

# THE DESERT SOUTHWEST

March 2019

## The Desert Southwest

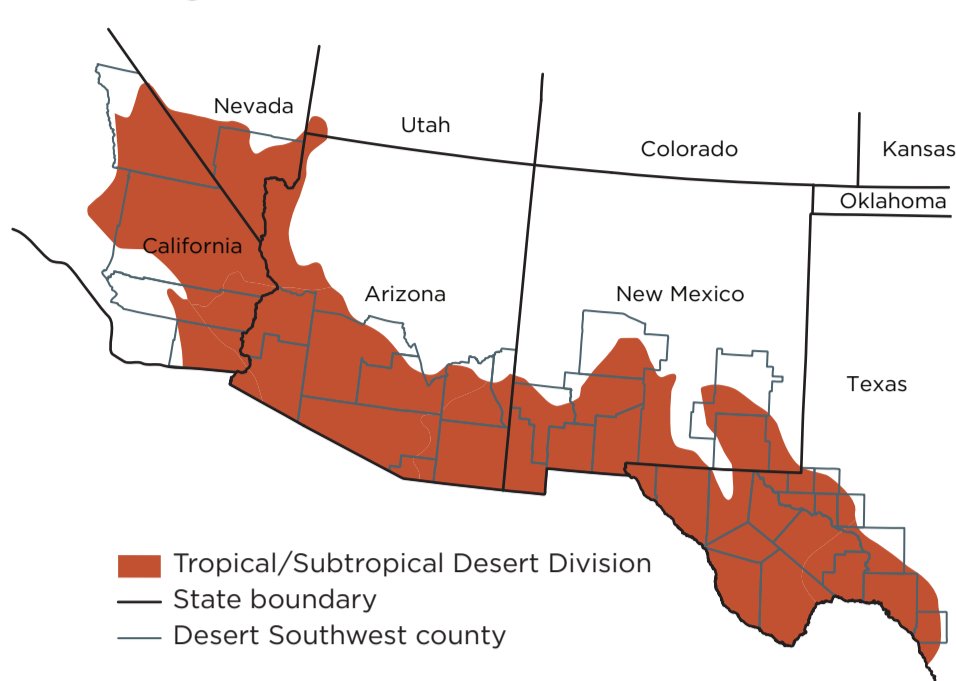
This infographic illustrates population change as well as demographic and economic characteristics of the Desert Southwest, a region of about 14.6 million people in 2016 that was delineated using a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service ecoregion classification.



## Geographic Extent

The region is defined here to be generally consistent with the Forest Service's Tropical/Subtropical Desert Division that hugs the U.S. border with Mexico. A county is classified as being within the Desert Southwest if its geographic center falls within the Tropical/Subtropical Desert Division. Forty counties in five states make up the Desert Southwest.

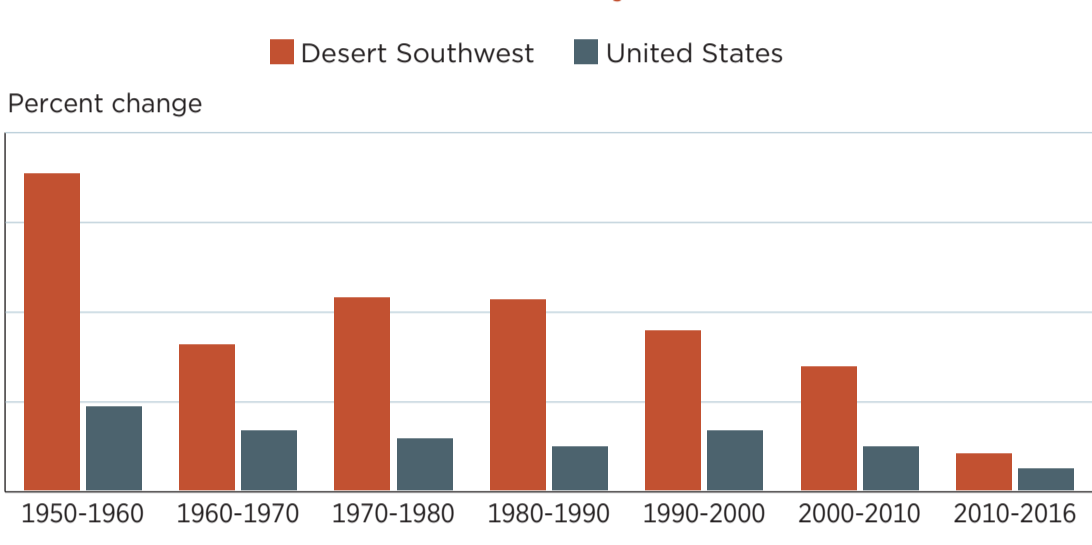
### Ecological Classification of the Desert Southwest



