

# Our Changing Denver Region.

## ABOUT SHIFT RESEARCH LAB

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The Piton Foundation's Shift Research Lab, formerly known as the Data Initiative, transforms data into actionable information that improves the social sector's ability to serve Colorado's low-income communities.

We educate and empower social change organizations by providing reliable, objective data and analysis, to inform their decision-making process with sound insight. This shift in perspective helps our partners have a more profound and lasting impact on the communities they serve.

Through our products and services, we offer neighborhood-level data and analysis via online platforms, perform objective research to support community change initiatives, and provide technical assistance that helps organizations build their capacity to use data.

Our work is focused on helping our partners advance their missions with confidence, clarity and empathy. This is #DataDrivingSocialChange.

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## Series Overview.

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Although cities across the United States saw a decline or flattening of population during the Great Recession, which lasted from 2007 through 2009, Denver is one of the few metro regions that experienced growth despite the economic downturn.

While anecdotal evidence has raised concerns that low-income families are struggling to fully participate in the post-2009 economic recovery and are experiencing displacement due to population growth, there has been a lack of actionable, quality data and analysis to help our region understand and respond to its changing dynamics—until now.

With the release of 2009 and 2014 data for metro Denver from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey, Shift Research Lab, a program of The Piton Foundation, has analyzed neighborhood-level data for the region, including Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield, Denver, Douglas and Jefferson counties, to provide insight into how low-income families have fared since emerging from the Great Recession.

In the **Our Changing Denver Region** series, we provide data, coupled with narratives from real families whose stories put a face to the numbers, to help service providers, public officials, community leaders and everyday citizens learn how communities across metro Denver are evolving.

In the first chapter of this series, we invite you to explore the demographic shifts that have occurred since 2009 related to total population, age, household types, race and ethnicity, and mobility.



DATA DRIVING

SOCIAL CHANGE

Our Changing  
Denver Region.

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CHAPTER ONE :

# Who We Are & Where We Live.

## THE NUMBERS AT A GLANCE\*

## TOTAL POPULATION : 2.9 MILLION

Under 18 Population :

696K

Over 65 Population :

315K

## ETHNIC POPULATION

White, Non-Hispanic :

1.9M

Hispanic or Latino :

639K

Black or African American :

144K

Asian :

110K

## HOUSEHOLDS : 1.12 MILLION

Households w/Children :

367K

Single Living Alone :

327K

Single, Not Living Alone :

93K

## Population &amp; Households.

**Although the Denver region's overall population grew substantially since 2005, its average household size, or the number of people living in each home, has gotten smaller.**

Since 2005, the Denver region has added nearly 430,000 residents, which translates to approximately 50 families moving here each day. These transplants include 31-year-old Shana, who grew up in Gilpin County but relocated to Jefferson County in 2012 with her husband and two young sons. Prior to moving to metro Denver, Shana's husband held onto a decent job with an hourly wage that kept their family financially secure despite the economic hardships others experienced during the Great Recession.

That all changed a few years ago when Shana separated from her husband, drastically changing her financial situation and threatening her ability to continue affording rent in Jefferson County. After spending many years as a stay-at-home parent, Shana was forced to find work and enroll in public assistance programs, including food stamps, subsidized child care and Medicaid, to keep her family stable. She eventually found a job that paid \$10.25 an hour, a salary increase that disqualified her for eligibility for public assistance, and she began to worry about whether she and her sons could continue living in their apartment.

When Shana and her husband separated and moved into different homes, they contributed to the increase in household growth and decrease in household size that the Denver region has experienced. In addition to more single parent households, this change can be attributed to the region's aging population, more single millennials living alone or with roommates, and fewer children being born.

As Shana considered more affordable places to live, she looked at Adams County, which has some of the lowest rents in the region. Because of its affordability, Adams County, has seen an increase in household size as larger families are either living or moving there. But, as more families relocate to Adams County, it's becoming more difficult to find available apartments. After struggling to find a vacant one-bedroom in her price range in Adams County, Shana eventually found a studio in Jefferson County, and she made the tough decision to downsize so she could save money and continue to pay for transportation to work, go back to school in hopes of gaining a higher-paying job, and cover costs for her sons.

\*Rounded figures from the American Community Survey 2014 5-Year Estimate.

## Age Composition

### A decline in births leads to less children under five living in the region.

Shana, who is currently working two jobs and earns a little over \$30,000 a year to support her sons, does not feel she can afford to have additional children without a spouse contributing to the family's income. While residents living in the Denver region are aging, and will continue to for years to come, there has been a stark decline in births.

