

THE BABY BOOMER GENERATION: WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THE 2005 AMERICAN HOUSING SURVEY

The U.S. population reached the 300 million mark in October of this year. This milestone causes many to focus their attention on the post-World War II generation because they make up a large portion of the U.S. population and will retire soon. Coined the “baby boomers,” the people of this generation were born between 1946 and 1964 and will reach the ages of 42 through 60 this year. The baby boomers make up 26 percent of the American population—a larger portion of the population than any other generation—and their living in retirement will have large ramifications for the rest of society. This article examines some socioeconomic characteristics we can learn about this generation from the 2005 American Housing Survey¹ (AHS), and compares the characteristics of the baby boomers to those of the generation born before the baby boomers (pre-1946) and the generation born after the baby boomers (post-1964). These comparisons suggest how things might change once the baby boomers retire.

Baby boomers are racially and ethnically more diverse than their predecessors but are less so than the generation born after them. They are more likely to have traditional husband-and-wife families, be more educated, and have higher incomes. They are also more likely to live in larger, more expensive homes but have the lowest housing cost burden, or housing costs relative to household income. Baby boomers prefer living in suburban areas and represent the greatest number of occupants of single-family detached homes.

Demographic Characteristics

The 2005 AHS indicates that baby boomers are heads of households for 39 percent of American households. This is nearly 40 percent larger than the number of households headed by pre-baby boomers, or those born prior to 1946, and nearly 20 percent larger than the number of households headed by post-baby boomers, or those born after 1964. Pre-baby boomers, the oldest generation of households, represent 28 percent of U.S. households and post-baby boomers, the youngest generation of households, represent 33 percent. The median age of a baby-boomer householder (a husband, wife, or other head of a household) is 49 years compared with 71 years for a pre-baby boomer householder and 32 years for a post-baby boomer householder.

Relative to the other two generations of households, baby boomers are in the middle range in terms of racial and ethnic diversity, the number of householders who are native born versus foreign born, and family size. Baby boomers represent the largest percentage of households with husband-and-wife families and the lowest percentage of nonfamily households. They have obtained higher levels of education and earn higher incomes than either of the other age groups.

In comparing these three generations of householders, it becomes clear that immigration has been changing the picture of race and ethnicity in America. As shown in Exhibit 1, the 2005 AHS estimates that non-Hispanic Whites make up 73 percent of baby-boomer householders, which is less than the 81 percent for the oldest generation of householders but more than the 64 percent for the youngest generation of householders. From the oldest to the youngest age cohort, nearly all other race and ethnicity groups make up increasingly larger proportions of U.S. householders. For example, Hispanics account for only 6 percent of householders in the pre-baby boomer age cohort; this proportion increases to 10 percent for the baby boomer age cohort and 16 percent for the post-baby boomer age cohort. Change in U.S. citizenship for the three generations of householders reflects a similar pattern. Exhibit 2 shows that 92 percent of pre-baby boomer householders are estimated to be native U.S. citizens, but only 89 percent of the baby boomer generation and 86 percent of the post-baby boomer group are native U.S. citizens.

Household composition or family type also varies among the different generations. As displayed in Exhibit 3, baby boomer households headed by a



Exhibit 1. Householder by Race and Ethnicity, 2005

Race and Ethnicity	Post-Baby Boomers		Baby Boomers		Pre-Baby Boomers	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
White, non-Hispanic	22,845,000	64	31,086,000	73	24,799,000	81
Black, non-Hispanic	5,054,000	14	5,051,000	12	2,944,000	10
Hispanic	5,653,000	16	4,144,000	10	1,785,000	6
Asian only	1,443,000	4	1,460,000	3	606,000	2
Other	779,000	2	800,000	2	453,000	1
Group size	35,774,000		42,541,000		30,586,000	
Percent of all households	33		39		28	

