

**THE SEASONALITY OF MOVES: 2009\***

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## **Abstract**

This paper analyzes the seasonality of moves in the United States, an important topic for schools, businesses, service providers, and others whose work may vary by time of the year. Using migration data from the 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), we first determine the distribution of moves throughout the year. We next look at detailed demographic characteristics of movers to determine how much variation in mobility exists by race, nativity, age, family status, income, etc. After analyzing the seasonality of moves in the 2008 panel, we then examine changes in the seasonality of moves over time. In this section of the paper, we use historical SIPP data (from the 1993, 1996, 2001, 2004, and 2008 panels) to investigate the extent of change over the past two decades and to determine whether domestic migration patterns have remained constant over that time or whether they differ from the patterns of 20 years ago.

## **Introduction**

In this paper, we examine the seasonality of residential moves in the United States – that is, during what part of the year people move from one housing unit to another. This topic is an important one for schools, businesses, service providers, and others whose work may vary by time of the year, as they may need to increase or decrease their staff, service provision, or other resources to respond more efficiently to variations in demand.

The paper has several sections. First, using migration data from the 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), we determine the distribution of moves throughout the year. We next look at detailed demographic characteristics of movers to determine how much variation in mobility exists by race, nativity, age, family status, income, etc. After analyzing the seasonality of moves in the 2008 panel, we then examine changes in the seasonality of moves

over time. In this section of the paper, we use historical SIPP data (from the 1993, 1996, 2001, 2004, and 2008 panels) to investigate the extent of change over the past two decades and to determine whether domestic migration patterns have remained constant over that time or whether they differ from the patterns of 20 years ago.

## Data

This paper continues an analysis of the seasonality of moves previously reported for the 1993,<sup>1</sup> 1996,<sup>2</sup> 2001,<sup>3</sup> and 2004<sup>4</sup> panels of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), a longitudinal survey conducted at 4-month intervals.<sup>5</sup> Although the SIPP mainly focuses its questions on labor force participation, jobs, income, and federal assistance program receipt, it also collects information on other topics, such as migration, in topical modules on a rotating basis.

The data in this paper come from the second wave of the 2008 SIPP panel, conducted between January 2009 and April 2009. We specifically focus on results from the main survey and the migration history topical module, which was asked of adults (15 years and older) and

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<sup>1</sup> Hansen, Kristin A. (1998). "Seasonality of Moves and Duration of Residence," P70-66. Available at <<http://www.census.gov/prod/3/98pubs/p70-66.pdf>>.

<sup>2</sup> Schachter, Jason P. and Jeffrey J. Kuenzi (2002). "Seasonality of Moves and the Duration and Tenure of Residence: 1996," Population Division Working Paper No. 69. Available at <<http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0069/twps0069.html>>.

<sup>3</sup> Marlay, Matthew C., and Alison K. Fields (2010). "Seasonality and the Duration of Residence: 2001 Detailed Tables." Available at <<http://www.census.gov/hhes/migration/data/sipp/sipp2001.html>>.

<sup>4</sup> Marlay, Matthew C., and Alison K. Fields (2010). "Seasonality of Moves and the Duration and Tenure of Residence: 2004," P70-122. Available at <<http://www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/p70-122.pdf>>.

<sup>5</sup> Statistics from surveys are subject to sampling and nonsampling error. Nonsampling errors in surveys may be attributed to a variety of sources, such as how the survey was designed, how people interpret questions, how able and willing people are to provide correct answers, and how accurately answers are coded and classified. To minimize these errors, the Census Bureau employs quality control procedures during all stages of the production process, including the design of surveys, the wording of questions, review of the work of interviewers and coders, and statistical review of reports.

The Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) weighting procedure uses ratio estimation, whereby sample estimates are adjusted to independent estimates of the national population by age, race, sex, and Hispanic origin. This weighting partially corrects for bias due to under-coverage, but biases may still be present when people who are missed by the survey differ from those interviewed in ways other than age, race, sex, and Hispanic origin. All of these considerations affect comparisons across different surveys or data sources.

includes questions on location, duration, and tenure of previous and current residences. Other items included in the topical module are place of birth, citizenship, nativity, year of entry, and immigration status.

The characteristics of movers reported here are those at the time of the survey interview. Some characteristics – such as marital status, parenthood, citizenship, education, and income – may have been different at the time of the most recent move, which may have occurred at any time prior to the survey. With the exception of tenure of previous residence, the survey did not collect data on the characteristics of people at the time they moved.

