

RURAL RESEARCH BRIEF

The Latest Research from the Housing Assistance Council



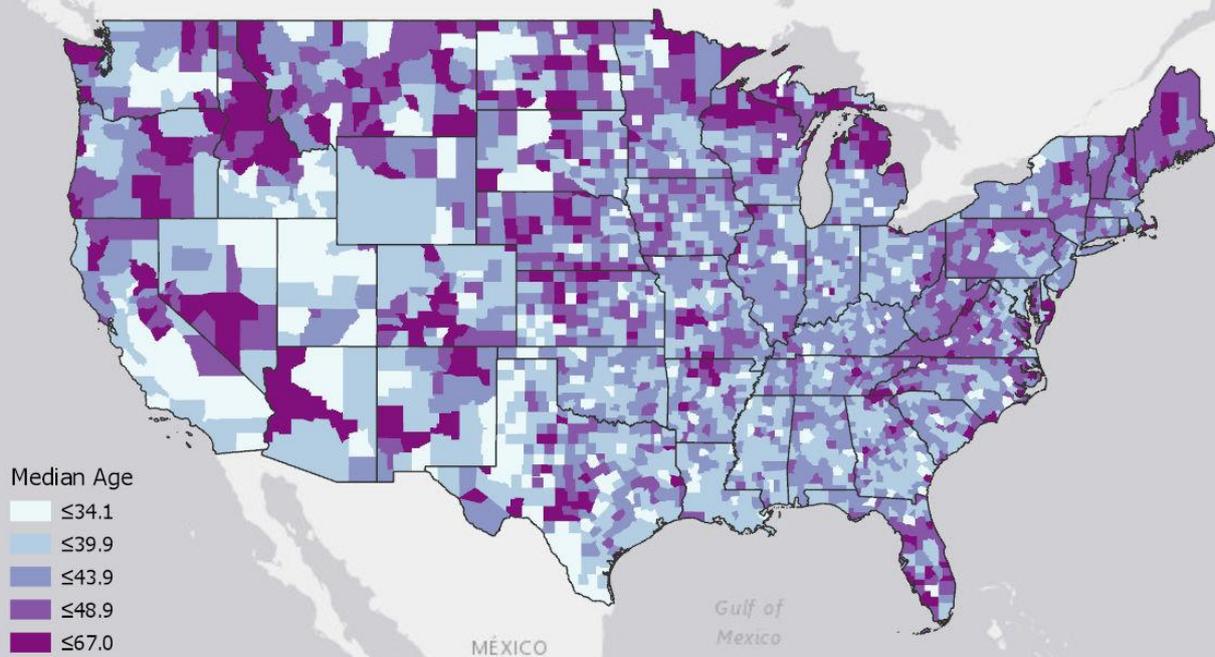
ABOUT HAC

The Housing Assistance Council (HAC) is a national nonprofit organization that helps build homes and communities across rural America. Since 1971, HAC has provided financial products, technical assistance and training, policy formulation, and research and information services to assist community-based organizations and policy makers who are working daily to improve life in rural communities across the United States.

Age and Aging in Rural America

We live in a multi-generational world which increasingly impacts every facet of society from healthcare to employment and housing. With the continued transition of Baby Boomers into older age, the United States is now squarely in one of the largest demographic shifts in our nation's history. In rural America, the impacts of an older and aging population are even more pronounced. But, as is the case with other social elements, rural America is not a monolith and there are important dynamics in all rural age strata.

Median Age in the United States, 2018



Source: HAC Tabulations of U.S. Census Bureau's 2014-2018 American Community Survey Data