Exhibit 2. Householder by Citizenship, 2005

Citizenship	Post-Baby Boomers		Baby Boomers		Pre-Baby Boomers	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Native, born in United States	29,563,000	83	36,491,000	86	27,568,000	90
Native, born in Puerto Rico or U.S. outlying area	773,000	2	882,000	2	474,000	2
Native, born abroad of U.S. parent(s)	253,000	1	281,000	1	70,000	—
Foreign born, U.S. citizen by naturalization	1,521,000	4	2,546,000	6	1,918,000	6
Foreign born, not a U.S. citizen	3,665,000	10	2,341,000	6	556,000	2

Exhibit 3. Family and Household Type, 2005

Family and Household Type	Post-Baby Boomers		Baby Boomers		Pre-Baby Boomers	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Husband-and-wife families	15,815,000	44	24,947,000	59	14,724,000	48
Male-headed families	2,253,000	6	1,712,000	4	648,000	2
Female-headed families	5,931,000	17	5,054,000	12	2,325,000	8
Nonfamily households	11,776,000	33	10,828,000	25	12,888,000	42

husband and wife represent the family type of 59 percent of all households in this generation, in contrast with 48 percent for the oldest generation and 44 percent for the youngest generation. Of the oldest group, a large percentage, 42 percent, is made up of nonfamily households; that is, people who either live alone or with nonrelatives. This is not

surprising given the age of these householders. Nearly a quarter of the youngest group are family households headed by an unmarried householder, with 6 percent headed by men and 17 percent by women. Household size also differs among the three age groups. As displayed in Exhibit 4, baby boomer households are evenly split between households of

one or two people and households of three or more. In contrast, 87 percent of pre-baby boomer households are made up of one or two people, whereas post-baby boomer households are larger with 53 percent having three or more people.

Baby boomers are more educated than the other generations, although the youngest age cohort still has time to surpass them in attaining higher education. Exhibit 5 examines the highest education level attained by householders, including their spouse, if any. The AHS estimates that 12 percent of baby boomers have received a graduate or professional degree, compared with 9 percent for both the pre- and post-baby boomer generations. A greater percentage of the youngest age cohort (23 percent) has received a bachelor's degree (B.A.) as the highest level of education compared with the baby boomer generation (19 percent) and the oldest generation (12 percent). Of note is that considerably more baby boomers than pre-baby boomers (19 percent versus 12 percent) obtained a B.A. as their highest level of education, while only slightly more (12 percent compared to 9

percent) obtained a graduate or professional degree. A higher percentage of baby boomers (13 percent) have obtained a vocational or associate degree than either the youngest (11 percent) or oldest (8 percent) generations. Of concern is that a larger percentage of the youngest cohort (14 percent) has less than a high school degree compared with 11 percent for those a generation older. As noted earlier, however, more schooling is still available to these younger people and a General Equivalency Diploma, or GED, is also an option.

Baby boomers have more household income than the other age groups. As shown in Exhibit 6, 58 percent of baby boomer households have incomes of \$50,000 or more compared with 44 percent of post-baby boomers and 28 percent of pre-baby boomers. The exhibit also shows that 46 percent of the oldest generation of households have incomes of less than \$25,000 compared with 26 percent for the youngest group and 19 percent for baby boomers.² The median income for baby boomers is \$58,000 compared with \$43,000 for the youngest age cohort and \$27,250 for

Exhibit 4. Number of Persons in Household, 2005

Number of Persons in Household	Post-Baby Boomers		Baby Boomers		Pre-Baby Boomers	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1	7,916,000	22	9,048,000	21	12,222,000	40
2	8,905,000	25	12,229,000	29	14,443,000	47
3-4	13,978,000	39	15,873,000	37	3,301,000	11
5 or more	4,976,000	14	5,391,000	13	620,000	2

Exhibit 5. Highest Education Level of Householder and Spouse, 2005

Highest Education Level	Post-Baby Boomers		Baby Boomers		Pre-Baby Boomers	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Less than high school degree	7,589,000	14	7,372,000	11	9,716,000	23
High school degree	24,364,000	44	29,006,000	45	19,674,000	47
Vocational or associate's degree	6,396,000	11	8,130,000	13	3,219,000	8
Bachelor's degree	12,697,000	23	12,410,000	19	5,063,000	12
Graduate or professional degree	4,936,000	9	7,485,000	12	3,755,000	9
Group size	55,982,000		64,403,000		41,427,000	
Percent of all group members		34		40		26



