

Sharp Decline in Income for Non-Citizen Immigrant Households, 2006-2007

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About the Report

This report outlines recent trends in the incomes of non-citizen immigrant households in the U.S. and identifies who among them experienced the largest losses from 2006 to 2007. The report includes the analysis of estimates of household income from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Pew Hispanic Center's estimates of the income of non-citizen households by principal characteristics. The analysis is based on data from the Current Population Survey, a monthly survey of about 55,000 U.S. households conducted by the Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The estimates in this report are from the surveys conducted in March which typically feature a larger sample of households.

A Note on Terminology

The terms "Latino" and "Hispanic" are used interchangeably in this report, as are the terms "foreign born" and "immigrant."

Foreign-born refers to an individual who is born outside of the United States, Puerto Rico or other U.S. territories and whose parents are not U.S. citizens.

About the Author

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1. Introduction

The current economic slowdown has taken a far greater toll on non-citizen immigrants than it has on the United States population as a whole, according to a Pew Hispanic Center analysis of new Census Bureau data. The median annual income of non-citizen immigrant households—a group that accounts for 7% of all U.S. households and 52% of all immigrant households—fell 7.3% from 2006 to 2007. In contrast, the median annual income of all U.S. households increased 1.3% during the same period.¹

The characteristics of immigrant heads of households who are not U.S. citizens help explain the vulnerability of this population to the latest economic slowdown. Most arrived in the U.S. in recent years with only a high school education or less. Many are employed in blue-collar production and construction occupations or lower-rung occupations in the service sector. The majority (56%) of non-citizen households are Hispanic. And nearly half (45%) of non-citizen immigrant households are headed by an undocumented immigrant.²

The incomes of non-citizen households have displayed great instability in the past decade—increasing rapidly in economic expansions but falling just as suddenly during economic slowdowns. These fluctuations have been far greater than the average for all U.S. households. For example, the latest turn in the economic fortunes of non-citizen households represents a sharp turnaround from the preceding year. Incomes of non-citizen households in 2006 were 4.1% higher than income levels in 2005. Incomes of all U.S. households, meanwhile, had increased 0.7%.

This report outlines recent trends in the incomes of non-citizen households and identifies who among them experienced the largest losses from 2006 to 2007. Of a total 116.8 million households in the U.S., 15.7 million are headed by immigrants. The majority of these immigrant households—8.2 million—are headed by immigrants who are not U.S. citizens.³ The data for the analysis are derived from

¹ For the Census Bureau estimates, see [DeNavas-Walt, Carmen, Bernadette D. Proctor and Jessica C. Smith \(2008\)](#).

² Unpublished Pew Hispanic Center estimates.

³ The estimates of the numbers of households are from the U.S. Census Bureau and are based on data from the March 2008 Current Population Survey.

the Current Population Survey, a monthly survey of approximately 55,000 U.S. households conducted by the Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics.⁴

Less-skilled workers in blue-collar occupations can benefit tremendously from tight labor markets but are also the most susceptible to economic downturns.⁵ In previous decades, these fluctuations played out in the ups and downs of employment throughout the goods-producing sector generally. But in recent times, the economic fate of Hispanic immigrant workers has been more specifically tied to the housing and construction sectors. Thus, these workers enjoyed significant economic gains during the construction boom of the early part of this decade, only to experience a sharp decline starting in 2006. ([Kochhar, 2008](#))

Incomes have fallen most for non-citizen households headed by Hispanics; immigrants from Mexico, other Latin American countries and the Caribbean; the most recently arrived; males, either unmarried or with no spouse present; those without a high school education; and those in construction, production or service occupations, according to the Pew Hispanic Center analysis of Census Bureau data. Those characteristics are also descriptive of most of the undocumented migrant population in the U.S.⁶ ([Passel, 2006](#))

⁴ The estimates in this report are from the Current Population Surveys conducted in March. The surveys in March typically feature a larger sample of households. Additional details are available at: <http://www.census.gov/aprd/techdoc/cps/cpsmar08.pdf>.

⁵ For example, see [Gardner \(1994\)](#), [Council of Economic Advisers \(1999\)](#) and [Freeman and Rodgers \(2005\)](#).

⁶ About 25% of undocumented household heads in 2007 were males, either unmarried or with no spouse present, according to unpublished Pew Hispanic Center tabulations. That share is higher than the 18% of all foreign-born heads of households who were males, either unmarried or with no spouse present.