The population represented (i.e., the population universe) is the civilian, noninstitutionalized, adult population (15 years and older) living in the United States, or approximately 223 million people. The institutionalized population, which is excluded from the population universe, is composed primarily of the population in correctional institutions and nursing homes (91 percent of the 4.1 million people in institutions in Census 2000).

## **Analysis**

Figure 1 displays the distribution of respondents' most recent move by month; moves are not evenly distributed throughout the year. Consistent with results from earlier SIPP panels, June remains the most popular month for a move, with about 11 percent of all moves conducted during this time.<sup>6</sup> The second most popular month was August, with about 10 percent of moves. At the other extreme, the winter months have the lowest incidence of moves: only 7 percent of

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<sup>6</sup> The estimates in this report (which may be shown in text, figures, or tables) are based on responses from a sample of the population and may differ from the actual values because of sampling variability or other factors. As a result, apparent differences between the estimates for two or more groups may not be statistically significant. All comparative statements have undergone statistical testing and are significant at the 90 percent confidence level unless otherwise noted.

movers had their most recent move in December, February, or March.<sup>7</sup> The months in the spring and fall fell somewhere in the middle, usually with between 8 and 9 percent of moves.

[Figure 1 about here]

Table 1 shows the seasonality of most recent move for respondents 15 and older by selected demographic characteristics. The table shows that there are more similarities than differences in the seasonality of moving among different population groups: people moved most often in the summer (June-August), with around 30 percent of people in most groups experiencing their most recent move then. The lowest proportion of moves occurred primarily in the winter for most groups, while in a few cases the lowest levels occurred in the fall or spring. As an example of this pattern, in the first panel of the table there are no statistically significant differences in the seasonality of moves by the gender of the respondent. About 23 percent of both men and women moved in the spring (March-May), while about 30 percent of both moved during the summer months.

[Table 1 about here]

### *Summer*

As noted, summer is the most popular season for moves. For example, as their educational attainment increased, people were statistically more likely to concentrate moves during the summer months. About 32 percent of people with at least a bachelor's degree moved during the summer, compared with 28 percent of people who had less than a high school diploma. Similarly, people currently living in the Northeast and Midwest regions of the United States were more likely to have moved in the summer (30 and 31 percent, respectively) than were people living in the South and West (29 percent in both regions).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The percentage of moves occurring in each of these three months did not differ statistically from each other.

<sup>8</sup> The proportion of Northeasterners and Midwesterners moving in the summer months did not differ statistically

In general, the relative distance of domestic moves increased concomitantly with the proportion of moves that occurred in the summer months. While the data do not permit a direct calculation of the distance moved, we can estimate the relative distance, assuming that people who move within the same county are moving, on average, a shorter distance than those moving between counties, and that those moving between states are moving the longest distance. The proportion of moves in the summer months increased from 29 percent for those moving within the same county to 31 percent for those moving between counties within the same state and to 33 percent for those making an interstate move.

### *Winter*

People living in the Midwest and Northeast showed lower rates of moving during the winter months (20 and 22 percent, respectively) than did those in the South and West (24 percent in both regions), perhaps due to weather conditions in the Midwest and Northeast that make moving in the winter more difficult. People with at least a bachelor's degree were also less likely to have moved most recently during December, January, or February, compared with people with less than a high school degree (21 percent compared to 25 percent).

For a few groups, the rates of moving in the winter were quite high. Overall, the foreign-born population was more likely to move in the winter months compared with the native-born (25 percent and 22 percent, respectively).<sup>9</sup> Naturalized citizens were less likely than noncitizens to have experienced their most recent move in the winter (24 percent and 26 percent, respectively). Blacks and Hispanics were more likely to have had their most recent move in the

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from each other; neither did the proportions of Southerners and Westerners.

<sup>9</sup> For the purposes of this paper, "native" or "native-born" refers to anyone born in the United States, Puerto Rico, or a U.S. Island Area (U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa), or born abroad to American parents.

winter than the other race groups: A quarter of both Blacks and Hispanics moved most recently in the winter, compared with only 22 percent of non-Hispanic whites and Asians.<sup>10</sup>

### *Spring and Fall*

Spring and fall showed less variation in their proportional level of moves across groups. Spring had between a fifth and a quarter of moves for most groups. Among the groups with the lowest proportion of movers in the spring was the 15-to-24-years age group, whose members moved in the spring 21.5 percent of the time, compared with around 23-24 percent of members in other age groups. Fall was the season that generally had the highest proportion of recent moves after the summer months, with about a quarter of moves having occurred during this time for each group.