CUBA

To view an interactive version of this map visit: <https://arcg.is/1ffbWP>

An Aging Rural America

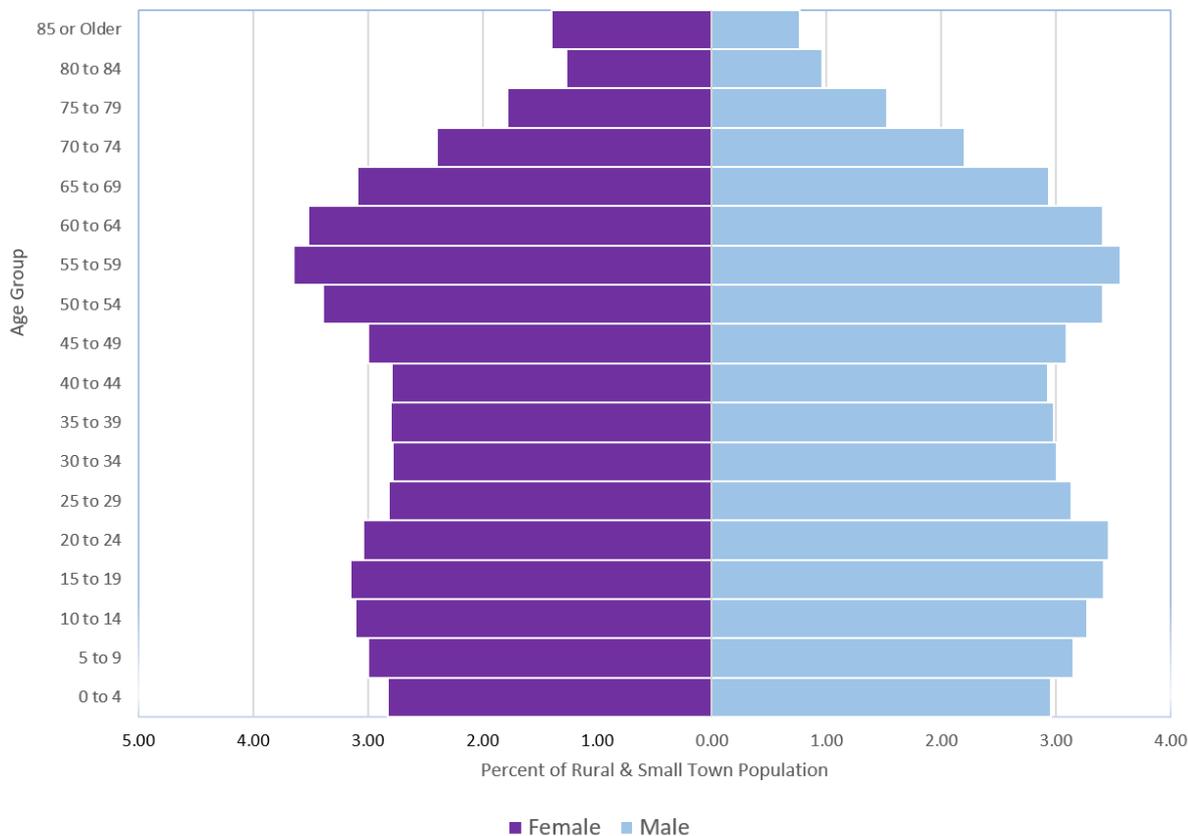
Rural America is older than the nation as a whole. The median age in rural and small town communities is 41.3 compared to 38.2 nationally. In 2010, the rural median age was 40. The relatively older composition of the rural population is not solely a factor of natural population change, but is also impacted by economic and social conditions. For decades, many rural areas have witnessed an exodus of younger and working-age adults - particularly those with higher education levels - in search of more viable employment options. These migration patterns have resulted in an age imbalance where older residents comprise a larger percentage of the rural population.

Over 11 million, or 18 percent of rural and small town residents are over the age of 65 - compared to 15 percent nationally. More than one-quarter of the nation's seniors live in rural and small town areas. Seniors are not a static group or population segment, and the characteristics and needs of older Americans vary substantially by age. Those age 65-74 make up a relatively large proportion of the rural senior population accounting for 58 percent of rural seniors. Those between the ages of 75 and 84 comprise 30 percent, and 12 percent of rural seniors are over the age of 84. Although the number of seniors age 85 and over make up a relatively small proportion of older persons, members of this group often have greater needs for housing, healthcare, and mobility assistance.

At the opposite end of the age spectrum, there are approximately 13.4 million children in rural America. The under age 18 group makes up 22 percent of the rural population, which is consistent with the national rate. Children make up a larger share of the rural population in some areas - particularly in the American Southwest and West as well as in communities on and near Native American Lands.

Rural America Through a Generational Lens

Age of Rural & Small Town Population by Gender, 2018



Within the rural age spectrum, generational differences (1) are important among a wide range of social, economic and lifestyle indicators, but are also essential in intergenerational support networks and dynamics of rural life. Baby Boomers – those born between 1946 and 1964 – continue to be one of the most influential age groups nationally and particularly in rural communities. There are approximately 15 million rural Baby Boomers comprising one-quarter of the rural population. Baby boomers have been transitioning into older age over the past decade and more will follow in the coming decade, continuing to reshape rural society and communities. Millennials, generally defined as those aged 22 to 39 are now estimated to be the largest age group nationally, but in rural America they are still not as numerous as Baby Boomers. Overall, there are an estimated 12.8 million Millennials making up 21 percent of the rural population. While some Boomers are exiting the labor market, Millennials are now entering the ranks of employment and household formation.

Sandwiched between Baby Boomers and Millennials is Generation X (age 40 to 54). Statistically smaller than Boomers and Millennials – both nationally and in rural areas – Generation X is now the nation’s solid “middle age” group comprising approximately 18 percent of the rural population.

At the ends of the generational spectrum are Generation Z – generally defined as age 7-23 – and the “Silent” and “Greatest Generations” who are over age 75. The youngest group – Generation Z- are substantial at over 13 million in number and approximately 22 percent of the rural population – which is proportionally comparable to Gen Z nationally. The oldest age group – those over age 75 make up approximately 8 percent of the rural population which is about two percentage points higher than the national rate for older Americans. The population in this older age cohort is also more likely to be female.

