

The Effects of the Recession on Child Poverty

Poverty Statistics for 2008 and
Growth in Need during 2009

By Julia B. Isaacs



BROOKINGS

FIRST FOCUS

MAKING CHILDREN & FAMILIES THE PRIORITY

Nearly one in five children under age 18 lived in poor families in 2008, according to poverty statistics released by the Census Bureau in September 2009. Though high, this statistic does not capture the full impact of the economic downturn, which is expected to drive poverty even higher in 2009. However, updated poverty statistics will not be released by the Census Bureau until next August or September. To better understand the effects of the recession on children and families, this brief examines child poverty rates in 2008 in conjunction with increases in families' use of nutrition assistance under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps).

Between August 2008 and August 2009, the number of people receiving food stamps, or what are now called SNAP benefits, increased by 7.0 million, or 24 percent, as monthly caseloads skyrocketed from 29.5 to 36.5 million participants.¹ This extraordinary increase means that roughly 3.4 million more children were receiving SNAP benefits in August 2009 than a year earlier, based on data showing that almost half (49 percent) of SNAP participants are children.² Tracking SNAP recipient data by state provides an initial sense of which parts of the country are experiencing the most dramatic growth in economic need among families with children and where we can expect to see the largest increases in child poverty during 2009.

OVERVIEW OF RESULTS

Children in nine states or jurisdictions are at particularly high risk of poverty in 2009, reflecting a combination of high child poverty in 2008 and very high increases in use of nutrition assistance between 2008 and 2009, according to the state-level data analysis summarized in table 1 and explained further in the body of the brief. All nine lie in the south or southwestern regions of the United States: Alabama, Arizona, Georgia, Mississippi, New Mexico, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and the District of Columbia (which is hereafter referred to as a state). Public agencies and private charities in these nine states are likely to face significant strain in meeting the economic needs of children and families during the current year and immediate future.

Seven states combine very high growth in SNAP caseloads over the past year with average levels of child poverty in 2008 (between 15 and 20 percent, or relatively close to the national average). These states, located throughout the country, include Florida, Idaho, Maine, Missouri, North Carolina, Nevada, and Oregon. In addition, three states with very high growth in assistance had relatively low child poverty rates (less than 15 percent) last year. The social service systems in these three states – Washington, Wisconsin, and Vermont – may not be prepared to serve an influx of newly poor children.

With families' incomes falling during the current economic recession, a total of 25 states may face high child poverty rates in 2009, based on high poverty in 2008 and/or large growth in assistance caseloads during the past year (see the pink shaded cells in table 1). At the other end of the spectrum, there are five states – Connecticut, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey and Wyoming – where child poverty was below 15 percent in 2008, and there was only moderate growth in recipients of SNAP benefits through June 2009. The children in these five states are at less risk of poverty in 2009 than children in the rest of the country. Finally, child poverty is likely to increase in the remaining 21 states, but generally not as high as in to the high levels threatening the states in the pink shaded areas of table 1.

Table 1. Child Poverty in 2008 and Growth in Need in 2009

GROWTH IN SNAP (FOOD STAMP) PARTICIPANTS IN 2009					
CHILD POVERTY IN 2008	Very High	High	Moderately High	Total	
	High (≥ 20 percent)	Alabama, Arizona, D.C., Georgia, Mississippi, New Mexico, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas (9)	Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Montana, Oklahoma, West Virginia (6)	-- (0)	(15)
	Mid-Level (15 to 20 percent)	Florida, Idaho, Maine, Missouri, Nevada, North Carolina, Oregon (7)	California, Colorado, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota (10)	North Dakota (1)	(18)
	Low (< 15 percent)	Washington, Wisconsin, Vermont (3)	Alaska, Delaware, Hawaii, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Utah, Virginia (10)	Connecticut, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, Wyoming (5)	(18)
	Total	(19)	(26)	(6)	(51)

Notes: Growth in SNAP is the difference between the average monthly number of participants in the first six months of 2009 and the first six months of 2008, divided by total state population as of July 2008. Those states with an increase of 2 to 3 percentage points of state population were deemed to have extremely high growth; those with an increase of 1 to 2 percentage points of state population, high growth; and those with an increase of 0.7 to 1.0 percent of state population, moderately high growth. Sources: Poverty data from the American Community Survey; SNAP data from National Data Bank Version 8.2 Public Use, adjusted by data on disaster assistance from the Disaster Report by Fiscal Year.

The remainder of this brief provides a review of child poverty rates in 2008, by state, followed by a discussion of how more contemporaneous measures of economic need, specifically SNAP caseloads and unemployment rates, can shed light on expected poverty rates in 2009. I then rank states as having very high, high, or moderately high growth in SNAP recipients and conclude with the combined analysis summarized in table 1.