Exhibit 6. Household Income, 2005

Household Income	Post-Baby Boomers		Baby Boomers		Pre-Baby Boomers	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Less than \$25,000	9,283,000	26	8,210,000	19	14,150,000	46
\$25,000 to \$49,999	10,749,000	30	9,795,000	23	7,871,000	26
\$50,000 to \$99,999	11,156,000	31	14,846,000	35	6,082,000	20
\$100,000 to \$149,999	3,090,000	9	5,949,000	14	1,538,000	5
\$150,000 or more	1,496,000	4	3,741,000	9	944,000	3
Median (\$)	43,000		58,000		27,250	

the oldest generation. These income patterns demonstrate that baby boomers earn the highest income of all generations, but they are in their preretirement and highest income-earning years compared with pre-baby boomers who are, for the most part, past their income-earning years and post-baby boomers who are just getting started.

Housing Characteristics and Costs

Compared with their predecessors, baby boomers represent a smaller percentage of homeowners, but they generally own larger, more expensive homes. They incur higher monthly housing costs than either of the other two generations but have the lowest housing cost burden. Baby boomers are more likely to dwell in single-family detached homes and are the least likely to live in multifamily structures or condominiums or cooperatives.

A larger percentage of the pre-baby boomer generation own their homes than either baby boomers or the youngest generation, which is to be expected given homeownership typically increases with age. Of the estimated 108.9 million households in the United

States, 74.9 million, or 69 percent, are homeowners and 34.0 million, or 31 percent, are renters. Exhibit 7 shows that approximately 76 percent of baby boomers own their homes compared with 81 percent of the oldest age cohort. Only 50 percent of the youngest group are currently homeowners.

Although baby boomers are less likely to own their homes than their predecessors, they own more expensive ones. Exhibit 8 shows that 35 percent of baby boomers own homes valued at \$250,000 or more compared with 30 percent for both the pre- and post-baby boomer generations. For homes valued at less than \$100,000, the oldest age cohort own more (33 percent) compared with 28 percent for the youngest group and 27 percent for baby boomers. The median value of an owner-occupied home for the baby boomer generation is \$170,000 relative to \$155,000 for the youngest generation and \$150,000 for the oldest generation. Most of the oldest generation have paid off their homes. Of the oldest group, only 30 percent have mortgages on their property compared with 70 percent for baby boomers and 82 percent for post-baby boomers.

Baby boomers also live in larger homes than the other age groups. As shown in Exhibit 9, which includes both owners and renters, nearly 60 percent of baby boomers live in homes with six or more

Exhibit 7. Ownership of Occupied Housing, 2005

Ownership of Occupied Housing	Post-Baby Boomers		Baby Boomers		Pre-Baby Boomers	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Owner occupied	17,739,000	50	32,461,000	76	24,750,000	81
Renter occupied	18,035,000	50	10,079,000	24	5,836,000	19

Exhibit 8. Owner-Occupied Units: House Values and Mortgage, 2005

Owner-Occupied Units	Post-Baby Boomers		Baby Boomers		Pre-Baby Boomers	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
House values						
Less than \$100,000	5,017,000	28	8,661,000	27	8,266,000	33
\$100,000 to \$249,999	7,422,000	42	12,438,000	38	9,079,000	37
\$250,000 to \$499,999	3,781,000	21	7,271,000	22	4,801,000	19
\$500,000 or more	1,519,000	9	4,092,000	13	2,604,000	11
Median value (\$)	155,000		170,000		150,000	
Mortgage on property	14,480,000		22,796,000		7,403,000	
Percent with a mortgage	82		70		30	

