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Census Data Show Recession-Driven Changes

By [SAM ROBERTS](#)

A smaller share of Americans married, drove to work alone, owned their own home or moved to a new residence last year than the year before.

More lived in overcrowded housing. Property values declined. And fewer immigrants arrived, which meant that for the first time since the beginning of the decade, the total number of foreign-born people in the country did not grow.

Those were among the findings released Monday in the [Census Bureau's](#) annual [American Community Survey](#), a wealth of data comparing the nation's profile in 2008 with that of 2007.

Several experts, including Mark Mather, associate vice president for domestic programs at the Population Reference Bureau, said a number of the changes could be attributed to the national [recession](#), which began at the end of 2007. The result is an early statistical snapshot of the economic downturn and the housing bust.

For example, after rising steadily since 2000, median home values dropped in 2008, and the homeownership rate fell half a point, to 66.6 percent, the lowest since 2002. Among blacks, who have been disproportionately affected by foreclosures, homeownership fell a full point, to 45.6 percent.

Furthermore, in a country where people typically move to take advantage of better job opportunities, those who changed residences fell to 15 percent in 2008, from a recent peak of 16 percent in 2006.

"Job loss, or the potential for job loss, leads to feelings of economic insecurity," Dr. Mather said, with implications for additional matters like the timing of divorce and marriage. Such insecurity appears to have added to a longer trend in which the share of people over age 15 who have never married increased to 31

percent last year from 27 percent in 2000.

The latest figures appear likely to fuel political debates on subjects as varied as health care (the rate of uninsured children last year ranged as high as 20 percent, in Nevada) and [immigration](#) (fewer newcomers appear to be illegal or unnaturalized immigrants).

Earlier private and government surveys suggested that immigration was slowing, but these were the first annual census figures showing it to be stagnant.

“We’ve had an economic downturn, and that may well be affecting the attractiveness of the United States as a destination,” said Thomas A. Gryn, a statistician with the bureau’s immigration statistics staff.

William H. Frey, a demographer at the [Brookings Institution](#), said: “The general economic malaise in the U.S. has drawn fewer immigrants from Mexico and elsewhere. At the same time, there are increases in high-skilled immigrants from India” and some other Asian countries.

The statistics also showed that real median household income declined nationwide, rising in only five states — New York, New Jersey, Kansas, Louisiana and Texas — compared with 33 states in 2007. It ranged from \$37,790 in Mississippi to \$70,545 in Maryland. [Income inequality](#) was highest in metropolitan New York, where the top fifth of households received 20 times as much as the bottom fifth.

The median price of an owner-occupied home fell nationally (by 2 percent, to \$197,600) and in 22 states. The biggest declines were in Nevada and California (16 percent) and Florida (9 percent). Increases in value were recorded in Texas, Utah, Wyoming, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and North Carolina.

The highest housing costs for homeowners with mortgages were in California, New Jersey, Hawaii, Connecticut and Massachusetts. While those costs nationally were about the same as the year before, the drop in median income meant that more owners with a mortgage (29 percent) and renters (41 percent) were paying 35 percent or more of their income for housing.

The proportion of people lacking health insurance ranged from 4 percent in Massachusetts to 24 percent in Texas.

Overcrowding, defined as more than 1.51 people per room, afflicted 1.1 percent of households, up from 0.7 percent.

And the proportion of workers who commuted by driving without anyone else decreased slightly, to 75.5 percent from 76.1 percent, and ranged from 54 percent in New York to 83 percent in Alabama. Those who carpooled and those who used public transportation increased a bit.

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