

Households and Families

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The annual increase in the number of households is not as high as in the past.

According to estimates based on the Current Population Survey, there were 97.1 million households in the United States in March 1994. This is a net increase of about 716,000 over the total for the previous year.

The number of households rose by a total of 17.4 million or an average of 1.7 million per year during the 1970's. During the 1980's, the number of households increased by about 12.6 million or by an average of about 1.3 million households per year. Since 1990, the number of households has increased by an average of approximately 940,000 per year.

The term "household" as used in this section of the report refers to the people occupying a housing unit, rather than the

physical structure in which they live. Households exhibit diversity in their composition. The Census Bureau, however, identifies two basic types of households: family or non-family. A family household is composed of at least two persons related by birth, marriage, or adoption. A nonfamily household is either a person living alone or a householder who is not related to any of the other persons sharing their home.

The composition of households has changed significantly.

There were 68.5 million family households in 1994. Families have traditionally accounted for a large majority of all households, but their proportion of the total is significantly lower now than at various points in the past. The share of households represented by families fell from about

81 percent in 1970, to 74 percent in 1980, and 71 percent in 1990 and 1994. Thus, during the 1990's the family household's shrinking portion of the household pie has come to at least a temporary halt.

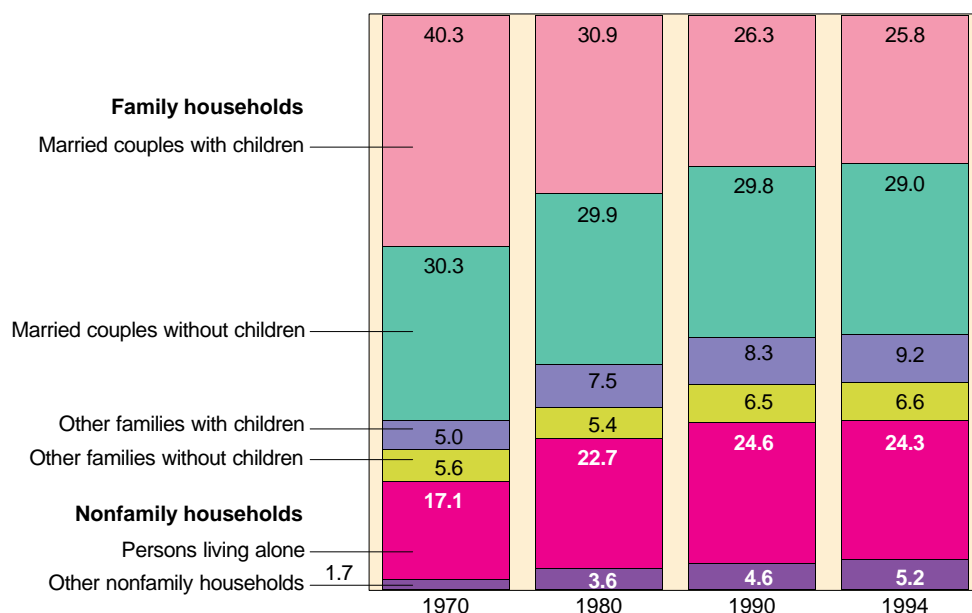
The Census Bureau differentiates between three broad categories of family households:

- married-couple families, numbering an estimated 53.2 million in 1994,
- families with female householders (no husband present), 12.4 million, and
- families with male householders (no wife present), 2.9 million.

Families do not necessarily include children. Barely half of American families had one or more children present in the home in 1994. The most recent year in which a majority of families included at least

Household Composition: 1970 to 1994

(In percent)



one child among their members was 1982. In these data, children are defined as the householder's own never-married children under 18 years old and living at home.

There were an estimated 28.6 million nonfamily households in 1994, compared with 11.9 million in 1970. During this 24-year period, the proportion of all households that were nonfamily households climbed from 19 to 30 percent. Although nonfamilies now account for 3 of every 10 households, the rate of increase in the number of this type of household has slowed significantly in recent years.

The vast majority of nonfamily households are one-person households. About 83 percent of nonfamily households in 1994 were comprised of people living alone. As with nonfamily households overall, the number of one-person households increased at a much higher rate in the 1970's than it has in the years since.

The decline in the number of persons per household has stopped.

Changes in household composition have contributed to changes in the average number of persons per household. There were 3.14 persons per household in 1970 versus 2.76 persons in 1980 and 2.63 persons in 1990. Household size has not declined since 1990. Average household size for 1993 was originally estimated to be 2.63 persons but was revised upward to 2.66 persons as a result of the introduction of the adjusted 1990 census population controls. There were 2.67 persons per household in 1994, which was not significantly higher than the revised average for 1993.

Large households have become less common. The proportion of households (with five or more persons) was 21 percent in 1970, compared with 11 percent in 1994. Medium-sized households

comprised of three or four persons accounted for about one-third of households in both 1970 and 1994. Finally, the smallest households with only one or two persons increased their share of the total from 46 percent in 1970 to 56 percent in 1994.

The number of single parents continues to increase but at a more moderate rate.

The number of single parents went from 3.8 million in 1970 to 6.9 million in 1980, increasing at an average rate of 6.0 percent per year. By 1990, there were 9.7 million single parents, but the average rate of increase during the 1980's was a more moderate 3.4 percent per year. There were an estimated 11.4 million single parents in 1994, and their number has been increasing by an average of 3.9 percent per year since 1990, a rate not significantly different from that for the 1980's. Thus,

single parents continue to increase but at much more moderate rates compared with the 1970's. About 7.3 million or 64 percent of all single parents in 1994 were White, but the incidence of one-parent situations is much higher among Blacks than Whites. Single parents accounted for almost two-thirds (65 percent) of all Black family groups¹ with children present (one and two parent situations combined), compared with 25 percent among Whites.

Mothers account for the vast majority of single parents. In 1994, there were about 9.9 million single mothers versus 1.6 million single fathers. Thus, single mothers represented 86 percent of all single parents, which was about the same as their share in 1990 and only slightly lower than their proportion in 1970 and 1980.

Most single parents have either never been married or are currently divorced. In 1994, about 38 percent of single parents were never married, and about an equal share were divorced. These two categories combined accounted for 3 of every 4 single parents. The remainder were either married but not living with their spouse (20 percent) or widowed (5 percent).

¹Parent-child family groups have at least one never-married own child under 18 years old living in them and include family households, related subfamilies, and unrelated subfamilies.

For Further Information

See: Current Population Reports, Series P20-483, *Household and Family Characteristics: March 1994*, forthcoming.

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Households, by Size: 1970 to 1994

(Percent of total households)

