

# How our households have changed

## 60 years of decennial censuses paint shifting picture

By DAVID HOWELL

An Alaska household looked quite different in 1960, just after statehood, than it does today. At that time, outside of the Alaska Native population, many people had only recently moved to the state, and most came for work.

The explosive population growth in the decades that followed reshaped the state and the housing landscape — both the homes themselves and the people who occupied them.

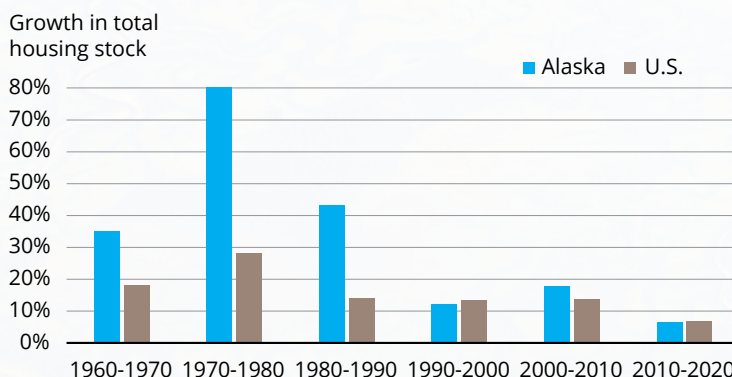
While we have an older and more established population today, the picture of Alaska households is still shifting. Census data from 1960 through 2020 show massive changes in Alaskans' living circumstances over the last 60 years. In contrast, over the same period, the national picture has stayed about the same in most household categories.

### The number of homes went from 67,000 to 326,000

In 1960, Alaska had 67,000 homes available for a population of 226,000. Over the next 10 years, Alaska's housing stock grew 35 percent, with Alaska adding homes at twice the rate of the U.S. as a whole. Over the decade, the state gained 74,000 residents.

The 1970s were a time of rapid housing growth for both Alaska and the U.S. Alaska's population grew by 101,000 as the construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System drew in a flood of workers. At the same time, the large baby boomer generation was leaving home en masse nationwide, which drove up the need for housing. Alaska's housing stock jumped 79 percent over that decade while the U.S. added 29 percent.

### Explosion of houses built in Alaska in the '70s and '80s, but fewer recently



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Alaska's population grew even more in the 1980s and reached 550,000 people by 1990. The number of homes increased by over 43 percent that decade (16 percent for the nation). Some of that was likely catch-up after the population boom of the previous decade, but Alaska also gained more permanent residents in the '80s, as many who arrived in the '70s came temporarily for pipeline construction or the military.

Home construction slowed after that, as did population growth. Alaska added 12 percent more housing units in the 1990s and 18 percent in the 2000s. The latter bump came when the large millennial generation began to move out of their parents' homes.

Housing growth has slowed considerably since 2010, both in the state and nationwide, partly due to the national housing bust of the late 2000s.

Alaska added fewer than 20,000 homes over the 2010-2020 decade, the smallest number since statehood. Home construction still outpaced population growth, however, even at that greatly reduced level.

As of the 2020 Census, Alaska had a population of

# Percentages by age group living in multigenerational households

## Alaska

Ages	0-9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80+	Total
<b>Single-generation home</b>										
1960	0%	5%	25%	20%	39%	58%	59%	53%	33%	<b>18%</b>
1970	0%	4%	37%	13%	24%	56%	75%	80%	50%	<b>18%</b>
1980	0%	6%	41%	26%	28%	58%	76%	62%	80%	<b>25%</b>
1990	0%	4%	37%	29%	37%	63%	74%	83%	70%	<b>28%</b>
2000	0%	3%	38%	27%	42%	62%	76%	73%	72%	<b>30%</b>
2010	0%	4%	43%	25%	35%	61%	75%	76%	65%	<b>33%</b>
2020	1%	3%	41%	29%	30%	54%	73%	80%	73%	<b>35%</b>
<b>Two-generation home</b>										
1960	97%	88%	69%	77%	56%	34%	29%	21%	33%	<b>77%</b>
1970	94%	92%	59%	81%	71%	39%	18%	10%	50%	<b>77%</b>
1980	95%	88%	56%	72%	68%	34%	17%	29%	20%	<b>70%</b>
1990	94%	88%	57%	68%	59%	28%	18%	10%	17%	<b>67%</b>
2000	91%	88%	53%	68%	53%	30%	16%	19%	20%	<b>62%</b>
2010	88%	89%	50%	69%	60%	34%	16%	17%	24%	<b>60%</b>
2020	88%	86%	52%	65%	64%	39%	20%	14%	20%	<b>57%</b>
<b>Three-generation home</b>										
1960	3%	7%	6%	2%	5%	8%	12%	26%	33%	<b>5%</b>
1970	6%	4%	4%	3%	5%	5%	7%	10%	0%	<b>5%</b>
1980	5%	6%	3%	2%	4%	9%	7%	9%	0%	<b>5%</b>
1990	6%	8%	6%	3%	4%	9%	8%	7%	13%	<b>6%</b>
2000	9%	10%	8%	5%	5%	8%	9%	8%	8%	<b>7%</b>
2010	12%	8%	7%	6%	5%	5%	8%	7%	11%	<b>7%</b>
2020	11%	11%	7%	6%	6%	7%	7%	6%	7%	<b>8%</b>

Sources: IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota and U.S. Census Bureau

733,000 and 326,000 housing units: 224 percent and 386 percent increases since 1960, respectively.