CHILD POVERTY RATES IN 2008, BY STATE

Nearly one in five children in the United States were poor in 2008, a much higher poverty rate than for Americans of other ages. The child poverty rate in 2008 was 19.0 percent according to the national survey used for official poverty statistics and 18.2 percent according to the larger American Community Survey (ACS), which has sufficient respondents to provide fairly reliable poverty estimates in each state.³ Turning to state estimates based on ACS data, child poverty ranged considerably, from 30.4 percent in Mississippi to 9.0 percent in New Hampshire (see figure 1). That is, about three in ten children in Mississippi and one in ten children in New Hampshire lived in families with annual cash incomes below the poverty thresholds, which were \$17,000 for a family of three and \$22,000 for a family of four in 2008.

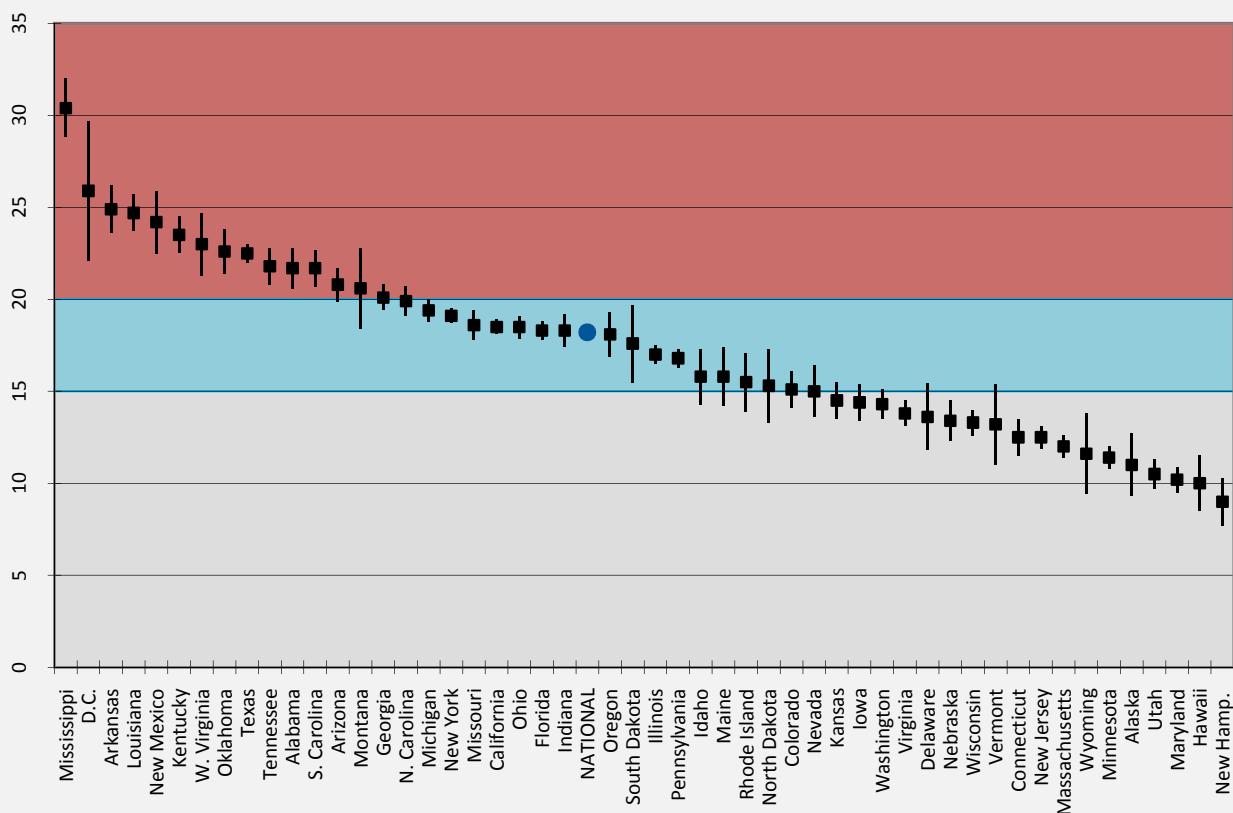
In 2008, there were 15 states with child poverty rates above 20 percent, the cut-off point used in this analysis to demarcate high poverty. All of these high poverty states (shaded in pink in the figures) are located in the South and West (see map 1). This group includes Texas, which is home to 1.5 million poor children, reflecting both the size of its child population and its fairly high child poverty rate (see table 2).

Another 18 states had poverty rates between 15 and 20 percent, including some of the largest states: California, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. California is home to more poor children (1.7 million) than any other state, even though its child poverty rate falls into this mid-level range. Finally, eighteen states (shaded in light grey in the figures) had poverty rates less than 15 percent, including New Jersey and several smaller states. In total, there were 13.2 million poor children in the United States in 2008.