QUICK FACTS ON AGE IN RURAL AMERICA

15 million

Baby Boomers in rural and small town America

Source: U.S. Census Bureau - 2014-2018 American Community Survey

58%

Proportion of rural age 75 and over population who are women

Source: U.S. Census Bureau - 2014-2018 American Community Survey

13.4 million

Children under the age of 18 in rural America

Source: U.S. Census Bureau - 2014-2018 American Community Survey

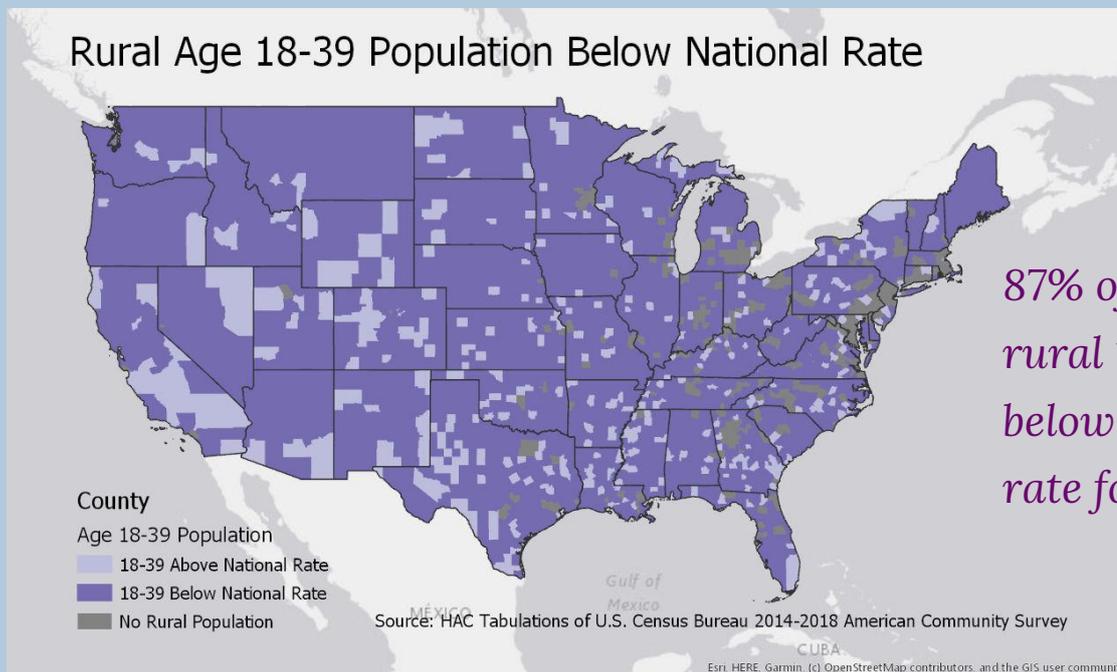
41.3

Median age in rural America

Source: U.S. Census Bureau - 2014-2018 American Community Survey



IT'S NOT "SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO?" BUT, "WILL I COME BACK?"



87% of counties have a rural 18-39 population below the national rate for this age group.

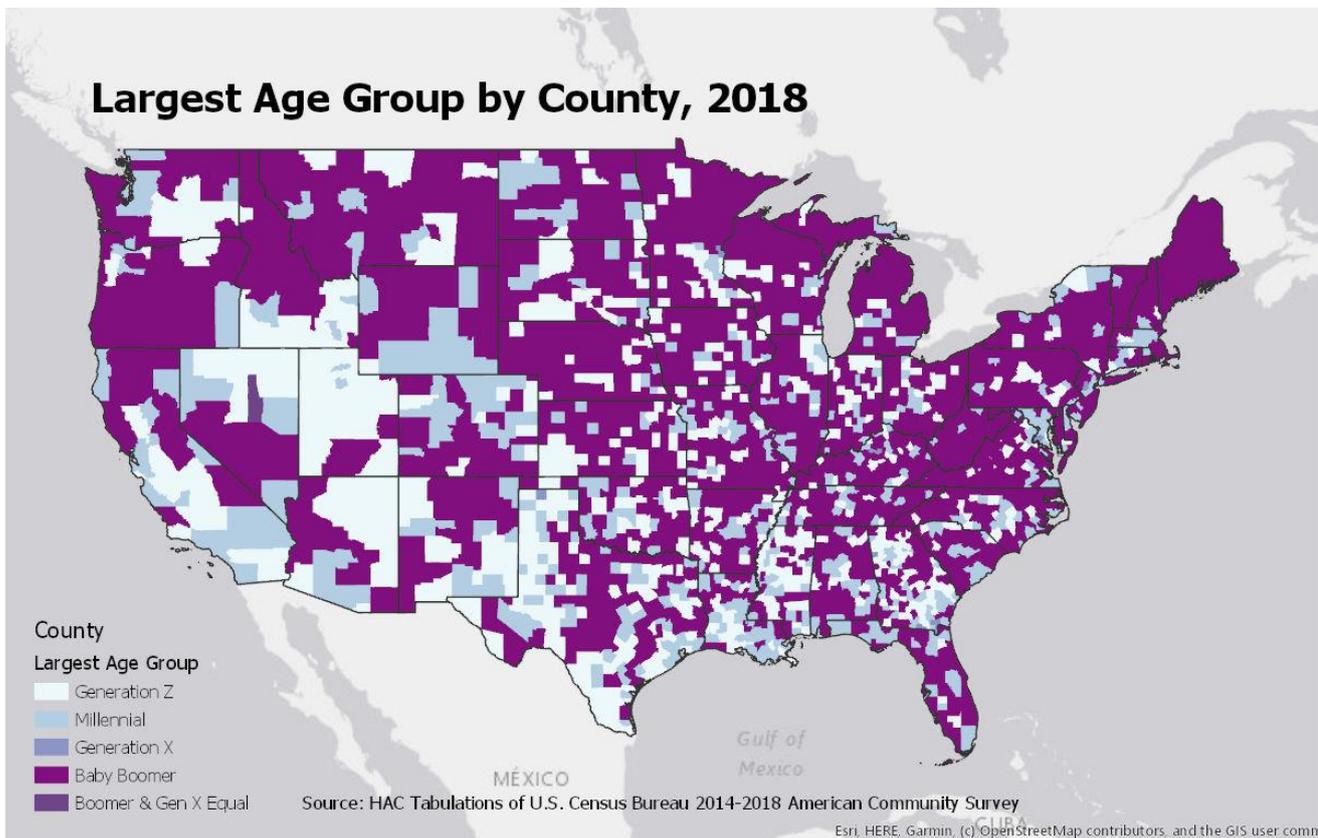
For decades, rural areas have experienced an exodus of young and working-age adults, especially those with higher educational attainment and skills. These migration patterns have resulted in an imbalance where the rural population is now older, poorer, and many rural places lack a vibrant economic core of workers. Rural outmigration surfaces as a concern in nearly every social, economic, or housing condition. Whether you call it “hollowing out, rural brain drain, or a diaspora,” this demographic trend has profound social and economic consequences for many rural communities.

