

Marital Status in the U.S., 2008: Variations by Gender, Race, and Ethnicity

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Introduction

- The last 20 years have been marked by increases in the average age at marriage and increasing proportions of individuals remaining single (Lichter, McLaughlin, & Ribar, 2002). Furthermore, rates of cohabitation have increased such that it has replaced marriage as the first co-residential union experience for most young adults (Manning, Porter, & Smock, 2005).
- Marriage is less dominant as a social institution (deinstitutionalization) in the United States than at any time in history (Cherlin, 2004). This is ironic in that the awareness of individual and societal benefits related to marriage has grown (Lichter, McLaughlin, & Ribar, 2002).
- There is increasing evidence of the deinstitutionalization of American marriage, which is defined as the weakening of the social norms that define people's behavior in a social institution [such as marriage] (Cherlin, 2004).
- Utilizing the latest data from the American Community Survey (2008), this project further examines trends in the proportion of Americans who are never married with a focus on gender, race and ethnicity.
- The ACS is an ongoing survey used to gather population estimates of the U.S. (<http://www.census.gov/acs/www/>)

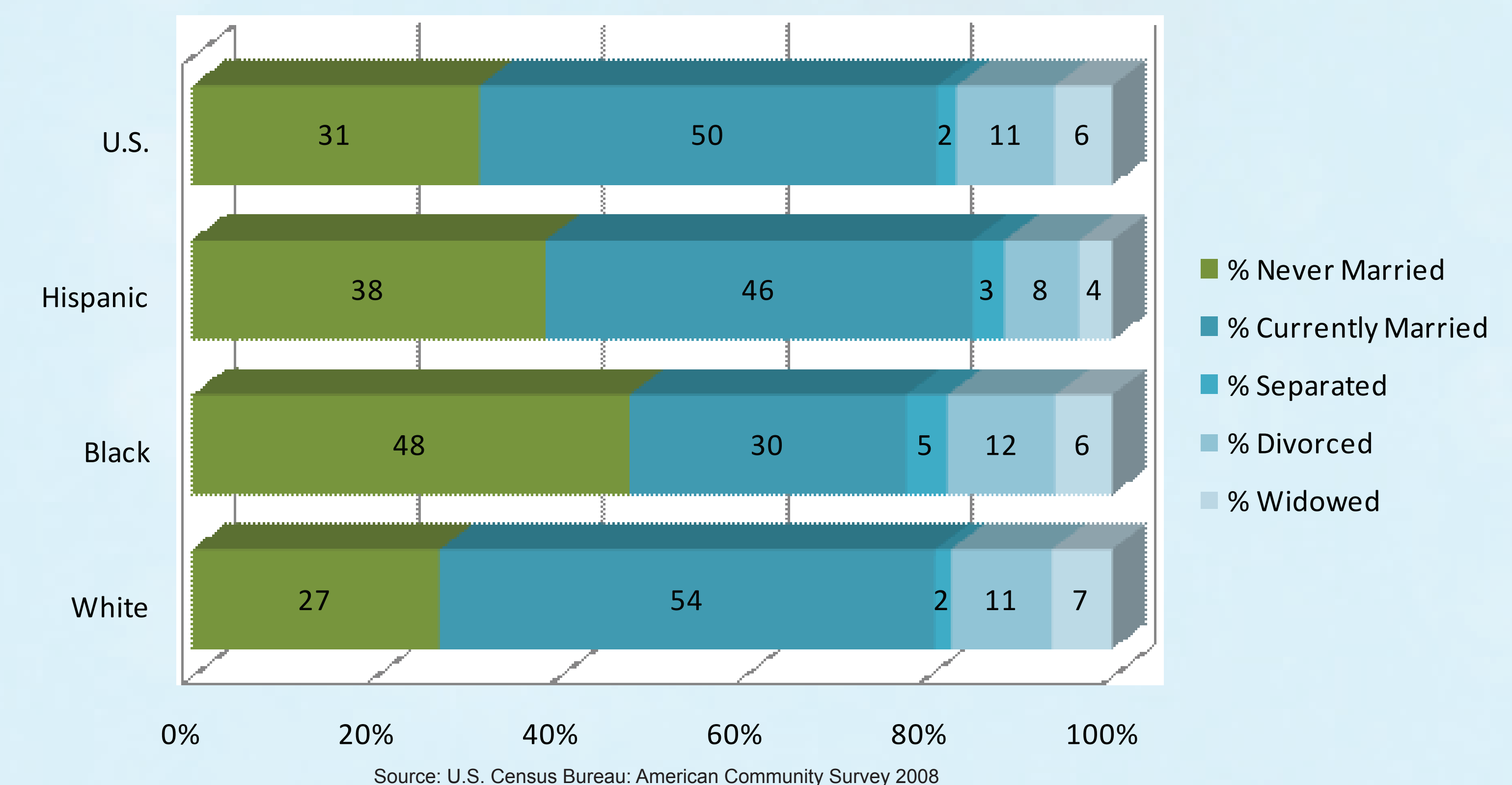
Previous Empirical Findings Regarding Differences in Marital Status by Race & Ethnicity

