

National Association of REALTORS®

2019 PROFILE OF HOME BUYERS AND SELLERS



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INTRODUCTION

Buying a primary residence for home buyers is a financial decision, but also an emotional decision that involves many lifestyle factors. For most home buyers, the purchase of a primary residence is one of the largest financial transactions they will make. Buyers purchase a home not only for the desire to own a home of their own, but also because of changes in jobs, family situations, and the need for a smaller or larger living area. This annual survey, conducted by the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS® of recent home buyers and sellers, helps to gain insight into detailed information about their unique experience with this transaction. The information provided supplies understanding, from the consumer level, of the trends that are transpiring. The survey covers information on demographics, housing characteristics, and the experience of consumers in the housing market, as well as for those who are not yet able to enter the market. Buyers and sellers also provide valuable information on the role that real estate professionals play in home sales transactions.

The *Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers* report has been the leading industry source of trusted insight into consumer behavior for nearly four decades. It has grown and evolved to keep up with changing home buying trends and the need for more information. NAR first administered the survey in 1981 with just 59 questions. In 2019, the survey contained 125 questions. Although the report has evolved, data has been collected for more than three decades describing the demographic characteristics of home buyers and sellers, buyers and sellers' experience in the home transaction process, as well as market characteristics including the use of real estate agents. One measure of how the market has changed is the manner in which the data is collected. In 1981, only a paper copy of the survey was offered. Today, recent home buyers can take the survey via paper or online, and in English or Spanish. Because of its long history and timely information available each year, the report is valued by REALTORS®, market analysts, and policymakers.

Data is collected from a nationally representative sample of recent home buyers who purchased a primary residence in the 12-month period between July and June. Data is also representative of the geographic distribution of home sales. Consumer names are obtained from Experian, a firm that maintains an extensive database of recent home buyers derived from county records.

Additionally, a new chapter provides insights into those who did not enter the housing market, but wanted to be homeowners.

Today the data set provides a wealth of information that is used to create a number of spin-off NAR reports including: *Home Buyer and Seller Generational Trends Report*, *Buyer Bios*, *Real Estate in a Digital Age*, *Veterans and Active Military Home Buyers and Sellers Profile*, *Profile of LGB Buyers and Sellers*, and *Moving with Kids*.

In 2019, the share of first-time home buyers was 33 percent, holding steady from 33 percent last year. This figure has gravitated away from the historical norm at 40 percent of the market. The median household income increased again this year, likely due to a nationwide increase in home prices caused by a lack of housing inventory, pushing out lower-income buyers. Married and unmarried couples have double the buying power of single home buyers in the market and may be better able to meet the price increases of this housing market. Repeat buyers are also returning to the market.

Tightened inventory is affecting the home search process of buyers. Due to suppressed inventory levels in many areas of the country, buyers are typically purchasing more expensive homes as prices increase. The number of weeks a buyer searched for a home remained at 10 weeks. Buyers continue to report the most difficult task for them in the home buying process was just finding the right home to purchase.

Increased prices are also impacting sellers. Tenure in the home remained at a high of 10 years this year. Historically, tenure in the home has been six to seven years. Sellers may now have the equity and buyer demand to sell their home after stalling or delaying their home sale.

Buyers needed the help of a real estate professional to help them find the right home for them, negotiate terms of sale, and help with price negotiations. Sellers, as well, turned to professionals to help market their home to potential buyers, price their home competitively, and sell within a specific timeframe. For-sale-by-owner sales have remained near the lowest level recorded in this data set at eight percent of sales again this year, while the use of the agent to buy the home reached a historic high of 89 percent, as the number of buyers purchasing directly from a previous owner or through a builder fell. Likewise, the seller's use of the agent remains near historic highs.

This year, a new chapter is added which explores who is not entering the home buying market. The data is among those who rented or lived with someone else over the same time period as those who purchased homes. The data suggests that non-owners do want to own homes, but they are unable to enter the market due to financial constraints.

This report provides real estate professionals with insights into the needs and expectations of their clients. What do consumers want when choosing a real estate professional? How do home buyers begin the process of searching for a home? Why do some sellers choose to forego the assistance of an agent? The answers to these questions, along with other findings in this report, will help real estate professionals better understand the housing market and provide the information necessary to address the needs of America's real estate consumers.

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HIGHLIGHTS

Characteristics of Home Buyers

- First-time buyers made up 33 percent of all home buyers, holding steady from last year's 33 percent.
- The typical buyer was 47 years old this year, and the median household income for 2018 rose again this year to \$93,200.
- Sixty-one percent of recent buyers were married couples, 17 percent were single females, nine percent were single males, and nine percent were unmarried couples.
- Twelve percent of home buyers purchased a multi-generational home, to take care of aging parents, because of children over the age of 18 moving back home, and for cost-savings.
- Ninety-one percent of recent home buyers identified as heterosexual, three percent as gay or lesbian, one percent as bisexual, and five percent preferred not to answer.
- Twenty percent of recent home buyers were veterans and three percent were active-duty service members.
- At 29 percent, the primary reason for purchasing a home was the desire to own a home of their own.

Characteristics of Homes Purchased

- Buyers of new homes made up 13 percent and buyers of previously owned homes made up 87 percent.
- Most recent buyers who purchased new homes were looking to avoid renovations and problems with plumbing or electricity at 39 percent. Buyers who purchased previously-owned homes were most often considering a better overall value at 33 percent.
- Detached single-family homes continued to be the most common home type for recent buyers at 83 percent, followed by six percent of buyers choosing townhomes or row houses.
- Senior-related housing dipped slightly this year to 12 percent, with 20 percent of buyers typically purchasing condos and 9 percent purchasing a townhouse or row house.
- There was a median of only 15 miles between the homes that recent buyers purchased and the homes that they moved from.
- Home prices increased slightly this year to a median of \$257,000 among all buyers. Buyers typically purchased their homes for 98 percent of the asking price.
- The typical home that was recently purchased was 1,850 square feet, had three bedrooms and two bathrooms, and was built in 1990.
- Heating and cooling costs were the most important environmental features for recent home buyers, with 85 percent finding these features at least somewhat important.

- Overall, buyers expected to live in their homes for a median of 15 years, while 20 percent said that they were never moving.

The Home Search Process

- For 44 percent of recent buyers, the first step that they took in the home buying process was to look online at properties for sale, while 16 percent of buyers first contacted a real estate agent.
- Eighty-seven percent of recent buyers found their real estate agent to be a very useful information source. Online websites were seen as the most useful information source at 93 percent.
- Buyers typically searched for 10 weeks and looked at a median of 9 homes.
- The typical buyer who did not use the internet during their home search spent only four weeks searching and visited four homes, compared to those who did use the internet and searched for 10 weeks and visited 10 homes.
- Among buyers who used the internet during their home search, 87 percent of buyers found photos and 85 percent found detailed information about properties for sale very useful.
- Sixty-three percent of recent buyers were very satisfied with their recent home buying process.

Home Buying and Real Estate Professionals

- Eighty-nine percent of buyers recently purchased their home through a real estate agent or broker, and five percent purchased directly from a builder or builder's agent.
- Having an agent to help them find the right home was what buyers wanted most when choosing an agent at 52 percent.
- Forty-one percent of buyers used an agent that was referred to them by a friend, neighbor, or relative and 12 percent used an agent that they had worked with in the past to buy or sell a home.
- Seventy-five percent of buyers interviewed only one real estate agent during their home search.
- Ninety percent of buyers would use their agent again or recommend their agent to others.

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Financing the Home Purchase

- Eighty-six percent of recent buyers financed their home purchase. Those who financed their home purchase typically financed 88 percent.
- First-time buyers who financed their home typically financed 94 percent of their home compared to repeat buyers at 84 percent.
- For 60 percent of buyers, the source of the downpayment came from their savings. Thirty-eight percent of buyers cited using the proceeds from the sale of a primary residence, which was the next most commonly reported way of securing a downpayment.
- For 13 percent of buyers, the most difficult step in the home buying process was saving for a downpayment.
- Of buyers who said saving for a downpayment was difficult, 51 percent of buyers reported that student loans made saving for a downpayment difficult. Forty-five percent cited credit card debt, and 38 percent cited car loans as also making saving for a downpayment hard.
- Buyers continue to see purchasing a home as a good financial investment. Eighty-one percent reported they view a home purchase as a good investment.

Home Sellers and Their Selling Experience

- The typical home seller was 57 years old, with a median household income of \$102,900.
- For all sellers, the most commonly cited reason for selling their home was the desire to move closer to friends and family (16 percent), that it was too small (13 percent), and a job relocation (11 percent). Sellers typically lived in their home for 10 years before selling, up from last year.
- Eighty-nine percent of home sellers worked with a real estate agent to sell their home.
- For recently sold homes, the final sales price was a median of 99 percent of the final listing price.
- Recently sold homes were on the market for a median of three weeks, the same as last year.
- Thirty-four percent of all sellers offered incentives to attract buyers.
- This year, home sellers cited that they sold their homes for a median of \$60,000 more than they purchased it.
- Sixty-six percent of sellers were very satisfied with the selling process.

Home Selling and Real Estate Professionals

- Sixty-six percent of sellers found their agent through a referral from a friend, neighbor, or relative or used an agent they had worked with before to buy or sell a home.