The initial exodus of younger people leaving from their rural communities is not necessarily a bad thing. Many economists, academics, and sociologists agree that mobility among young adults is a common, and even positive, life-cycle stage. (2) Leaving home for education, the military, or work experience improves skills, economic prospects, knowledge and worldview. Young adults are typically a highly mobile group regardless of where they grow up. But increasingly, people who leave rural areas for these pursuits are not coming back to resettle in, or even near, their home communities. Younger and working age adults have not returned to rural places because of a dearth of viable employment options. This reality is borne out in statistics, and also in anecdotes from many rural and small-town leaders and residents. Some cultural issues may influence this trend as well.

While the trends on rural outmigration are clear, there is a notion, and supporting evidence that some young adults who grew up in rural areas wish to return to their home communities. (3) The reasons are varied, but one particularly strong pull for return migration is connection to family, especially parents and grandparents. One important factor in this scenario is a focus on “return” migration and a reattraction strategy as opposed to just a simple attraction strategy to rural communities. Ironically, some of the same forces that drove younger and more educated persons from rural areas, could now help facilitate their return. Technology, the evolving workplace, and new notions of family and community well-being all play an important role in helping young families relocate to be near their relatives and home communities.



Baby Boomers Are the Largest Age Group in Most Rural Communities



To view an interactive version of this map visit: <https://arcg.is/8b0Kn0>

For More Information About Age and Aging in Rural America

01

U.S. CENSUS BUREAU'S AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/>

02

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

<https://www.pewresearch.org/topics/generations-and-age/>

03

RURAL VOICES MAGAZINE:
HOUSING AN AGING RURAL AMERICA

<http://www.ruralhome.org/sct-information/rural-voices/1852-rvsummer2020>

04

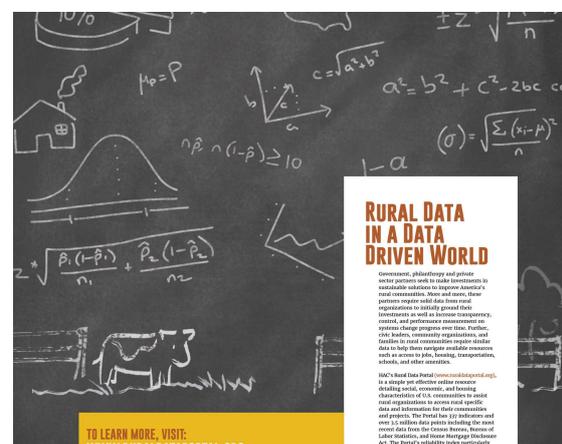
LEADING AGE

<https://www.leadingage.org/>

THE RURAL DATA PORTAL

Data is Important.

The Housing Assistance Council created a searchable database that combines many disparate data sources into one easily accessible place. The Rural Data Portal is a simple, easy to use, on-line resource that provides essential information on the social, economic, and housing characteristics of communities in the United States. The Rural Data Portal provides over 350 data indicators for your community. Access important data for your community at www.ruraldataportal.org



WWW.RURALDATAPORTAL.ORG

About the Author

Lance George is the Director of Research & Information at the Housing Assistance Council. Lance's research at HAC encompasses a wide array of issues and topics on rural people and their housing condition. Lance works at the intersection of housing, research, and data to help Americans who have quality and safe homes, understand and care about those who do not.



The Housing Assistance Council (HAC) is a national nonprofit organization that helps build homes and communities across rural America. Since 1971 HAC has provided financial products, technical assistance and training, policy formulation, and research and information services to assist community-based organizations and policy makers who are working daily to improve rural housing and rural communities across the United States.