- Race/ethnic differences in marital status are related to union formation behavior. Blacks tend to be in cohabiting unions more than Whites and Hispanics (Raley, 1996).
- Another contributing factor to the disparity in marriage proportions can be attributed to the fact that Black Americans have an imbalanced sex ratio, whereas the ratio for Whites is more balanced (Raley, 1996).
- Wax (2007) noted that not only are Blacks less likely to marry at all ages, but the rate at which Blacks do marry declines faster over time than that of other race/ethnic groups.
- According to Raley (1996) and Wilson (1987), the availability of marriageable men contribute to the lower marriage rates of Black women. This is especially true for Black women with the lowest and highest levels of education, which can partially explain the inequalities in marriage among Blacks and other groups.

Racial & Ethnic Differences in Marital Status

- In the U.S., 48% of Blacks, 38% of Hispanics, and 27% of Whites are never married.
- Blacks have a higher proportion of never married individuals, compared to Hispanics and Whites. Nearly half of Blacks are never married.
- With regard to proportion of married individuals, 54% of Whites, 46% of Hispanics, and 30% of Blacks are currently married.
- Whites have the highest proportion of currently married individuals. The proportion of married individuals among Blacks is much lower than Whites and Hispanics.
- Blacks' marital behavior appears distinct from that of Whites and Hispanics, while whites and Hispanics are more similar in their marital behavior.