Exhibit 9. Number of Rooms, 2005

Number of Rooms	Post-Baby Boomers		Baby Boomers		Pre-Baby Boomers	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1	173,000	—	110,000	—	95,000	—
2	465,000	1	303,000	1	221,000	1
3–5	20,647,000	58	16,729,000	39	14,221,000	47
6–7	10,313,000	29	15,856,000	37	11,286,000	37
8–9	2,871,000	8	6,437,000	15	3,178,000	10
10 or more	1,305,000	4	3,106,000	7	1,585,000	5

rooms compared with 52 percent for pre-baby boomers and 41 percent for post-baby boomers. Few households have homes of one or two rooms. Baby boomers typically live in homes with more bedrooms and bathrooms. Exhibit 10 shows that 71 percent of baby boomers’ homes have three or more bedrooms relative to 61 percent for the oldest generation and 54 percent for the youngest age cohort. Exhibit 11 shows that 54 percent of baby boomers’ homes have two or more bathrooms compared with 47 percent for the oldest age cohort and 42 percent for the youngest group.

Coinciding with larger homes and a high percentage of mortgages, baby boomers pay higher monthly housing costs. As illustrated in Exhibit 12, 24 percent of baby boomers (both owners and renters) incur monthly housing costs of \$1,500 or more compared with 18 percent for the youngest generation and 10 percent for the oldest. The exhibit also shows

that 62 percent of the youngest generation is more likely to have monthly housing costs in the middle range of \$500 to \$1,500 compared with 52 percent for baby boomers and 40 percent for pre-baby boomers. Average monthly housing costs are \$1,157 for baby boomers, \$1,044 for the youngest generation, and \$725 for the oldest group. Median monthly housing costs are \$917 for baby boomers, \$849 for the youngest age cohort, and \$512 for the oldest group.

Monthly housing cost burdens are fairly similar for owners across the different age groups but vary considerably for renters. Exhibit 12 shows that, for owners, the median cost burden is highest for the youngest cohort, at 21.4, followed by the oldest cohort, at 19.3, and the baby boomers, at 18.5. A different pattern exists for renters. The median cost burden for renter-occupied housing is 38.6 for pre-baby boomers, 28.1 for post-baby boomers, and 27.6 for baby boomers.³



Exhibit 10. Number of Bedrooms, 2005

Number of Bedrooms	Post-Baby Boomers		Baby Boomers		Pre-Baby Boomers	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
0	395,000	1	248,000	1	174,000	1
1	5,206,000	15	3,343,000	8	3,326,000	11
2	10,982,000	31	8,739,000	21	8,496,000	28
3	13,526,000	38	19,284,000	45	13,338,000	44
4	4,732,000	13	8,569,000	20	4,222,000	14
5 or more	934,000	3	2,358,000	6	1,029,000	3

Exhibit 11. Number of Bathrooms, 2005

Number of Bathrooms	Post-Baby Boomers		Baby Boomers		Pre-Baby Boomers	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
0	217,000	1	203,000	—	135,000	—
1	15,930,000	45	13,073,000	31	10,904,000	36
1.5	4,506,000	13	6,067,000	14	5,317,000	17
2	13,362,000	37	18,487,000	43	11,926,000	39
3 or more	1,759,000	5	4,711,000	11	2,304,000	8

Exhibit 12. Monthly Housing Costs, 2005

Monthly Housing Costs	Post-Baby Boomers		Baby Boomers		Pre-Baby Boomers	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Less than \$250	2,538,000	7	3,389,000	8	5,544,000	18
\$250 to \$499	4,872,000	14	6,613,000	16	9,657,000	32
\$500 to \$999	14,666,000	41	13,654,000	32	9,245,000	30
\$1,000 to \$1,499	7,484,000	21	8,692,000	20	3,098,000	10
\$1,500 to \$1,999	3,064,000	9	4,665,000	11	1,480,000	5
\$2,000 to \$2,499	1,284,000	4	2,274,000	5	645,000	2
\$2,500 or more	1,865,000	5	3,254,000	8	916,000	3
Average (\$)	1,044		1,157		725	
Median (\$)	849		917		512	
Median cost burden						
Owner occupied	21.4		18.5		19.3	
Renter occupied	28.1		27.6		38.6	

The type of housing structure occupied by both owners and renters is illustrated in Exhibit 13, which shows that baby boomers and pre-baby boomers live in similar types of housing. Two small exceptions are that 72 percent of baby-boomer households while only 69 percent of pre-baby boomer households live in single-family detached homes; and, secondly, only 2 percent of baby boomers but 6 percent of pre-baby boomers live in large multifamily units of 50 or more units. A much larger percentage of households from the youngest generation (37 percent) live in multifamily units compared with baby boomer households (16 percent) and pre-baby boomer households (19 percent). Nearly equal percentages of the three age groups live in single-family attached homes and manufactured or mobile homes.

Only 5 percent of all households live in condominiums or cooperatives; of those housing units, 75 percent are owner occupied and 25 percent are renter occupied. The oldest generation is slightly more likely to live in condominiums or cooperatives than the other two groups. As shown in Exhibit 14, 6 percent of the pre-baby boomers, 5 percent of the post-baby boomers, and 4 percent of the baby boomers inhabit condominiums or cooperatives.

Where Do They Live?

Baby boomers are fairly evenly represented in all areas of the nation, although they prefer the suburbs to central cities or nonmetropolitan areas. Of the three age groups, baby boomers are the least likely to live in multifamily structures of five or more units.

All three age cohorts are fairly evenly represented in the Midwest and the South, but a larger percentage of the oldest householders live in the Northeast and a larger percentage of the youngest householders have settled in the West. As shown in Exhibit 15, 21 percent of the oldest generation live in the Northeast compared with 19 percent of baby boomers and 17 percent of post-baby boomers. On the other hand, 23 percent of the youngest generation live in the West compared with 22 percent of baby boomers and 20 percent of pre-baby boomers.

Baby boomers are more likely to live in the suburbs than are the other two generations. Exhibit 15 shows that 49 percent of baby boomers live in the suburbs compared with 45 percent of pre-baby boomers and 44 percent of post-baby boomers. The youngest generation (34 percent) is more likely to live in

Exhibit 13. Type of Housing, 2005

Type of Housing	Post-Baby Boomers		Baby Boomers		Pre-Baby Boomers	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Single-family, detached	18,193,000	51	30,617,000	72	21,216,000	69
Single-family, attached	2,354,000	7	2,141,000	5	1,666,000	5
Multifamily						
2 to 4 units	4,002,000	11	2,433,000	6	1,607,000	5
5 to 19 units	5,571,000	16	2,637,000	6	1,420,000	5
20 to 49 units	1,980,000	6	997,000	2	796,000	3
50 units or more	1,492,000	4	1,052,000	2	1,807,000	6
Manufactured housing	2,183,000	6	2,664,000	6	2,073,000	7

Exhibit 14. Condominiums and Cooperatives, 2005

Condominiums and Cooperatives	Post-Baby Boomers		Baby Boomers		Pre-Baby Boomers	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Occupied units	1,866,000	5	1,815,000	4	1,949,000	6



central cities than is the baby boomer generation (27 percent) or oldest generation (26 percent). Of the three groups, households from the oldest generation (29 percent) are more likely to live in nonmetro areas than are the baby boomers (24 percent) and post-baby boomers (22 percent).