The proportion of moves occurring in the fall showed less variation, both between and within groups. People in households without their own children under age 18 were not different from those in households with their own children under age 18 with respect to recent moves in the winter and spring. However, households with children moved less often during the early part of the school year than did those households without children. Among people in households with their own children under age 18, 24 percent moved in the fall, compared with about 25 percent for people in households without their own children.

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<sup>10</sup> Federal surveys now give respondents the option of reporting more than one race. Therefore, two basic ways of defining a race group are possible. A group such as Asian may be defined as those who reported Asian and no other race (the race-alone or single-race concept) or as those who reported Asian regardless of whether they also reported another race (the race-alone-or-in-combination concept). The body of this paper (text, figures, and tables) shows data for people who reported they were White, Black, or Asian alone. People who reported that race in combination with another race and people who reported another race alone are shown in a separate category. Use of the single-race populations does not imply that it is the preferred method of presenting or analyzing data. The U.S. Census Bureau uses a variety of approaches. For further information, see the Census 2000 Brief *Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin: 2000* (C2KBR/01-1) at <[www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/c2kbr01-1.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/c2kbr01-1.pdf)>.

Because Hispanics may be of any race, data in this paper for Hispanics overlap with data for the White, Black, Asian, and other race populations. Based on the population 15 years and older in the 2008 SIPP, 16 percent of the White-alone population, 6 percent of the Black-alone population, 2 percent of the Asian-alone population, and 16 percent of the other races alone and in-combination population were also Hispanic. In the text of this report, the groups “White alone, non-Hispanic,” “Black alone,” and “Asian alone” are referred to as “White,” “Black,” and “Asian,” respectively.

### *Patterns of Seasonality over Time*

As shown in both Table 2 and Figure 2, there have been some shifts in the seasonality of moves in the 16 years between 1993 and 2009.<sup>11</sup> For example, moving during the winter has gotten substantially more common. In 1996, only about 19 percent of respondents moved during the winter; by 2008, this number had grown to about 23 percent. Conversely, summer and fall showed declines in the proportion of movers who switched residences during these months. In 1996, 32 percent of movers had had their most recent move in the summer, a number that had dropped to 30 percent by 2009. Fall's decline was less severe, dropping from 27 percent of moves in 1996 to 25 percent in 2009.

[Table 2 and Figure 2 about here]

### **Conclusion**

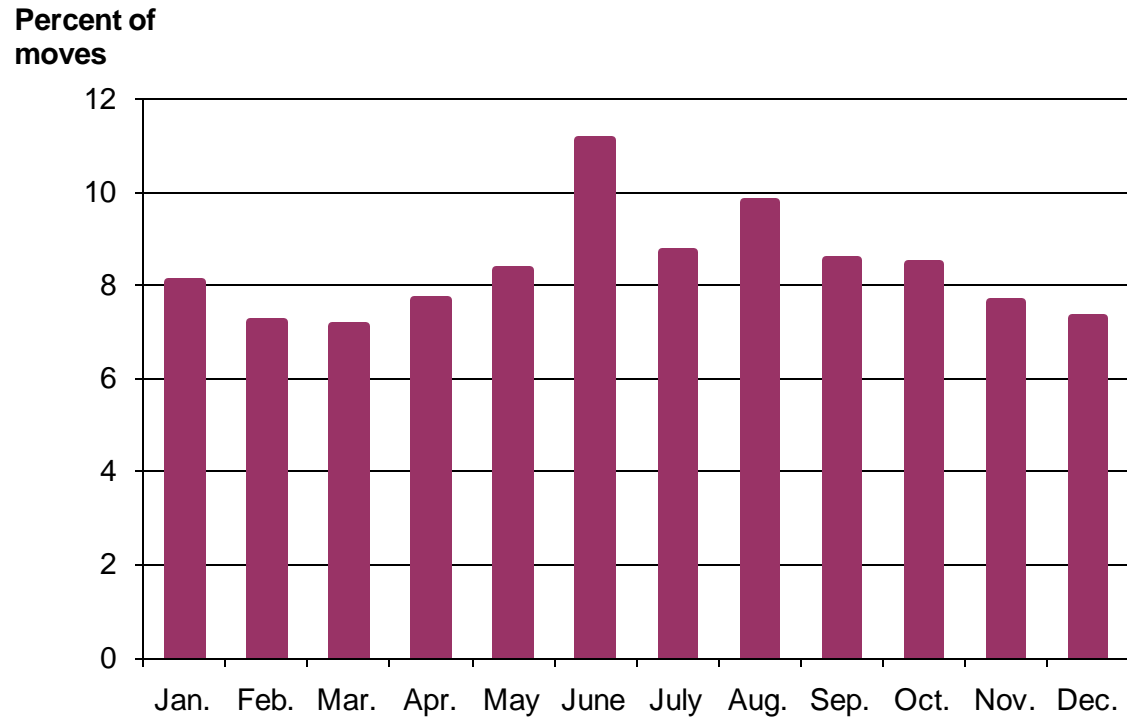
This paper first looked at the seasonality of moves in 2009 and then compared the 2009 results to those from earlier SIPP panels. In 2009, moves were not evenly distributed throughout the year, with summer being the most popular season for a move. June and August were the most popular individual months, with 11 and 10 percent of all moves, respectively. Furthermore, this pattern has generally held over time, as summer has been the most popular season for a move in every SIPP panel from 1993 to 2009. However, its popularity has become less pronounced over the years, as there has been a shift towards moving in the spring and winter.