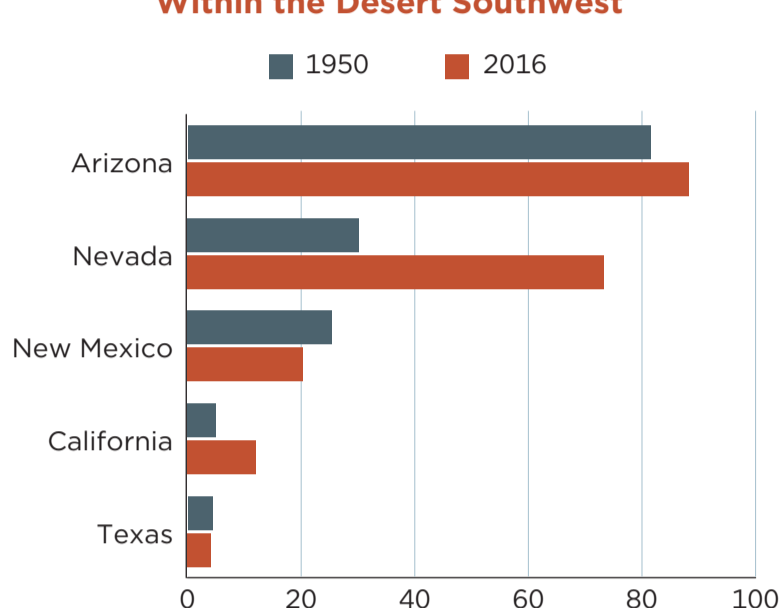
## Change Over Time

The population of the Desert Southwest grew rapidly between 1950 and 2016. For each decade between 1950 and 2010, the growth rate of the region was at least twice that of the United States as a whole. The region's growth rate was more than three times the U.S. growth rate during 3 decades: 1950 to 1960, 1970 to 1980, and 1980 to 1990. In 2016, roughly three-quarters of Nevadans lived in the Desert Southwest—up from roughly 3 in 10 Nevadans in 1950.

