



## Trends in U.S. Adoptions: 2008-2012

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# Trends in U.S. Adoptions: 2008–2012

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## Background

- There are no official statistics for the total number of adoptions in the United States. No single agency is charged with compiling this information. Agencies that collect adoption data do so for their own purposes and therefore count adoptions differently (e.g., by court cases filed, by birth certificates modified), which makes compilation difficult.
- Over the past 20 years, only a handful of national, comprehensive data sets have been compiled on the total number of children adopted in the United States.
- Information on total U.S. adoptions is needed by policymakers, government agencies, court personnel, social workers, adoption-related organizations, advocacy groups, and others to help guide adoption practice and policy, including strategies to increase placements, plan for postadoptive services, and determine funding and personnel needs.

## Methodology

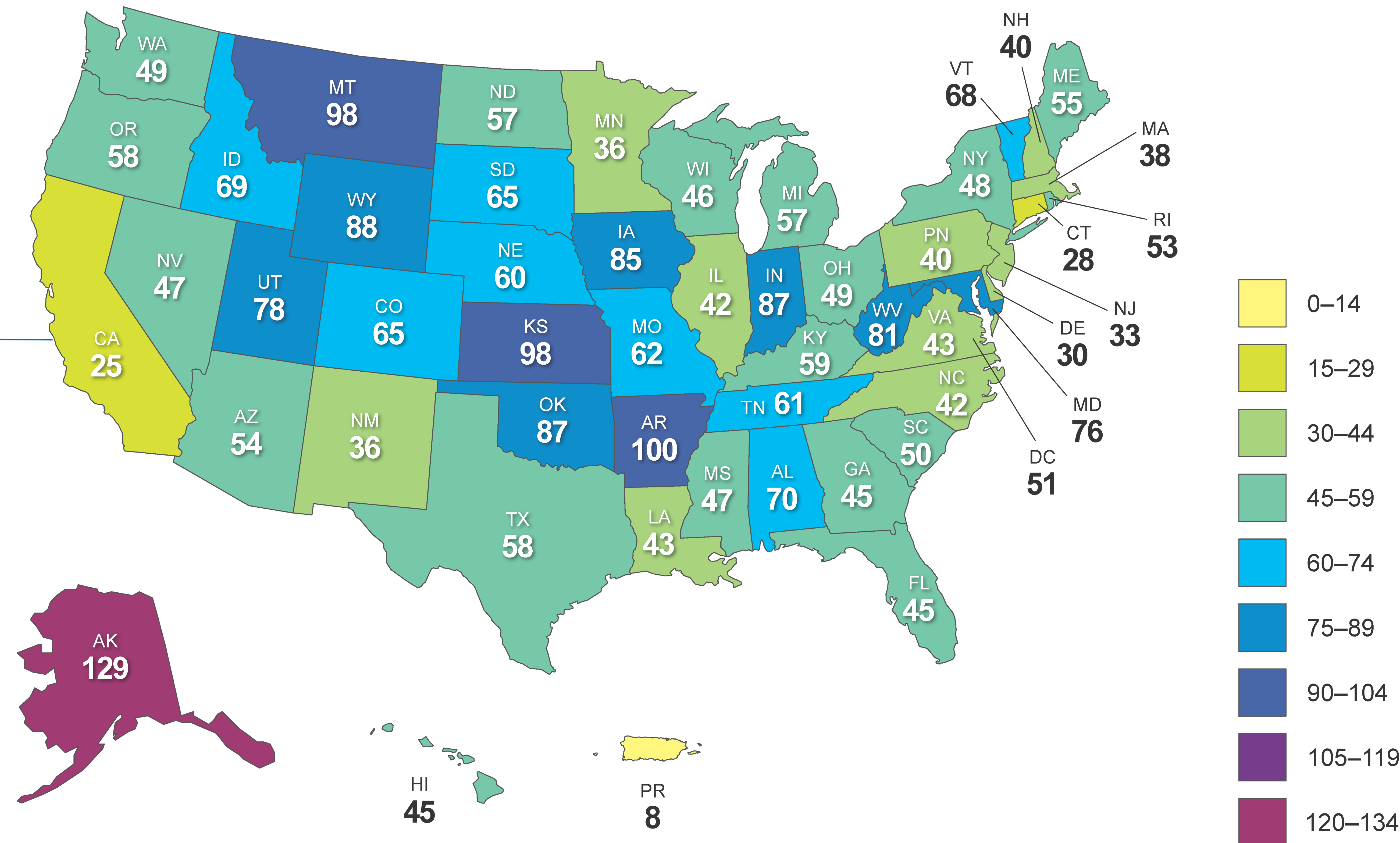
This study estimated the total number of adoptions in the United States (50 States plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico) by compiling data from the following sources:

- State courts:** Data on adoption filings (requests to adopt that are submitted to the court) or dispositions (decisions by the court to grant or deny adoptions) were obtained from the National Center for State Courts or directly from the States.
  - U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Children's Bureau:** The total numbers of public agency adoptions are based solely on data submitted by State child welfare agencies to HHS's Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS).
  - State Departments of Social Services (DSSs):** Data from State DSSs or similar agencies were sometimes used when domestic adoption data could not be collected from the courts.
  - State bureaus of vital records:** Data from bureaus of vital records (or vital statistics) were sometimes used when domestic adoption data could not be collected from the State court. Bureaus of vital records base their data on the number of requests to amend birth certificates due to adoption.
  - U.S. Department of State, Office of Children's Issues:** This office collects data on the number of immigrant visas issued to children to enter the United States for the purpose of an intercountry adoption. All intercountry adoption data for this study were obtained from the Office of Children's Issues website.
- This study also yielded data for "other" types of adoption, which include all types of adoption that are not public agency or intercountry, such as private agency, tribal, facilitated, independent, and stepparent.

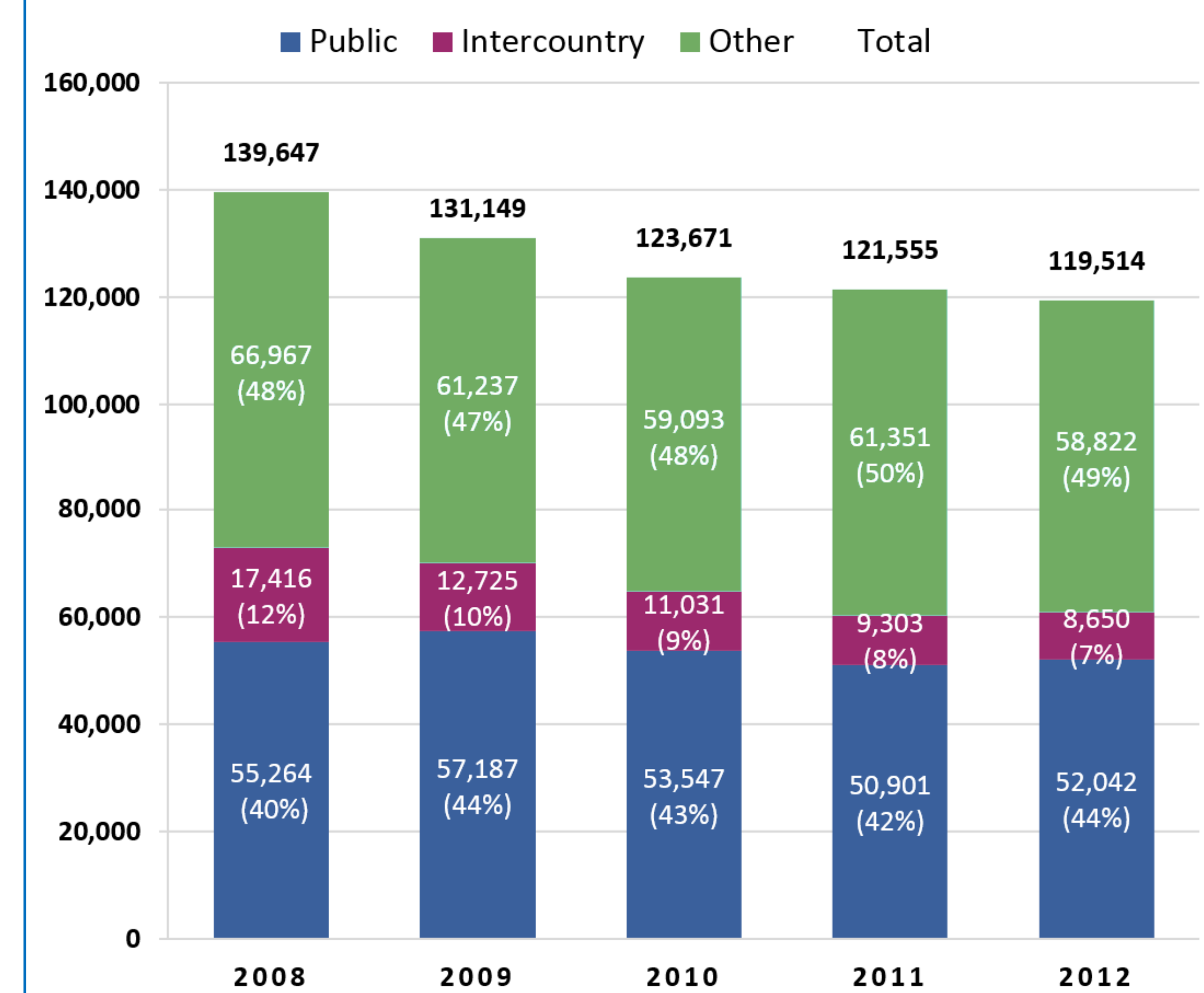
The adoption rate per 100,000 adults decreased 18 percent from 2008 to 2012 (60 to 49) and 24 percent from 2001 to 2012 (65 to 49).