2. Recent Trends in Household Income: Estimates From the Census Bureau

The steep drop in the incomes of non-citizen households is distinct from income trends among other groups. Median real income of non-citizen households declined from \$40,617 in 2006 to \$37,637 in 2007, or by 7.3%.⁷ The median income of naturalized citizen households also declined, but their loss of 1.5% appears minimal in comparison. In contrast, the median annual income of all U.S. households increased 1.3%, from \$49,568 in 2006 to \$50,233 in 2007 (Table 1). While the increase was modest, it was an improvement over the preceding year— from 2005 to 2006, household income in the U.S. increased only 0.7%.

	2005	2006	2007	CHANGE	
				2005-06	2006-07
All households	\$49,202	\$49,568	\$50,233	0.7%	1.3%
Native-born households	\$49,809	\$50,466	\$50,946	1.3%	1.0%
Foreign-born households	\$44,650	\$45,190	\$44,230	1.2%	-2.1%
Citizens	\$53,136	\$52,899	\$52,092	-0.4%	-1.5%
Non-citizens	\$39,021	\$40,617	\$37,637	4.1%	-7.3%

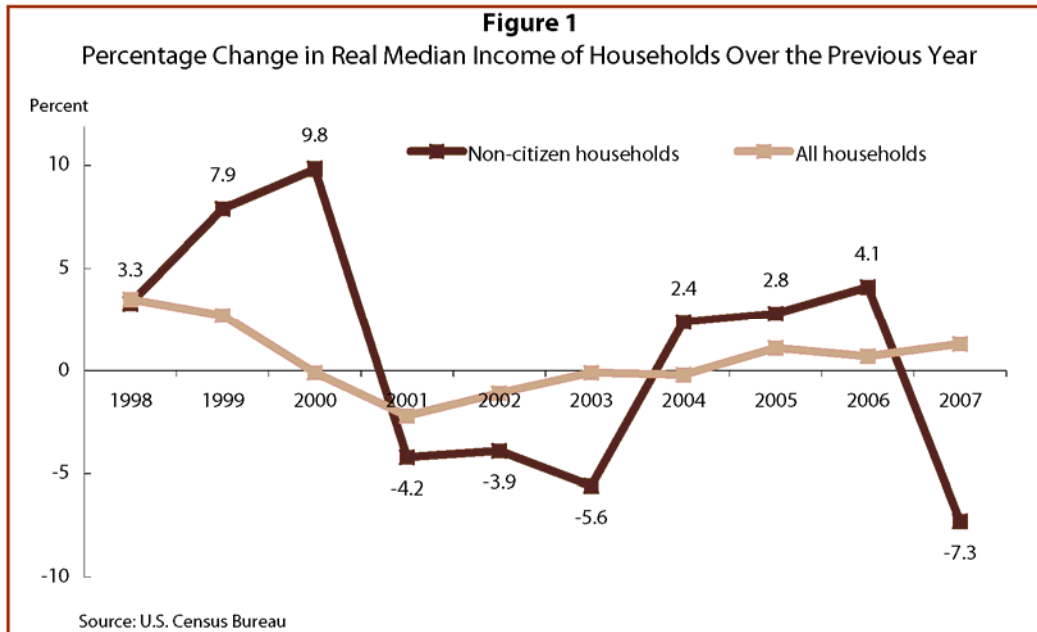
Note: Census Bureau estimates are derived from the March 2006, March 2007 and March 2008 Current Population Surveys.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The sharp reversal in the fortune of non-citizen households is not unprecedented in their recent economic history. Figure 1 shows the annual percentage change in the median real income of all households and non-citizen households from 1998 to 2007. The data illustrate that non-citizen households have been on an income roller coaster ride for the past 10 years. In contrast, economy wide fluctuations in incomes have been relatively shallow.⁸

Non-citizen household incomes increased rapidly from 1998 to 2000, as the economy reached the peak of an historic expansion. The incomes of non-citizen households increased 3.3%, 7.9% and 9.8% successively, in the three-year period

⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all income data are expressed in 2007 dollars.