### Population Growth Rate in the Desert Southwest and United States by Decade

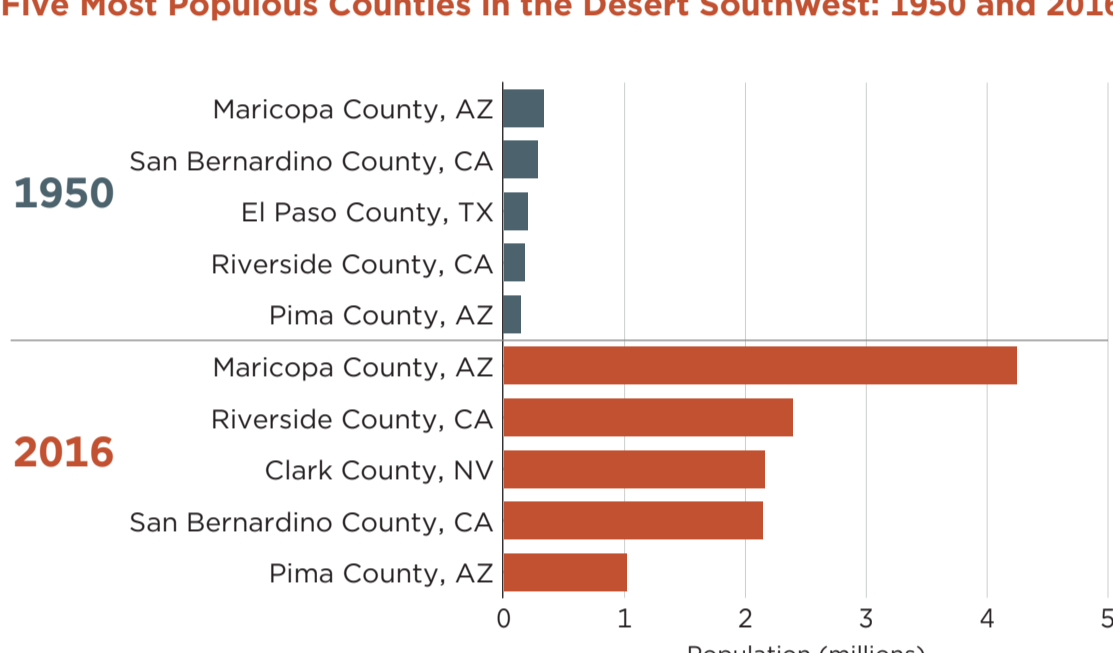


### Percentage of State Populations Within the Desert Southwest



Despite the dynamic growth of the region, four of the five counties with the largest populations in 1950 remained among the five most populous in 2016. The largest county in both years—Maricopa County, Arizona—grew from a population under 350,000 in 1950 to over 4.0 million in 2016.

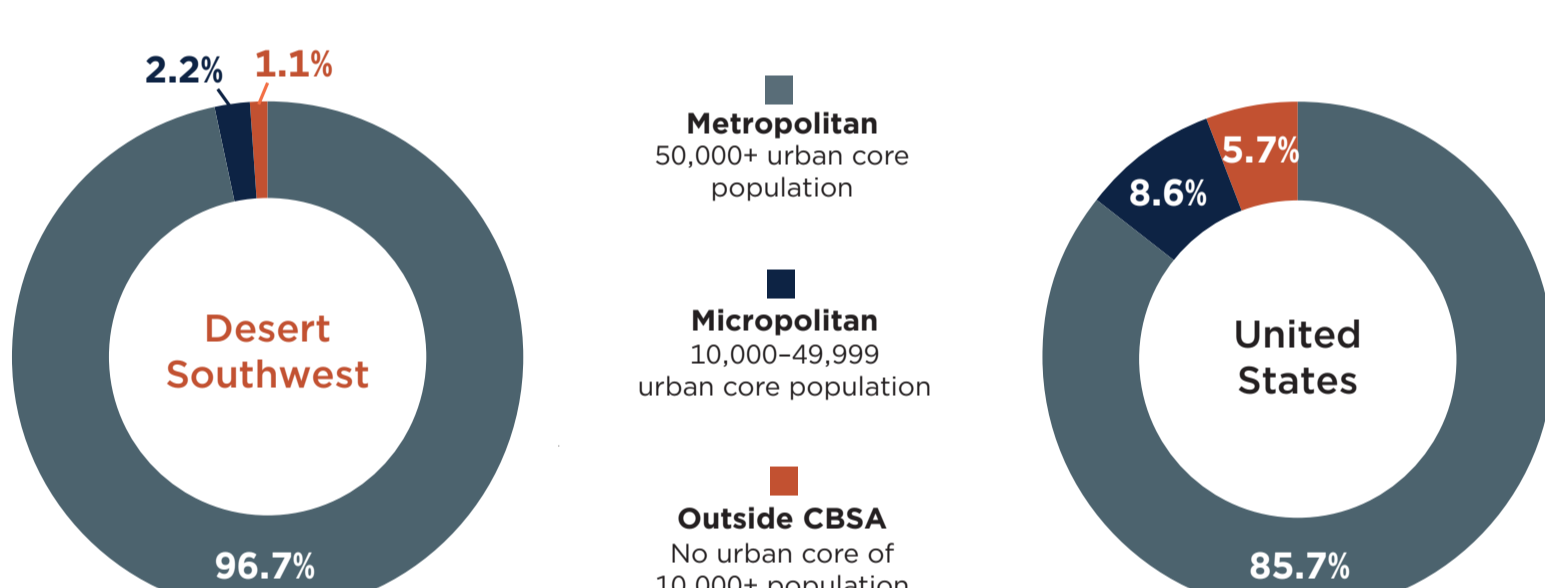
### Five Most Populous Counties in the Desert Southwest: 1950 and 2016