When looking at the maps on the right, this new demographic shift can be attributed to the financial strain the Great Recession has placed on families and their inability to fully participate in the economic recovery, which has caused them to reconsider the number of children they can afford to raise. The choice to delay having children, or to have smaller families, is a larger national trend, and, according to the Urban Institute, birthrates among millennial women have declined more than 15 percent following the Great Recession.



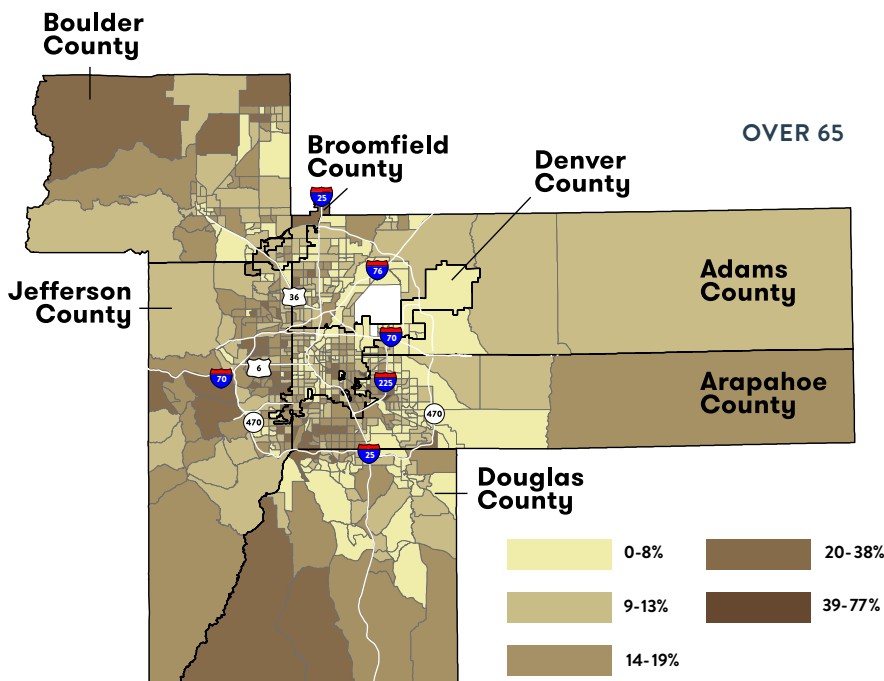
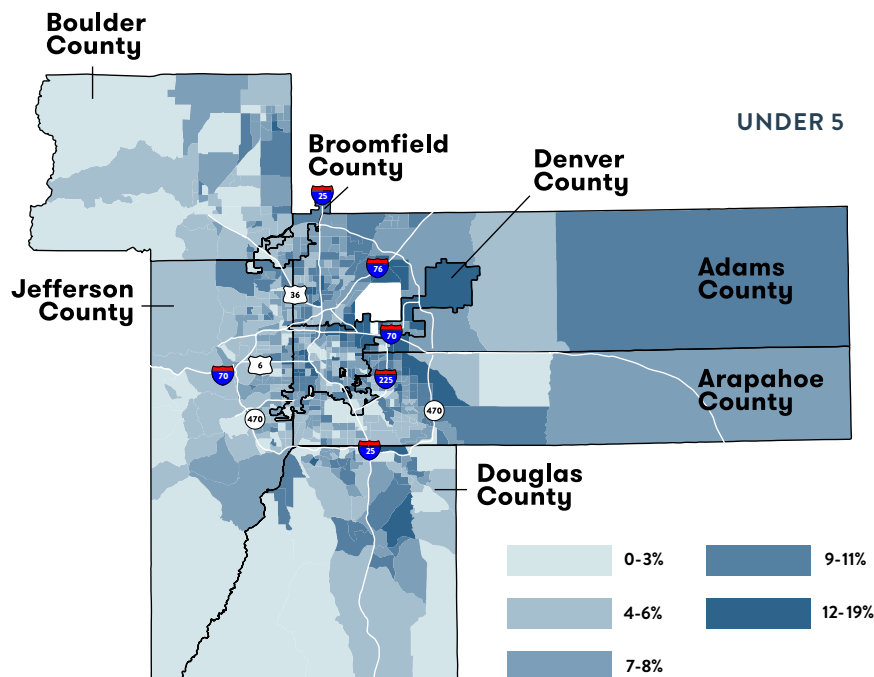
#### MAP

Jefferson County accounted for 23 percent of growth in the over 65 population, while 44 percent of the loss in the under five population occurred in Denver County. When looking at the maps, notice the difference in where these two populations are concentrated.

