

## Regional Young Child Poverty in 2008: Rural Midwest Sees Increased Poverty, While Urban Northeast Rates Decrease

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American Community Survey (ACS) data released by the U.S. Census Bureau on September 29, 2009, reveal interesting trends in poverty for young children—under the age of 6. For those young children living in the rural Midwest, poverty rates increased by 1.7 percent over the past year, while rates for young children in the urban Northeast dropped by 0.7 percentage point. Also striking is the very high rate of young child poverty experienced by those in the South: Nearly one-third of young children in the rural South are poor.

Although all children suffer consequences of being poor, young children are especially vulnerable. Women in poverty are more likely to have babies of low birth weight, a correlate of later health problems, infant mortality, and more cognitive and emotional problems.<sup>1</sup> Other challenges include poorer health, lower quality education and programs, lower cognitive and behavioral functioning, and greater parental stress. There is also evidence that poverty is associated with a lower quality home environment and less effective parenting practices.<sup>2</sup> Being poor also means that families may have trouble accessing adequate quality food and young children may experience stunted growth. Poor children live in lower-quality housing. In many communities, this means young children are exposed to lead paint. Prenatal exposure and exposure at young ages through inhalation and ingestion of paint chips can lead to a variety of health problems and decreased intelligence. The consequences of early poverty ripple through the life cycle for many children. Childhood health problems often follow into adulthood, and early childhood poverty is correlated with fewer years of completed schooling.<sup>3</sup>

While changes from 2007 through 2008 are important, they cannot fully reflect the current recession. ACS data are collected throughout the calendar year, so the 2008 data reflect January through December 2008. When data are available for 2009, we are likely to see a bleaker picture for poverty and for children in particular. Consensus among experts is that 2008 does not capture the worst effects of the

### Key Findings

- Significant changes in poverty rates among children under 6 in 2008 included the following:
  - \* Estimated young child poverty in the rural Midwest was 22.8 percent, significantly higher than in 2007 (21.0 percent).
  - \* The young child poverty rate in Northeastern central cities fell by 0.7 percentage point to 27.6 percent. However, Northeastern central cities continue to have higher young child poverty rates than Northeastern rural and suburban places.
- Young children in the rural South remain the most likely to be poor. Nearly one-third of young children in the rural South are poor.
- Estimates suggest more than one in five American children under age 6 was in poverty in 2008.
- In no urban, suburban, or rural regional breakdowns did the number of young children in poverty decline significantly since 2007, and some areas saw increases in the number of children under age 6 living in poverty.

recession.<sup>4</sup> As Robert Greenstein of the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities noted, a further weakened economy coupled with higher unemployment in 2009 may lead to the highest poverty rate in 50 years.<sup>5</sup> Emily Monea and Isabel Sawhill predicted future poverty rates given the economic climate and found a bleak picture for America's children, suggesting that by 2011, between 5.4 and 6.1 million more children will be living in poverty without dramatic changes.<sup>6</sup>

Table 1 is restricted to very young children and shows 2008 estimates of those in poverty, poverty rates, and the change in poverty rates since 2007 by region and for the United States. Poverty determination is based on the U.S.

TABLE 1. YOUNG CHILD POVERTY BY PLACE SIZE IN 2008

	2008 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY											
	RURAL				SUBURBAN				CENTRAL CITY			
	POPULATION UNDER AGE 6 FOR WHOM POVERTY IS DETERMINED	BELOW POVERTY	PERCENT BELOW POVERTY	PERCENT POINT CHANGE SINCE 2007	POPULATION UNDER AGE 6 FOR WHOM POVERTY IS DETERMINED	BELOW POVERTY	PERCENT BELOW POVERTY	PERCENT POINT CHANGE SINCE 2007	POPULATION UNDER AGE 6 FOR WHOM POVERTY IS DETERMINED	BELOW POVERTY	PERCENT BELOW POVERTY	PERCENT POINT CHANGE SINCE 2007
UNITED STATES	3,660,889	970,407	26.5%	0.8%	12,383,825	1,906,933	15.4%	0.6%	8,431,955	2,240,857	26.6%	-0.2%
NORTHEAST	330,783	68,788	20.8%	1.9%	2,289,294	256,293	11.2%	0.7%	1,308,055	360,560	27.6%	-2.4%
MIDWEST	1,117,265	254,505	22.8%	1.7%	2,543,142	341,095	13.4%	0.5%	1,558,611	450,533	28.9%	0.3%
SOUTH	1,679,310	523,601	31.2%	0.1%	4,628,916	825,360	17.8%	0.4%	2,947,165	855,078	29.0%	-0.4%
WEST	533,531	123,513	23.2%	0.4%	2,922,473	484,185	16.6%	0.9%	2,618,124	574,686	22.0%	0.7%

