Does a FSBO home sell for less than an agent-listed home?

WHEN RESEARCHERS COMPARE SIMILAR HOMES, THE ANSWER IS NO!

In two studies, homes sold without a traditional agent actually sold for MORE.

SPOILER ALERT **That famous NAR number saying agents get you more? It falls apart the moment you compare similar homes. Here's the data they don't show you.**

Where "FSBO sells for less" comes from

One National Association of Realtors (NAR) number, from its 2026 Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers:

FSBO median	$368,500
Agent-assisted	$455,000

Here's what you need to understand: those two numbers compare **two different groups of homes**, not the same home sold two ways. NAR itself says the lower FSBO price may reflect more lower-cost mobile or manufactured homes and rural homes. And 41% of FSBO sellers did not actively market their home.

> **For example:** if more owner-sold homes are in lower-priced neighborhoods and more agent-listed homes are in higher-priced ones, the two medians will be far apart even if every home sold for exactly what it was worth. That gap comes from where the homes are, not from who sold them.

SPOILER #2 **If someone shows you a study, read it yourself. In my research, the studies agents cite usually fall short on these points.**

- Comparing different home types (manufactured or rural vs. suburban)
- Measuring against an interested party's valuation model, not an independent yardstick
- Thin samples: a few markets or a short time window
- Not removing sales to family or buyers the seller already knew
- Not comparing FSBO homes that were actually marketed to buyers

Here we deal with facts and data. This is what the research found.

The research covers both homes sold by owner and flat-fee MLS listings, where the owner handles the sale and pays a small flat fee to get on the MLS.

$5,750
Average net savings for flat-fee sellers, even counting extra time and effort. Study homes averaged about $450,000 (2004 to 2006; Chicago suburbs, Sacramento, Santa Cruz), so roughly 1.3% of the price.
Levitt & Syverson, Brookings-Wharton 2008

+1% to 4%
Flat-fee MLS homes sold for more than similar homes sold with a traditional agent
Atlanta Fed working paper 2024

Top 10% to 20%
Only agents in roughly the top 10% to 20% (79th to 90th percentile) got a high enough price to justify a 3% fee vs. a flat-fee MLS listing.
Atlanta Fed working paper 2024

Atlanta Fed = Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta working paper by Cunningham, Gerardi & Shen (revised June 2024): 2.3M+ home sales in Charlotte, Minneapolis and Houston, 2000 to 2019, comparing flat-fee MLS listings with traditional agent listings.

Now you see how misleading the claim that owner-sold homes sell for less really is. Fear of a lower price is no reason not to sell by owner. Now we're going to geek out on you and give you all the data. These studies use sales from before the 2024 commission-rule changes. *Links to every source are at the bottom.*

STUDY	PRICE RESULT	WHAT IT FOUND
SELLING WITHOUT A TRADITIONAL AGENT, VS. A TRADITIONAL AGENT		
Hendel, Nevo & Ortalo-Magné American Economic Review 2009	about the same	**Same price** as MLS homes, before commission. True FSBO. About 15,000 Madison sales. MLS homes sold faster, likelier to sell.
Cunningham, Gerardi & Shen Atlanta Fed working paper 2024	1% to 4% more	Similar homes: **1% to 4% more** with flat-fee MLS. Not traditional FSBO. Days on market barely differed; 8% to 11% less likely to sell in a year.
Levitt & Syverson Brookings-Wharton 2008	about the same	**Similar prices** to full-commission homes; sellers **saved about $5,750**. Not traditional FSBO. Took longer, less likely to sell; savings already count that. That's if you pay a buyer's agent, as the study assumed: about $500 flat fee plus about 2.5% to the buyer's agent, vs. about 5% full service.
Bernheim & Meer Economic Inquiry 2013	broker-sold 5.9% to 7.7% less	Sellers who used a broker sold for **about 5.9% to 7.7% less**. Unusual market: Stanford campus, free listing service for nearly all sellers.
AGENTS SELLING THEIR OWN HOMES, VS. THEIR CLIENTS' HOMES		
Levitt & Syverson REStat 2008	agents' own 3.7% more	Agents' own homes: **about 3.7% more**, about 10 days longer. Made famous by *Freakonomics*. 98,000 Chicago-area sales. Not a FSBO comparison.
Rutherford, Springer & Yavas J. of Financial Economics 2005	agents' own 4.5% more	Agent-owned homes: **about 4.5% more**, and sold no faster. 193,007 sales. Not a FSBO comparison.

Why this matters: *A separate question, but it shows where the motivation lies. When agents sell their own homes, they hold out longer and get more. That points to a misalignment between what's best for the agent and what's best for you.*

Owner-sold, no broker | Flat-fee MLS (not traditional FSBO) | Agents' own homes (not FSBO)

This is something I get told all the time. I've been challenged on it many times, and I have never found solid, independent evidence that proves the point so many agents make. I honestly believe they believe it. To be fair, FSBO sellers are at a disadvantage on today's platforms, where it's hard to even get listed. That's what SaveOnYourHome.com is working to fix, by being one place for all FSBO listings. But even with those challenges, the data does not support the claim. The way I see it, a full-service listing only breaks even if your agent is roughly in the top 10% to 20%, in the markets studied. Otherwise, you can do just as well on your own, plus keep the commission.

Yehuda Kohn **Yehuda Kohn**, founder of SaveOnYourHome.com

THE TRUTH

When research compares like with like, the same kinds of homes, owner-sold homes did not sell for less than agent-sold homes. The downside: MLS homes were more likely to sell, and flat-fee listings were 8% to 11% less likely to sell within a year. So the takeaway is, paying a commission is not what gets you a good price. Getting exposure is. SaveOnYourHome.com helps you get that exposure.

Sources

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2. **Hendel, Nevo & Ortalo-Magné, American Economic Review 2009:** https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257%2Faer.99.5.1878
3. **Cunningham, Gerardi & Shen, Atlanta Fed Working Paper 2022-11b (revised June 2024):** https://doi.org/10.29338/wp2022-11
4. **Levitt & Syverson, flat-fee study, Brookings-Wharton Papers on Urban Affairs 2008:** https://pricetheory.uchicago.edu/levitt/Papers/antitrustimplications.pdf
5. **Bernheim & Meer, Economic Inquiry 2013:** https://people.tamu.edu/~jmeer/Bernheim_Meer_Brokers_EI.pdf
6. **Levitt & Syverson, Review of Economics and Statistics 2008 (NBER version):** https://www.nber.org/papers/w11053
7. **Rutherford, Springer & Yavas, "Conflicts between principals and agents," Journal of Financial Economics 2005:** https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jfineco.2004.06.006