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About the Data

Most of the data for this Brief derives from Housing Assistance Council tabulations of various public use data sets including the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), and the Decennial Census of Housing and Population. For more information on these data please consult the primary data source, or contact the Housing Assistance Council at lance@ruralhome.org.

Age and Aging in Rural America is part of a series of Rural Research Briefs presenting data and findings from the Census and American Community Survey (ACS). Throughout 2020, the Housing Assistance Council (HAC) will publish Rural Research Briefs highlighting various social, economic, and housing characteristics of rural Americans.

The Rural Research Brief series will preview HAC's decennial *Taking Stock* report - a comprehensive assessment of rural America and its housing. Since the 1980s, HAC has presented *Taking Stock* every ten years following the release of Census data. The newest *Taking Stock* report will be published in 2020.

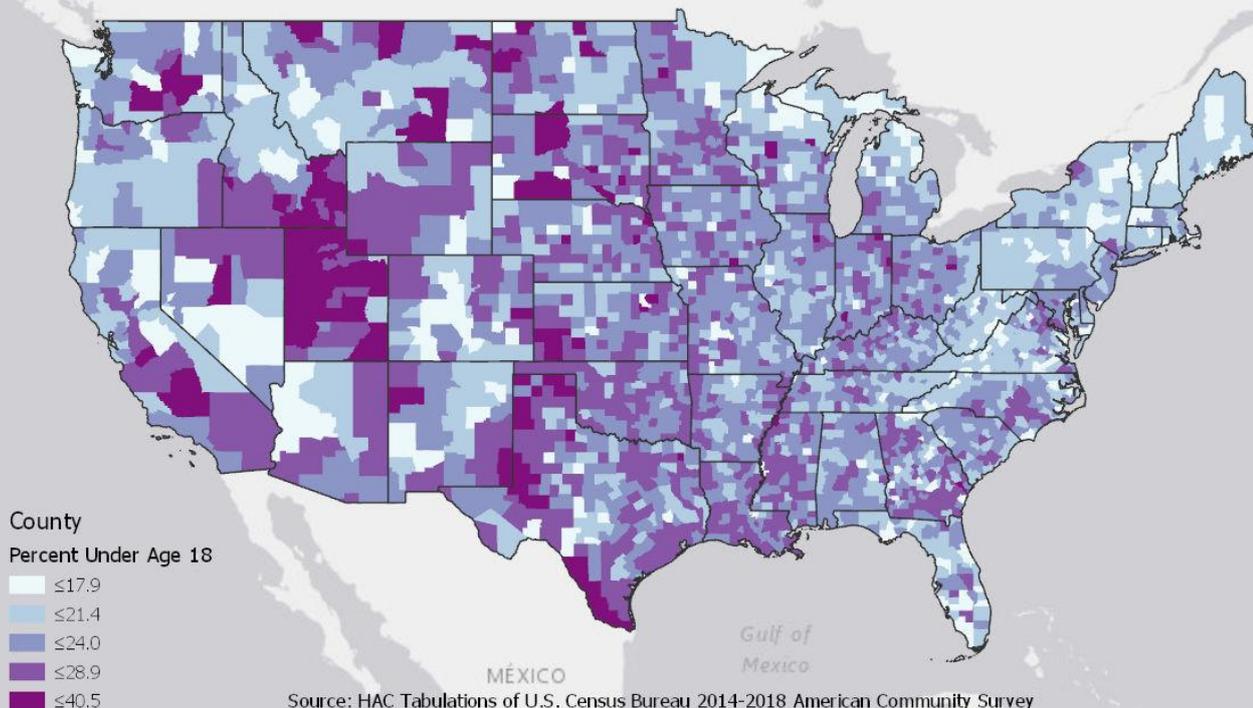
REFERENCES

1. There is no universal consensus on defining age generations as these groupings are not only an age construct, but also have cultural characteristics and are empirical in nature. In this research, age generations were constructed in close approximation to the Pew Research Center's delineations of generations: https://www.pewresearch.org/st_18-02-27_generations_defined/ as well as available age data categorization in the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey as of 2018. For this Brief, Generation Z is defined as persons age 5-21 in 2018; Millennials age 22-39 in 2018; Generation X age 40-54 in 2018; Baby Boomers age 55-74 in 2018; and the Silent and Greatest Generations over age 75 in 2018. Data tabulations on the age groups were calculated using the U.S. Census Bureau's 2014-2018 American Community Survey.
2. Alvin Chang. "Those Who Leave, And Those who Stay." *Vox*. July 25, 2018. <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/6/15/15757708/hometown-stay-leave>
3. John Cromartie, Christiane von Reichert, and Ryan Arthun. "Why Some Return Home to Rural America and Why It Matters." *Amber Waves*. USDA Economic Research Service. July 6, 2015. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2015/july/why-some-return-home-to-rural-america-and-why-it-matters/>



