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percent in 2011, according to one of two American Community Survey briefs covering the housing market released by the U.S. Census Bureau.

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The rental vacancy rates for the nation declined from 8.4 percent in 2009 to 7.4 percent in 2011, according to one of two American Community Survey briefs covering the housing market released by the [U.S. Census Bureau](#).

Approximately four times as many metro areas experienced declines in rental vacancy rates as those that experienced increases. The share of U.S. households that rent rather than own increased from 34.1 percent in 2009 to 35.4 percent in 2011. Nearly a quarter of the nation's metro areas saw a rise in renting households, while less than 3.0 percent of the nation's metro areas saw a decline.

In its report, "[Rental Housing Market Condition Measures: A Comparison of US Metropolitan Areas](#)," the agency examined four characteristics of the rental housing stock using American Community Survey data collected in 2009 and 2011. The characteristics are gross rent, gross rent as a percentage of household income, rental vacancy rates, and renter share of total households and describe changes comparing 2009 with 2011.

The brief found that more renters are spending a high percentage of their household income on rent. Policymakers use gross rent as a percentage of income as a measure of housing affordability, and it is often used to determine eligibility for housing programs. In this report, renters spending 35 percent or more of household income on rent and utilities are considered to have high rental costs.

The share of renters with high housing costs in the United States rose from 42.5 percent in 2009 to 44.3 percent in 2011. However, average rental rates in the United

States declined from 2009 to 2011.

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Among the 50 most populous metro areas, some of the heaviest rental costs were borne by renters in metro areas in Florida, California and Louisiana in 2011, despite rent declines between 2009 and 2011. These include Miami with 55.7 percent of renters experiencing heavy rental costs. Orlando, Fla. (52.9 percent); Riverside, Calif. (52.2 percent); and New Orleans (51.3 percent), whose shares did not differ significantly from one another, followed closely.

Among the 50 most populous metro areas, only two became affordable for more renters — Richmond, Va., with a decline of 3.2 percentage points in the share of renters with high rental costs from 42.7 percent to 39.5 percent between 2009 and 2011, and Buffalo, N.Y., with a decline of 3.0 percentage points from 45.6 percent to 42.6.

Other highlights include:

- [Rental Costs](#)
- [Rental Vacancy Rate](#)
- [Renter Share of Total Households](#)

Physical Characteristics of Housing

Another brief released today is “[Physical Characteristics of Housing](#)”. Based on American Community Survey data covering 2009 to 2011, this brief presents statistics on basic physical and structural characteristics of the total housing inventory at the national level and for metro areas. The report examines types of housing structures, newer and older houses, and the size of the houses measured by the number of rooms.

According to the American Community Survey, there were 131.8 million housing units in the United States on average from 2009 to 2011, with 81.1 million (61.5

percent) being single-family houses not attached to another structure. In terms of

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- [Newer/Older Houses](#)

The American Community Survey provides a wide range of important statistics about people and housing for every community across the nation. The results are used by everyone from town and city planners to retailers and homebuilders. The survey is the only source of local estimates for most of the 40 topics it covers, such as education, occupation, language, ancestry and housing costs for even the smallest communities. Ever since Thomas Jefferson directed the first census in 1790, the census has collected detailed characteristics about our nation's people. Questions about jobs and the economy were added 20 years later under James Madison, [who said](#) such information would allow Congress to "adapt the public measures to the particular circumstances of the community," and over the decades allow America "an opportunity of marking the progress of the society."

Notes: The rental vacancy rate is the proportion of the rental inventory that is vacant and "for rent." It is computed by dividing the number of vacant units "for rent" by the sum of renter-occupied units, vacant units "for rent," and vacant units that have been rented but not yet occupied, and then multiplying by 100.

Gross rent is the contract rent plus the cost of electricity, gas, water, sewer and other fuels (oil, coal, kerosene, wood, etc.) if they are not included in the contract rent.

Small Business

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