88.3	11.7
Utah	91	9	87	13
Washington	92.5	7.5	88.8	11.2
Wyoming	93.6	6.4	91.1	8.9

Source: US Census Bureau 2000, 2010.

Carolina experienced the largest increase of any state, with an increase of 148% from 2000 to 2010 (Ennis et al. 2011).

Figures 11 and 12 illustrate the disproportionate contribution that Hispanics have provided toward the population growth in the western states. In the nation, the West, and all western states, population growth among Hispanics far outpaces that of the populations in general (see Figure 11). Those states that have the highest relative increase in growth also tend to be states that have smaller base populations, thereby allowing the relative increase among Hispanics to be large.

Figure 12 shows more directly that growth in most states is disproportionately attributable to Hispanics. The graph depicts the share of the total population growth that is attributable to the growth in Hispanic population, found by dividing the increase in Hispanic population by the increase in total population. Note that more than 90% of California's population increase is due directly to Hispanic growth.

5.2 Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the West

Turning to racial distinctions, the Census' categories are expanding and changing, as are the influences and desires of racial groups to be recognized individu-

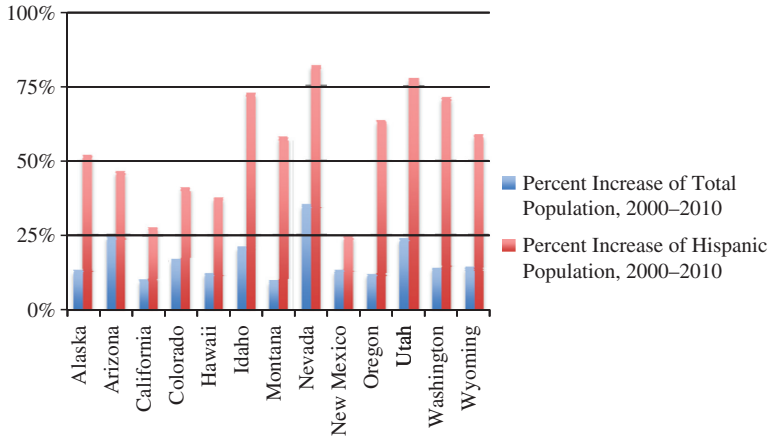


Figure 11: Total Growth and Hispanic Growth.

Source: US Census Bureau 2000, 2010.

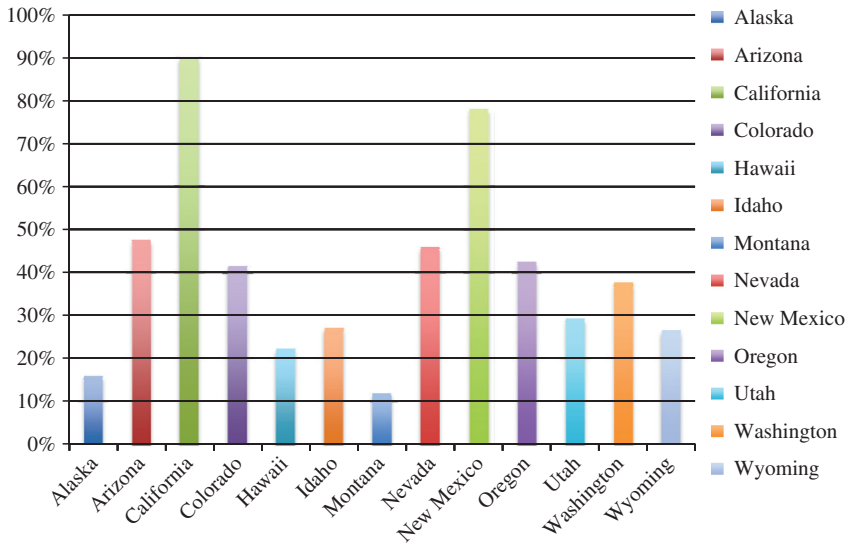


Figure 12: Hispanic Share of Total Population Growth, 2000–2010.

Source: US Census Bureau 2000, 2010.

ally in the US (see Tables 4 and 5). Nationally, the white population is shown to have decreased in proportion, the black or African American population has stayed stagnant, and many individuals took advantage of the new 2000 Census categorical option of “Some Other Race.” There has been notable growth in the

Table 4: Racial Distributions for the US and the Western States, 2000.