⁸ Greater fluctuations in the incomes of non-citizen households stem in part from their smaller sample size. However, the changes shown in Figure 1 are statistically significant in seven of the 10 years.



from 1998 to 2000. The income gains made by non-citizen households during peak years of the economic expansion began to reverse as the economy entered a recession in 2001. The incomes of non-citizen households fell 4.2% in 2001 and decreased an additional 3.9% and 5.6% in 2002 and 2003.

The economic recovery that commenced in the middle of 2003 reestablished growth in earnings. The incomes of non-citizen households increased 2.4%, 2.8% and 4.1% in three consecutive years, from 2004 to 2006. But this growth halted and reversed sharply in 2007 as incomes dropped 7.3%. The cause for the latest setback appears to be the decline of activity in the construction industry, which shed more than 700,000 jobs in 2007 and caused a jump in the unemployment rate for foreign born and Hispanic workers. ([Kochhar, 2008](#))

The ups and downs in the incomes of non-citizens can be illustrated for a hypothetical household earning \$30,000 in 1997. Based on the growth rates shown in Figure 1, the inflation-adjusted income of this household would have peaked at \$36,715 in 2000. Trends thereafter would have reduced the household's income to \$31,908 in 2003. Economic recovery from 2004 to 2006 would have led to renewed income gains, with household income reaching \$34,966 in 2006. The latest setback in income growth would have reduced the income of this household to \$32,414 in 2007, 11.7% less than the peak attained in 2000.⁹

Figure 1 also shows the trends in income for all U.S. households. Fluctuations in the incomes of all households are far less severe than in the incomes of non-

⁹ All income data in this paragraph are expressed in 1997 dollars.

citizen households. The highest increase for all U.S. households was 3.5% in 1998 and the largest drop was 2.2% in 2001.

Although non-citizen households experienced greater income instability, their incomes increased by more than average in the past 10 years. The cumulative effect of the ups and downs was to raise household incomes for non-citizens by 8.0%—from \$30,000 in 1997 to \$32,414 in 2007 for the hypothetical household. However, for all households in the U.S., incomes increased only 5.6% on average—from \$30,000 in 1997 to \$31,682 in 2007 for a hypothetical household.¹⁰

¹⁰ The income data are expressed in 1997 dollars.

3. Incomes of Non-Citizen Households, by Selected Characteristics: Pew Hispanic Center Estimates

Census reports do not identify changes in the incomes of foreign-born households by principal characteristics such as ethnicity or national origin. Because those characteristics are not included in the Census Bureau estimates, it is impossible to determine, from those reports, how the incomes of non-citizen Hispanic households or non-citizen Mexican households changed in 2007.

Therefore, the Pew Hispanic Center developed its own estimates of changes in the income of non-citizen households by principal characteristics using the same source data as the Census Bureau—the Current Population Survey. The Center’s estimates of changes in household income may differ from those reported by the Census Bureau because of differences in the sample of households and slight differences in methodology.¹¹

For example, the Center estimates that the median income of all non-citizen households decreased 6.5% from 2006 to 2007 (Table 2).

	2005-06	2006-07
All Non-Citizens	5.4	-6.5
Ethnicity		
Hispanic	4.1	-7.5
Non-Hispanic	-3.2	-2.7
Region of Origin		
Mexico	3.5	-6.2
Caribbean	2.4	-9.6
Asian, Europe, Africa, and other	-2.1	-1.1
Period of Arrival		
Pre-1980	3.2	-2.0
1980 to 1989	-0.5	-5.6
1990 to 1999	1.4	-2.8
2000 or later	11.9	-11.8
Educational Attainment		
Less than high school	4.8	-12.5
High school diploma	-3.2	-5.5
Less than four years of college	3.4	-2.7
Bachelor's degree or more	-2.8	5.4
Occupation		
Construction and extraction	2.9	-7.9
Production	13.7	-17.3
Service	3.2	-8.8
Type of Household		
Family households		
Married couple	-0.7	1.2
Male householder, no spouse present	0.5	-9.5
Female householder, no spouse present	2.0	-2.6
Non-family households		
Male householder	12.1	-8.4
Female householder	-3.1	-3.3

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of March 2006, March 2007 and March 2008 Current Population Survey data

¹¹ In particular, the Pew Hispanic Center estimates are for civilian householders ages 16 and older and Census Bureau estimates are for all householders ages 15 and older. The Census Bureau also makes use of interpolation methods not employed by the Center.