## Settlement Structure

The Desert Southwest is more metropolitan than the United States as a whole, and less of the region's population falls within micropolitan statistical areas or outside of core based statistical areas (CBSAs).

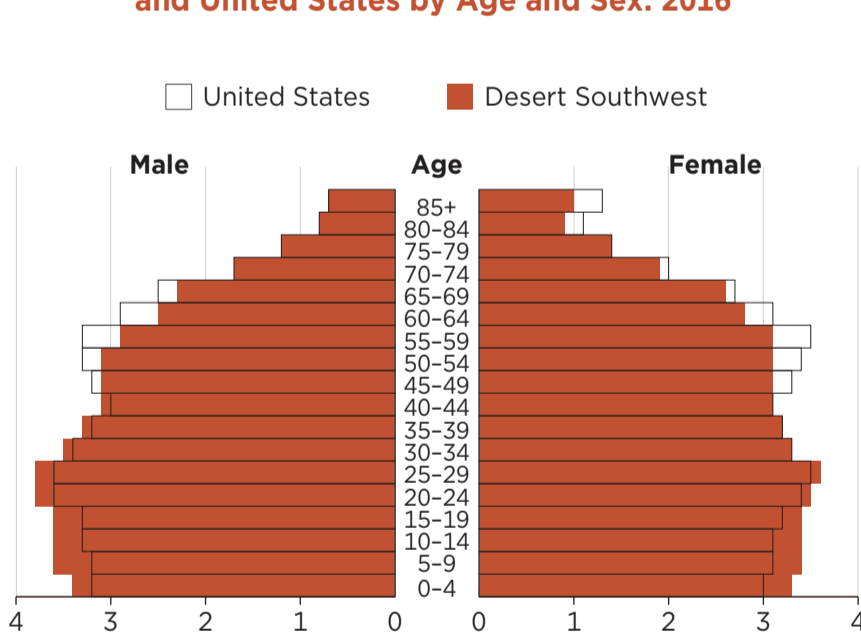
### Population of the Desert Southwest and United States by Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Area Status: 2016