Methodological Notes. Poverty estimates are not as precise in small states as in large states. In Texas, for example, the poverty rate is 22.5 percent with a margin of error of 0.5 percentage points, while in Montana, the poverty rate is 20.6 but the margin of error is 2.2 percent percentage points. In other words, while one can state with 90 percent confidence that the true rate in Texas is within 0.5 percent of the reported estimate, or between 22.0 and 23.0 percent, the 90 percent confidence interval in Montana is much wider, extending from between 18.4 and 22.8 percent (as shown in figure 1). In practical terms, this means that while both states are classified as states with poverty rate greater than 20 percent, the classification of Montana is less certain than that of Texas.⁴

Though subject to some imprecision, the poverty estimates in this analysis are more precise than state poverty statistics used in the past, because this analysis uses data from the relatively new American Community Survey (ACS), which is a larger survey than the long-established Current Population Survey (CPS). At this point, the Census Bureau recommends using the CPS for national poverty estimates and the ACS for state and smaller area poverty estimates. As another methodological note, the child poverty rates presented here, and throughout this report, are based on official measures of poverty, without making the various adjustments to income and poverty lines that are being considered under alternative poverty measures.

Figure 1. Child Poverty Rates in 2008



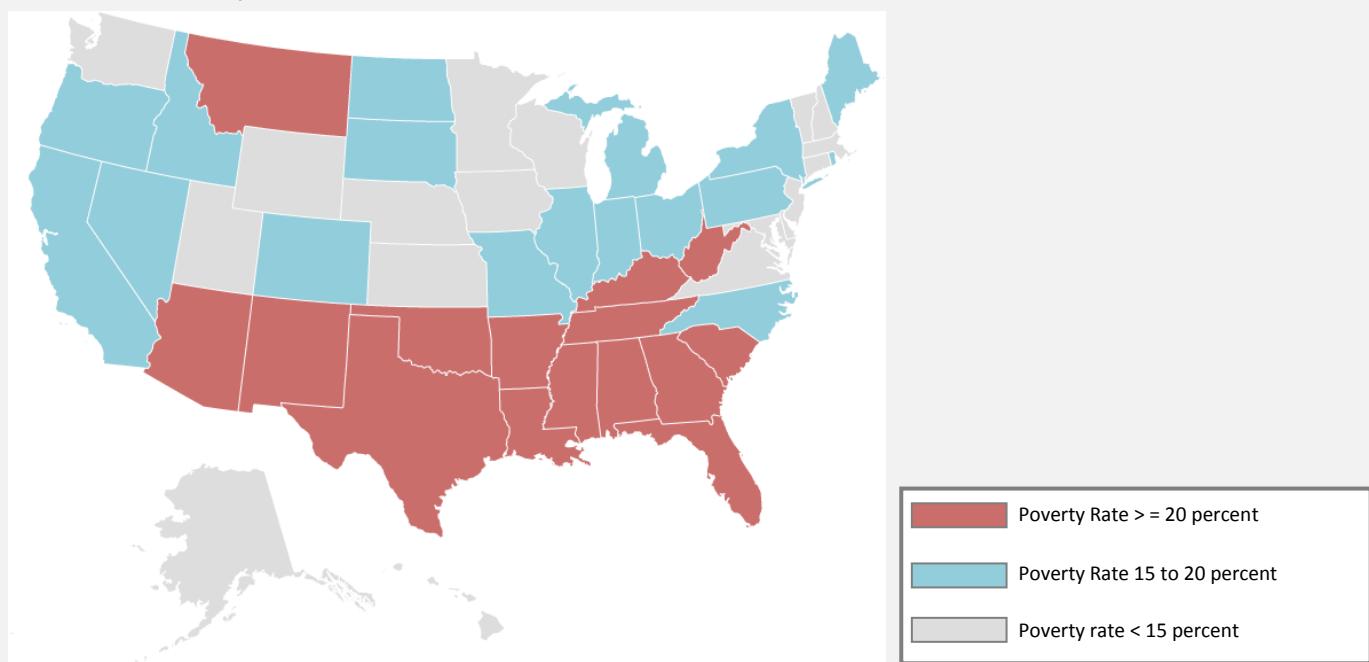
Source: See Table 2.