## Multigenerational households have become more common

While multigenerational households have long been common among Alaska Natives and in the Lower 48, they weren't common among the rest of Alaska's population in the early decades of statehood.

This is largely because migration expanded the state so much during the second half of the 20th century. Most migrants to Alaska are young, creating more single-generation households or households with parents and children, as most grandparents lived elsewhere.

## United States

Ages	0-9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80+	Total
<b>Single-generation home</b>										
1960	0%	3%	19%	13%	24%	51%	70%	69%	55%	<b>21%</b>
1970	0%	3%	27%	12%	21%	51%	75%	78%	64%	<b>24%</b>
1980	0%	4%	38%	20%	22%	51%	76%	83%	74%	<b>30%</b>
1990	1%	3%	36%	25%	29%	53%	74%	83%	80%	<b>32%</b>
2000	0%	3%	38%	27%	31%	58%	74%	80%	79%	<b>33%</b>
2010	1%	3%	39%	27%	30%	56%	77%	81%	79%	<b>35%</b>
2020	1%	2%	40%	29%	26%	51%	73%	80%	77%	<b>37%</b>
<b>Two-generation home</b>										
1960	91%	87%	73%	81%	68%	41%	22%	21%	32%	<b>70%</b>
1970	92%	89%	67%	83%	72%	43%	20%	15%	26%	<b>69%</b>
1980	92%	89%	58%	76%	72%	43%	20%	12%	20%	<b>65%</b>
1990	91%	89%	57%	70%	66%	40%	21%	13%	15%	<b>62%</b>
2000	88%	88%	54%	68%	63%	35%	19%	14%	15%	<b>59%</b>
2010	88%	88%	53%	67%	64%	37%	17%	13%	16%	<b>57%</b>
2020	87%	88%	51%	63%	67%	42%	20%	13%	17%	<b>55%</b>
<b>Three-generation home</b>										
1960	9%	10%	7%	6%	8%	7%	8%	10%	13%	<b>8%</b>
1970	7%	8%	5%	5%	7%	6%	5%	6%	9%	<b>7%</b>
1980	7%	7%	5%	4%	6%	6%	4%	5%	7%	<b>6%</b>
1990	9%	8%	7%	4%	6%	7%	5%	4%	5%	<b>6%</b>
2000	11%	9%	8%	6%	6%	7%	7%	6%	5%	<b>8%</b>
2010	11%	9%	8%	6%	6%	6%	6%	6%	5%	<b>7%</b>
2020	12%	10%	8%	7%	7%	7%	7%	6%	6%	<b>8%</b>

As the population has become less transient, the percentage living in a household with three or more generations has grown, from 5 percent in 1970 to 8 percent in 2020, putting Alaska on par with the rest of the country. This isn't because more grandparents have joined their families here but because those who moved to Alaska in the 1970s and 1980s are now the grandparents.

Among Alaska Natives, 9 percent lived in multigenerational households in 1960. As the Alaska Native population has grown steadily over the years, the share living in multigenerational households has more than doubled, to 20 percent.

The percentage of people living in multigenerational households in the rest of the country looked similar to the Alaska Native population in 1960 but hasn't grown as much over the last 60 years. The U.S. percentage has ranged from a low of 6 percent in 1980 to a high of 8 percent in 2020.



Multigeneration households will probably become even more common everywhere as the large baby boomer generation gets older. The popularity and availability of in-home health care will also support that growth, as it will make this type of living arrangement possible longer.

## But single-generation homes have also increased

The number of generations per household is affected by birth rates as well as migration. Alaska's birth rate is higher than most of the country, meaning we have more two-generation households, which is the most common household type. The difference isn't large, though, at 57 percent for Alaska and 55 percent nationwide.

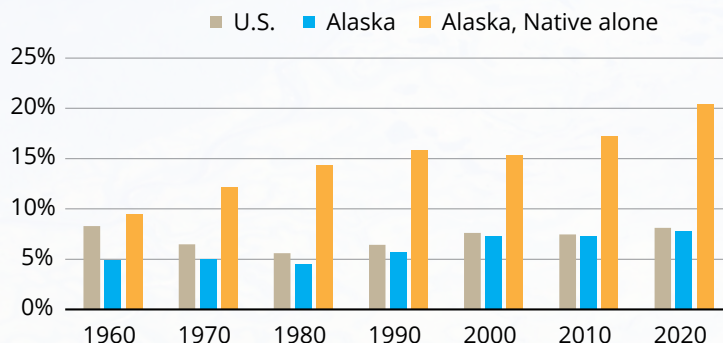
Declining fertility rates have steadily increased the share living in single-generation households, however, from 18 percent in Alaska in 1960 to 35 percent in 2020.