Appendix

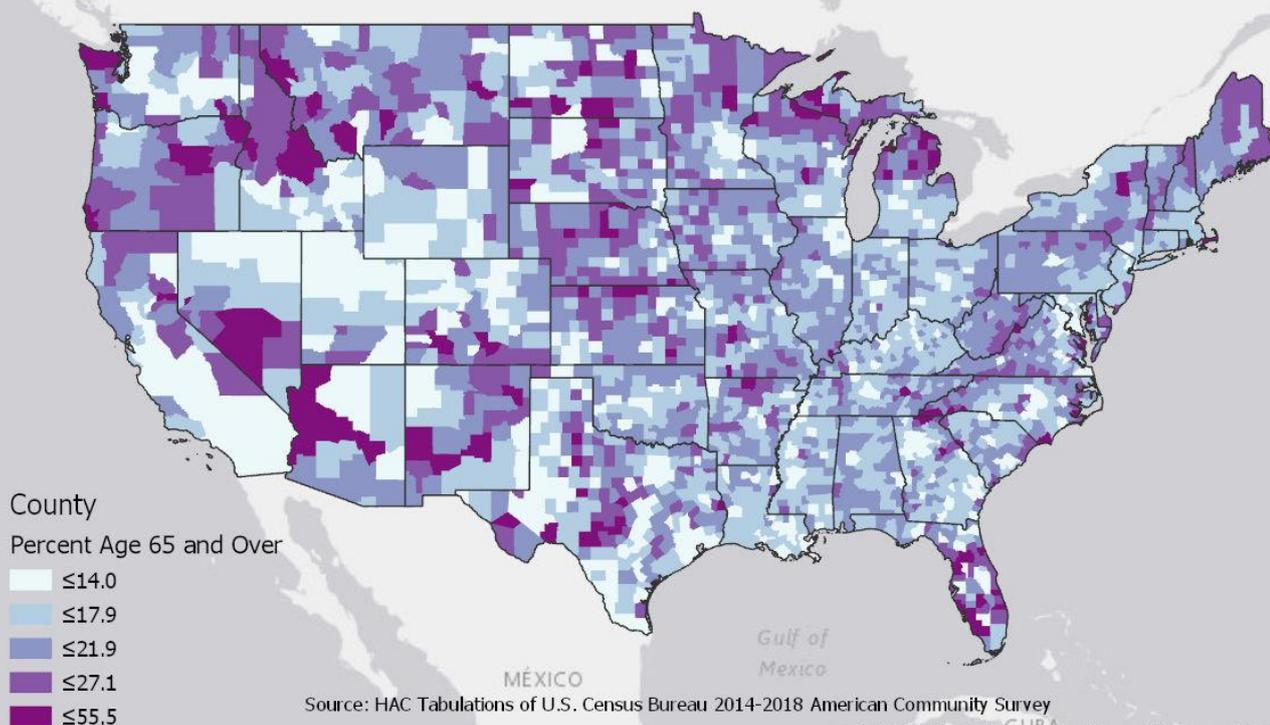
Under Age 18 Population, 2018



Source: HAC Tabulations of U.S. Census Bureau 2014-2018 American Community Survey

Esri, HERE, Garmin, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS user community