Table 2. Child Poverty Rates and Number of Poor Children in 2008

State	Poverty Rate with Margin of Error			# Poor Children
Alabama	21.7	+/-	1.1	240,518
Alaska	11.0	+/-	1.7	19,549
Arizona	20.8	+/-	0.9	349,390
Arkansas	24.9	+/-	1.3	171,849
California	18.5	+/-	0.4	1,700,910
Colorado	15.1	+/-	1.0	179,409
Connecticut	12.5	+/-	1.0	99,580
Delaware	13.6	+/-	1.8	27,733
District of Columbia	25.9	+/-	3.8	28,365
Florida	18.3	+/-	0.5	721,284
Georgia	20.1	+/-	0.7	501,892
Hawaii	10.0	+/-	1.5	28,233
Idaho	15.8	+/-	1.5	64,473
Illinois	17.0	+/-	0.5	535,197
Indiana	18.3	+/-	0.9	283,227
Iowa	14.4	+/-	1.0	100,685
Kansas	14.5	+/-	1.0	99,772
Kentucky	23.5	+/-	1.0	232,700
Louisiana	24.7	+/-	1.0	270,794
Maine	15.8	+/-	1.6	42,231
Maryland	10.2	+/-	0.7	134,890
Massachusetts	12.0	+/-	0.6	169,460
Michigan	19.4	+/-	0.6	458,303
Minnesota	11.4	+/-	0.6	140,211
Mississippi	30.4	+/-	1.6	228,572
Missouri	18.6	+/-	0.8	259,017
Montana	20.6	+/-	2.2	45,058
Nebraska	13.4	+/-	1.1	58,354
Nevada	15.0	+/-	1.4	98,784
New Hampshire	9.0	+/-	1.3	25,878
New Jersey	12.5	+/-	0.6	253,378
New Mexico	24.2	+/-	1.7	119,016
New York	19.1	+/-	0.4	829,340
North Carolina	19.9	+/-	0.8	439,518
North Dakota	15.3	+/-	2.0	21,266
Ohio	18.5	+/-	0.6	498,387
Oklahoma	22.6	+/-	1.2	200,421
Oregon	18.1	+/-	1.2	154,198
Pennsylvania	16.8	+/-	0.5	455,488
Rhode Island	15.5	+/-	1.6	34,816
South Carolina	21.7	+/-	1.0	227,868
South Dakota	17.6	+/-	2.1	33,976
Tennessee	21.8	+/-	1.0	316,476
Texas	22.5	+/-	0.5	1,497,803
Utah	10.5	+/-	0.8	88,449
Vermont	13.2	+/-	2.2	16,646
Virginia	13.8	+/-	0.7	246,734
Washington	14.3	+/-	0.8	217,002
West Virginia	23.0	+/-	1.7	86,988
Wisconsin	13.3	+/-	0.7	172,180
Wyoming	11.6	+/-	2.2	14,602
US TOTAL	18.2	+/-	0.2	13,240,870

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey, Table GCT1704

Map 1. Child Poverty Rates in 2008



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008

INCREASED ECONOMIC NEED IN 2009

Families' economic conditions grew worse during both 2008 and 2009. The national unemployment rate has more than doubled during the economic recession, rising from 4.9 percent in December 2007 (when the recession officially began) to 10.2 percent in October 2009 (the most recent data available at the time of this analysis).

As families' incomes have fallen, more Americans have signed up to receive food stamps, or what have recently been renamed Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. The old paper food stamps have been replaced by plastic electronic benefit cards, which look like ATM cards and allow families to purchase food at grocery stores without drawing attention to their reliance on public assistance. The number of SNAP participants jumped from 29.5 million to 36.5 million people between August 2008 and August 2009, an increase of 7.0 million people, or 24 percent, in that one-year period. This dramatic increase translates into approximately 3.4 million more children receiving SNAP benefits in August 2009 than a year earlier, based on data showing that almost half (49 percent) of SNAP participants are children.⁵ For reasons discussed below, many of these new SNAP child recipients represent newly poor children, suggesting a substantial increase beyond the 13.2 million children who were poor in 2008.

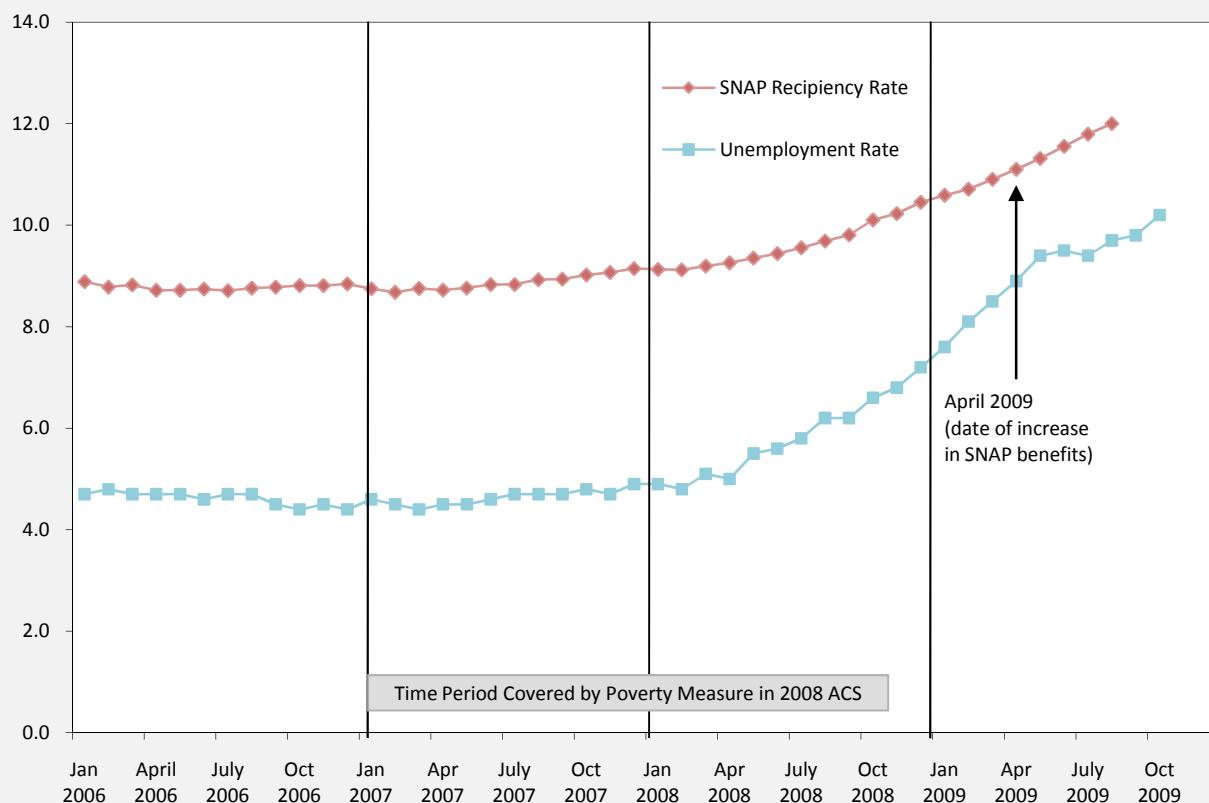
The poverty statistics released annually by the Census Bureau lag considerably behind current economic conditions. Job losses and wage reductions occurring in 2009 were obviously not captured in the 2008 ACS data. In addition, many adverse events in 2008 were only partially captured, because families are asked to report on their income in the 12 months prior to their interview, and so families interviewed early in 2008 were reporting more on income from 2007 than income from 2008. While each family reports on 12 months of income, the period covered across families interviewed throughout calendar year 2008 ranges over 23 months, from January 2007 to November 2008 (see figure 2).⁶