- Seventy-five percent of recent sellers contacted only one agent before finding the right agent they worked with to sell their home.
- Eighty-nine percent of sellers listed their homes on the Multiple Listing Service (MLS), which is the number one source for sellers to list their home.
- Seventy-five percent of sellers reported that they provided the agent's compensation.
- The typical seller has recommended their agent once since selling their home. Thirty-six percent of sellers recommended their agent three or more times since selling their home.
- Eighty-seven percent said that they would definitely (73 percent) or probably (14 percent) recommend their agent for future services.

For-Sale-by-Owner (FSBO) Sellers

- Only eight percent of recent home sales were FSBO sales again this year. This remains near the lowest share recorded since this report started in 1981.
- The median age for FSBO sellers is 60 years. Sixty-five percent of FSBO sales were by married couples that have a median household income of \$94,000.
- FSBOs typically sell for less than the selling price of other homes; FSBO homes sold at a median of \$200,000 last year (the same as the year prior), and significantly lower than the median of agent-assisted homes at \$280,000.
- FSBO homes sold more quickly on the market than agent-assisted homes. Fifty-eight percent of FSBO homes sold in less than two weeks—often because homes were sold to someone the seller knows.
- Seventy-seven percent of successful FSBO sellers who knew the buyer were very satisfied with the process of selling their home.

Aspiring Buyers

- Among non-owners, 74 percent of those surveyed are currently renters and 26 percent currently live with someone else without paying housing costs.
- Fifty-seven percent of non-owners believe it would be at least somewhat difficult to become a homeowner based on their current financial situation.
- Seventy-eight percent of non-owners believe homeownership is a good financial decision.
- Non-owners believe homeownership is part of their American Dream, at 75 percent. Additionally, 81 percent of non-owners want to own a home in the future.

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METHODOLOGY AMONG RECENT BUYERS AND SELLERS (CHAPTERS 1 THROUGH 8)

In July 2019, NAR mailed out a 125-question survey using a random sample weighted to be representative of sales on a geographic basis to 159,750 recent home buyers. The recent home buyers had to have purchased a primary residence home between July of 2018 and June of 2019. A total 5,870 responses were received from primary residence buyers. After accounting for undeliverable questionnaires, the survey had an adjusted response rate of 3.7 percent.

Respondents had the option to fill out the survey via hard copy or online. The online survey was available in English and Spanish.

Consumer names and addresses were obtained from Experian, a firm that maintains an extensive database of recent home buyers derived from county records. Information about sellers comes from those buyers who also sold a home.

All information in this profile is characteristic of the 12-month period ending June 2019, with the exception of income data, which are reported for 2018. In some sections comparisons are also given for results obtained in previous surveys. Not all results are directly comparable due to changes in questionnaire design and sample size. Some results are presented for the four U.S. Census regions: Northeast, Midwest, South, and West. The median is the primary statistical measure used throughout this report. Due to rounding and omissions for space, percentage distributions may not add to 100 percent.

Data gathered in the report is based on primary residence home buyers. From the *Realtors Confidence Index*, 85 percent of home buyers were primary residence buyers, which accounts for 5,063,450 homes sold in 2018. Using that calculation, the sample at the 95 percent confidence level has a confidence interval of plus-or-minus 1.28%.

METHODOLOGY AMONG ASPIRING BUYERS (CHAPTER 9)

The survey was conducted by an established survey research firm, TechnoMetrica Market Intelligence. Each month, July of 2018 to June of 2019, a sample of U.S. households was surveyed via random-digit dial, including cell phones and land lines. Using a computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) system, TechnoMetrica conducts interviews from their call center in Ramsey, NJ.

Regional quotas are used, based on four census regions and nine census divisions.

The data compiled for this report is based on 10,863 completed telephone interviews of qualified households survey respondents over a 12-month period from July of 2018 to June of 2019 who own, rent or live with someone else. Approximately 900 interviews are conducted each month. For this chapter, only data from those who rent or live with someone else was used for a total of 3,802 responses. For the annual results, the margin of error for the survey is +/-1.6 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, based on non-owner households.





The National Association of REALTORS® is America's largest trade association, representing more than 1.3 million members, including NAR's institutes, societies and councils, involved in all aspects of the real estate industry. NAR membership includes brokers, salespeople, property managers, appraisers, counselors and others engaged in both residential and commercial real estate.

The term REALTOR® is a registered collective membership mark that identifies a real estate professional who is a member of the National Association of REALTORS® and subscribes to its strict Code of Ethics.

Working for America's property owners, the National Association provides a facility for professional development, research and exchange of information among its members and to the public and government for the purpose of preserving the free enterprise system and the right to own real property.

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