<sup>1</sup>Levels of urbanization are defined as follows: rural consists of ACS geographic components "Not in metropolitan or micropolitan statistical area" and "in micropolitan statistical area"; suburban includes "In metropolitan statistical area - not in principal city" and central city includes "In metropolitan statistical area - in principal city".

<sup>2</sup>Data are based on 2008 American Community Survey estimates. For corresponding margins of error, refer to the US Census American Community Survey.

Office of Management and Budget income thresholds, which vary by family composition. In 2008, the poverty line for a family of four (two adults, two children) was \$21,834.

Observed differences are likely driven by a host of factors not captured here. These include the demographics of the population (race, single motherhood, parental education and employment, and so on) and local characteristics, including access to services, housing quality, social capital, and job market conditions.

Data released earlier this month by the Census Bureau showed that while young children remain the most likely to be in poverty, this group did not see overall increases in the national poverty rate at 21.3 percent in 2008.<sup>7</sup> However, the Census Bureau's own report indicates that the overall U.S. poverty rate jumped significantly from 2007, and more people in the United States are living in poverty than in any year since 1960.<sup>8</sup> The Census report indicates that children have been especially hard hit by this recession: The poverty rate for all children under age 18 reached 19 percent in 2008, up from 18 percent a year earlier. Of all ages, children remain the group most likely to be poor.<sup>9</sup> According to the Census report, they represent 24.6 percent of the population but 35.3 percent of those in poverty.

The ACS data allow examination of the poverty rate by state and place.

Table 2 shows estimated child poverty—under age 18—numbers and rates for each state, each region, and the nation, by place. Rates by state and place are presented for illustrative purposes to guide comparisons, but in most cases, differences since 2007 are not statistically significant.

Persistent child poverty indicates a need for policies that focus on children, particularly in the early years. In this "great recession," while it may be tempting to cut services to children and families, this is a time when policies need to target these groups and do a better job of assisting those who are in poverty. Additionally, since this recession is not over, and we have seen dramatic declines in income, many families above the poverty line may need additional support to remain afloat. Investing in children is an essential priority

to ensure their successful long-term outcomes. Expanding the provisions provided for in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act may be an important first step, but other measures to address child poverty and focus on poverty reduction are also important. While President Barack Obama's administration has taken important steps to assist struggling families, there is still important work to be done at both the federal and state levels. Keeping poverty reduction as a top policy priority will enhance the well-being of America's children.

## Data

This analysis is based upon U.S. Census Bureau estimates from the 2008 ACS released on September 29, 2009. For more details or information, please refer to the U.S. Census American Community Survey.<sup>10</sup> Tables were produced by aggregating information from detailed tables available on American FactFinder ([http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en)). These estimates are meant to give perspective on child poverty, but since they are based on survey data, caution must be used in comparing across years or places, as the margin of error may indicate that seemingly disparate numbers fall within sampling error.<sup>11</sup> Regional differences highlighted in this brief are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

## ENDNOTES

1. Brooks-Gunn, Jeanne, and Greg J. Duncan. 1997. "The effects of poverty on children." *The Future Of Children / Center For The Future Of Children, The David And Lucile Packard Foundation* 7:55–71.
2. See Bradley, Robert H., Corwyn, Robert F., McAdoo, H. P., & García Coll, C. G. (2001). The home environments of children in the United States part I: Variations by age, ethnicity, and poverty status. *Child Development*, 72, 1844–1886.
3. See Case, Anne, Angela Fertig, and Christina Paxson. 2005. "The lasting impact of childhood health and cir-