With so many more people out of work in the second half of 2008 and in 2009, there is little doubt that poverty is on the increase. Unemployment has a particularly strong impact on child poverty rates, according to a recent study by economist Rebecca Blank.⁷ A Brookings simulation based on the Blank analysis suggests that the national child poverty rate may rise by 2 percentage points in the next year, reaching 21 percent in 2009.⁸ The Brookings researchers

further project that the national child poverty rate will continue rising over the next few years, reaching 24 or 25 percent in 2012, before gradually declining.

The goal of this analysis is to preview child poverty rates by state, in 2009. Because of data limitations, I do not predict a numeric estimate for each state, but instead, take on the easier task of identifying states likely to have a “high” child poverty rate (20 percent or higher) in 2009, based on child poverty rates in 2008 and the growth in SNAP benefits between 2008 and 2009.⁹

Figure 2. Measures of Economic Need, 2006-2009



Note: Unemployment data are seasonally adjusted; SNAP data for September and October 2008 have been adjusted to remove disaster relief assistance.
Sources: SNAP National Data Bank Version 8.2 Public Use, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

What makes use of food stamps, or to use the modern term, SNAP benefits, a good predictor of child poverty rates? SNAP is the broadest federal safety-net program providing assistance to low-income individuals and families. Almost all individuals and families with monthly earnings and other income below 130 percent of the poverty guidelines and no more than \$2,000 in their bank account are eligible to receive benefits. Nearly two-thirds of eligible low-income individuals do indeed sign up for and receive benefits. Uptake is higher in families with children and/or lower income: the participation rate was recently estimated as 95 percent among poor families with children.¹⁰ With such high participation among families with children, children make up almost half (49 percent) of all SNAP/food stamp participants, with their parents or other adults in their household making up another quarter (27 percent) of participants.¹¹ Not surprisingly, the vast majority of SNAP recipients are poor: 87 percent of SNAP recipients have monthly incomes below the poverty guidelines and the incomes of the remaining 13 percent are not much higher.¹² Finally, there is a high correlation between state child poverty rates and state food stamp recipiency rates, considerably

higher than the association between child poverty and state unemployment rates (0.82 compared to 0.32 based on 2008 data).¹³

There are challenges, however, with using SNAP/food stamp caseload data to track economic need. Recipients receiving disaster assistance after hurricanes or floods cause temporary spikes in caseloads that are not related to deeper economic trends. To address this, the SNAP/food stamp data in this analysis have been adjusted by removing recipients of disaster assistance from reported participant counts.

A more serious issue is that changes in federal policies or states' administrative practices (e.g., the use of on-line applications) can lead to increased caseloads absent any changes in economic conditions. Of particular concern is the 13.6 percent increase in SNAP benefits enacted under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, effective April 1, 2009. As a result of this change, average nutrition benefits per household jumped, from \$252 in March 2009 to \$295 in April 2009, and the average per person benefit increased as well, from \$114 to \$133.¹⁴ Such an increase could motivate some people who had not previously applied for benefits to submit an application at the welfare office. However, as shown in figure 2, there was no noticeable jump in recipient counts in April 2009. Instead, there has been a steady increase in participation throughout the past 18 months, suggesting that most of the observed increase is driven by economic need, not by increased size or attractiveness of the nutrition benefit.¹⁵

GROWTH IN SNAP BENEFITS, 2008 TO 2009, BY STATE

All 51 states and jurisdictions saw growth in SNAP caseloads between 2008 and 2009, measured here as monthly participation averaged over the first six months of each year. The highest increases in average monthly participation were in Florida (485,000), Texas (482,000) and California (455,000). Adjusting for size of state population, the largest increase was in Oregon, where the 114,000 increase in average monthly participants amounted to 3.0 percent of the entire state population. The two next largest increases also were in the West, namely, in Arizona and Washington, each with increases totaling 2.8 percent of state population. Nationally, the increase in SNAP participants from the first half of 2008 to the first half of 2009 was 5.4 million people, or 1.8 percent of the U.S. population.

Nineteen states were classified in this analysis as having a very high increase in SNAP participants, namely, an increase equal to 2 to 3 percent of the state population (see table 3). These states include six states in the West (Arizona, Idaho, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington) and nine states in the South (Alabama, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia), as shown in map 2. The remaining four states are scattered across the Midwest and Northeast (Maine, Missouri, Vermont and Wisconsin).

An additional 26 states were assessed as having a high increase in SNAP participation between 2008 and 2009 (a growth equal to 1 to 2 percent of state population, shown in dark blue). Finally, six states had an increase of between 0.7 and 0.9 percent of state population, a level which would be considered quite high in most years, but was classified here as only "moderately high" compared to the growth in other states. Three of these six states are in the Midwest (Minnesota, Nebraska and North Dakota). While moderate growth in SNAP participants in these six states is probably a sign of less economic deterioration than in other states, it also could reflect state administrative practices that discourage new applicants (i.e., limited office hours or a burdensome application process).

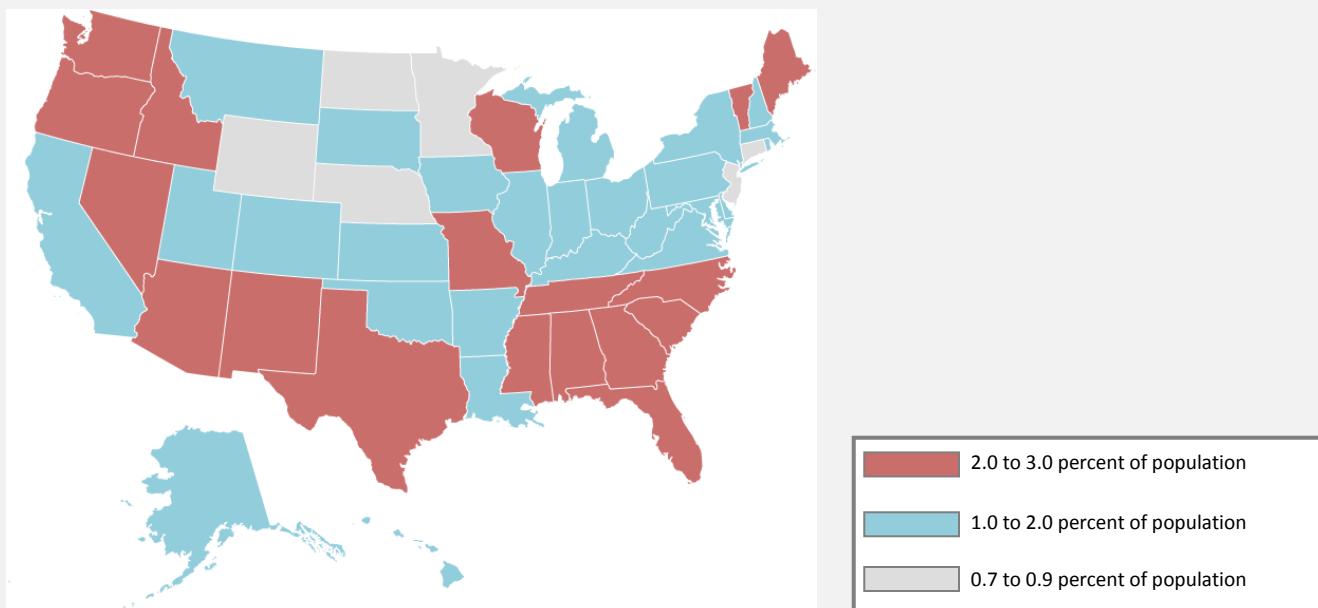
Is an increase of 2 to 3 percentage points of the state population a high increase? Indeed it is, as can be seen in the second to last column of table 3, which expresses the SNAP increases as a simple percent increase. The SNAP caseload grew by 39 percent in Utah and 36 percent in Nevada. Six other states also experienced increases of more than 30 percent, including Arizona, Florida, Idaho, Nevada, Washington, Wisconsin, and Vermont.¹⁶