	2000						
	White	Black or African American	American Indian and Alaska Native	Asian	Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	Some Other Race	Two or More Races
US	75.1	12.3	0.1	3.6	0.1	5.5	2.4
Alaska	69.3	3.5	15.6	4.0	0.5	1.6	5.4
Arizona	75.5	3.1	5	1.8	0.1	11.6	2.9
California	59.5	6.7	1	10.9	0.3	16.8	4.7
Colorado	82.8	3.8	1	2.2	0.1	7.2	2.8
Hawaii	24.3	1.8	0.3	41.6	9.4	1.3	21
Idaho	91	0.4	1.4	0.9	0.1	4.2	2
Montana	90.6	0.3	6.2	0.5	0.1	0.6	1.7
Nevada	75.2	6.8	1.3	4.5	0.4	8	3.8
New Mexico	66.8	1.9	9.5	1.1	0.1	17	3.6
Oregon	86.6	1.6	1.3	3	0.2	4.2	3.1
Utah	89.2	0.8	1.3	1.7	0.7	4.2	2.1
Washington	81.8	3.2	1.6	5.5	0.4	3.9	3.6
Wyoming	92.1	0.8	2.3	0.6	0.1	2.5	1.8

Source: US Census Bureau 2000.

Table 5: Racial Distributions for the US and the Western States, 2010.

	2010						
	White	Black or African American	American Indian and Alaska Native	Asian	Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	Some Other Race	Two or More Races
US	72.4	12.6	0.9	4.8	0.2	6.2	2.9
Alaska	66.7	3.3	14.8	5.4	1	1.6	0.1
Arizona	73	4.1	4.6	2.8	0.2	11.9	3.4
California	57.6	6.2	1	13	0.4	17	4.9
Colorado	81.3	4	1.1	2.8	0.1	7.2	3.4
Hawaii	24.7	1.6	0.3	38.6	10	1.2	23.6
Idaho	89.1	0.6	1.4	1.2	0.1	5.1	2.5
Montana	89.4	0.4	6.3	0.6	0.1	0.6	2.5
Nevada	66.2	8.1	1.2	7.2	0.6	12	4.7
New Mexico	68.4	2.1	9.4	1.4	0.1	15	3.7
Oregon	83.6	1.8	1.4	3.7	0.3	5.3	3.8
Utah	86.1	1.1	1.2	2	0.9	6	2.7
Washington	77.3	3.6	1.5	7.2	0.6	5.2	4.7
Wyoming	90.7	0.8	2.4	0.8	0.1	3	2.2

Source: US Census Bureau 2010.

percentage of racial and ethnic minorities in the nation between 2000 and 2010. The Brookings Institution noted that “as the white population continued to age, racial and ethnic minorities accounted for an astonishing 91% of the US population growth in the 2000s” (Frey 2010).

The West also experienced population growth among minority populations and the percentage of minorities in many of the states has grown since 2000. Notably is the state of Nevada which saw an increase in the percentage of Black/African Americans, Asians, and Other Minority groups as a portion of their population. The percentage of Blacks/African Americans grew from 6.8% of their population in 2000 to 8.1% in 2010; the percentage of Asians increased from 4.5% to 7.2%; and the percentage which identified as some other race increased from 8% to 12%.

Other states also experienced changes in the percentage of minorities in their population as well. The percentage of Asian persons in California increased for 10.9%–13%; Washington’s percentage increased from 5.5% to 7.2%. The intermountain states (Idaho, Colorado, Montana, Utah, and Wyoming) along with Oregon remain predominately White. Even with this said, it is clear that the region is becoming more diverse ethnically and racially.

5.3 Immigration

According to the Department of Homeland Security, who maintains US immigration statistics, the foreign-born population was estimated to be 19,767,316 in 1990, and 31,107,889 in 2000, an increase of about 1.13 million per year. However, the trend has slowed in recent years, primarily due to the effects of the Great Recession in fall 2007. The foreign born population went from 37,547,315 in 2006 to 38,059,555 in 2007, then down to 37,960,773 in 2008. The trend has resumed upwards in recent years, with the foreign-born population breaking 40 million in 2011, and the Census recently projected that immigration from foreign countries will become the primary driver of US population growth within the next 25 years (Census 2013).³

In terms of where the immigrants came from, more than half of all immigrants came from the Americas. Of the 40,377,757 immigrants living in the US in 2011, 21,245,344 were estimated to have come from Latin America, with 11,672,619 coming from Mexico alone. A further 11,562,022 came from Asia, with India the

³ A brief from the Migration Policy Institute noted that the overall level of immigration remained rather steady in the years after 9/11, though rates of temporary admission and refugee admissions decreased significantly. It does not appear that those changes made much impact to the overall immigration picture (Coffey 2014).

leader at 1,856,777. Another 4,889,987 came from Europe, 1,664,414 from Africa, and 221,211 from Oceania.