## Results

2012 Adoption Rates Per 100,000 Adults



Adoptions by Type: 2008–2012



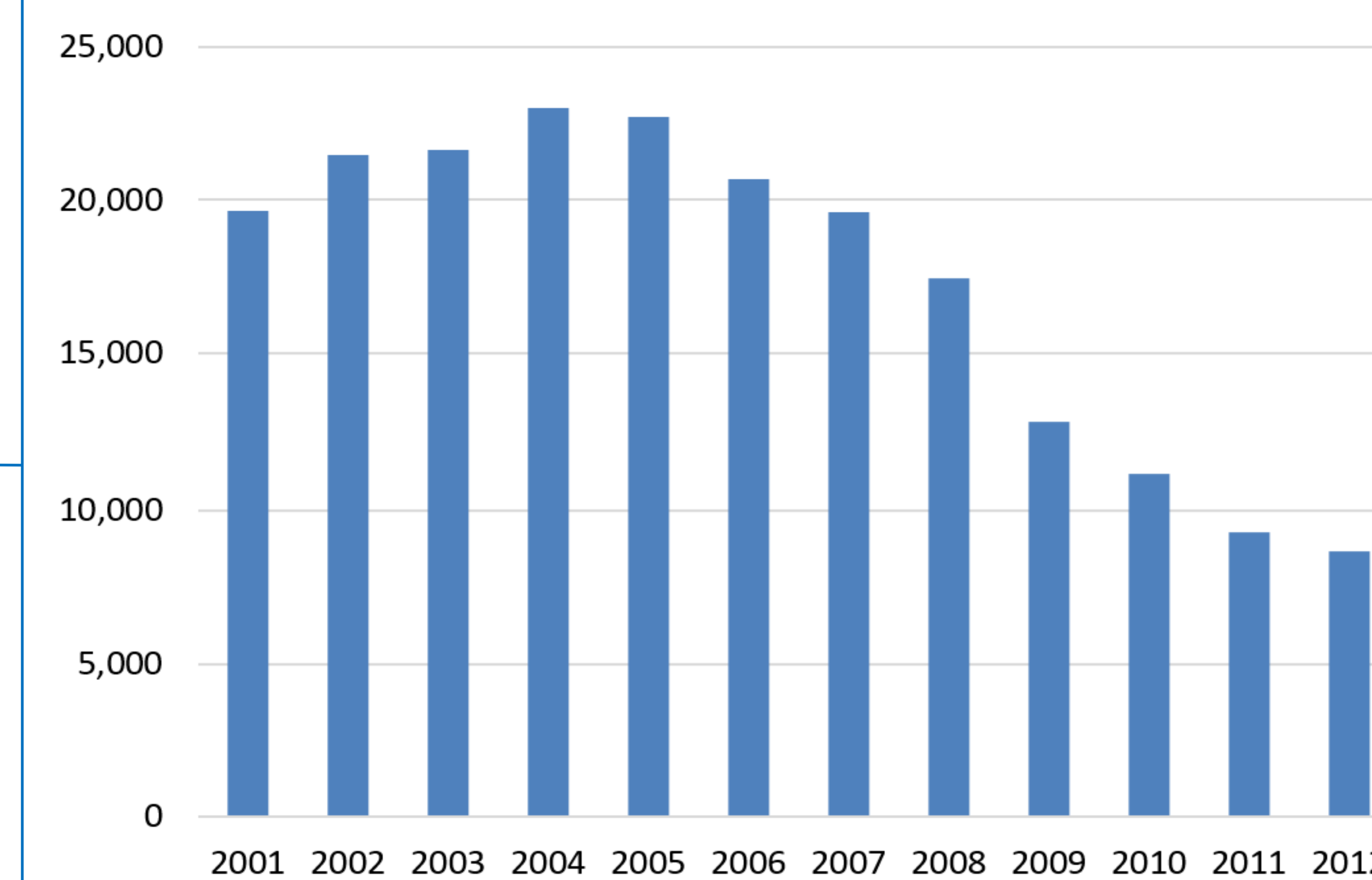
140,034 children were adopted in 2001, and 146,172 children were adopted in 2005.

There was a 14-percent decrease in the total number of adoptions from 2008 to 2012 and a 15-percent decrease from 2001 to 2012.

Intercountry adoptions decreased 56 percent from 2001 to 2012 and 50 percent from 2008 to 2012.

From 2008 to 2012, public adoptions decreased 6 percent, but the percentage of total adoptions made through a public agency increased from 40 percent in 2008 to 44 percent in 2012.