There is a divide between the northeast and southwest portions of the region, with families with young children living in the northeast and retiree households living in the older, more established communities in the southwest.



#### REGION POPULATION, UNDER 5 AND OVER 65



## Household Characteristics

### While homes without children account for the majority of household growth, there was an increase in single father households.

Single parent households across the region continue to increase, accounting for 80 percent of the growth in households with children ages 0 to 17. According to the Pew Research Center, the decline in two-parent households is a nationwide trend as divorce, remarriage and cohabitation are on the rise. Although single mothers like Shana are 2.5 times more prevalent in the region than single fathers, the number of single father households has increased 16 percent. Single fathers like Menghis, who relocated with his three daughters from East Africa to Denver in 2014, account for 40 percent of the single parent growth the region has experienced.

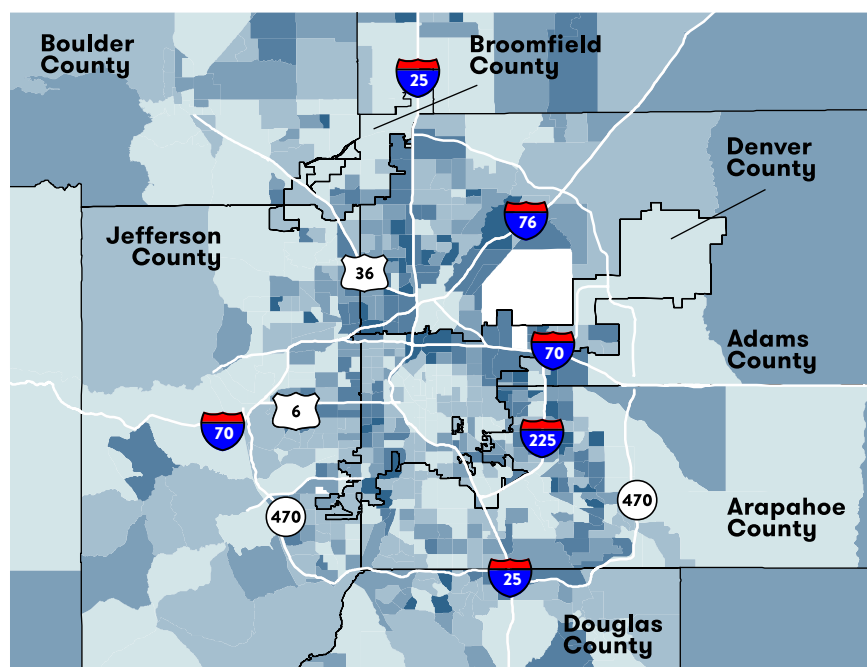
Menghis is employed as a full-time family liaison at Aurora Public Schools, where he advocates on behalf of families like himself and makes nearly \$40,000 a year. But his position is contracted through a time-limited grant and he receives no benefits. Currently, he and his daughters reside in a three-bedroom apartment at Denver's Warren Village, a two-year transitional housing program for low-income, single-parent families. While he can afford Warren Village's \$657 monthly rent, Menghis says housing is his most expensive budget item and he worries that his family can't stay at Warren Village forever. To move into an equivalent fair-market apartment, Menghis would need to double his annual income, so he is on a waitlist for subsidized public housing.

With no disposable income for entertainment, eating out or new clothing, Menghis has honest conversations about finances with his three girls, who feel pressure to keep up with their peers at school. He asks them if they would rather have new shoes or food to eat, and he uses these conversations to teach them that who they are is more than what they wear.

Although the Denver region has an increasing number of single fathers, most programs and supportive services for single parents are geared toward women. At Warren Village, Menghis is one of three men living at Warren Village who are pushing for more resources for single fathers. Despite the financial burdens he faces, Menghis admits that his biggest struggle is raising his daughters without a wife. He says that being a single father has made him fearful—there is no one to share his daily worries about his daughters or reassure him that he's doing right by them.

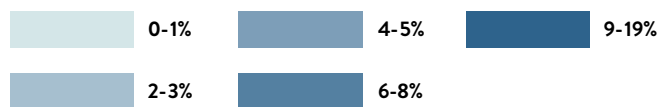


### SINGLE FATHER HOUSEHOLDS



### MAP

This map, which shows where there is the greatest concentration of single fathers in the region, indicates a general pattern in the shape of an upside-down 'U' around the urban core, plus northeast Boulder County and an area east of I-25 in Douglas County.