The national fertility decline began earlier, so the U.S. percentage in single-generation homes jumped from 21 percent to 37 percent over those decades.

## More people live alone now

Similarly, the percentage of single-*person* households has been on the rise. Living alone becomes more common as you age, so this living arrangement has grown as the number of seniors and

## Multigenerational homes have been common among Alaska Natives



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

their share of the population have risen.

Alaska's percentage who live alone has steadily increased from a low of 4 percent in 1970 to 10 percent in 2020. It's slightly higher for the U.S. at 11 percent — seniors make up a larger share of the population nationally than they do in Alaska.

The ability to get in-home health care enables people to live alone, and for longer, in the same way it supports three-generation households.

A side effect of more people living alone is that more of Alaska's housing units are occupied by just one person. In the 2020 Census, 27 percent of Alaska housing units had just one occupant. It was 28 percent nationwide.

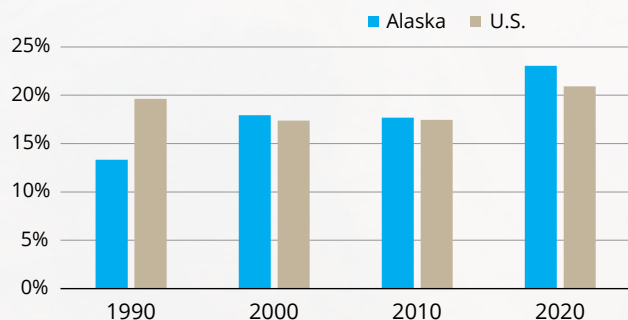
## More homes now occupied by owners, more homes paid off

Owning a home has become much more common than renting in Alaska over the years. In the 1960s, a slight majority of homes — 52 percent — were rented. As more people moved to Alaska for work, they bought houses, so by 1980, 58 percent of homes were owner-occupied.

The deep recession of the 1980s took a slight toll on home ownership — the percentage dipped to 56 — but it started rising again in 1990 and by 2020, 64 percent of homes were owner-occupied.

The pattern differed from the rest of the country, where owner-occupied housing has been relatively stable, bouncing between 62 and 66

## More now own homes outright



**Note:** Percentage of population living in a home they paid off. Includes children whose parents own the home outright.  
**Source:** U.S. Census Bureau

percent over the last 60 years.

More Alaskans over time have also paid off their homes. Just 13 percent of the population lived in a home they owned outright in 1990, and it's now 23 percent. (See the graph at the bottom of the previous page.) Many of the baby boom generation who moved here in the 1980s and 1990s bought relatively cheap housing and have since paid off their mortgages.

The percentage of the national population living in a paid-off home fell from 20 percent in 1990 to 17 percent in 2000 and 2010, then jumped to 21 percent in 2020.

## Group living common in Alaska, especially early on

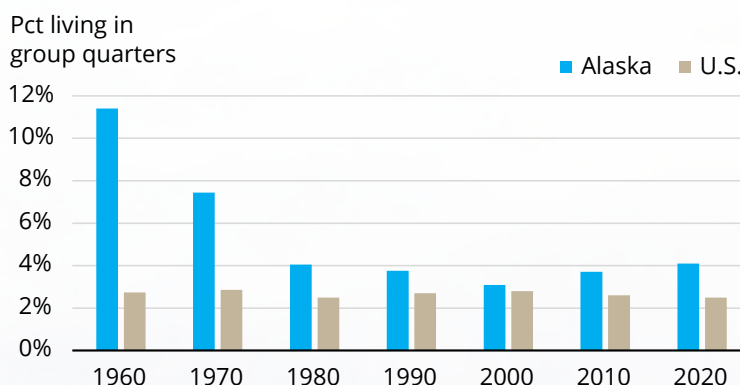
Alaska has always had a significant share of the population living in group quarters: shared housing such as barracks, dorms, or prisons. Group housing was especially common in the years following statehood because so much of the population worked in logging, seafood processing, or the military.

In 1960, 11 percent of the population lived in group quarters compared with just 3 percent nationally. The differences between Alaska and the rest of the country were even more striking when broken down by age. At statehood, 28 percent of those in their 20s lived in group housing and in 1970 it was 22 percent. For the U.S. it was just 7 percent in 1970.

Alaska's share of young adults in group quarters fell considerably during the 1980s but remained double the national average as of 2020.

The decline in group housing has come with population growth and the increase in housing stock. Among all ages, 7.4 percent of Alaskans lived in

## More group living in Alaska than the U.S.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

### About the data

Data for this article come primarily from the decennial census short form. More detailed breakouts by age rely on Public Use Microdata Samples from the census long form for 1960 through 2000 and then the Census Bureau's American Community Survey for 2010 and 2020.

group quarters in the 1970s, and it fell to around 4 percent over the next decade, where it has remained since.

While the group housing graph above shows an uptick for Alaska after 2000, that's mainly a change in how the Census Bureau counts group quarters rather than a true increase. For example, the thousands of oilfield workers in Prudhoe Bay weren't counted in group quarters until 2010.

Nationwide, the group housing percentage hasn't changed much; it has remained between 2 and 3 percent since 1960.

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