About 15 percent of all housing units are in multifamily buildings of five or more units. Residents of these units often enjoy selected amenities, such as recreational facilities, or community services, such as daycare. Younger households (25 percent) are much more likely to live in these buildings than in other structure types (single-family homes and smaller multifamily buildings of two to four units), compared with the oldest generation (13 percent) and baby boomers (11 percent). Of the estimated 17.8 million multifamily buildings (five or more units) in the United States, Exhibit 16 shows that 51 percent are occupied by the youngest generation, 26 percent by baby boomers, and 23 percent by the oldest generation. Recreational facilities, such as a community center or walking and jogging trails, are offered by 43 percent of these units. Of those living in multifamily structures with five or more units, the oldest generation is more likely to live in units offering recreational services (51 percent) compared with 41 percent of the youngest generation and 39 percent of baby boomers. Community services such as shuttles buses or daycare services are offered by 20 percent of these multifamily buildings. The exhibit shows that, of those households in structures

of five or more units, 34 percent of the oldest generation are more likely to inhabit units offering community services, followed by 19 percent of baby boomers and 14 percent of post-baby boomers.

Exhibit 16 also illustrates security features offered by these multifamily buildings. Approximately 3 in 10 respondents reported that their communities use special entry systems such as key cards or security guard approval. Of those households in multifamily (5+) units, the oldest age cohort (48 percent) is more likely to live in units with security features, followed by baby boomers (28 percent) and the youngest generation (25 percent). About 18 percent of these multifamily buildings are gated communities; that is, surrounded by walls or fences. Of those inhabiting multifamily (5+) units buildings, the youngest cohort (56 percent) is most likely to live in gated communities relative to 18 percent of pre-baby boomers and 16 percent of baby boomers.

The survey asks any household in a multifamily structure with someone aged 55 or older if their community offers assistive services, such as meals and transportation, or personal care services, such as bathing and dressing. The only age group with complete information for questions of this sort is the oldest generation. Exhibit 17 shows that, of those living in multifamily buildings of five or more units, the AHS estimates that 25 percent of the oldest generation are offered assistive services and that 8 percent are offered personal care services.

Exhibit 15. Location by Region and Metropolitan Area, 2005

Location	Post-Baby Boomers		Baby Boomers		Pre-Baby Boomers	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Region						
Northeast	5,974,000	17	8,036,000	19	6,327,000	21
Midwest	8,170,000	23	9,626,000	23	7,160,000	23
South	13,289,000	37	15,488,000	36	10,945,000	36
West	8,319,000	23	9,385,000	22	6,153,000	20
Metropolitan area						
Central city	12,287,000	34	11,371,000	27	7,924,000	26
Suburb	15,690,000	44	20,907,000	49	13,880,000	45
Nonmetropolitan area	7,775,000	22	10,257,000	24	8,781,000	29

Exhibit 16. Selected Characteristics of Multifamily Communities, 2005

Description	Post-Baby Boomers		Baby Boomers		Pre-Baby Boomers	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Community recreation facilities available ^a	3,747,000	41	1,848,000	39	2,068,000	51
Community services provided ^b	1,252,000	14	894,000	19	1,363,000	34
Entry system required to access building	2,230,000	25	1,284,000	28	1,918,000	48
Walls or fences surrounding community	1,830,000	56	731,000	16	705,000	18
All multifamily (5+) units	9,043,000		4,686,000		4,024,000	
Percent of all living in multifamily (5+) units	51		26		23	

^a Any of the following: community center or clubhouse; golf course; walking/jogging trails; or private or restricted access to beach, park, or shoreline.

^b Shuttle bus or daycare services.

Exhibit 17. Selected Characteristics of Senior Assisted Living in Multifamily Communities, 2005

Description	Pre-Baby Boomers	
	Number	Percent
Management provides:		
Assistive services ^a	997,000	25
Personal care services ^b	333,000	8
All multifamily (5+) units	4,024,000	
Percent of all living in multifamily (5+) units	23	

^a Any of the following: meals, transportation, housekeeping, managing finances, use of telephone, or shopping.

^b Any of the following: bathing, eating, moving about, dressing, or use of toilet.

