

We asked... You told us

Employment Status

The Census Bureau conducts a census of population and housing every 10 years. This bulletin is one of a series that shows the questions asked in the 1990 census and the answers that you, the American people, gave. Each bulletin focuses on a question or group of questions appearing on the 1990 census questionnaires.

In questions 21, 25, and 26 on the 1990 census forms, we asked people to tell us about their connection to the paid workforce in the week before they filled out the census questionnaires. We used the answers to classify civilian persons of working age (16 years and over) as employed, unemployed, or not in the labor force.

We classified persons who had a job as “employed.” Persons on layoff and those looking for work who could take a job were classified as “unemployed.” All other persons—mostly retirees, homemakers, and full-time students—were classified as “not in the labor force.”

From what **you told us**, we learned that:

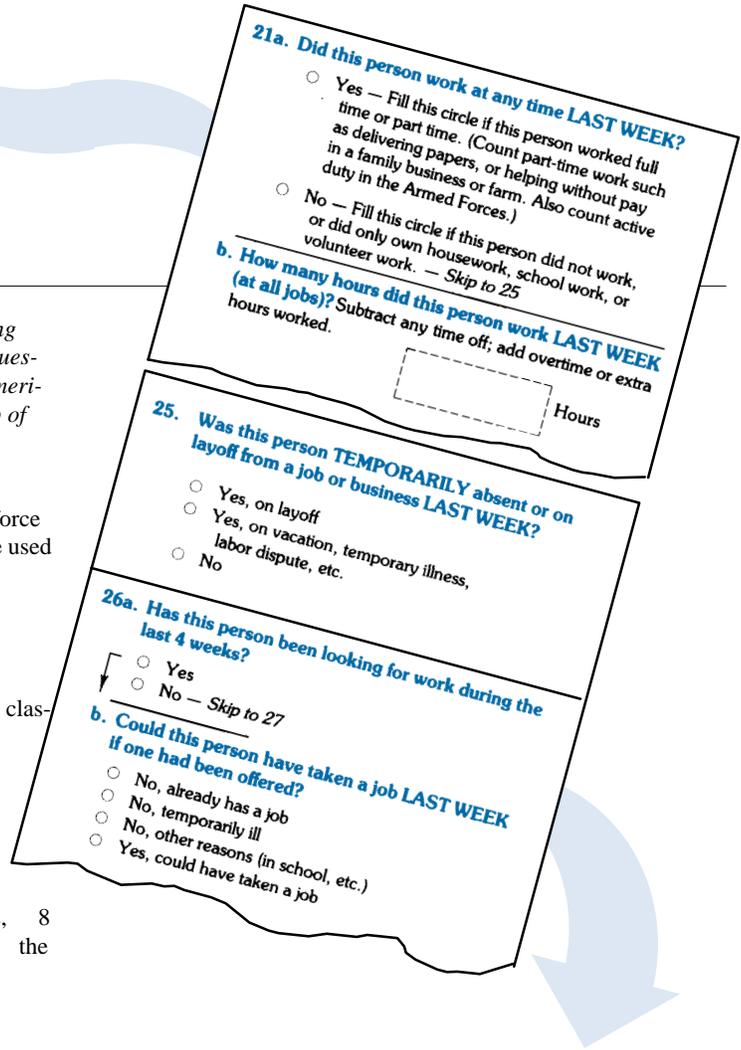
- For the Nation as a whole in 1990, there were 116 million employed persons, 1.7 million persons in the Armed Forces, 8 million unemployed persons, and 67 million persons not in the labor force.

