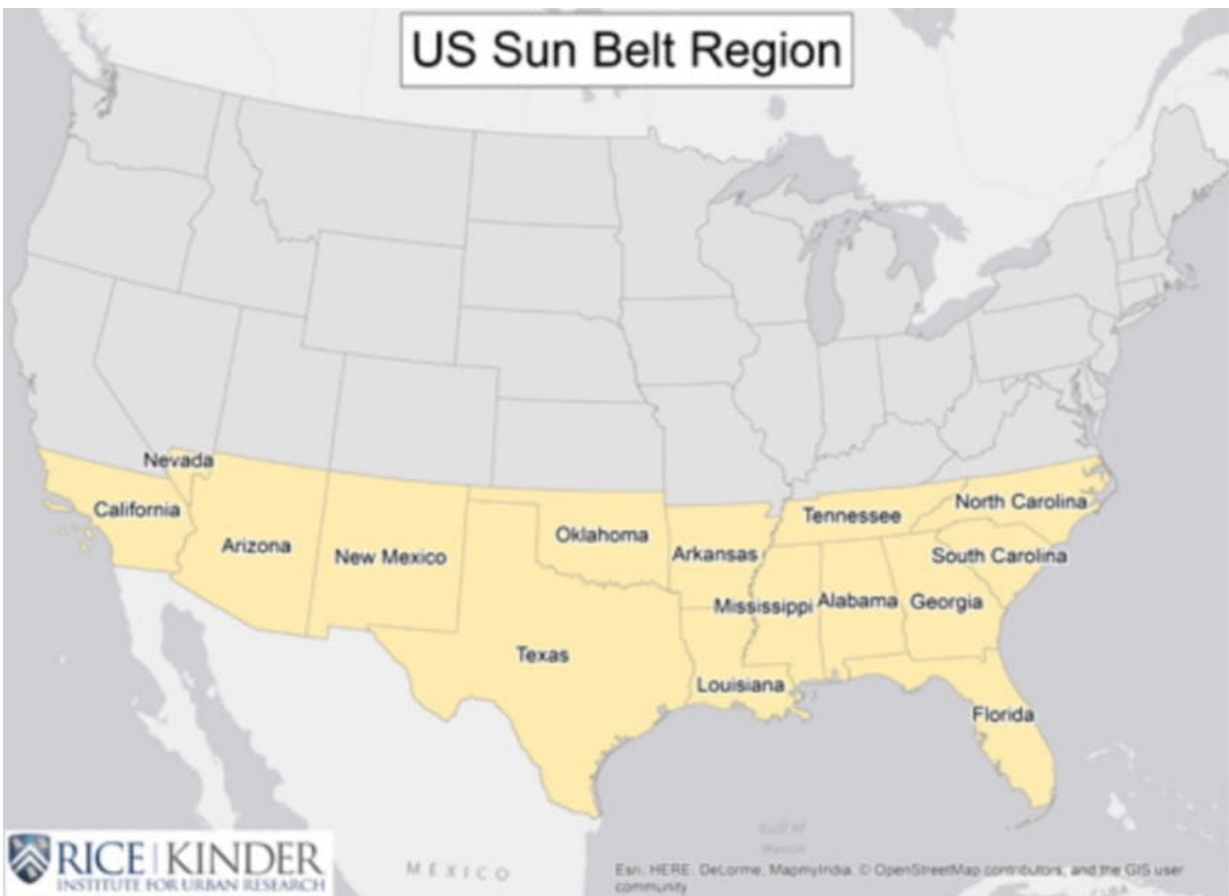


# Sun Belt cities comprise nearly half of U.S. population growth

June 11 2020, by Amy McCaig



Credit: Rice Kinder Institute

The Sun Belt's large metro areas are growing much faster than those elsewhere in the United States, and they are adding more young and old

residents than the rest of the nation, according to a new white paper from Rice University's Kinder Institute for Urban Research.

But most American urban policy is still crafted—and research is still conducted—with traditional Northeastern and Midwestern cities in mind, the paper says.

"The Urban Sun Belt: An Overview" draws on data from various sources, including the U.S. census and the American Community Survey between 2000 and 2016. The study not only examines large metropolitan areas in the Sun Belt, but also highlights differences between Sun Belt metros and those in other parts of the country.

The Kinder Institute defines the Sun Belt as the wide swath of the continental United States south of [36 degrees 30 minutes north latitude](#). In particular, the paper focuses on the 22 metropolitan statistical areas in the Sun Belt with populations of 1 million or more. Those metros accounted for more than 40% of U.S population growth between 2000 and 2016.

Sun Belt economies also grew quickly, with jobs growing fastest in the highest- and lowest-paying sectors. And the Sun Belt was slower to lose manufacturing jobs than the Rust Belt, the paper concludes.

"There's a lot of manufacturing strength in the Sun Belt," said Bill Fulton, director of the Kinder Institute and the paper's lead author.

Sun Belt cities are also more dependent on automobiles, they have higher transportation costs and more pedestrians die on their streets, the report says. Although they have invested heavily in [public transit](#) in recent decades, on a per capita basis ridership remains low compared to other parts of the country.

And while Sun Belt metros have had a reputation for [affordable housing](#), that phenomenon is fading, the report says. Homeownership rates are on the decline, and a high percentage of households are classified as "housing-cost-burdened." (In other words, they spend more than 30% of their income on housing and may have problems affording necessities such as food, clothing, transportation and medical care).

Poverty appears to be growing faster in large Sun Belt metros, the report says.

"The way Sun Belt cities are laid out, you're just more dependent on cars," Fulton said. "That's a real strain on families who are filling these low-wage jobs, since transportation costs are higher than you think, not to mention the cost of housing, which is on the rise."

Fulton and fellow researchers Shelly G. Hazle, Wendie Choudary and Stephen Sherman hope the report will encourage further research that can help the region address the issues raised by its rapid growth.

**More information:** The Urban Sun Belt: An Overview:  
[kinder.rice.edu/research/urban-sun-belt-overview](https://kinder.rice.edu/research/urban-sun-belt-overview)

Provided by Rice University

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