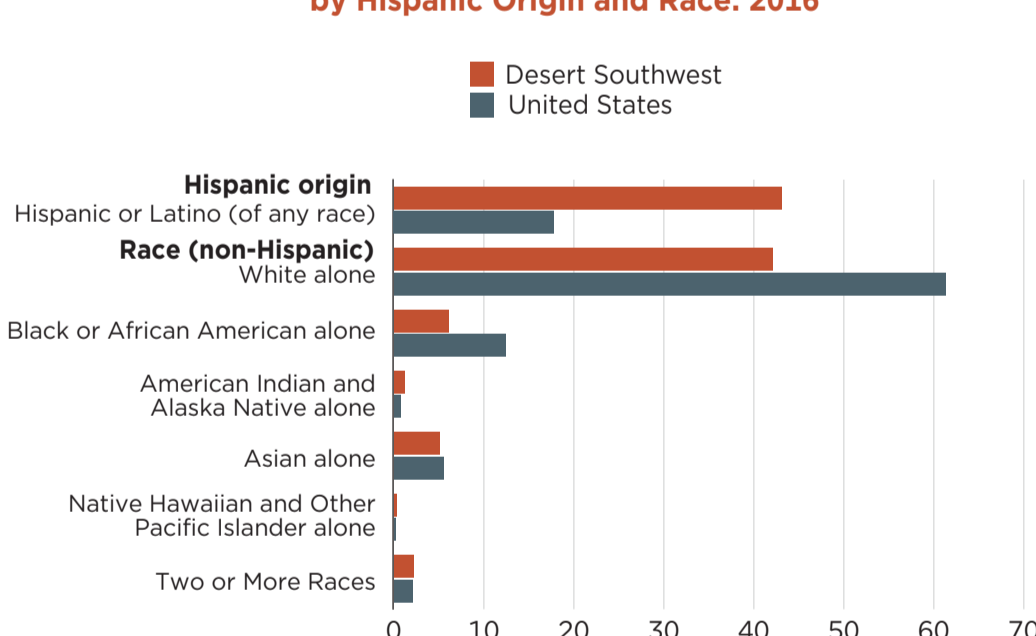
## Demographic Characteristics

The Desert Southwest is commonly considered a popular destination for retirees. However, the region actually has a younger overall age structure than the United States as a whole, with generally higher than U.S. shares in the ages below 45 through 49 and lower shares in most older ages. In addition, more than 40 percent of the region's population in 2016 was Hispanic or Latino, compared to about 18 percent for the United States overall.