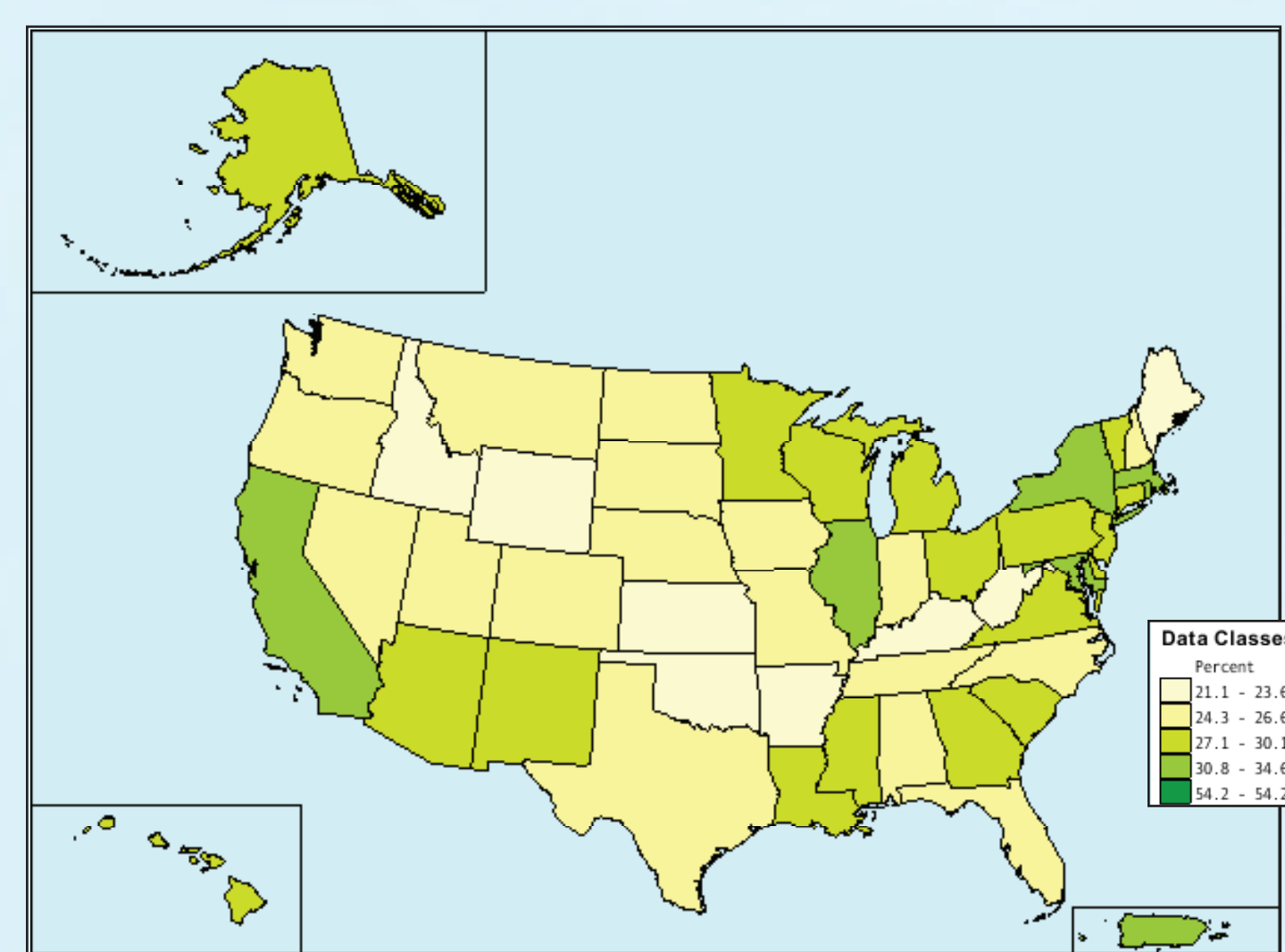
Racial & Ethnic Differences in Marital Status



