Using a Data Visualization to Display Select Characteristics of the Population 65 Years and Older

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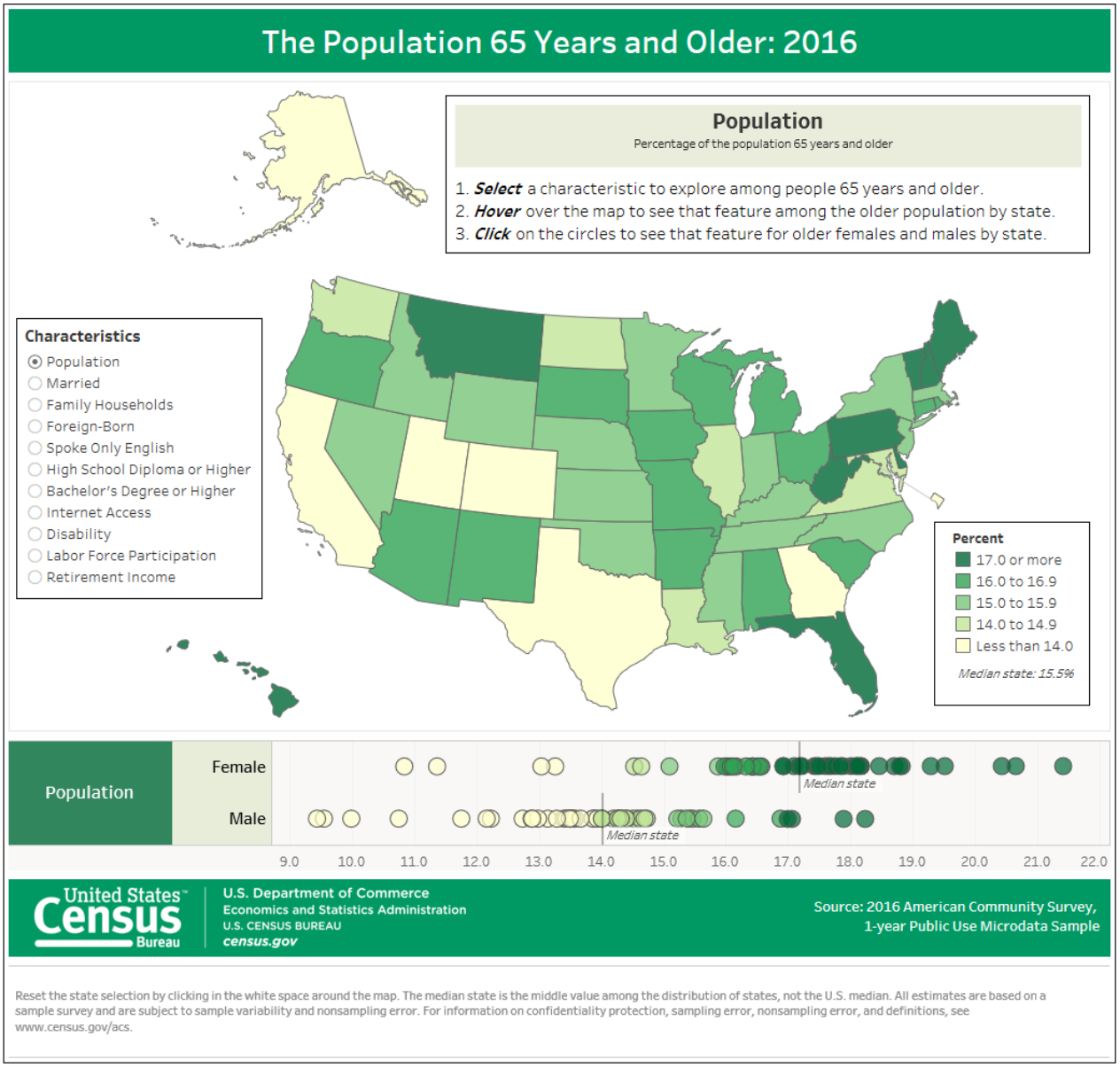
Lower fertility and increased longevity have led to the rapid growth of the older population across the world and in the United States. In the United States, the older population has grown rapidly for most of the 20th century, from 3.1 million in 1900 to 35.0 million in 2000. Furthermore, the growth of the population age 65 and older has surpassed that of the total population and the population under age 65. The U.S. will experience further growth of the older population for as more members of the baby boom cohort reach age 65.

In addition to the older population being increasingly a larger segment of the U.S. population, many of the social norms associated with old age have changed in recent years. Individuals are remaining in the labor force past the typical retirement age of 65. Modern health care improvements have allowed many to stay more active and healthy. Many remain in their own households instead of retirement or assisted care communities, even living as caregivers to grandchildren.