Increased Labor Force Participation by Women Boosted the Overall Rate

- The labor force participation rate for the Nation was 65 percent in 1990. This rate expresses the sum of Armed Forces members, employed persons, and unemployed persons as a percentage of all persons 16 years and over. It is an important measure of the attachment of the population to work for pay or profit.
- As the chart shows, the labor force participation rate for all persons increased steadily in the last four decades. In 1950, 55 out of 100 persons participated in the labor force; by 1990, this figure had increased to 65 persons.
- The labor force participation rates for women¹ have risen dramatically since 1950. In that year, about 30 of every 100 working-age women participated in the labor force. This figure nearly doubled to 57 in 1990.
- The increased labor force participation among women has more than offset a long-term decline in participation by men. The bar chart shows a steady downward trend in male participation from 82 percent in 1950 to 74 percent in 1990. The spread of pension and retirement benefits to more of the workforce has aided this trend by making it possible for persons to leave the workforce at younger ages.

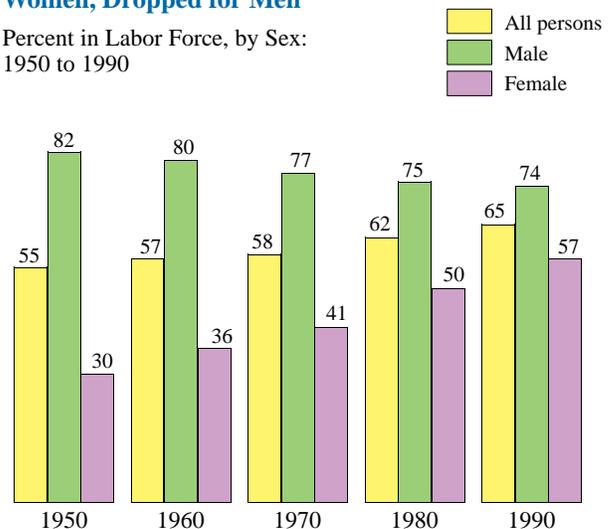
Note: Data on employment status are based on a sample and are subject to sampling variability.

¹Information on gender is collected from question 3. (See CQC-3, *Gender*.)



Labor Force Participation Rose for Women, Dropped for Men

Percent in Labor Force, by Sex: 1950 to 1990



Census Trivia: According to the 1990 census, what percentage of mothers with children under age 6 were in the labor force? What was the percentage for mothers with children age 6 to 17 years only? (Answer on reverse.)

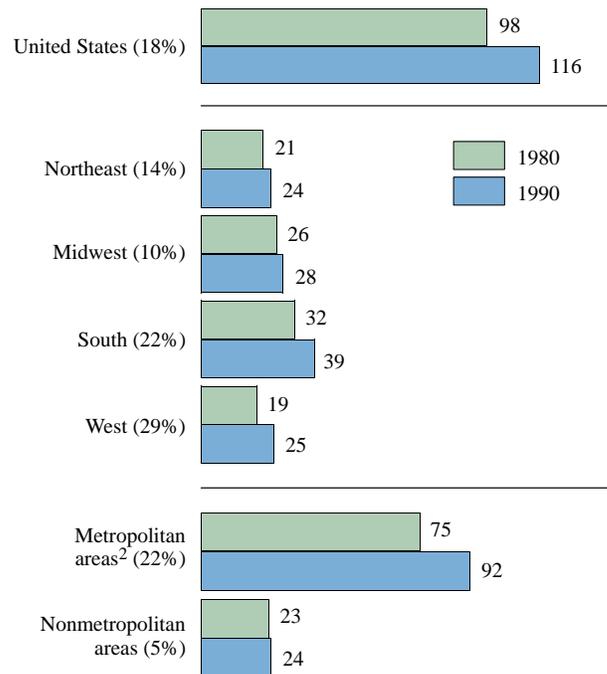
Employment Measures Varied by Geographic Area

- Among regions of the country, the South had the largest number of employed persons in 1990—39 million or 34 percent of the total national employment. The Midwest had the next largest number, 28 million (see chart).
- The number of employed persons grew in all regions between 1980 and 1990. The South had the largest numerical increase in employed persons (7 million), and the Midwest had the smallest increase (2.5 million).
- The West experienced the largest percentage growth in employed persons (29 percent) during the 1980s. The South's employment grew by 22 percent, the second largest percentage increase. Nationally, the number of employed persons rose by 18 percent during this decade.
- Between 1980 and 1990, the number of employed persons increased more than four times faster in metropolitan areas² than in nonmetropolitan areas. By 1990, there were 92 million employed persons in metropolitan areas, accounting for nearly 80 percent of all employed persons in the Nation.
- The map shows how labor force participation rates varied across the States in 1990. Alaska had the highest rate, 75 percent; West Virginia had the lowest, 53 percent. These two States also had the highest and lowest rates among women: Alaska, 66 percent; West Virginia, 43 percent.