Table 3. Growth in SNAP Participants, 2008 to 2009

State	SNAP Participants Jan-June 2008	SNAP Participants Jan-June 2009	Increase in Participants	Percent Increase	Increase as Percent of Population
Alabama	567,116	674,974	107,859	19	2.3
Alaska	59,712	66,618	6,906	12	1.0
Arizona	623,025	806,829	183,804	30	2.8
Arkansas	375,223	408,124	32,902	9	1.2
California	2,216,181	2,671,068	454,887	21	1.2
Colorado	252,235	320,696	68,461	27	1.4
Connecticut	224,784	253,260	28,475	13	0.8
Delaware	74,470	90,641	16,171	22	1.9
DC	89,040	102,555	13,516	15	2.3
Florida	1,442,234	1,927,600	485,366	34	2.6
Georgia	1,008,776	1,277,350	268,574	27	2.8
Hawaii	95,813	114,332	18,519	19	1.4
Idaho	101,263	138,080	36,817	36	2.4
Illinois	1,296,476	1,462,299	165,823	13	1.3
Indiana	612,875	695,763	82,888	14	1.3
Iowa	252,668	294,213	41,546	16	1.4
Kansas	186,976	218,000	31,024	17	1.1
Kentucky	631,112	700,362	69,250	11	1.6
Louisiana	656,264	708,466	52,202	8	1.2
Maine	174,581	202,358	27,776	16	2.1
Maryland	357,113	451,020	93,907	26	1.7
Massachusetts	501,397	624,818	123,421	25	1.9
Michigan	1,263,400	1,443,472	180,071	14	1.8
Minnesota	294,994	344,286	49,292	17	0.9
Mississippi	442,261	499,787	57,526	13	2.0
Missouri	886,249	1,032,447	146,198	16	2.5
Montana	80,756	92,484	11,728	15	1.2
Nebraska	120,673	132,986	12,313	10	0.7
Nevada	143,884	197,562	53,679	37	2.1
New Hampshire	63,971	78,377	14,407	23	1.1
New Jersey	435,175	496,544	61,369	14	0.7
New Mexico	238,522	290,530	52,008	22	2.6
New York	1,961,561	2,317,448	355,887	18	1.8
North Carolina	937,636	1,134,179	196,542	21	2.1
North Dakota	48,655	52,991	4,336	9	0.7
Ohio	1,148,453	1,358,300	209,847	18	1.8
Oklahoma	415,914	463,726	47,812	11	1.3
Oregon	469,162	583,168	114,006	24	3.0
Pennsylvania	1,187,615	1,334,234	146,619	12	1.2
Rhode Island	84,976	100,830	15,854	19	1.5
South Carolina	585,525	683,567	98,042	17	2.2
South Dakota	63,412	72,918	9,505	15	1.2
Tennessee	905,694	1,070,402	164,708	18	2.7
Texas	2,458,142	2,940,433	482,291	20	2.0
Utah	133,755	186,017	52,262	39	1.9
Vermont	55,896	73,415	17,520	31	2.8
Virginia	543,069	649,615	106,546	20	1.4
Washington	581,955	767,664	185,709	32	2.8
West Virginia	276,827	305,678	28,851	10	1.6
Wisconsin	420,480	547,600	127,121	30	2.3
Wyoming	22,847	26,977	4,130	18	0.8

Source: SNAP data from National Data Bank Version 8.2 Public Use, adjusted by data on disaster assistance from the Disaster Report by Fiscal Year.

Map 2. Growth in SNAP Participants, 2008 to 2009



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008

COMBINATION OF CHILD POVERTY AND SNAP STATISTICS

As a final step, the analyses of child poverty rates and growth in SNAP participants were combined to identify states with high child poverty rates in the wake of the recession.¹⁷ Nine states were identified as facing the highest risk of high child poverty in 2009, as reflected in the top left-hand corner of table 1. All nine lie in the south or southwestern regions of the United States: Alabama, Arizona, the District of Columbia, Georgia, Mississippi, New Mexico, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas. Child poverty rates, which already exceed 20 percent in these states, are likely to rise considerably higher in 2009, with increases of 2 percentage points and more being likely. Another 17 states, while not at the same level of risk, also are likely to face high poverty rates (20 percent or higher) in 2009, based on high poverty in 2008 and/or large growth in assistance caseloads during the past year (see the pink shaded cells in table 1).

At the other extreme, there were five states – Connecticut, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey and Wyoming – which combined low child poverty in 2008 with a smaller than average uptake in nutrition assistance through July 2009. Even in these five states, however, child poverty rates are likely to be higher in 2009 than in 2008 because the increase in SNAP benefits, while moderate compared to other states, nonetheless reflects rising levels of economic distress among families with children.

Updated child poverty statistics will be released by the Census Bureau next August or September, providing further information about the breadth and depth of child poverty in the country in 2009. In the meantime, there is sufficient evidence to predict that most states will experience higher child poverty in 2009 than in 2008. Moreover, judging from past recessions, child poverty rates in many states will continue to rise over the next few years, even after the economy begins to recover.

Such predictions are sobering, since child poverty rates were higher in the United States than in most other rich nations even before the onset of the recession.¹⁸ Given the negative impact of child poverty on children's long-term development, it is important to continue monitoring of child poverty rates, under the official poverty measures analyzed here as well as under the new alternative poverty measures being considered in Congress. Given inevitable lag in reporting of poverty statistics, however, it also is important to examine more contemporaneous measures of need, such as the SNAP participant counts highlighted in this issue brief, to get a more timely sense of the effects of the recession on children and their families.

NOTES:

¹ Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), U.S.D.A. “Program Data. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Monthly Data National Summary.” (data as of November 2, 2009). <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/34SNAPmonthly.htm> [downloaded 11/11/09]

² Kari Wolkwitz and Carole Trippe. *Characteristics of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2008*, Table A-14. Alexandria, VA: Food and Nutrition Service, U.S.D.A. 2009.

³ The 19.0 percent estimate is probably the most relevant estimate of child poverty when looking at national statistics only, but the 18.2 percent rate is the more appropriate when comparing to the state estimates provided in this brief. It is not unusual for the two surveys to provide slightly different estimates, due to differences in survey design, including the timing. As discussed further in the text and footnote 6, the “2008” ACS survey includes data from both 2007 and 2008, while the 2008 estimates from CPS are based on 2008 only.

⁴ In fact, Montana is one of only five states that did shift poverty categories poverty when I did a sensitivity check comparing the one-year estimates provided here with three-year estimates (with data from 2006-2008). While the three-year estimates had smaller margins of error, they capture economic conditions from before the recession. Of the five states with a category shift, four were lower under the three-year measure (Montana, Georgia, North Dakota and Nevada) and one was higher (North Carolina).

⁵The 49 percent has held constant over the past three years (2006-2008) and so it is reasonable to assume it will remain 49 percent in 2009, though the characteristics of SNAP recipients in 2009 are not yet known.

⁶ The period ranges from January 2007 to November 2008 because families interviewed in January 2008 report on income between January and December 2007, families interviewed in February report on income between February 2007 and January 2008, and so on, with families interviewed in December 2008 reporting on income between December 2007 and November 2008.

⁷ Rebecca M. Blank. “Economic Change and the Structure of Opportunity for Less-Skilled Workers.” In Maria Cancian and Sheldon H. Danziger, eds. *Changing Poverty, Changing Policies*. New York: Russell Sage Press, 2009.

⁸ Emily Monea and Isabel Sawhill, “Simulating the Effect of the “Great Recession” on Poverty,” Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 2009. http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2009/0910_poverty_monea_sawhill.aspx

⁹ I did explore the possibility of directly predicting state child poverty rates, using lagged child poverty, growth in SNAP recipiency rates, and/or unemployment rates as independent variables in a simple regression analysis. Indeed, there is a strong association between these variables. However, I did not have sufficient confidence in my results to publish predicted values for state child poverty rates. The ACS data on state child poverty only extend back a few years, and so my data sample was limited. Moreover, the time series did not capture any periods with as much increase in SNAP participation or unemployment rates as occurred between 2008 and 2009 and I was hesitant to extrapolate the effects of these large increases based on the much smaller increases observed in the sample. I also was concerned that the large sampling error around the state child poverty estimates would make it extremely difficult to predict future rates with any precision.

¹⁰ Joshua Leftin and Kari Wolkwitz, *Trends in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates: 2000 to 2007*. Alexandria, VA: Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), U.S.D.A. 2009.

¹¹ Wolkowitz and Trippe, 2009. The 25 percent of participants who do not live in household with children are primarily elderly or disabled individuals and their family members. Less than 4 percent of all participants are childless, non-elderly, non-disabled adults, and this latter group is subject to strict work requirements.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ The correlation between state SNAP recipiency rates and state child poverty rises to 0.84 when measured with four years of pooled state data, 2004-2008.

¹⁴ Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), U.S.D.A. “Program Data. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Monthly Data National Summary.” (data as of November 2, 2009). <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/34SNAPmonthly.htm> [downloaded 11/11/09].

¹⁵ Even without a sharp jump in April 2009, the higher benefit may lead to gradually increasing participation over time, as families learn about the higher benefit and come in to apply or get re-certified in the months since April.

¹⁶ Note that a high growth rate can be driven by low SNAP population in 2008 as well as a high increase between 2008 and 2009. For example, the increase of 52,262 participants in Utah is a 39 percent increase above the base SNAP population, yet represents only 1.9 percent of the state population, placing the state in the “high” but not “very high” category under my analysis. I believe the increase relative to state population is the most relevant for predicting the child poverty rate (a population-based measure), and so use it as the primary measure of SNAP recipient growth.

¹⁷ The combined analysis of poverty and growth in SNAP caseloads follows the approach taken in Julia Isaacs and Timothy M. Smeeding, *The First Wisconsin Poverty Report*, Madison, WI: Institute for Research on Poverty, 2009.

¹⁸ UNICEF, *Child Poverty in Perspective: An Overview of child well-being in rich countries*. Innocenti Research Centre Report Card 7. Florence, Italy: UNICEF Innocenti Research Center, 2007.

Julia Isaacs is the Child and Family Policy Fellow at the Brookings Institution and a First Focus Fellow. She can be reached at jisaacs@brookings.edu.

First Focus is a bipartisan advocacy organization that is committed to making children and their families a priority in federal policy and budget decisions. Learn more by visiting www.firstfocus.net.