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<sup>11</sup> Note that in the 1993 report (see footnote #1), moves into both current and previous residences were used to analyze the timing of moves, while in the remaining years, time of move is limited to the month each person moved into his or her current residence. Therefore, some of the apparent trends from 1993 to 2009 may be due to differences in measurement and not reflective of a true difference in the population. Despite this, we have opted to include results from 1993 just to give a sense of how the reported numbers have changed. In the discussion, we focus on trends from 1996 to 2009 and limit comparisons of 1993 to later years.



**Figure 1. Distribution of Most Recent Move by Month for the Population 15 Years and Older, 2009**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 2008 Panel, Wave 2 Migration Topical Module.  
For more information, see the Source & Accuracy statement at <<http://www.census.gov/sipp/source.html>>.

**Table 1. Seasonality of Most Recent Move for People 15 Years and Older by Selected Characteristics, 2009**

Characteristic	Movers, 15 years and older		Percent distribution of movers			
	Number	90-percent confidence interval/1	December-February	March-May	June-August	September-November
<b>Total (in thousands)</b>	222,755	222,296 - 223,214	22.6 (0.20)	23.1 (0.20)	29.6 (0.22)	24.7 (0.20)
<b>Sex</b>						
Male	107,212	106,322 - 108,102	22.8 (0.28)	23.2 (0.29)	29.6 (0.31)	24.4 (0.29)
Female	115,543	114,649 - 116,437	22.3 (0.27)	23.1 (0.28)	29.7 (0.30)	24.9 (0.28)
<b>Age</b>						
15 to 24 years	34,056	33,431 - 34,681	23.7 (0.51)	21.5 (0.49)	30.3 (0.55)	24.5 (0.52)
25 to 34 years	37,916	37,262 - 38,569	22.6 (0.48)	23.3 (0.48)	29.3 (0.52)	24.9 (0.49)
35 to 44 years	39,572	38,908 - 40,237	22.4 (0.47)	24.4 (0.48)	29.6 (0.51)	23.6 (0.47)
45 to 54 years	42,495	41,811 - 43,178	21.7 (0.44)	23.5 (0.46)	29.6 (0.49)	25.2 (0.47)
55 to 64 years	32,767	32,152 - 33,382	22.5 (0.51)	22.8 (0.52)	29.9 (0.56)	24.7 (0.53)
65 years and older	35,949	35,310 - 36,588	22.7 (0.49)	22.9 (0.49)	29.2 (0.53)	25.2 (0.51)
<b>Marital Status</b>						
Married	120,531	119,636 - 121,426	21.7 (0.26)	23.6 (0.27)	30.2 (0.29)	24.5 (0.28)
Spouse present	117,496	116,601 - 118,391	21.6 (0.27)	23.6 (0.28)	30.4 (0.30)	24.5 (0.28)
Spouse absent	3,035	2,835 - 3,235	25.9 (1.77)	24.0 (1.72)	25.1 (1.75)	25.0 (1.75)
Widowed	13,197	12,789 - 13,606	23.1 (0.82)	23.7 (0.82)	28.3 (0.87)	24.9 (0.84)
Separated	4,257	4,020 - 4,493	25.4 (1.48)	23.8 (1.45)	27.5 (1.52)	23.3 (1.44)
Divorced	23,518	22,985 - 24,050	22.6 (0.61)	23.4 (0.61)	28.4 (0.65)	25.6 (0.63)
Never married	61,252	60,471 - 62,033	24.0 (0.38)	21.9 (0.37)	29.4 (0.41)	24.7 (0.39)
<b>Race and Hispanic Origin</b>						
White alone	180,869	180,098 - 181,640	22.2 (0.22)	23.2 (0.22)	29.9 (0.24)	24.7 (0.23)
Non-Hispanic	152,380	151,518 - 153,242	21.6 (0.23)	23.0 (0.24)	30.6 (0.26)	24.8 (0.25)
Black alone	25,802	25,247 - 26,356	24.5 (0.60)	23.1 (0.58)	27.6 (0.62)	24.8 (0.60)
Asian alone	8,971	8,632 - 9,311	22.4 (0.98)	22.7 (0.98)	31.1 (1.09)	23.9 (1.00)
All other races alone or in combination	7,113	6,809 - 7,417	24.5 (1.13)	22.7 (1.10)	28.2 (1.19)	24.6 (1.13)
Hispanic (any race)	31,325	30,722 - 31,928	25.1 (0.54)	24.0 (0.54)	26.4 (0.55)	24.6 (0.54)
<b>Nativity and Citizenship</b>						
Native-born	188,563	187,829 - 189,297	22.1 (0.21)	23.0 (0.22)	30.1 (0.23)	24.8 (0.22)
Foreign-born	34,192	33,566 - 34,817	24.9 (0.52)	23.7 (0.51)	27.4 (0.54)	24.0 (0.51)
Citizen	15,579	15,137 - 16,020	23.9 (0.76)	23.9 (0.76)	28.2 (0.80)	24.0 (0.76)
Noncitizen	18,613	18,134 - 19,092	25.7 (0.71)	23.5 (0.69)	26.7 (0.72)	24.0 (0.70)
<b>Own Children Under 18</b>						