### Percentage of Total Population of Desert Southwest and United States by Age and Sex: 2016



### Percentage of Desert Southwest and U.S. Population by Hispanic Origin and Race: 2016

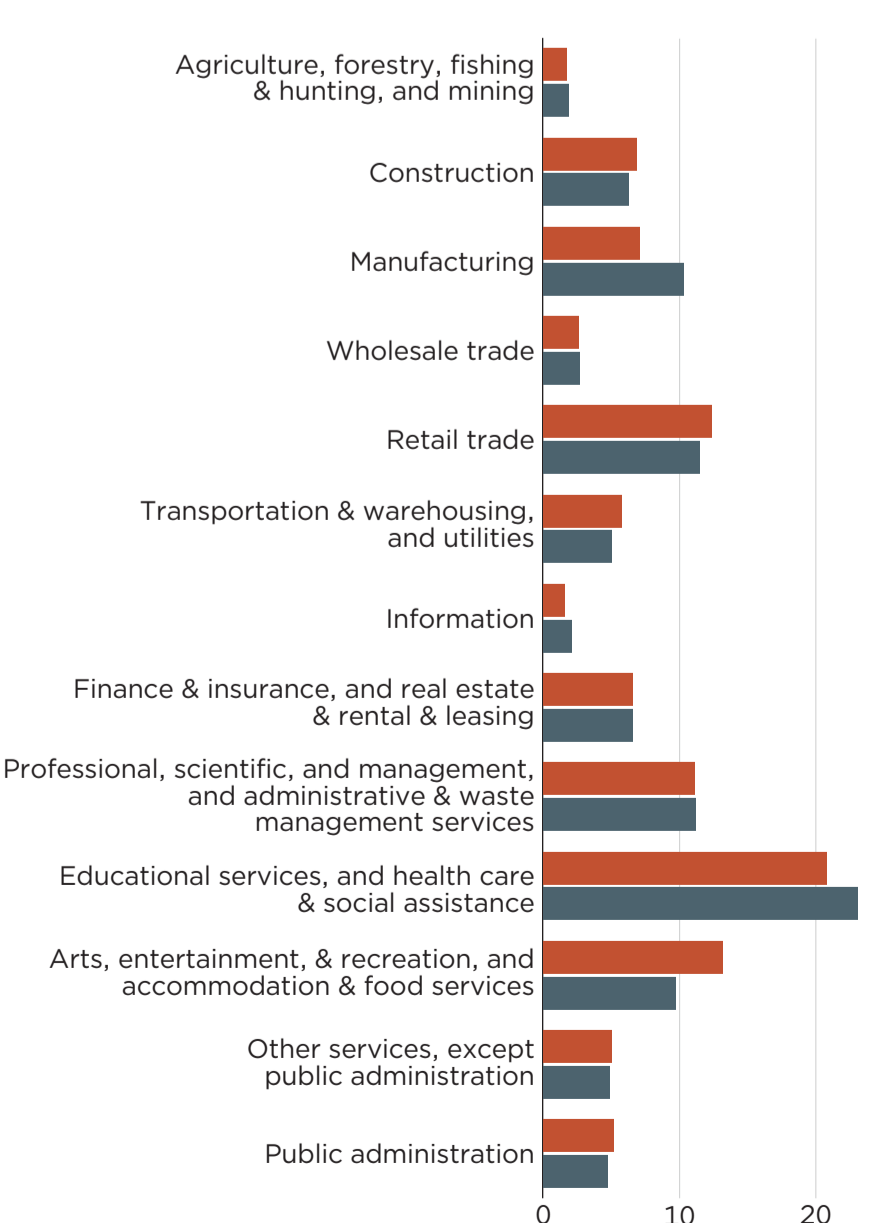


## Industry and Occupation Characteristics

In terms of industrial concentration, compared to the United States as a whole, the region had a higher percentage of its employment in categories such as (1) arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services, (2) retail trade, and (3) transportation and warehousing, and utilities. On the other hand, the region's employment had a lower percentage than the United States as a whole in categories such as (4) educational services, and health care and social assistance and (5) manufacturing. In terms of occupational concentration, compared to the United States as a whole, the Desert Southwest had a higher percentage of its employment in the categories (1) service, (2) sales and office, and (3) natural resources, construction, and maintenance, but a correspondingly lower percentage of employment than the United States in the (4) management, business, science, and arts category, and the (5) production, transportation, and material moving category.

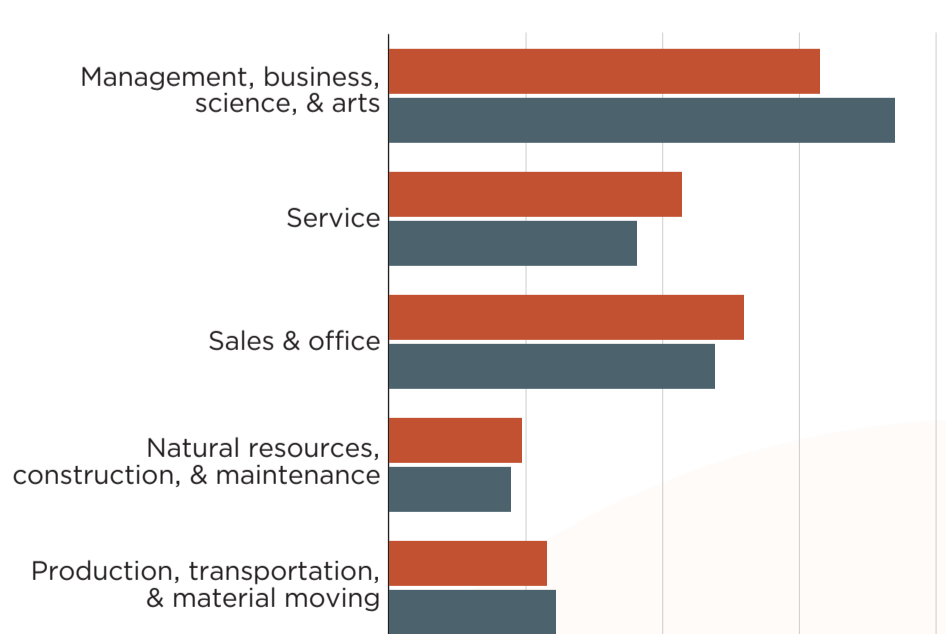
### Industry Concentration

Legend: ■ Desert Southwest, ■ United States



### Occupation Concentration

Legend: ■ Desert Southwest, ■ United States



Note: For industry concentration and occupation concentration—percent distribution of the civilian-employed population aged 16 and older. Data based on a sample. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see [www.census.gov/acs/www](http://www.census.gov/acs/www).  
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates.