

An Overview of the American Community Survey

Overview

- What is the American Community Survey?
- Content
- Survey Methodology
- Data Products
- How is it different from Census 2000?

What is the American Community Survey?

A poster for the American Community Survey. It features a central text area surrounded by a collage of images including American flags, a school bus, a doctor examining a child, a man in a cowboy hat, a city skyline, a train, and a family. The text in the center reads: "AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY", "America is changing, and so is the census.", "A detailed look at how our communities are changing every year—not just once every ten years. That's what the powerful new American Community Survey provides. Your community needs current information about its residents' education, employment, income, housing and more in order to plan and fund local services that are important to you.", "Your response is important and completely confidential.", "For more information, please visit www.census.gov/acs", "Or call the Census Bureau's ACS toll-free number at 888-346-9682", "U.S. Department of Commerce Economics and Statistics Administration U.S. CENSUS BUREAU", and "United States Census 2010".

AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

America is changing, and so is the census.

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Census
2010

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Decennial Census

In Census 2000, the census used 2 forms

1. “short” form – asked for basic demographic and housing information, such as age, sex, race, how many people lived in the housing unit, and if the housing unit was owned or rented by the resident
2. “long” form – collected the same information as the short form but also collected more in-depth information such as income, education, and language spoken at home

Only a small portion of the population, called a sample, received the long form.

2010 Census and American Community Survey

- 2010 Census will focus on counting the U.S. population
- The sample data are now collected in the ACS
- Puerto Rico is the only U.S. territory where the ACS is conducted
- 2010 Census will have a long form for U.S. territories such as Guam and U.S. Virgin Islands
- Same “short form” questions on the ACS

American Community Survey Content



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American Community Survey

Social Characteristics



- Education
- Marital Status
- Fertility
- Grandparent Caregivers
- Veterans
- Disability Status
- Place of Birth
- Citizenship
- Year of Entry
- Language Spoken at Home
- Ancestry / Tribal Affiliation

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Economic Characteristics

- Income
- Benefits
- Employment Status
- Occupation
- Industry
- Commuting to Work
- Place of Work



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Housing Characteristics



- Tenure
- Occupancy & Structure
- Housing Value
- Taxes & Insurance
- Utilities
- Mortgage/Monthly Rent

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Demographic Characteristics



- Sex
- Age
- Race
- Hispanic Origin

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2008 Content Changes

- Three new questions
 - Health Insurance Coverage
 - Veteran's Service-connected Disability
 - Marital History
- Deletion of one question
 - Time and main reason for staying at the address
- Changes in some wording and format

American Community Survey

Methodology

- Sample includes about 3 million addresses each year
- Three modes of data collection
 - mail
 - phone
 - personal visit
- Data are collected continuously throughout the year

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Target Population

- Resident population of the United States and Puerto Rico
 - Living in housing units and group quarters
- Current residents at the selected address
 - “Two month” rule

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Group Quarters

- Place where people live or stay that is normally owned or managed by an entity or organization providing housing or services for the residents.
- 2 categories of group quarters:
 - Institutional
 - Non-institutional

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Period Estimates

- ACS estimates are period estimates, describing the average characteristics over a specified period
- Contrast with point-in-time estimates that describe the characteristics of an area on a specific date
- 1-year, 3-year, and 5-year estimates will be released for geographic areas that meet specific population thresholds

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Data Products Release Schedule

Data Product	Population Size of Area	Data released in:							
		2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
1-Year Estimates for Data Collected in:	65,000+	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
3-Year Estimates for Data Collected in:	20,000+			2005-2007	2006-2008	2007-2009	2008-2010	2009-2011	2010-2012
5-Year Estimates for Data Collected in:	All Areas*					2005-2009	2006-2010	2007-2011	2008-2012

* Five-year estimates will be available for areas as small as census tracts and block groups.
Source: US Census Bureau

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Data Products

Profiles

- Data Profiles
- Narrative Profiles
- Comparison Profiles
- Selected Population Profiles

Tables

- Detailed Tables
- Subject Tables
- Ranking Tables
- Geographic Comparison Tables

Thematic Maps

Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) Files


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Learning More

- ACS Main Page
- 2007 Data Product Details
- Subject Definitions
- Guidance on Comparing 2007 Data to Other Sources
- Design and Methodology Report
- *The ACS Compass Products*

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ACS Main Page



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ACS Alerts

Alert 58 - released 8/26/2008
[Archives »](#)

Contact Us

Contact the American Community Survey Office by [email](#) or by phone at **1-888-456-7215**, or visit [ask.census.gov](#) for further information on the American Community Survey.

News Releases

August 6th, 2008
Media Advisory -- Census Bureau to Release New Data on Income, Poverty and Health Insurance

July 15th, 2008
Media Advisory -- 2008 Release Schedule for American Community Survey Data

April 30th, 2008
Kim M. Williams Selected for Census Bureau's African-American Advisory Committee

[more News Releases »](#)

THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

- is an on-going survey
- is sent to a small sample of the population
- tells us what the population looks like and how it lives
- helps communities determine where to locate services and allocate resources

HIGHLIGHTS

2007 ACS Data Release ←


Preparing to use the 2007 ACS estimates? Find detailed information and guidance about the data products here.


Get Data - American FactFinder (AFF)

2007 ACS data available starting August 26, 2008

Coming Soon

Our site is undergoing new and exciting changes. Please check again as we move from this modest look to an expanded face for the American Community Survey. To receive periodic updates, please subscribe to the ACS Alert.

[PDF] or  denotes a file in Adobe's Portable Document Format. To view the file, you will need the [Adobe® Acrobat® Reader](#), available free from Adobe.

This symbol  indicates a link to a non-government web site. Our linking to these sites does not constitute an endorsement of any products, services or the information found on them. Once you link to another site you are subject to the policies of the new site.

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<http://www.census.gov/acs/www>

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American Community Survey 2007 Data Release

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2007 ACS Data Release

Available in this Section

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 - [PUMS Files](#)
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- Data User Tools and Tips**
 - [Data Release Schedule](#)
 - [What's New & Different](#)
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 - [Quality Measures](#)
- Special Project**
 - [The 2005 ACS Special Product for the Gulf Coast Area](#)

GET DATA

- [American FactFinder \(AFF\)](#)
- [File Transfer Protocol \(FTP\) Site](#)
- [Public Use Microdata Sample \(PUMS\) Files](#)
- [Request a Custom Tabulation](#)

DATA USER TOOLS & TIPS

- [2007 Data Release Schedule](#)
Details on 2007 data products availability
- [What's New & Different](#)
Changes in the data products since the 2006 ACS, including new products
- [2007 Data Product Details](#) ←
Table shells/IDs, maps, geographic areas, and more
- [Understanding the ACS - Forthcoming](#)
User-specific handbooks and other materials
- [Comparing ACS Data](#) ←
Guidance on making data comparisons between the 2007 ACS, 2006 ACS, and Census 2000
- [Using Multiyear Estimates](#)
Guidance on how to use the new ACS multiyear estimates

DOCUMENTATION

- [Media Tool Kit](#)
News releases and general information about the ACS
- [Questionnaires](#)
Sample ACS questionnaires and instruction guides, and why we ask each question
- [Subject Definitions](#) ←
Glossary of all ACS variables
- [Accuracy of the Data](#)
Sample design, weighting methodology, and guidance on measuring the reliability
- [Errata](#) ←
Updates made to the data due to detected errors
- [User Notes](#) ←
[ACS Design and Methodology \[PDF\]](#) ←
Comprehensive description of the ACS methods and procedures
- [Quality Measures](#)
Documentation of specific measures of quality associated with ACS published data

<http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Products/>

U S C E N S U S B U R E A U

American Community Survey 2007 Data Product Details

http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Products/users_guide/
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American Community Survey 2007 Data Product Details