Growth of the U.S. older population has generated numerous studies, programs, and policy initiatives needed to advance knowledge of and plan investments for this population, including one written by the U.S. Census Bureau (forthcoming). Given the importance of effective data dissemination, the Census Bureau supplemented that report by creating an interactive data visualization that allows users to easily explore selected demographic, social, housing, and economic characteristics of the 65 years and older population. Using the 2016 1-year American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample, the tool displays topics including marital status, living arrangement, nativity, English ability, educational attainment, Internet access, disability, labor force participation, and receipt of retirement income. Along with showing the distribution across the nation, the visualization also enables users to distinguish detailed statistics for males and females and people ages 65 to 74, 75 to 84, and 85 and older at the state level. Using an interactive visualization to display this data works both to engage the public and to allow decision-makers to quickly recognize patterns and act accordingly.

Figure 1: Population



Reset the state selection by clicking in the white space around the map. The median state is the middle value among the distribution of states, not the U.S. median. All estimates are based on a sample survey and are subject to sample variability and nonsampling error. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/acs.

Figure 2: Marital Status

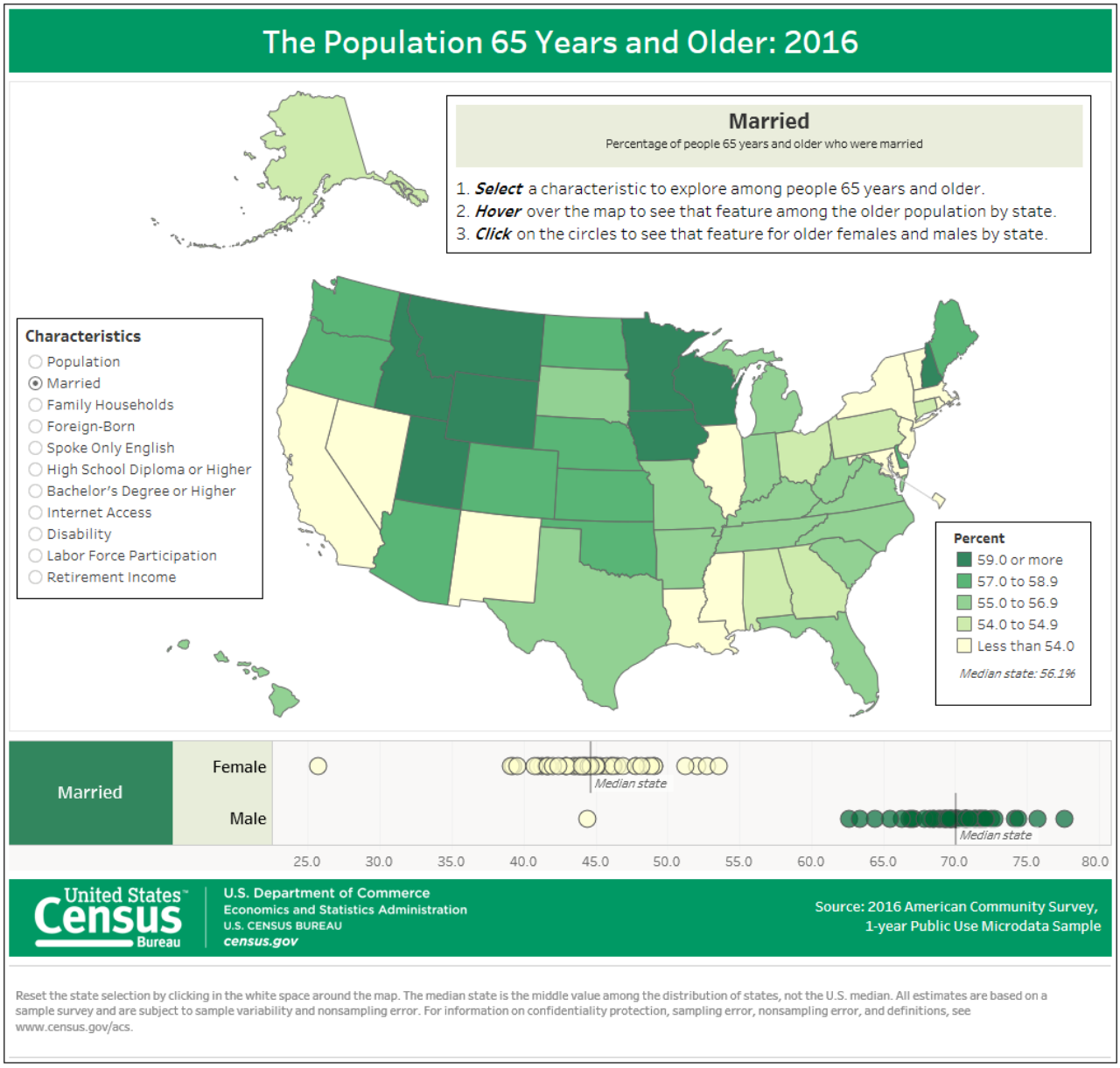
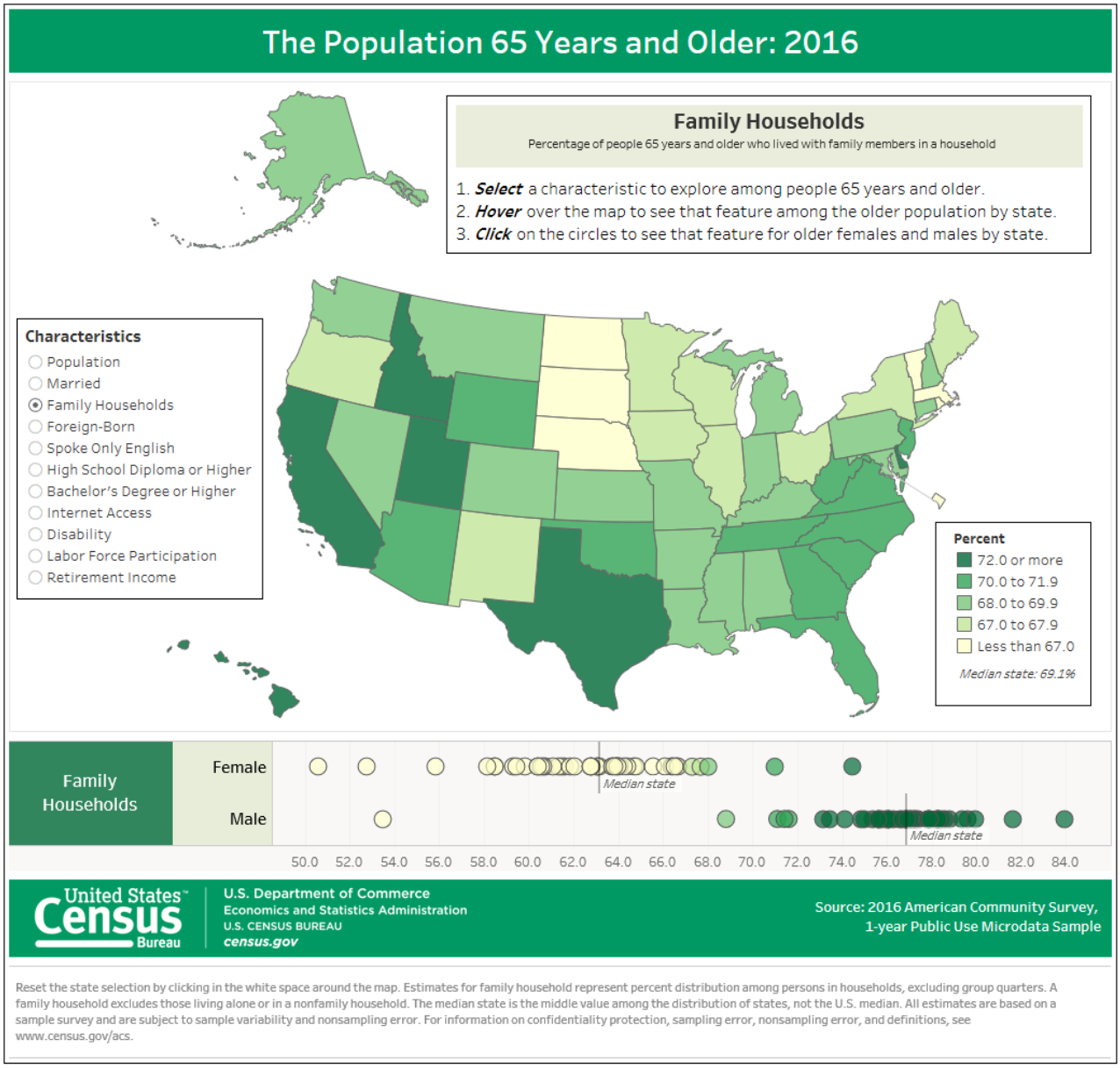



Figure 3: Living Arrangement