TABLE 2. CHILD POVERTY BY PLACE SIZE IN 2008

	2008 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY											
	RURAL				SUBURBAN				CENTRAL CITY			
	POPULATION UNDER AGE 18 FOR WHOM POVERTY IS DETERMINED	BELOW POVERTY	PERCENT BELOW POVERTY	PERCENT POINT CHANGE SINCE 2007	POPULATION UNDER AGE 18 FOR WHOM POVERTY IS DETERMINED	BELOW POVERTY	PERCENT BELOW POVERTY	PERCENT POINT CHANGE SINCE 2007	POPULATION UNDER AGE 18 FOR WHOM POVERTY IS DETERMINED	BELOW POVERTY	PERCENT BELOW POVERTY	PERCENT POINT CHANGE SINCE 2007
<b>UNITED STATES</b>	<b>11,187,926</b>	<b>2,499,004</b>	<b>22.3%</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>38,282,003</b>	<b>5,047,946</b>	<b>13.2%</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>23,355,074</b>	<b>5,693,920</b>	<b>24.4%</b>	<b>-0.3</b>
ALABAMA	307,572	81,031	26.3%	-1.0	515,688	79,456	15.4%	-5.0	282,753	80,031	28.3%	0.0
ALASKA	43,745	7,472	17.1%	-2.5	41,564	3,592	8.6%	-0.3	78,964	7,203	9.1%	-0.3
ARIZONA	125,261	34,995	27.9%	-3.1	727,078	117,107	16.1%	0.4	828,202	197,288	23.8%	1.5
ARKANSAS	262,216	71,343	27.2%	-1.7	228,908	42,992	18.8%	-2.2	200,201	57,514	28.7%	1.6
CALIFORNIA	162,179	35,297	21.8%	3.3	4,732,249	776,814	16.4%	1.2	4,323,520	888,799	20.6%	1.1
COLORADO	149,192	20,099	13.5%	-5.3	605,684	64,171	10.6%	-0.7	436,060	95,139	21.8%	-0.8
CONNECTICUT	64,771	6,872	10.6%	3.1	514,107	41,735	8.1%	0.5	220,420	50,973	23.1%	2.8
DELAWARE	39,808	8,085	20.3%	6.7	141,415	14,804	10.5%	-1.0	23,213	4,844	20.9%	-14.6
FLORIDA	205,079	56,796	27.7%	6.2	2,743,782	461,457	16.8%	1.7	992,771	203,031	20.5%	-0.9
GEORGIA	434,306	116,778	26.9%	1.0	1,676,873	266,455	15.9%	0.9	390,572	118,659	30.4%	-2.2
HAWAII	84,801	9,253	10.9%	-0.4	133,936	11,809	8.8%	-1.2	62,229	7,171	11.5%	4.4
IDAHO	137,479	28,328	20.6%	2.9	149,478	17,837	11.9%	-1.3	120,610	18,308	15.2%	-2.0
ILLINOIS	346,926	67,420	19.4%	2.0	1,741,520	199,108	11.4%	0.5	1,052,502	268,669	25.5%	-0.2
INDIANA	330,259	64,768	19.6%	1.7	730,229	92,452	12.7%	1.1	488,936	126,007	25.8%	0.5
IOWA	291,163	47,144	16.2%	1.5	204,543	15,499	7.6%	1.3	202,484	38,042	18.8%	-0.5
KANSAS	236,774	40,036	16.9%	0.0	228,799	17,367	7.6%	-1.3	221,660	42,369	19.1%	0.8
KENTUCKY	401,161	115,910	28.9%	-0.4	358,883	59,980	16.7%	-0.6	231,155	56,810	24.6%	0.0
LOUISIANA	287,728	82,945	28.8%	-5.0	491,824	85,762	17.4%	-2.2	315,015	102,087	32.4%	0.9
MAINE	105,542	18,597	17.6%	-0.8	124,397	13,645	11.0%	-1.0	37,355	9,989	26.7%	8.6
MARYLAND	65,853	8,942	13.6%	2.6	1,031,077	82,632	8.0%	0.1	226,042	43,316	19.2%	-2.4
MASSACHUSETTS	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1,084,594	95,810	8.8%	-0.2	322,415	73,624	22.8%	-3.1
MICHIGAN	392,259	79,429	20.2%	0.6	1,329,292	172,029	12.9%	0.4	636,534	206,845	32.5%	-0.9
MINNESOTA	304,831	41,982	13.8%	0.4	661,003	48,786	7.4%	-1.0	267,313	49,443	18.5%	-1.2