Microsoft Excel - SF3_2007ACS_Table_comparison

File Edit View Insert Format Tools SAS Data Window Help Adobe PDF

Active Data: Active Worksheet

My SAS Favorites

E1 = 2007 ACS Table Title


	A	B	C	D	E
	Subject Area/Item	Census 2000 Summary File 3 Table Number	Census 2000 Summary File 3 Table Title	2007 ACS Table Number	2007 ACS Table Title
1					
2	Age and Sex (01)				
3	Age	P19	AGE BY LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME BY ABILITY TO SPEAK ENGLISH FOR THE POPULATION 5 YEARS AND OVER	B16004	AGE BY LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME BY ABILITY TO SPEAK ENGLISH FOR THE POPULATION 5 YEARS AND OVER
4	Age	P87	POVERTY STATUS IN 1999 BY AGE	B17001	POVERTY STATUS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS BY SEX BY AGE
5	Age	P159A	POVERTY STATUS IN 1999 BY AGE (WHITE ALONE)	B17020A	POVERTY STATUS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS BY AGE (WHITE ALONE)
6	Age	P159B	POVERTY STATUS IN 1999 BY AGE (BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN ALONE)	B17020B	POVERTY STATUS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS BY AGE (BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN ALONE)
7	Age	P159C	POVERTY STATUS IN 1999 BY AGE (AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE ALONE)	B17020C	POVERTY STATUS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS BY AGE (AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE ALONE)
8	Age	P159D	POVERTY STATUS IN 1999 BY AGE (ASIAN ALONE)	B17020D	POVERTY STATUS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS BY AGE (ASIAN ALONE)
9	Age	P159E	POVERTY STATUS IN 1999 BY AGE (NATIVE HAWAIIAN AND OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER ALONE)	B17020E	POVERTY STATUS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS BY AGE (NATIVE HAWAIIAN AND OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER ALONE)
10	Age	P159F	POVERTY STATUS IN 1999 BY AGE (SOME OTHER RACE ALONE)	B17020F	POVERTY STATUS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS BY AGE (SOME OTHER RACE ALONE)

American Community Survey

Comparison Guidance

- Comparing 2007 ACS to 2006 ACS
 - Census Bureau supports comparisons made between 2006 and 2007 ACS data
- Comparing 2007 ACS to Census 2000
 - Differences between the 2007 ACS and Census 2000 include residence rules, universes, and reference periods.

American Community Survey Comparing Data



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How to Use the Data: **Comparing ACS Data to Other Sources**

Subject Area/Item*	Comparing 2007 ACS with Census 2000	Comparing 2007 ACS with 2006 ACS
Children; Household Relationship (09)		
Relationship to Householder	Compare more info table crosswalk	Compare more info
Grandparent; Grandchildren (10)		
Grandparents as Caregivers	Compare more info table crosswalk	Compare more info
Household Type; Family Type; Subfamilies (11)		
Household/Family Type	Compare more info table crosswalk	Compare more info
Subfamilies	Compare with Caution more info table crosswalk	Compare more info
Marital Status (12)		
Marital Status	Compare more info table crosswalk	Compare more info
Fertility (13)		
Fertility	Do Not Compare more info No comparable detailed tables published	Compare more info
School Enrollment (14)		
Type of School & School Enrollment	Compare more info table crosswalk	Compare more info
Educational Attainment (15)		
Educational Attainment	Compare more info table crosswalk	Compare more info
Language Spoken at Home and Ability to Speak English (16)		
Ability to Speak English	Compare more info table crosswalk	Compare more info
Language Spoken at Home	Compare more info table crosswalk	Compare more info

<http://www.census.gov/acs/www/UseData/compACS.htm>

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American Community Survey

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How to Use the Data: User Notes