Exhibit 18 summarizes how respondents living in communities with multifamily buildings rated their homes and neighborhoods as a place to live on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the worst and 10 being the best. The data include responses from both owners and renters. Little variation existed among residents of owner-occupied units, with the oldest generation giving their units the highest average rating (8.82) and the youngest generation giving the lowest rating (8.09). Renters responded with more

variation but in a similar fashion, with the highest rating given by the oldest generation (8.36) and the lowest rating by the youngest generation (7.31). Results for the ranking of neighborhoods as a place to live were fairly similar. The oldest group of residents of owner-occupied units gave the highest ranking of 8.62 and the youngest group gave the lowest ranking of 7.84. For renters, pre-baby boomers gave the highest average ranking of neighborhoods (8.25) and post-baby boomers gave the lowest ranking (7.24).



Exhibit 18. Rating of Unit and Neighborhood, 2005

Average Rating ^a as a Place To Live	Owner-Occupied Unit			Renter-Occupied Unit		
	Post-Baby Boomers	Baby Boomers	Pre-Baby Boomers	Post-Baby Boomers	Baby Boomers	Pre-Baby Boomers
Housing unit	8.09	8.28	8.82	7.31	7.47	8.36
Neighborhood	7.84	8.12	8.62	7.24	7.42	8.25

^a Rating was on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the worst and 10 the best.

When Will Baby Boomers Be Empty Nesters?

As with the generation born after them, nearly 50 percent of baby boomers have no children at home. In contrast to the post-baby boomer generation, however, baby boomers are likely to be empty nesters within the next 10 years.

Exhibit 19 shows that nearly half of baby boomer households, 48 percent, have no children living at home; of the households with children, more than a third of the children will be old enough to leave within the next 10 years. In contrast, 86 percent of the oldest generation have no children living at home and most of their children who live at home are over 20 years of age. The youngest generation is similar to baby boomers in that nearly half of them have no children living at home, but many of these households have not started their families yet. Of this group, 42 percent have children who are 10 years of age or younger.


Notes

¹ The Department of Housing and Urban Development sponsors the National American Housing Survey every other year in odd-numbered years. The AHS is conducted by the Census Bureau using a representative sample of approximately 60,000 U.S. housing units, 43,000 of which are occupied. The survey collects extensive data on (a) housing structure and condition of the unit; (b) social, demographic, and economic characteristics of the occupants; (c) mortgage data; (d) remodeling and home improvements; (e) qualities and features of the neighborhood; (f) commuting and labor force participation; (g) equipment and fuels; and (h) information related to moving. Because the AHS is a statistical sample, the estimates presented are subject to both sampling and nonsampling errors.

² The 2005 AHS adopted a more elaborate series of income questions similar to the questions used in the American Community Survey (ACS) because comparisons with other surveys suggested that reported income was generally lower on the AHS. For each person in the family, the 2005 AHS questionnaire collects the amount of income for nine different types of income, such as wages and salaries and

Exhibit 19. Age of Youngest Child Living at Home, If Any, 2005

Age of Youngest Child, If Any	Post-Baby Boomers		Baby Boomers		Pre-Baby Boomers	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
No children at home	17,715,000	50	20,337,000	48	26,230,000	86
5 years or less	10,746,000	30	2,524,000	6	72,000	—
6–10 years	4,458,000	12	4,376,000	10	64,000	—
11–15 years	2,119,000	6	5,934,000	14	159,000	1
16–20 years	636,000	2	5,546,000	13	402,000	1
Greater than 20 years	101,000	0	3,823,000	9	3,659,000	12



Social Security income. Prior to 2005, respondents were asked the wages and salaries of each person in the family, and all other sources of income were collected as a single amount for the family as a whole. Comparisons of the 2005 AHS with the 2004 ACS indicate that reporting of specific types of income is generally comparable. One exception is the reporting of “interest, dividend, net rental income, royalty income, and income from estates and trusts,” where the percent of persons reporting is lower in the 2005 AHS. As a result, household income may be understated in Exhibit 6, particularly for the

oldest generation, since this type of income is likely to be a greater source of income for the elderly.

³ As noted in an earlier note, “interest, dividend, net rental income, royalty income, and income from estates and trusts” may be underreported in the 2005 AHS. Because this type of income is likely to be a greater source of income for the elderly, the housing cost burdens for the oldest generation may be overstated.



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