That compares with the 7.3% reduction reported by the Census Bureau (Table 1). Similarly, the Center finds the median income of all non-citizen households increased 5.4% from 2005 to 2006 compared with the Census estimate of 4.1%. Although the estimates for each year are somewhat different, the two sets of estimates show very similar turnarounds in the economic fortune of non-citizen households.

The current economic slowdown is hurting Hispanic non-citizen households and households headed by immigrants from Mexico and Caribbean and Latin American countries more than it is hurting non-citizen households of other ethnic groups and origins. The median income of Hispanic non-citizen households fell 7.5% in 2007 compared with a loss of only 2.7% for non-citizen households that are not Hispanic. Differences also emerge across immigrants from different regions. Non-citizens from Mexico lost 6.2% and those from the Caribbean and other Latin American countries lost 9.6%, while non-citizens from Asia, Europe and other regions experienced a loss of only 1.1%. (See Appendix Table A2 for estimates of the median incomes of these households)

The time an immigrant has spent in the U.S. was also a factor in income declines. The incomes of the most recent immigrants (those who entered in 2000 or later) dropped by 11.8%, far in excess of the losses incurred by non-citizens who have been in the U.S. longer.

An immigrant's education level is directly associated with losses in household income. The incomes of households led by non-citizens with less than a high school education dropped by 12.5%. Those with a high school education lost 5.5% of their incomes and those with some college education lost just 2.7% of their incomes. Meanwhile, incomes for college-educated non-citizen households increased 5.4%.

Reflecting this pattern of income losses for the least educated, non-citizens employed in production (-17.3%) and construction occupations (-7.9%) were among those whose incomes fell the most. Incomes of households led by non-citizens working in service occupations dropped 8.8%. Those three occupations employed nearly half (48.7%) of non-citizen household heads in 2008.

Households led by non-citizen males, either unmarried or with no spouse present, were at a clear disadvantage. Those households experienced the largest losses in incomes—9.5% for family households and 8.4% for non-family households headed by males.¹² In contrast, the incomes of married couple households increased 1.2% from 2006 to 2007.

¹² See <http://www.census.gov/population/www/cps/cpsdef.html> for definitions of family and non-family households.

In sum, household incomes have fallen most for non-citizens who are Hispanic; from Mexico, other Latin American countries and the Caribbean; recently arrived; males, either unmarried or with no spouse present; lacking a high school education; and employed in construction, production or service occupations. Those characteristics of non-citizen households experiencing declines in income that are higher than average are also associated with likely undocumented status for the head of household.

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Appendix A: Data Tables

	NON-CITIZENS		CITIZENS		ALL FOREIGN BORN	
	2005-06	2006-07	2005-06	2006-07	2005-06	2006-07
All	5.4	-6.5	-1.2	-1.2	1.2	-1.9
Ethnicity						
Hispanic	4.1	-7.5	2.5	4.3	3.3	-2.8
Non-Hispanic	-3.2	-2.7	-1.1	-6.8	-2.1	-3.1
Region of Origin						
Mexico	3.5	-6.2	4.7	6.4	7.0	-4.8
Caribbean	2.4	-9.6	-1.0	-0.6	-0.3	-1.7
Asian, Europe, Africa, and other	-2.1	-1.1	-1.5	-6.2	0.3	-4.7
Period of Arrival						
Pre-1980	3.2	-2.0	-8.1	-2.5	-5.3	0.7
1980 to 1989	-0.5	-5.6	10.5	-2.1	3.2	0.0
1990 to 1999	1.4	-2.8	2.1	-6.3	1.5	-0.5
2000 or later	11.9	-11.8	40.6	3.7	15.9	-13.6
Educational Attainment						
Less than high school	4.8	-12.5	0.8	-14.5	3.5	-12.7
High school diploma	-3.2	-5.5	-2.9	-2.9	-0.6	-5.4
Less than four years of college	3.4	-2.7	3.6	1.8	3.3	-0.7
Bachelor's degree or more	-2.8	5.4	4.1	-6.1	-1.3	0.5
Occupation						
Construction and extraction	2.9	-7.9	-1.8	7.2	1.4	-2.8
Production	13.7	-17.3	-3.5	19.3	1.7	-7.4
Service	3.2	-8.8	-0.8	0.7	1.8	-5.5
Type of Household						
Family households						
Married couple	-0.7	1.2	3.6	-0.5	1.1	1.4
Male householder, no spouse present	0.5	-9.5	5.1	1.8	-0.5	0.9
Female householder, no spouse present	2.0	-2.6	-6.1	8.8	-3.2	-2.8
Non-family households						
Male householder	12.1	-8.4	-8.9	0.6	6.2	-6.1
Female householder	-3.1	-3.3	4.3	-3.7	-2.2	-3.8