## THE NUMBERS AT A GLANCE\*

## ETHNIC POPULATION

White, Non-Hispanic :

1.9M

Hispanic or Latino :

639K

Black or African American :

144K

Asian :

110K

## Race &amp; Ethnicity Characteristics

**The region is more diverse, yet racial and ethnic concentrations are diminishing.**

Although White/Non-Hispanic residents still make up 65 percent of the region's population, there has been considerable growth among other groups, including Asians (21 percent), people who identify as two or more races (37 percent), and Hispanics/Latinos (12 percent), and the growth of these groups has outpaced the growth of White residents by 5 percent.

While the minority population is growing faster than the White population, African-American residents and Hispanic/Latino residents are less concentrated across the region. The only exception is Adams County, which has seen an increase in the majority of Hispanics or Latinos living there. This points to the gentrification and displacement that has been occurring in traditionally minority neighborhoods like North Park Hill, Skyland, Federal Heights and South Thornton. Many longtime residents like Aisha, who is African-American and grew up in Montbello, have found themselves priced out of their neighborhoods because of financial troubles and the changing housing landscape.

After separating from her husband in 2009, Aisha became the sole provider for her four children. But, as a veteran government worker making \$55,000 annually, Aisha felt financially secure—she owned her home and often provided monetary support to extended family and community members. In 2013, she left her full-time position to pursue her dream of opening her own counseling practice, and she used her savings, along with a loan against her home, to launch the business. Although she had a healthy clientele and low overhead, Aisha found herself in financial trouble after more than a year. Feeling panicked, she sold her home in 2015, but, without a steady income, strong credit score or rental history, Aisha and her four children quickly found themselves struggling with housing insecurity.

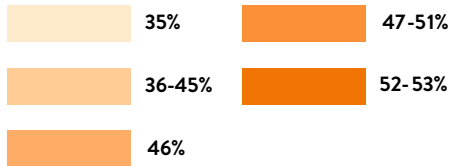
\* Rounded figures from the American Community Survey 2014 5-Year Estimate.



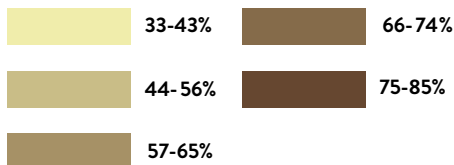


## ETHNIC PLURALITY (2009 & 2014)

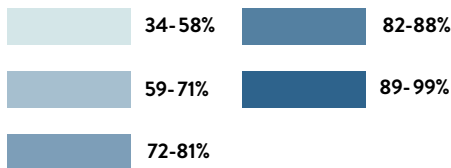
### BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN



### HISPANIC OR LATINO



### WHITE ALONE

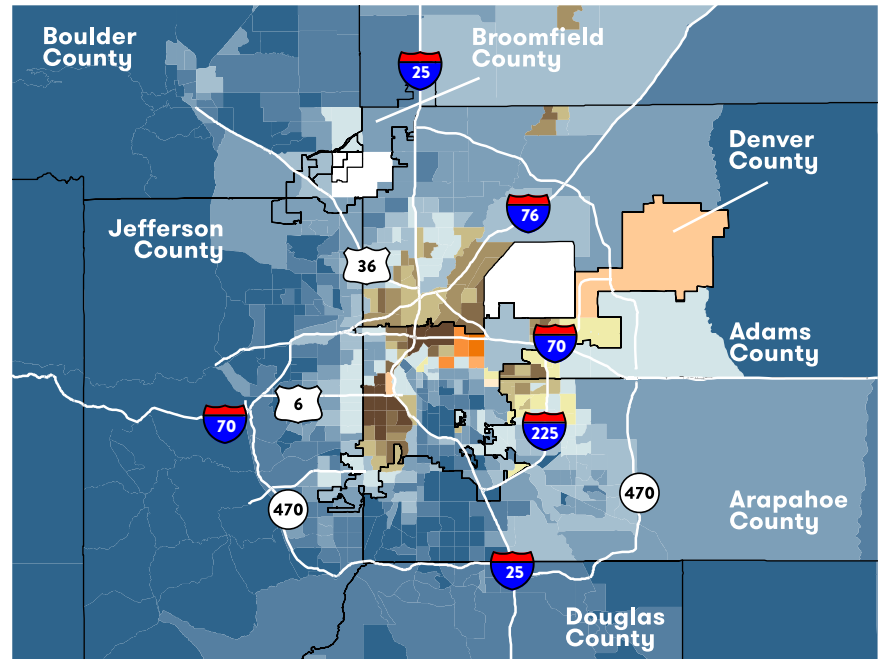


### MAP

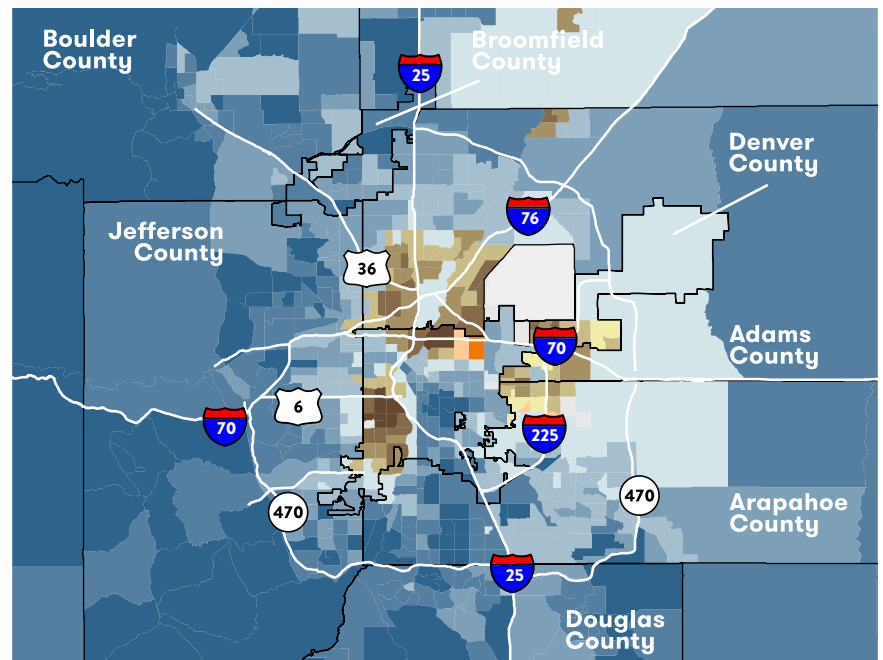
Denver's African American population saw a more than 70 percent reduction in the number of Census tracts where they are a majority and a reduction of 3.7 percent across all tracts.

Hispanics or Latinos in Adams County increased plurality among all tracts by 7.3 percent.

2009



2014



## THE NUMBERS AT A GLANCE\*

## ETHNIC POPULATION

White, Non-Hispanic :

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## Mobility

## African American and Hispanic populations are more likely to move within the region.

Overall, there has not been much change in resident mobility, which tracks where families move within a given year, but there are differences in the movement of various racial and ethnic groups, providing more insight into how the region has changed over time. African American and Hispanic residents are more likely to have moved within the region than White residents, and, since selling her home two years ago and moving to three different counties in the past year, Aisha and her four children have become an example of the increased mobility of minorities in the region.

Aisha first found a small, two-bedroom apartment in Arapahoe County, but, soon after, decided to “double up” with a friend living in a house in Denver County, hoping it would help keep her children more stabilized in their schools. After paying their first and last month’s rent, Aisha and her friend were told they needed to move out of the home because the landlord planned to sell and capitalize on Denver’s real estate market. With little notice of the eviction and even less money in her bank account, Aisha and her children were forced to spend two weeks in a shelter, and, due to his age, her 14-year-old son was separated from the rest of the family. In early 2016, Aisha and her family moved to Adams County, where they received emergency housing through a church. Currently, Aisha is working three contract jobs and making about \$12 an hour or \$24,000 annually. If she is able to get a better job and build up her savings, she dreams of moving to Missouri or Florida, where she has family and the cost of living isn’t as high as Colorado. Until then, she will rely on many of the family members and friends who she used to be able to support.

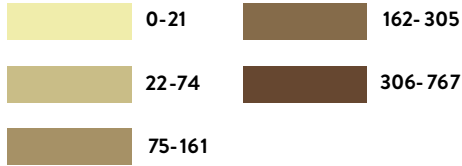
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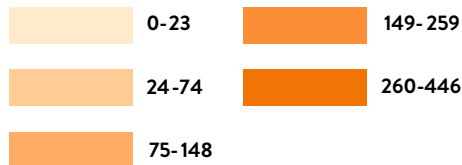


## AFRICAN AMERICAN MIGRATION (2009 & 2014)

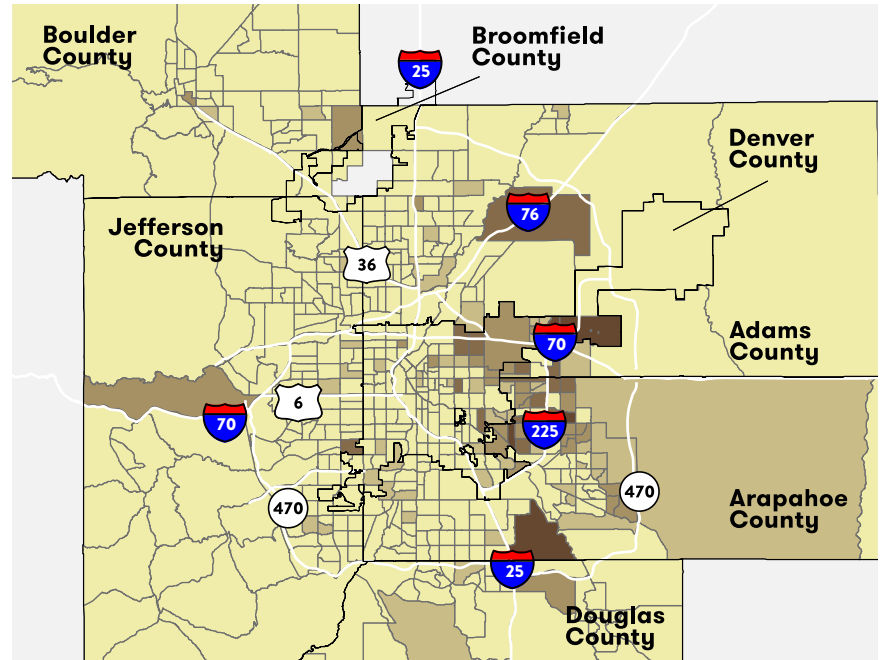
2009



2014



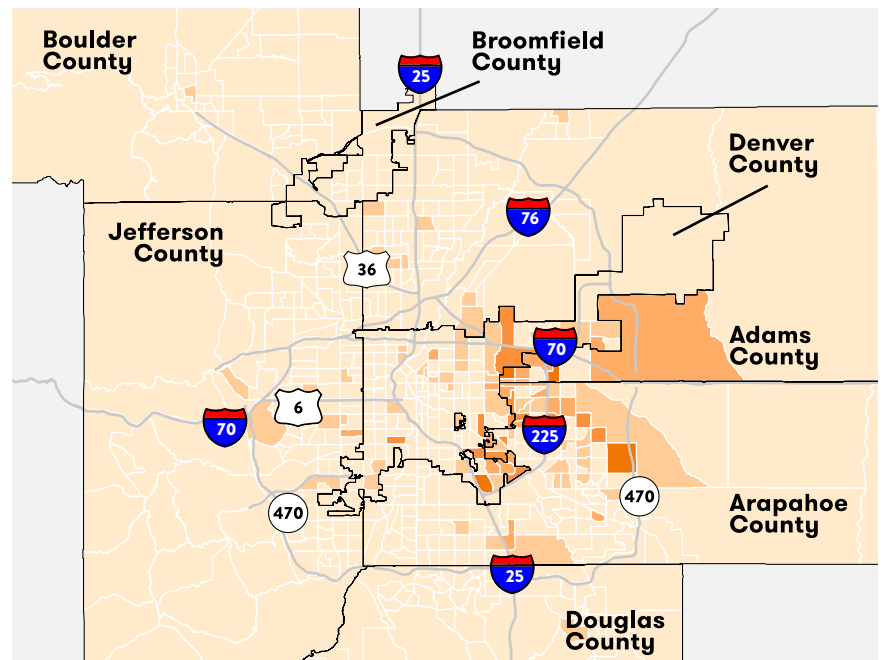
2009



## MAP

Arapahoe County saw an 8.6 percent reduction in the share of African Americans who moved from a different county in 2009, but it still captured 4 in 10 of those who moved in 2014, and almost half of those who moved within the county.

2014



## Conclusion

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The demographic shifts that have occurred across metro Denver since the end of the Great Recession have implications for all aspects of life in our region, including housing, the economy and education.

In the next chapter of the **Our Changing Denver Region** series, Shift Research Lab will examine how housing and jobs are both influencing and being influenced by growth and displacement, helping to provide a more comprehensive picture of the challenges facing metro Denver's low-income families.

Original data sources with analysis performed by Shift Research Lab. U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2009 and 2014 5-Year Estimates.



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