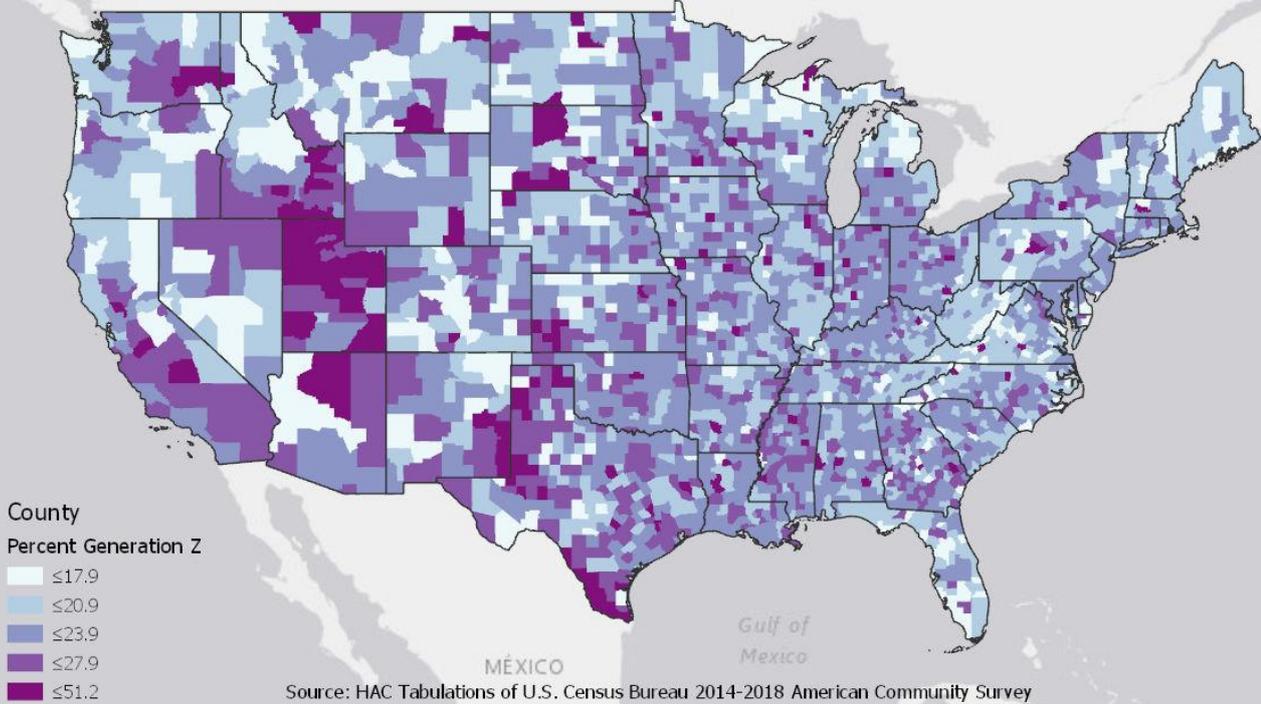
Age 65 and Older, 2018



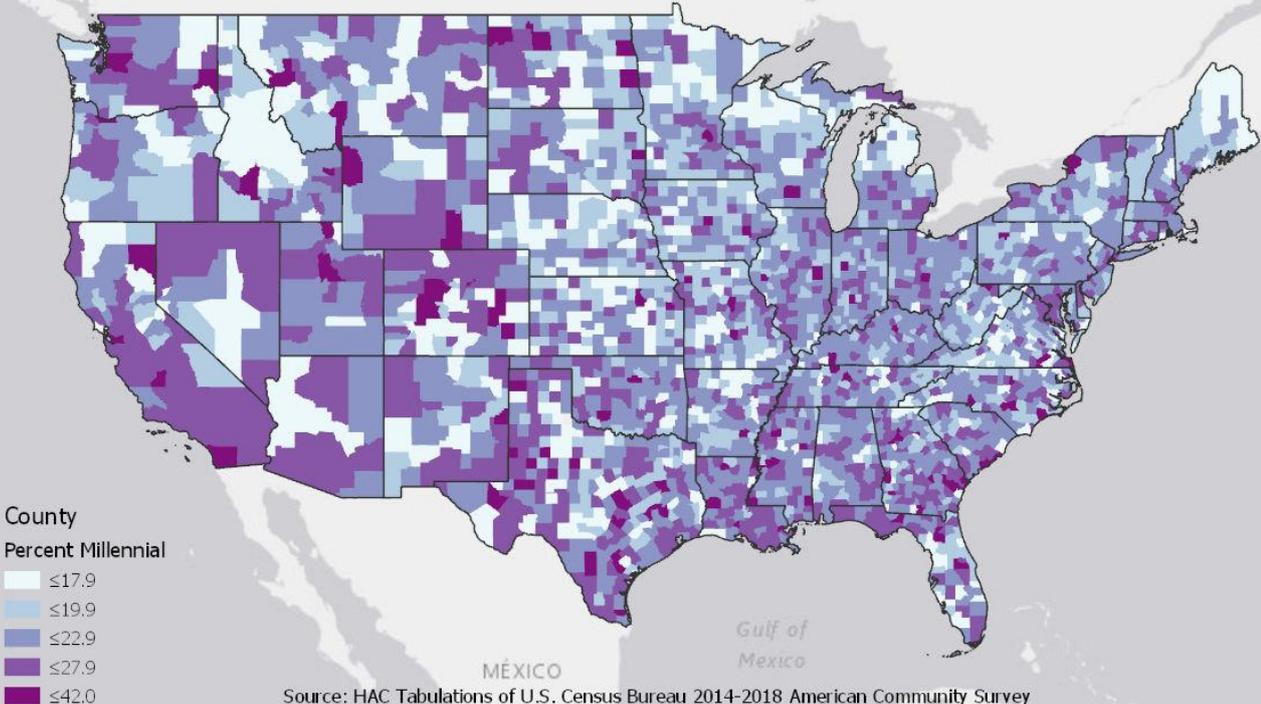
Source: HAC Tabulations of U.S. Census Bureau 2014-2018 American Community Survey