Available in this Section	
How to Use the Data Main ACS and Intercensal Population Estimates Comparing ACS Data to Other Sources Subject Definitions Accuracy of the Data Quality Measures Sample Size: Data Definitions Coverage Rates: Data Definitions Response Rates: Data Definitions Item Allocation Rates: Data Definitions ACS Group Quarters » 2006 GQ Data Products Errata » ACS 2000 Errata (11/7/02) » ACS 2000 Errata (3/25/02)	
Year	American Community Survey User Note
2007	<i>Modification Made in 2007 ACS Weighting Methodology for Orleans and St. Bernard Parishes, LA</i> <p>The review of the 2007 operational data discovered evidence that suggests a high incidence of misclassification of uninhabitable units as vacant units. The effect of misclassification was almost entirely removed through a modification in the weighting methodology for Orleans and St. Bernard Parishes. The effect of the weighting adjustment was to down-weight units that had the vacancy status of "Other Vacant". This modification resulted in more consistent and accurate ACS estimates of the number of vacant units and "persons per household" in these two parishes. This modification was also made to the 2006 ACS weighting methodology.</p>
2007	<i>County Estimates of Group Quarters Population</i> <p>The weighting for the group quarters population is controlled at the state level. For that reason, users should expect that the ACS estimate for the group quarters population to be consistent with the Population Estimates Program only at the state level. At the county level, the ACS estimate will typically be different from the Population Estimates Program due to sampling variability. Like estimates of total population, data users who require an estimate of the group quarters population at the county level should use the official estimates from the Population Estimates Program.</p>
2007	<i>Year-to-year Change in the ACS Group Quarters Population Estimates at the Sub-State Level</i> <p>The weighting for the group quarters (GQ) population is controlled at the state level, but not at sub-state levels. For this reason, users may observe greater fluctuations in year-to-year ACS estimates of the GQ population at sub-state levels than at state levels. The causes of these fluctuations typically are the result of either GQs that have closed or where the current population of the GQ is significantly different than the expected population as reflected on the sampling frame. Substantial changes in the ACS GQ estimates can impact ACS estimates of total population characteristics for areas where either the GQ population is a substantial proportion of the total population or where the GQ population may have very different characteristics than the total population as a whole. Users can assess the impact that year-to-year changes in sub-state GQ total population estimates have on the changes in total ACS population estimates by accessing Table B26001 on American Fact Finder. Users should also use their local knowledge to help determine whether the year-to-year change in the ACS estimate represents a real change in the GQ population or may be the result of the lack of adequate population controls for sub-state areas.</p>

<http://www.census.gov/acs/www/UseData/usernotes.htm>


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American Community Survey Errata Notes



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How to Use the Data: Errata

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Note	Subject	Revised Date
46	Subject Table S2101 and Base Table B21002 for years prior to 2007, period of military service Due to an editing error, veteran's period of service (VPS) was being incorrectly assigned for some individuals. The majority of the errors misclassified some people who reported only serving during the Vietnam Era as having served in the category "Gulf War and Vietnam Era." The remainder of the errors misclassified some people who reported only serving between the Vietnam Era and Gulf War as having served in the category "Gulf War." These errors have been resolved for the 2007 tabulations.	September 23, 2008
45	Hanford CA and San Francisco-Oakland CA Urban Areas During the processing of data products for the urban areas we discovered the geographic boundaries were incorrect for two of these areas, Hanford CA (code 36703) and San Francisco-Oakland CA (code 78904). Therefore, we are unable to release data products for these urban areas at this time. We are correcting the geographic boundaries in our data files now, and will release the data products as soon as possible.	August 26, 2008

<http://www.census.gov/acs/www/UseData/Errata.htm>

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American Community Survey Subject Definitions

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- [Past Notices ACS](#)
- [Past Notices Suppl. Surveys](#)
- [Guide to the ACS Data Products](#)
- [Using Data from the 2006 ACS \[PDF\]](#)
- [ACS Data User Training Guide](#)
- [ACS Summary File](#)

- [2007 Subject Definitions \[PDF 532k\]](#)
- [2006 Subject Definitions \[PDF 511k\]](#)
- [2005 Subject Definitions \[PDF 451k\]](#)
- [2004 Subject Definitions \[PDF 279k\]](#)
- [2003 Subject Definitions \[PDF 285k\]](#)
- [2002 Subject Definitions \[PDF 456k\]](#)

<http://www.census.gov/acs/www/UseData/Def.htm>

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American Community Survey

Subject Definitions

Language Spoken at Home and Ability to Speak English

Language Spoken at Home Data on language spoken at home were derived from answers to the 2007 American Community Survey Questions 13a and 13b. These questions were asked only of persons 5 years of age and older. Instructions mailed with the American Community Survey questionnaire instructed respondents to mark “Yes” on Question 13a if they sometimes or always spoke a language other than English at home, and “No” if a language was spoken only at school – or if speaking was limited to a few expressions or slang. For Question 13b, respondents printed the name of the non-English language they spoke at home. If the person spoke more than one non-English language, they reported the language spoken most often. If the language spoken most frequently could not be determined, the respondent reported the language learned first.