Employment Increased at Differing Rates

Number Employed, by Region and Metropolitan Residence: 1980 and 1990

(In millions. 1980-90 percent change in parentheses)



²Generally, a **metropolitan area** consists of a sizable central city (or cities) and the surrounding suburbs, with a total population of at least 100,000. Metropolitan areas are defined in terms of counties (cities and towns in New England).

Who Uses This Information?

- Just a few examples:
- Federal Government to allocate funds to States and local areas for job training and employment services to assist persons in economically disadvantaged areas
 - Private business and industry to select office/plant sites
 - Companies to comply with anti-discrimination legislation such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Act

Trivia Answer: In 1990, 60 percent of mothers with children under age 6 were in the labor force, compared with 75 percent of mothers with children age 6 to 17 years only.

Want to Know More?

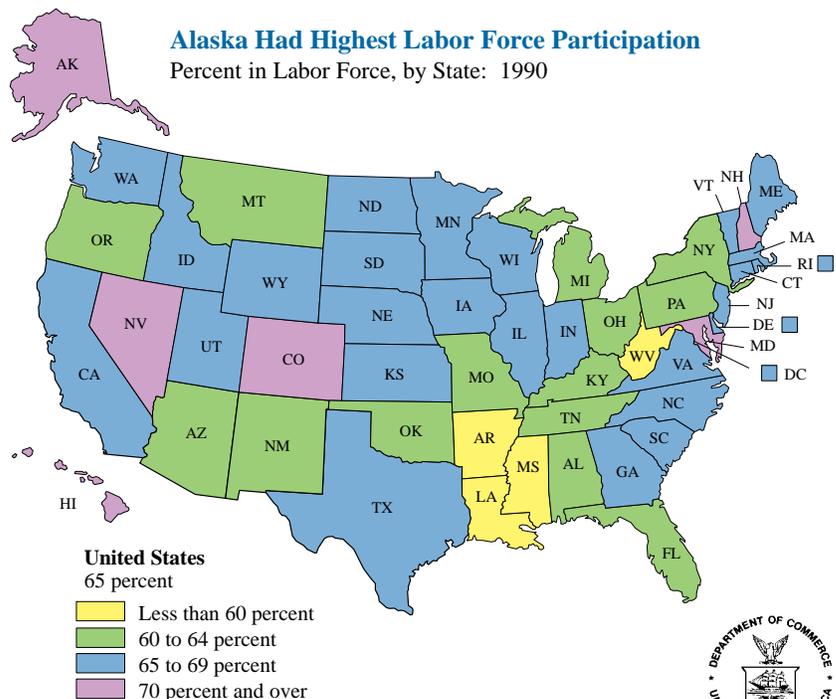
Consult the series of 1990 census reports, CP-2, *Social and Economic Characteristics*; CPH-3, *Census Tracts*; and CPH-5, *Summary Social, Economic, and Housing Characteristics*, at a large public or university library. Also for sale by Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO).

Call:

- Customer Services at the Census Bureau, **301-763-4100**, for ordering information about the GPO reports listed above OR for copies of CQC bulletins
- Selwyn Jones or Thomas Palumbo, **301-763-8574**, for more information on this bulletin or on employment status
- Karen Mills, **301-763-4263**, for general information on CQC bulletins

Alaska Had Highest Labor Force Participation

Percent in Labor Force, by State: 1990



United States
65 percent

- Less than 60 percent
- 60 to 64 percent
- 65 to 69 percent
- 70 percent and over



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