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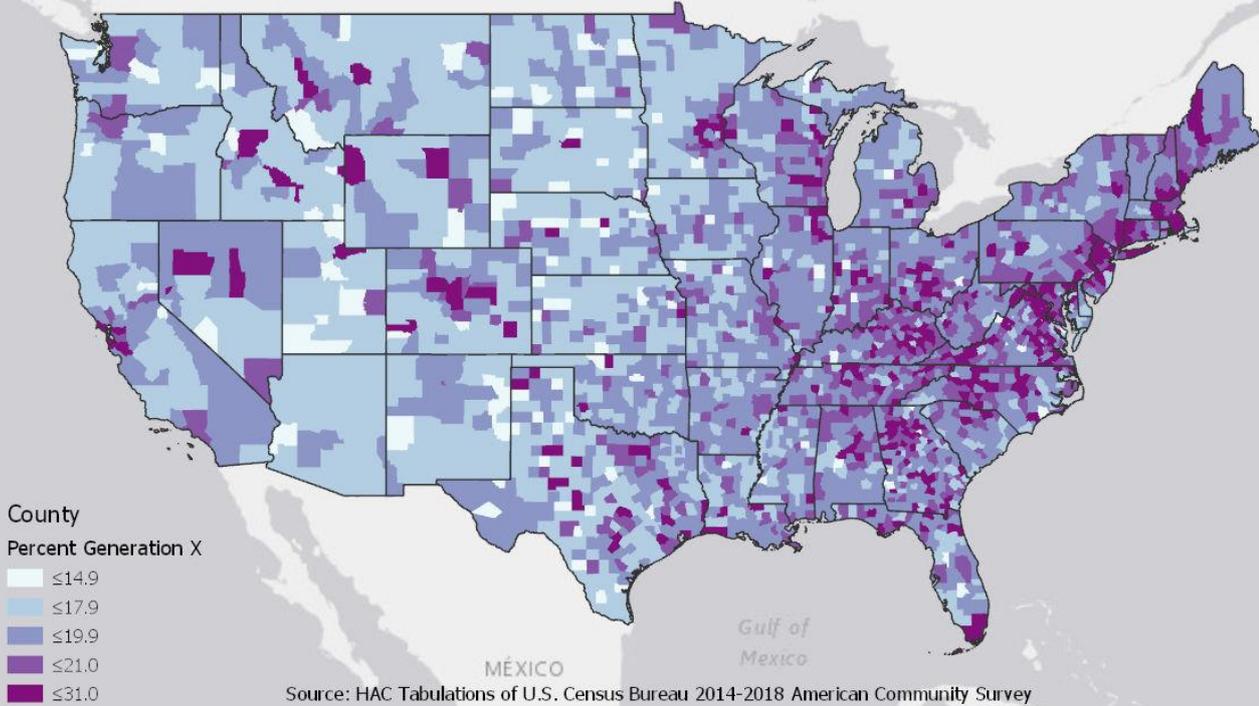
Generation Z, 2018 (Age 5-21)



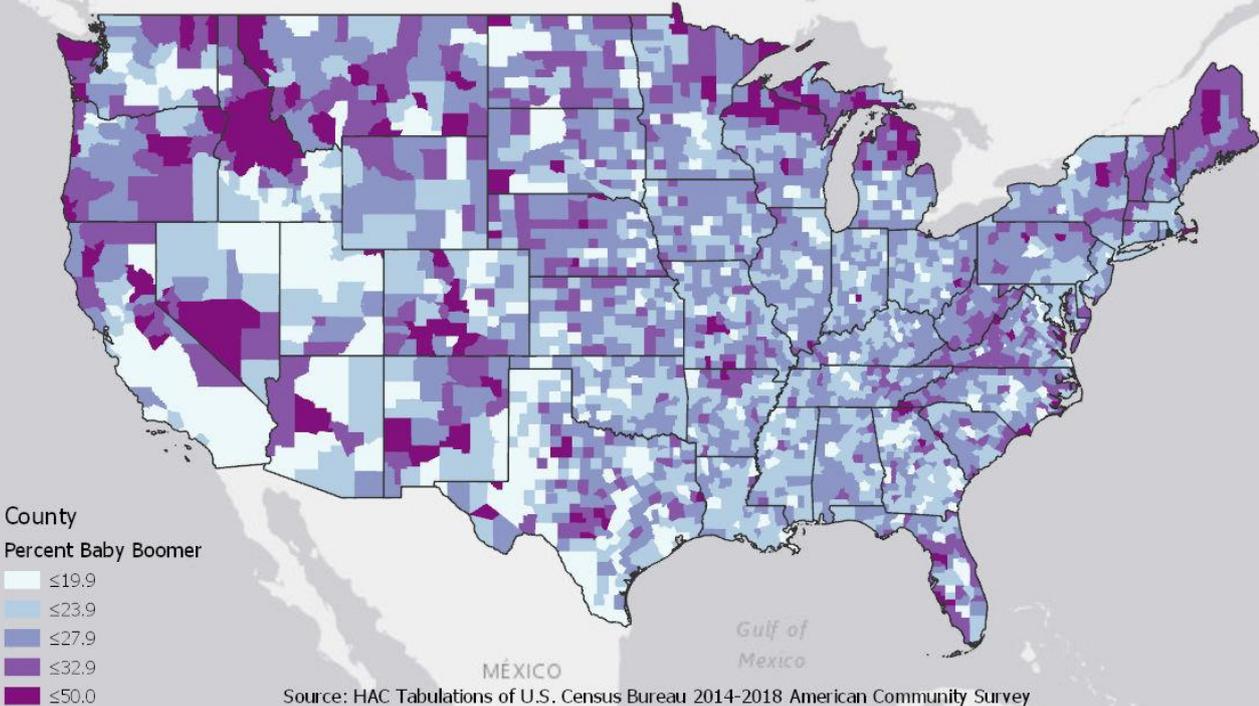
Millennials, 2018 (Age 22-39)



Generation X, 2018 (Age 40-54)



Baby Boomers, 2018 (Age 55-74)



Silent and Greatest Generations, 2018 (Age 75 and older)