Questions 13a and 13b referred to languages spoken at home in an effort to measure the current use of languages other than English. This category excluded respondents who spoke a language other than English exclusively outside of the home.

American Community Survey

Design and Methodology Report



Important reference document covering methods used in producing ACS data

Available at <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/tp67.pdf>

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How to Use the Data

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Section Overview

Each year we add new documentation to reflect changes in the survey or update the existing documents to help you understand the data better.

Subject Definitions

We have identified and **defined** population and housing variables to help you understand the results of the American Community Survey. These include information on how the data were collected and how they are presented in data products.

Accuracy of the Data

These documents provide data users with a basic understanding of the sample design, confidentiality, sampling error, nonsampling error, estimation methodology, and **accuracy of the data**.

Errata

Quality measures

The content in **quality measures** provides discussion and data tables at the state and national level on 4 key indicators of survey data quality -- response rates, coverage rates, sample size and allocation rates.

ACS Group Quarters

Definitions and Type Codes are available! The content in **ACS Group Quarters** provides the definitions and type codes that help users understand the scope of American Survey Group Quarters data collection.


Geography Notes

The **geography notes** gives a brief explanation of the Census Bureau's geographic hierarchy and common terms as well as details on specific geographic areas presented in the American Community Survey data products.

<http://www.census.gov/acs/www/UseData.htm>

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American Community Survey Geography Notes



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How to Use the Data: Overview of Geographic Areas

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The 2007 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year data release provides data products for a set of geographic areas with a population of 65,000 or more. The 2005-2007 ACS 3-year data release provides data products for geographic areas with a population of 20,000 or more. The population sizes for both the 1-year and 3-year data products are based on the July 1, 2007 population estimates from the Census Bureau's Population Estimates Program.

WHAT TYPE OF GEOGRAPHIC AREAS ARE PUBLISHED IN THE 1-YEAR AND 3-YEAR ACS?

The Census Bureau strives to produce information for the geographic areas that are useful to a wide spectrum of data users. For example, the Census Bureau presents data summaries for the nation's many legal and administrative entities such as states (including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico), American Indian and Alaska Native areas, counties and municipios, minor civil divisions (MCDs), incorporated places, and congressional districts.

Data products are also available for other geographic entities. In cooperation with state and local agencies, the Census Bureau identifies and delineates geographic entities referred to as, "statistical areas." These include census regions and divisions, urbanized areas (UAs) and zonas urbanas, census designated places (CDPs), and Public Use Microdata Sample Areas (PUMAs). In addition, data are available for 15 geographic components. Geographic components are the total type of the geographic area (such as rural) in another geographic area (e.g. state).

On September 23rd, the Census Bureau will release ACS data for over 6,500 geographic areas that meet the 65,000 or more population threshold for the 1-year estimate. On December 9th, the Census Bureau will also release ACS

<http://www.census.gov/acs/www/UseData/geo.htm>

U S C E N S U S B U R E A U

American Community Survey

The ACS Compass Products

- Set of educational handbooks aimed at specific audiences
- Presentation slides on important ACS topics
- E-learning tutorial

American Community Survey

Similarities with Census 2000

- Same questions and many of the same basic statistics
- 5-year estimates will be produced for same broad set of geographic areas including census tracts and block groups

American Community Survey

Key Differences from Census 2000

- Beginning in 2010, data for small geographic areas will be produced every year versus once every 10 years
- Data for larger areas are available now and data for mid sized area will be available in December 2008
- Census 2000 data described the population and housing as of April 1, 2000 while ACS data describe a period of time and require data for 12 months, 36 months, or 60 months

American Community Survey

Key Differences from Census 2000

- The goal of ACS is to produce data comparable to the Census 2000 long form data
- These estimates will cover the same small areas as Census 2000 but with smaller sample sizes
- Smaller sample sizes for 5-year ACS estimates results in reductions in the reliability of estimates

For more information

Subscribe to “ACS Alert”

<http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Special/Alerts.htm>

Visit the ACS/PRCS website:

<http://www.census.gov/acs/www>

Contact by telephone:

1-800-923-8282

Contact by email:

acso.users.support@census.gov