Fully one fourth of all immigrants to the US live in California alone, with its total of 10,195,057 being more than double the total for any other state. Thirty-five percentage of immigrants live in the West, the highest of any region. The South has 32% of all immigrants, the Northeast has 22%, and the Midwest has 11%. More than half of all immigrants live in California, Texas, New York, or Florida (Homeland Security 2012).

6 Political Implications of Population Changes in the West

Demographers examine mortality, fertility, immigration, and other issues to better understand how and where the population changes. This also raises an important question: What are the political consequences of demographic change? We seek to examine how the population changes are affecting the political atmosphere in the West. Of course, there are many other important public policy questions such as: how does the growing population affect the limited water supply in the West; how do communities and states plan for the growth in their areas; and what changes should public education consider as their student population becomes more diverse.

The population growth in the West resulted in real political change and an increase in political power for four Western states. Following the Census, the US government reapportions seats for the US House of Representatives. Each state is assigned one congressional seat; then the remaining 385 congressional seats are allocated according to their apportionment populations. The 2010 Census indicated that eight states in the nation were deserving of additional representation, including the western states of Arizona, Nevada, Utah, and Washington which each gained one additional seat.⁴ These shifts were representative of the national population shifts from the Northeast and Midwest to the South and the West (Census 2011). The remaining western states retained their number of representatives. It was the first time since statehood that California did not gain a seat; this too is an indication that the population growth is occurring in other states (Mehta et al. 2010).

⁴ The other states who gained seats were Texas (4 seats), Florida (2 seats), Georgia (1 seat) and South Carolina (1 seat).

The growth of the minority population, especially the Hispanic population, is also of importance to the conversation about political implications. As the population of Hispanics continues to grow in the West, as well as nationally, there may be changes to public policies such as immigration policies, higher education tuition rates, and driver's license laws that Hispanics tend to favor.

According to a Pew study, the Hispanic population made up 17.2% of the nation's total population and 10.8% of eligible voters in 2012. Much of this difference is driven by the relative youth of the Hispanic population. Hispanics also make up only 8.4% of actual voters, though this was an increase from 7.4% in 2008 (Gonzalez-Barrera 2013).

Mark DiCamillo, director of the Field Poll, studies the changes in Hispanic's political strength. He found that the percentage of the electorate in California who identify as Latino rose from 15% in 1994 to 23% in 2013. This occurred at the same time that non-Hispanic white voters decreased from 73% to 60% (DiCamillo 2013). Coinciding with this change, there have been a number of Hispanic-friendly laws passed in the state from a law allowing undocumented immigrants to receive driver's licenses, to a law requiring that state prisons only hold undocumented immigrants who have committed serious crimes, to a law allowing undocumented immigrants to practice law in the state (White 2013). DiCamillo notes that the non-Hispanic white population tends to oppose these laws, and that in recent years their larger numbers would have meant that the laws did not pass; however, the Hispanic population has grown in California to the point that their combined political might is large enough to pass favorable legislation.

California is also one of 16 states that allow undocumented students to receive the in-state tuition rate. Six of the 16 states are in the West, including: California, Washington, Oregon, Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico. However, it is important to note that there is considerable variability, in both in-state tuition laws and immigration-related laws in general, in states with large Hispanic populations, with Arizona notable for having very strict immigrant laws.

Population changes have consequences for the nation, as well as regions, states, and local communities. The complex shifts in our population, where people live, growth among minorities, and aging of the population, require public policy leaders to think about the impacts on their community's priorities, programs, and funds.

7 Conclusion

The phrase “demography is destiny” commonly suggests that the sheer weight and composition of one’s population creates its own momentum and inertia that aids or impedes governments in designing and implementing public policies. The message here is that demographics create a setting in which nations, states, and communities exist. The age composition of a population represents a foundation from which nearly all public policies can be intelligently devised. Age compositions clearly point to the needs of a society. Policies can accept the age structure and react accordingly, or seek to manage or control the age structure through policies such as family planning programs or tax incentives for larger families. Either way, knowledge of the inertia of a population’s age structure is vital to public policy design.

The populations comprising the West are quite varied, ranging from high fertility-low immigration to low fertility-high immigration scenarios. What remain as common denominators for all the western states are that they have all gotten older, they have all grown in size, and they are increasingly Hispanic. Demographics are a fundamental force affecting policy choices. Understanding the drastically changing demography of the western states is essential for all policy makers, as population structure will continue to shape urban planning, energy use and development, transportation, voting patterns, education, and social policies.

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