MISSISSIPPI	411,794	144,028	35.0%	-0.2	251,624	53,082	21.1%	4.1	88,472	31,462	35.6%	-0.4
MISSOURI	354,436	86,547	24.4%	2.9	756,902	94,283	12.5%	-0.2	281,072	78,187	27.8%	1.8
MONTANA	140,873	31,154	22.1%	1.7	28,464	4,031	14.2%	2.7	49,262	9,873	20.0%	3.0
NEBRASKA	167,730	23,117	13.8%	-2.3	112,431	9,788	8.7%	0.6	155,265	25,449	16.4%	-2.3
NEVADA	45,824	5,736	12.5%	-1.4	318,991	43,090	13.5%	0.5	279,661	47,763	17.1%	-0.4
NEW HAMPSHIRE	88,884	11,439	12.9%	4.0	146,910	6,069	4.1%	-1.2	43,967	7,558	17.2%	-0.4
NEW JERSEY	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1,798,186	187,912	10.5%	0.9	228,359	65,466	28.7%	-0.7
NEW MEXICO	168,678	46,731	27.7%	-0.1	151,430	33,873	22.4%	-3.2	172,595	38,412	22.3%	-0.7
NEW YORK	313,193	64,014	20.4%	1.0	1,854,076	168,511	9.1%	0.5	2,178,095	596,815	27.4%	-1.2
NORTH CAROLINA	627,103	157,597	25.1%	0.8	913,460	141,303	15.5%	1.4	669,466	140,618	21.0%	-1.2
NORTH DAKOTA	70,587	11,413	16.2%	0.9	28,862	3,706	12.8%	4.9	39,785	6,147	15.5%	1.6
OHIO	515,115	101,027	19.6%	1.0	1,548,750	179,136	11.6%	-0.6	628,500	218,224	34.7%	0.2
OKLAHOMA	305,323	80,371	26.3%	1.1	325,178	50,726	15.6%	0.1	257,216	69,324	27.0%	-1.0
OREGON	180,444	39,785	22.0%	0.9	389,716	60,861	15.6%	1.3	282,299	53,552	19.0%	1.1
PENNSYLVANIA	404,659	65,009	16.1%	-0.8	1,719,227	191,394	11.1%	1.1	593,247	190,032	32.0%	-2.6
RHODE ISLAND	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	152,475	18,937	12.4%	-0.5	72,448	15,879	21.9%	-4.5
SOUTH CAROLINA	246,379	65,009	26.4%	0.3	650,684	120,946	18.6%	0.7	155,066	41,913	27.0%	1.1
SOUTH DAKOTA	101,270	21,543	21.3%	0.0	42,635	3,530	8.3%	2.3	49,346	8,903	18.0%	2.1
TENNESSEE	366,312	90,898	24.8%	-1.6	584,440	74,914	12.8%	-2.2	503,252	150,664	29.9%	-0.0
TEXAS	718,738	187,423	26.1%	-0.6	2,885,609	481,416	16.7%	-0.5	3,046,302	828,964	27.2%	-0.8
UTAH	87,199	12,266	14.1%	-3.2	590,311	49,751	8.4%	0.4	164,576	26,432	16.1%	-2.0
VERMONT	80,730	11,324	14.0%	-0.9	36,411	3,292	9.0%	2.2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
VIRGINIA	220,607	48,903	22.2%	2.8	1,095,826	100,884	9.2%	0.3	475,934	96,947	20.4%	0.8
WASHINGTON	173,787	35,068	20.2%	0.1	915,339	105,297	11.5%	-0.8	429,179	76,637	17.9%	-0.9
WEST VIRGINIA	166,932	44,101	26.4%	0.1	167,340	29,841	17.8%	-0.2	44,062	13,046	29.8%	1.0
WISCONSIN	324,710	48,415	14.9%	0.6	606,342	47,681	7.9%	-0.2	362,103	76,084	21.0%	-3.9
WYOMING	86,625	9,196	10.6%	-3.1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	25,788	3,013	11.7%	4.7
NORTHEAST	1,071,729	187,146	17.5%	1.1	7,430,383	727,305	9.8%	0.6	3,705,599	1,012,366	27.3%	-1.3
MIDWEST	3,436,060	632,841	18.4%	1.0	7,991,308	883,365	11.1%	0.1	4,385,500	1,144,369	26.1%	-0.4
SOUTH	5,066,911	1,360,160	26.8%	0	14,062,611	2,146,650	15.3%	0.2	8,011,030	2,067,595	25.8%	-0.6
WEST	1,613,226	318,857	19.8%	-0.4	8,797,701	1,290,626	14.7%	0.6	7,252,945	1,469,590	20.3%	0.7

N/A = Not applicable.