Intercountry Adoptions: 2001–2012



## Discussion

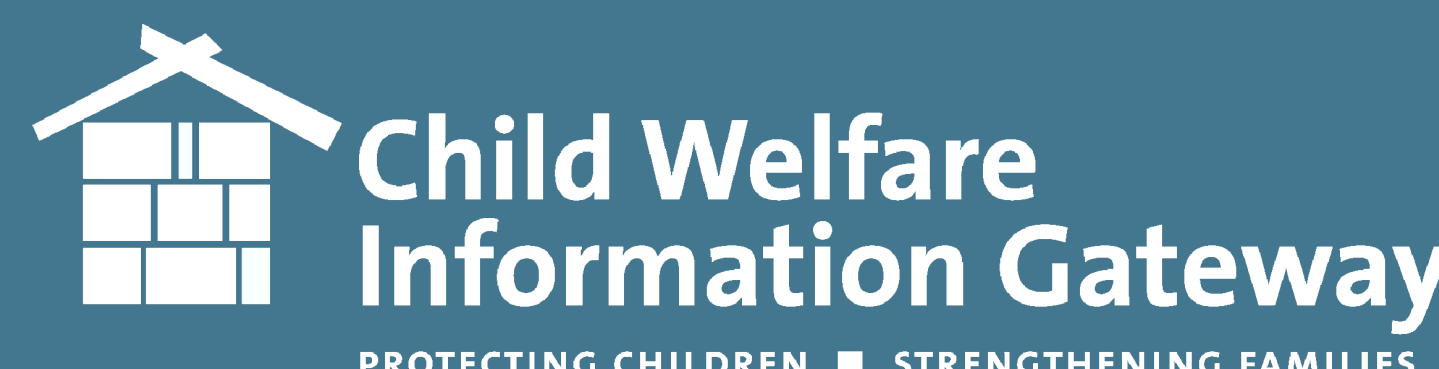
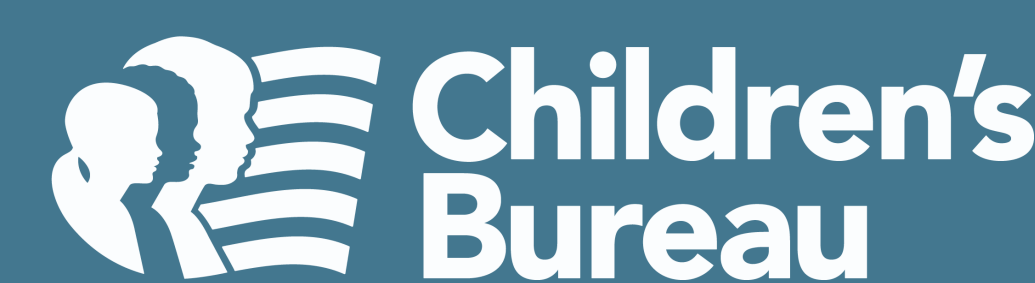
- Adoptions decreased by 20,133 from 2008 to 2012, with the decrease in intercountry adoptions accounting for 44 percent of that decline.
  - The steep decrease in intercountry adoptions may have been caused or heightened by the United States' 2008 ratification of the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect to Intercountry Adoption.
  - Seventy-two percent of the 4,700 adoption decrease from 2008 to 2009 was due to a drop in adoptions from Guatemala, from which the United States stopped receiving adoptions after ratifying the Hague Convention.
- Even when excluding intercountry adoptions, the total number of adoptions still decreased 8 percent from 2001 to 2012 and 9 percent from 2008 to 2012.
- The decline in the U.S. economy between 2000 and 2009 could have contributed to the decrease in adoptions, with that environment putting an additional monetary and personal strain on families who otherwise would have considered adoption.
- The number of public agency adoptions increased 4 percent from 2001 to 2012, even with a 21-percent decrease in the number of children in out-of-home care waiting to be adopted.
- Public agency adoptions decreased 6 percent from 2008 to 2012, but that only represents 16 percent of the overall drop during that period.

It is most likely that numerous factors affected the number of adoptions in the United States, with factors probably varying to some degree from State to State.

## Limitations

- There is no overlap between AFCARS data and the data provided by the Department of State, but there may be overlap in court data and Department of State data because children adopted abroad also may be adopted in a U.S. court. Since there are no available data about the percentage of intercountry adoptions that are also processed in U.S. courts, we assumed that (1) families in States that *give* full effect and recognition to adoptions made in other countries *would not* readopt their children in U.S. courts and (2) families in States that *do not give* full effect and recognition *would* readopt their children in U.S. courts.
- The time parameters for the data (e.g., fiscal year, calendar year) often change depending on the data source. Since totals from the various sources tend not to change drastically from year to year, it is reasonable to make calculations using data gathered during different timeframes.
- Bureaus of vital records report when a birth certificate amendment was processed, which may not occur within the same year the adoption was finalized. This could cause a double count of children if a child was born in a State that provided data on birth certificate amendments and then adopted in a State that provided court data.
- Breakouts of types of adoption within "other" are not possible based on the available data.

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