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of March 2006, March 2007 and March 2008 Current Population Survey data

	NON-CITIZENS			CITIZENS			ALL FOREIGN BORN		
	2005	2006	2007	2005	2006	2007	2005	2006	2007
All	\$38,235	\$40,312	37,700	53,104	52,447	51,800	44,331	\$44,860	\$44,001
Ethnicity									
Hispanic	32,606	33,936	31,392	41,604	42,658	44,500	34,851	35,993	35,000
Non-Hispanic	53,104	51,418	50,022	61,367	60,674	56,552	57,433	56,252	54,498
Region of Origin									
Mexico	30,907	31,982	30,000	39,297	41,147	43,801	32,394	34,656	33,000
Caribbean	37,810	38,708	35,000	46,732	46,277	46,000	41,421	41,289	40,601
Asian, Europe, Africa, and other	55,228	54,092	53,521	62,631	61,702	57,890	58,568	58,736	56,000
Period of Arrival									
Pre-1980	37,793	39,006	38,242	52,425	48,191	47,000	47,794	45,262	45,592
1980 to 1989	39,856	39,643	37,440	54,918	60,674	59,400	48,129	49,660	49,660
1990 to 1999	40,582	41,135	40,000	53,135	54,239	50,808	43,546	44,220	44,000
2000 or later	35,452	39,674	35,000	32,925	46,293	48,000	35,059	40,639	35,120
Educational Attainment									
Less than high school	29,441	30,851	27,000	30,187	30,420	26,000	29,738	30,791	26,892
High school diploma	37,173	35,993	34,000	41,821	40,595	39,400	38,235	38,009	35,952
Less than four years of college	41,848	43,284	42,100	52,587	54,504	55,500	47,794	49,362	49,000
Bachelor's degree or more	69,115	67,152	70,781	87,025	90,562	85,081	79,656	78,611	79,000
Occupation									
Construction and extraction	37,981	39,078	36,000	51,320	50,394	54,000	40,582	41,137	40,000
Production	36,192	41,135	34,004	52,637	50,802	60,625	42,483	43,191	40,000
Service	31,873	32,908	30,000	42,483	42,163	42,468	35,709	36,363	34,362
Type of Household									
Family households									
Married couple	46,779	46,457	47,000	66,593	68,983	68,644	54,918	55,532	56,329
Male householder, no spouse present	44,019	44,220	40,000	56,027	58,912	60,002	47,794	47,552	48,000
Female householder, no spouse present	25,405	25,915	25,241	38,814	36,448	39,638	31,863	30,851	30,002
Non-family households									
Male householder	30,161	33,825	31,000	39,526	35,993	36,200	32,925	34,965	32,822
Female householder	22,304	21,608	20,900	19,710	20,567	19,800	21,242	20,780	20,000

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of March 2006, March 2007 and March 2008 Current Population Survey data

Table A3
Number of Foreign-Born Household Heads, by Characteristic, 2006, 2007 and 2008
(thousands)