<sup>1</sup>Levels of urbanization are defined as follows: rural consists of ACS geographic components "not in metropolitan or micropolitan statistical area" and "in micropolitan statistical area"; suburban includes "in metropolitan statistical area - not in principal city" and central city includes "in metropolitan statistical area - in principal city"

<sup>2</sup>Data are based on 2008 American Community Survey estimates. For corresponding margins of error, refer to the US Census American Community Survey.

<sup>3</sup>Percentage point changes are based on unrounded poverty percentages and may differ slightly from those that would be obtained using rounded figures.

- cumstance.” *Journal of Health Economics* 24:365–389, who examined the impact of prenatal conditions and child health at age 7 on various outcomes and McLoyd, Vonnie. C. (1998). Socioeconomic disadvantages and child development. *American Psychologist*, 53, 185–204.
4. See Burtless, Gary. September 10, 2009. “Prepared Remarks on the 2008 poverty statistics” (Brookings Institution). [http://www.brookings.edu/events/2009/0910\\_poverty.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/events/2009/0910_poverty.aspx); Greenstein, Robert. September 10, 2009. “Greenstein Statement on Census’ 2008 Health Insurance & Poverty Data” <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=2911>; Monea, Emily and Isabel Sawhill. September 10, 2009. “Simulating the Effect of the ‘Great Recession’ on Poverty” (Brookings Institution), [http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2009/0910\\_poverty\\_monea\\_sawhill.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2009/0910_poverty_monea_sawhill.aspx); Parrott, Sharon. 2008. “Recession Could Cause Large Increases in Poverty and Push Millions into Deep Poverty.” (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities), <http://www.cbpp.org/files/11-24-08pov.pdf>.
5. Greenstein, Robert. September 10, 2009. “Greenstein Statement on Census’ 2008 Health Insurance & Poverty Data” <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=2911>.
6. Monea, Emily and Isabel Sawhill. September 10, 2009. “Simulating the Effect of the ‘Great Recession’ on Poverty” (Brookings Institution), [http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2009/0910\\_poverty\\_monea\\_sawhill.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2009/0910_poverty_monea_sawhill.aspx); see also Parrott, Sharon. 2008. “Recession Could Cause Large Increases in Poverty and Push Millions into Deep Poverty.” (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities), <http://www.cbpp.org/files/11-24-08pov.pdf> who estimates closer to 2.6 to 3.3 million additional children in poverty.
7. Higher poverty rates for young children result in large part because younger children typically having younger parents who often command lower wages: see McLoyd, Vonnie. C. (1998). Socioeconomic disadvantages and child development. *American Psychologist*, 53, 185–204.
8. U.S. Census Bureau. September, 2009 Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage. <http://www.census.gov/prod/2009pubs/p60-236.pdf> and see U.S. Census Bureau. September 2009 Poverty: 2008 Highlights <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/poverty08/pov08hi.html>. See also Burtless, Gary. September 29, 2009. “Prepared Remarks on the 2008 poverty statistics (Brookings Institution).” [http://www.brookings.edu/events/2009/0910\\_poverty.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/events/2009/0910_poverty.aspx)
9. Moses, Jay. September 10, 2009. “A Legacy of Poverty: New Census Numbers Fail to Reflect the Severity of Inherited Problems” (Center for American Progress), [http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2009/09/poverty\\_obama\\_era.html](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2009/09/poverty_obama_era.html).
10. [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTGeoSearchByListServlet?ds\\_name=ACS\\_2007\\_3YR\\_G00\\_&\\_lang=en&\\_ts=268570514748](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DTGeoSearchByListServlet?ds_name=ACS_2007_3YR_G00_&_lang=en&_ts=268570514748)
11. Refer to the U.S. Census Bureau’s published tables for detailed margins of error.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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