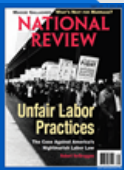


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Modern Poverty Includes A.C. and an Xbox

By Ken McIntyre July 18, 2011 10:39 A.M.

When Americans think of poverty, we tend to picture people who can't adequately shelter, clothe, and feed themselves or their families.

When the Census Bureau defines "poverty," though, it winds up painting more than 40 million Americans — one in seven — as "poor."

Census officials continue to grossly exaggerate the numbers of the poor, creating a false picture in the public mind of widespread material deprivation, writes Heritage Foundation senior research fellow Robert Rector [in a new paper](#).

"Most news stories on poverty feature homeless families, people living in crumbling shacks, or lines of the downtrodden eating in soup kitchens," Rector says. "The actual living conditions of America's poor are far different from these images."

Congress is tying itself in knots figuring out how to cut spending and bring down a \$14 trillion national debt. Lawmakers might well take a much closer look at the nearly a trillion dollars spent each year on welfare even though many recipients aren't what the typical American would recognize as poor and in need of government assistance.

What is poverty? Americans might well be surprised to learn from other government [data](#) that the overwhelming majority of those defined as "poor" by the Census Bureau were well-housed and adequately fed even in the recession year 2009. About 4 percent of them did temporarily become homeless.

- Data from the Department of Energy and other agencies show that the average poor family, as defined by Census officials:
- Lives in a home that is in good repair, not crowded, and equipped with air conditioning, clothes washer and dryer, and cable or satellite TV service.
 - Prepares [meals](#) in a kitchen with a refrigerator, coffee maker and microwave as well as oven and stove.
 - Enjoys two color TVs, a DVD player, VCR and — if children are there — an Xbox,

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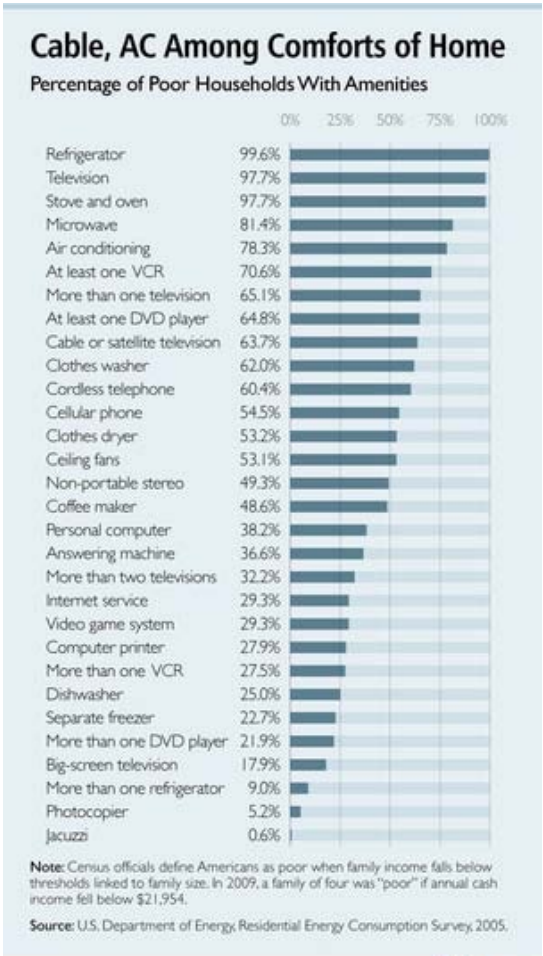
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What you can try:

PlayStation, or other video game system.

- Had enough money in the past year to meet essential needs, including adequate [food](#) and medical care.



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Rather than report such detailed surveys, Rector and co-author [Rachel Sheffield](#) write, the media “amplified” the Census Bureau’s annual misrepresentation of poverty over the past 40 years. News reports routinely suggest that poor Americans typically are homeless and [hungry](#) — and U.S. foes and rivals such as Iran, China, and Russia are delighted to report the same.

“Regrettably, most discussions of poverty in the U.S. rely on sensationalism, exaggeration, and misinformation,” Rector says. “But an effective anti-poverty policy must be based on an accurate assessment of actual living conditions and the causes of deprivation.”

See the full Heritage Foundation paper, including downloadable charts, here: “[Air Conditioning, Cable TV, and an Xbox: What Is Poverty in the United States Today?](#)”

— [Ken McIntyre](#) is the Marilyn and Fred Guardabassi fellow in media and public policy studies at the [Heritage Foundation](#).

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