Characteristic	Movers, 15 years and older		Percent distribution of movers			
	Number	90-percent confidence interval/1	December-February	March-May	June-August	September-November
Not present	144,840	143,965 - 145,715	22.6 (0.24)	23.1 (0.25)	29.3 (0.27)	25.0 (0.25)
Present	77,915	77,076 - 78,753	22.5 (0.33)	23.2 (0.34)	30.2 (0.37)	24.1 (0.34)
<b>Educational Attainment</b>						
Less than high school diploma	34,072	33,447 - 34,697	24.5 (0.52)	23.3 (0.51)	27.8 (0.54)	24.3 (0.52)
High school graduate	57,713	56,948 - 58,478	23.4 (0.39)	23.0 (0.39)	28.5 (0.42)	25.2 (0.40)
Some college/associate's degree	73,487	72,661 - 74,312	22.6 (0.34)	23.5 (0.35)	29.2 (0.37)	24.8 (0.35)
Bachelor's degree or more	57,483	56,719 - 58,247	20.5 (0.37)	22.8 (0.39)	32.5 (0.43)	24.3 (0.40)
<b>Household Received Means-Tested Benefits</b>						
Yes	61,187	60,407 - 61,968	21.6 (0.37)	23.3 (0.38)	30.4 (0.41)	24.7 (0.39)
No	161,568	160,729 - 162,407	25.0 (0.24)	22.8 (0.23)	27.6 (0.25)	24.6 (0.24)
<b>Annual Household Income /2</b>						
Under \$25,000	44,739	44,041 - 45,436	24.1 (0.45)	23.0 (0.44)	28.7 (0.48)	24.2 (0.45)
\$25,000 to \$49,999	56,018	55,260 - 56,775	24.0 (0.40)	22.9 (0.39)	28.0 (0.42)	25.1 (0.41)
\$50,000 to \$74,999	42,942	42,255 - 43,628	21.8 (0.44)	23.0 (0.45)	30.6 (0.49)	24.6 (0.46)
\$75,000 to \$99,999	29,307	28,720 - 29,893	21.8 (0.54)	24.1 (0.56)	29.6 (0.59)	24.5 (0.56)
\$100,000 and over	49,750	49,024 - 50,476	20.7 (0.40)	23.1 (0.42)	31.5 (0.46)	24.7 (0.43)
<b>Region of Current Residence</b>						
Northeast	39,872	39,205 - 40,538	21.7 (0.46)	22.6 (0.47)	30.2 (0.51)	25.5 (0.48)
Midwest	48,824	48,103 - 49,545	20.1 (0.40)	23.1 (0.42)	31.0 (0.47)	25.8 (0.44)
South	81,203	80,356 - 82,050	23.6 (0.33)	23.6 (0.33)	28.9 (0.35)	23.9 (0.33)
West	52,856	52,114 - 53,598	24.0 (0.41)	22.9 (0.41)	29.0 (0.44)	24.1 (0.41)
<b>Housing Tenure of Current Residence</b>						
Owner-occupied	154,305	153,448 - 155,162	21.7 (0.23)	23.3 (0.24)	30.2 (0.26)	24.9 (0.24)
Renter-occupied	68,450	67,642 - 69,259	24.5 (0.37)	22.9 (0.36)	28.4 (0.38)	24.2 (0.36)
