



## Economic Review

# Why Are Prime-Age Men Vanishing from the Labor Force?

by: Didem Tüzemen

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Prime-age men are increasingly vanishing from the labor force, due in part to job polarization.

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The labor force participation rate for prime-age men (age 25 to 54) has declined dramatically in the United States since the 1960s, but the decline accelerated more recently. In 1996, 4.6 million prime-age men did not participate in the labor force. By 2016, this number had risen to 7.1 million. Better understanding these men and the personal situations preventing them from working may be crucial in evaluating whether they are likely to return to the labor force.

Didem Tüzemen documents changes in the nonparticipation rates of prime-age men with different demographic characteristics as well as changes in their personal situations during nonparticipation. She finds nonparticipation rates increased most among younger men and men with only a high school degree, some college, or an associate's degree. In addition, she finds that job polarization has been a key contributor to the rise in nonparticipation. Overall, her results suggest prime-age men are unlikely to return to the labor force if current conditions hold.

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