	NON-CITIZENS			CITIZENS			ALL FOREIGN BORN		
	2006	2007	2008	2006	2007	2008	2006	2007	2008
All	7,815	8,191	8,218	6,971	7,200	7,460	14,786	15,391	15,678
Ethnicity									
Hispanic	4,434	4,603	4,607	2,157	2,255	2,408	6,591	6,858	7,015
Non-Hispanic	3,381	3,587	3,611	4,814	4,945	5,052	8,195	8,533	8,663
Region of Origin									
Mexico	2,961	3,110	3,211	1,036	1,090	1,173	3,997	4,200	4,384
Caribbean	1,864	1,897	1,825	1,634	1,783	1,839	3,498	3,680	3,664
Asian, Europe, Africa, and other	2,989	3,184	3,183	4,296	4,327	4,447	7,285	7,511	7,630
Period of Arrival									
Pre-1980	930	950	853	3,456	3,409	3,429	4,386	4,359	4,281
1980 to 1989	1,548	1,553	1,507	2,020	2,197	2,166	3,568	3,750	3,674
1990 to 1999	3,005	2,929	2,815	1,312	1,395	1,572	4,316	4,324	4,387
2000 or later	2,333	2,759	3,043	183	199	293	2,516	2,957	3,336
Educational Attainment									
Less than high school	3,010	2,994	3,068	1,507	1,492	1,417	4,518	4,486	4,484
High school diploma	1,799	1,900	1,858	1,646	1,662	1,843	3,445	3,562	3,701
Less than four years of college	1,092	1,208	1,150	1,383	1,512	1,523	2,476	2,720	2,673
Bachelor's degree or more	1,913	2,089	2,142	2,434	2,534	2,677	4,347	4,623	4,819
Occupation									
Construction and extraction	848	979	892	230	256	261	1,078	1,235	1,153
Production	577	591	632	413	320	361	990	912	993
Service	1,461	1,417	1,536	852	895	866	2,313	2,312	2,403
Type of Household									
Family households									
Married couple	4,498	4,654	4,542	4,146	4,294	4,325	8,644	8,948	8,866
Male householder, no spouse present	608	600	621	358	316	290	967	916	911
Female householder, no spouse present	1,023	1,120	1,121	847	887	939	1,871	2,007	2,061
Non-family households									
Male householder	1,018	1,147	1,212	662	619	713	1,680	1,766	1,925
Female householder	658	666	710	957	1,078	1,189	1,615	1,744	1,899

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of March 2006, March 2007 and March 2008 Current Population Survey data

	NON-CITIZENS			CITIZENS			ALL FOREIGN BORN		
	2006	2007	2008	2006	2007	2008	2006	2007	2008
All	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Ethnicity									
Hispanic	56.7	56.2	56.1	30.9	31.3	32.3	44.6	44.6	44.7
Non-Hispanic	43.3	43.8	43.9	69.1	68.7	67.7	55.4	55.4	55.3
Region of Origin									
Mexico	37.9	38.0	39.1	14.9	15.1	15.7	27.0	27.3	28.0
Caribbean	23.8	23.2	22.2	23.4	24.8	24.7	23.7	23.9	23.4
Asian, Europe, Africa, and other	38.2	38.9	38.7	61.6	60.1	59.6	49.3	48.8	48.7
Period of Arrival									
Pre-1980	11.9	11.6	10.4	49.6	47.3	46.0	29.7	28.3	27.3
1980 to 1989	19.8	19.0	18.3	29.0	30.5	29.0	24.1	24.4	23.4
1990 to 1999	38.4	35.8	34.3	18.8	19.4	21.1	29.2	28.1	28.0
2000 or later	29.9	33.7	37.0	2.6	2.8	3.9	17.0	19.2	21.3
Educational Attainment									
Less than high school	38.5	36.6	37.3	21.6	20.7	19.0	30.6	29.1	28.6
High school diploma	23.0	23.2	22.6	23.6	23.1	24.7	23.3	23.1	23.6
Less than four years of college	14.0	14.7	14.0	19.8	21.0	20.4	16.7	17.7	17.1
Bachelor's degree or more	24.5	25.5	26.1	34.9	35.2	35.9	29.4	30.0	30.7
Occupation¹									
Construction and extraction	14.4	15.7	14.2	4.8	5.1	5.2	10.1	11.0	10.2
Production	9.8	9.5	10.1	8.6	6.4	7.1	9.3	8.1	8.8
Service	24.9	22.7	24.4	17.8	18.0	17.2	21.7	20.6	21.2
Type of Household									
Family households									
Married couple	57.6	56.8	55.3	59.5	59.6	58.0	58.5	58.1	56.6
Male householder, no spouse present	7.8	7.3	7.6	5.1	4.4	3.9	6.5	5.9	5.8
Female householder, no spouse present	13.1	13.7	13.6	12.2	12.3	12.6	12.7	13.0	13.1
Non-family households									
Male householder	13.0	14.0	14.7	9.5	8.6	9.6	11.4	11.5	12.3
Female householder	8.4	8.1	8.6	13.7	15.0	15.9	10.9	11.3	12.1

¹ Occupation distribution is based on total employment of household heads. Not all occupations are shown.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of March 2006, March 2007 and March 2008 Current Population Survey data