Conclusions

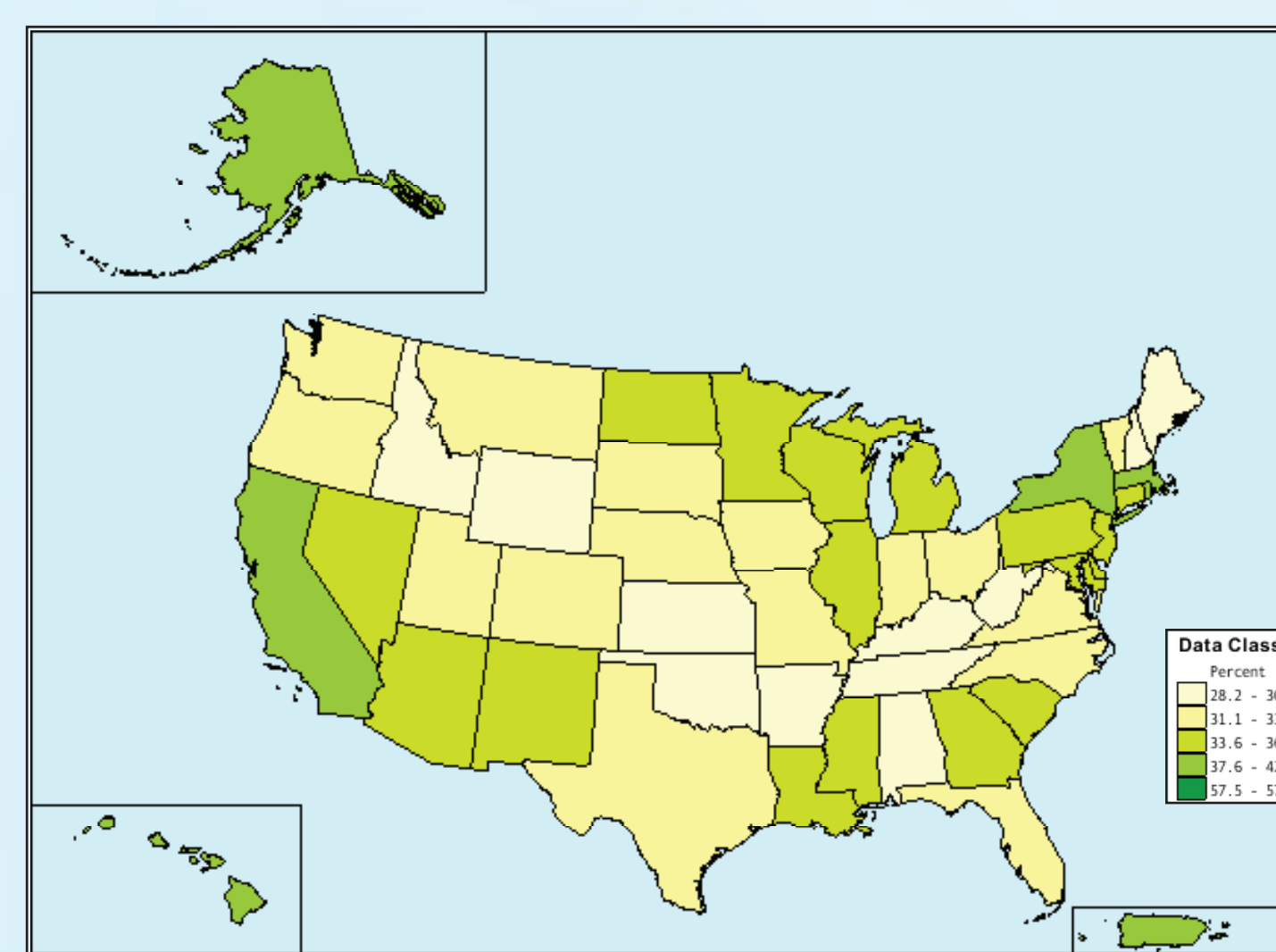
- The eastern region of the United States tends to have a higher proportion of never married individuals.
- There are differences among Whites and Blacks with respect to the proportion of individuals by marital status.
- A similar proportion of Hispanics and Whites are currently married.
- The majority of Whites are currently married, while nearly half of Blacks are never married.
- In terms of gender, there are more never married men in the United States compared to women; however, the age structure of the population in each state should be taken into account. Those states with higher proportions of older individuals tend to have higher proportions of married individuals, while those states with higher proportions of younger individuals tend to have lower proportions of married individuals.

Proportion of Population Never Married for Women



Source: U.S. Census Bureau: American Community Survey 2008

Proportion of Population Never Married for Men



Gender and Geographical Differences in Proportion of the Never Married Population

- Gender and geographical differences in the proportion of never married individuals vary between men and women.
- The proportion of Americans who are never married varies substantially across the U.S., ranging from 54.2% for women and 57.5% for men (DC, Wash)—among individuals aged 15 and older—to 21.1% for women (West Virginia) and 28.2% for men (Idaho) with a national average of 28.1% for women and 34.6% for men.
- The states with the highest proportion of their population never married tend to be clustered in the East, Great Lakes, and Southwest regions of the U.S.
- The states with the smallest proportion of their population never married tend to be clustered in the central region of the U.S.

Ten States with Highest & Lowest Proportion of Never Married Individuals

Women	Men	
DC, Wash	54.2	57.5
New York	33.9	39.7
Massachusetts	32.6	38.9
Rhode Island	31.5	38.4
California	31.4	38.3
Maryland	31.3	37.7
Illinois	30.8	37.6
Alaska	30.1	36.8
New Jersey	29.5	36.3
Delaware	29.4	36.0
US	28.1	34.6
Iowa	24.3	30.5
Tennessee	24.3	30.5
Kansas	23.6	30.5
Maine	23.5	30.1
Arkansas	23.0	29.8
Kentucky	22.9	29.7
Oklahoma	22.3	29.4
Wyoming	22.3	29.2
Idaho	21.7	29.0
West Virginia	21.1	28.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: American Community Survey 2008

Acknowledgement

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