<b>Type of Current Residence</b>						
Metropolitan	186,981	186,239 - 187,723	22.6 (0.22)	23.1 (0.22)	29.9 (0.24)	24.4 (0.22)
Nonmetropolitan	35,774	35,136 - 36,412	22.2 (0.49)	23.4 (0.50)	28.5 (0.53)	26.0 (0.52)
<b>Type of Move (from Previous Residence)</b>						
Same state, same county	157,897	157,048 - 158,746	23.0 (0.24)	23.4 (0.24)	28.8 (0.25)	24.8 (0.24)
Same state, different county	34,664	34,035 - 35,294	21.6 (0.49)	23.2 (0.50)	31.0 (0.55)	24.2 (0.51)
Different state	25,396	24,845 - 25,947	20.7 (0.57)	21.5 (0.57)	33.3 (0.66)	24.6 (0.60)
From abroad	4,797	4,547 - 5,048	24.0 (1.37)	23.3 (1.36)	29.0 (1.46)	23.7 (1.36)

Footnotes:

Characteristic	Movers, 15 years and older		Percent distribution of movers			
	Number	90-percent confidence interval/1	December-February	March-May	June-August	September-November

The data in this table are for people who: 1) reported a valid month in which they began living in their current residence and 2) had at least one lifetime move. Standard errors given in parentheses.

1/ This range represents the 90 percent confidence interval around the estimate.

2/ The annual income per household is based on the annualized average of the monthly incomes for households during the four months of the second wave of the SIPP 2008 panel.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 2008 Panel, Wave 2 Migration Topical Module.

For more information, see the Source & Accuracy statement at <<http://www.census.gov/sipp/source.html>>.

**Table 2. Seasonality of Moves for People 15 Years and Older, 1993-2009**

Season of Move	1993 SIPP	1996 SIPP	2001 SIPP	2004 SIPP	2008 SIPP
	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Winter (December, January, February)	16.6 (0.12)	18.8 (0.20)	20.3 (0.22)	20.7 (0.20)	22.6 (0.20)
Spring (March, April, May)	18.7 (0.12)	22.6 (0.21)	24.0 (0.23)	23.5 (0.21)	23.1 (0.20)
Summer (June, July, August)	36.9 (0.15)	32.0 (0.24)	32.3 (0.25)	32.2 (0.23)	29.6 (0.22)
Fall (September, October, November)	27.8 (0.14)	26.6 (0.22)	23.5 (0.23)	23.6 (0.21)	24.7 (0.20)

Footnotes:

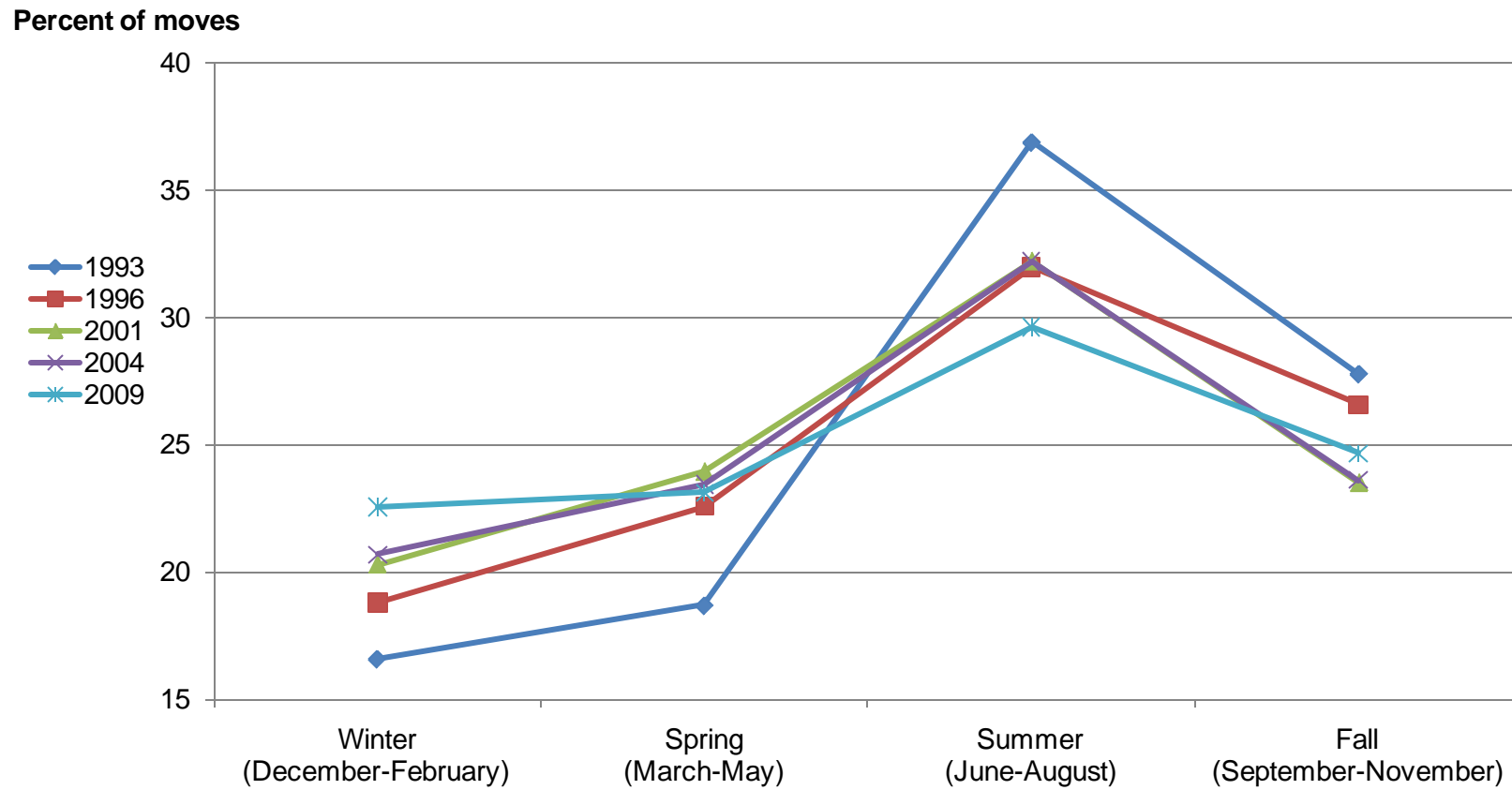
The data in this table are for people who: 1) reported a valid month in which they began living in their current residence and 2) had at least one lifetime move. In the P70-66 report based on the 1993 SIPP panel, the months of moves into both current and previous residences were used to analyze the seasonality of the moves. Seasonality of moves discussed using the 1996, 2001, 2004, and 2008 SIPP panels is limited to the month each person moved into his or her current residence.

Standard errors given in parentheses.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1993, 1996, 2001, 2004, and 2008 Panels, Wave 2 Migration Topical Module.

For more information, see the Source & Accuracy statement at <<http://www.census.gov/sipp/source.html>>.

**Figure 2. Seasonality of Moves for People 15 Years and Older, 1993-2009**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 1993, 1996, 2001, 2004, and 2008 Panels, Wave 2 Migration Topical Module. For more information, see the Source & Accuracy statement at <http://www.census.gov/sipp/source.html>.