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Census notes shift in state's households

By 2010, most North Carolina households could be headed by unmarried partners, singles

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Associated Press

RALEIGH — Young job-hunters drawn to North Carolina in the 1990s have made their mark on more than just the workplace.

The past decade's employment boom means the number of unmarried adults living alone in

Census2000



the state is now greater than the number of nuclear families, according to figures from the 2000 Census released Wednesday.

Homes in which two married adults live with children younger than age 18 made up 22.6 percent of the state's 3.1 million households, compared with 25.4 percent occupied by unmarried adults who live alone.

The state also saw one of the country's fastest increases in unmarried partners living together.

North Carolina's 113 percent increase in the decade — from 67,425 households in 1990 to 76,880 in 2000 — tops the national average of 71 percent.

More single mothers were raising children alone in the 1990s. They made up 7.3 percent of North Carolina households in 2000 compared with 6.7 percent in 1990.

Married couples, with or without children, still make up a majority of the state's households though they're becoming less common — 52.5 percent in 2000 compared with 56.6 percent of

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households in 1990.

Part of the reason for fewer nuclear families could be that children of the baby boomers are only now shifting from the lean years of their early working life into opportunities to start families, said William Brooks Jr., president of the North Carolina Family Policy Council.

Projections suggest "the next surge of kids will be coming along in the next 10 years. It may just be we're riding the trough of a wave," he said.

The immigration of single men from Latin America to North Carolina is another factor, Brooks said.

The state's growth during the 1990s — which added 1.42 million people to its population — did add 73,809 married-with-children households, though their share of all households fell from 25.2 percent in 1990.

"It's kind of the way we were brought up. I don't know much different, I guess," Elizabeth Daigle, 36, of Raleigh said while attending a weekend music and arts festival with her husband and two young children.

Edina Frazier of Wake Forest was a single mother for her daughter's first four years. When she married last year, her husband brought two children of his own into the new

family.

"When I stop and think about it, a number of people have my kind of blended household," she said. "I know several people who have gone through changes like I've gone through."

Married-couple households grew 7 percent nationally in the past decade. Almost 52 percent of U.S. households contained a married couple in 2000, down from 55 percent in 1990, 60.8 percent in 1980 and 70.5 percent in 1970.

If the trend continues, most North Carolina households will be headed by unmarried partners and singles by the time the census is taken again in 2010, said the American Association for Single People in Glendale, Calif.

The number of unmarried partners has grown seven times faster than the nearly 16 percent increase in married couples. They now make up 1.8 percent of North Carolina households. The numbers do not disclose how many unmarried partner homes were made up of same-sex couples. That number and additional census details will be released later.

"It doesn't surprise me that unmarried partners make up a growing portion of the family landscape in North Carolina," said Marshall Miller of the Alternatives to Marriage Project in Boston. "Cohabitation isn't limited to young people in New York and California any more."