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?

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. Census Bureau 2010
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
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
American Community Survey
Economic Characteristics

- Income
- Benefits
- Employment Status
- Occupation
- Industry
- Commuting to Work
- Place of Work
American Community Survey
Housing Characteristics

- Tenure
- Occupancy & Structure
- Housing Value
- Taxes & Insurance
- Utilities
- Mortgage/Monthly Rent
American Community Survey
Demographic Characteristics

- Sex
- Age
- Race
- Hispanic Origin
American Community Survey
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
American Community Survey
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
American Community Survey
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
American Community Survey
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
# American Community Survey

## Data Products Release Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Product</th>
<th>Population Size of Area</th>
<th>Data released in:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>2006</td>
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<tr>
<td>for Data Collected in:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>for Data Collected in:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>for Data Collected in:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Five-year estimates will be available for areas as small as census tracts and block groups.

Source: US Census Bureau
American Community Survey
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
American Community Survey
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*
American Community Survey
ACS Main Page

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 28, 2008

http://www.census.gov/acs/www
American Community Survey
2007 Data Release

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

US Census Bureau
American Community Survey
2007 Data Product Details

Guide to the ACS Data Products from Other Years

- 2006 Guide to the Data Products
- 2005 Guide to the Data Products
- 2004 Guide to the Data Products

Finding Basic Data

Two easy steps to ACS data:
1. Go to the ACS page on the American FactFinder web site: ACS on American FactFinder.
2. Click on any of the data products on the lower right of the webpage.

http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Products/users_guide/uscensusbureau
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Area/Item</th>
<th>Census 2000 Summary File 3 Table Number</th>
<th>Census 2000 Summary File 3 Table Title</th>
<th>2007 ACS Table Title</th>
<th>2007 ACS Table Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>Age and Sex (E1)</td>
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<td>E1</td>
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<td>Age</td>
<td>P13</td>
<td>AGE BY LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME BY ABILITY TO SPEAK ENGLISH FOR THE POPULATION 5 YEARS AND OVER</td>
<td>B16004</td>
<td>AGE BY LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME BY ABILITY TO SPEAK ENGLISH FOR THE POPULATION 5 YEARS AND OVER</td>
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<td>Age</td>
<td>P87</td>
<td>POVERTY STATUS IN 1999 BY AGE</td>
<td>B17001</td>
<td>POVERTY STATUS IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS BY SEX BY AGE</td>
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<td>Age</td>
<td>P159A</td>
<td>POVERTY STATUS IN 1999 BY AGE (WHITE ALONE)</td>
<td>B17020A</td>
<td>POVERTY STATUS IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS BY AGE (WHITE ALONE)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>P159B</td>
<td>POVERTY STATUS IN 1999 BY AGE (BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN ALONE)</td>
<td>B17020B</td>
<td>POVERTY STATUS IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS BY AGE (BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN ALONE)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>P159C</td>
<td>POVERTY STATUS IN 1999 BY AGE (AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE ALONE)</td>
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<td>POVERTY STATUS IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS BY AGE (AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE ALONE)</td>
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<td>POVERTY STATUS IN 1999 BY AGE (ASIAN ALONE)</td>
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<td>POVERTY STATUS IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS BY AGE (ASIAN ALONE)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>P159E</td>
<td>POVERTY STATUS IN 1999 BY AGE (NATIVE HAWAIIAN AND OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER ALONE)</td>
<td>B17020E</td>
<td>POVERTY STATUS IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS BY AGE (NATIVE HAWAIIAN AND OTHER PACIFIC ISLANDER ALONE)</td>
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<td>Age</td>
<td>P159F</td>
<td>POVERTY STATUS IN 1999 BY AGE (SOME OTHER RACE ALONE)</td>
<td>B17020F</td>
<td>POVERTY STATUS IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS BY AGE (SOME OTHER RACE ALONE)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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
# American Community Survey

## Comparing Data

**U.S. Census Bureau**

### American Community Survey (ACS)

[Table]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship to Household</td>
<td>Compare</td>
<td>Compare</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grandparent, Grandchildren</td>
<td>Compare</td>
<td>Compare</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grandparents as Caregivers</td>
<td>Compare</td>
<td>Compare</td>
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<tr>
<td>Household (Family) Type, Homeownership Status</td>
<td>Compare</td>
<td>Compare</td>
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<td>Subfamilies</td>
<td>Compare with Caution</td>
<td>Compare</td>
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<td>Marital Status</td>
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<td>Compare</td>
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<td>Fertility</td>
<td>Do Not Compare</td>
<td>Compare</td>
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<td>School Enrollment</td>
<td>Compare</td>
<td>Compare</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educational Attainment</td>
<td>Compare</td>
<td>Compare</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language Spoken at Home and Ability to Speak English</td>
<td>Compare</td>
<td>Compare</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

[Links]

- [American Community Survey](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/UseData/compACS.htm)

**US Census Bureau**
### American Community Survey User Notes

#### How to Use the Data: User Notes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>American Community Survey User Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td><strong>Modification Made in 2007 ACS Weighting Methodology for Orleans and St. Bernard Parishes, LA</strong>&lt;br&gt;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 2008 ACS weighting methodology.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>County Estimates of Group Quarters Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td><strong>Year-to-year Change in the ACS Group Quarters Population Estimates at the Sub-State Level</strong>&lt;br&gt;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 in 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 B200G1 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.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[http://www.census.gov/acs/www/UseData/usernotes.htm](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/UseData/usernotes.htm)
### Errata Notes

#### Subject Table S2101 and Base Table S21002 for years prior to 2007, period of military service

- **Note:** Due to an editing error, veterans’ 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.

- **Revised Date:** September 23, 2006

#### Hanford CA and San Francisco-Oakland CA Urban Areas

- **Note:** 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 72824). 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.

- **Revised Date:** August 26, 2008

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[http://www.census.gov/acs/www/UseData/Errata.htm](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/UseData/Errata.htm)

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**U.S. Census Bureau**

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American Community Survey
Subject Definitions

http://www.census.gov/acs/www/UseData/Def.htm
**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

American Community Survey
How to Use the Data

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, non-sampling error, estimation methodology, and accuracy of the data.

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 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
How to Use the Data: Overview of Geographic Areas

The 2007 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year data release provides data products for a set of geographic areas with a population of 66,000 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 municipalities, 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, urban areas (URAs) and zones urbano, 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 8,500 geographic areas that meet the 66,000 or more population threshold for the 1-year estimate. On December 9th, the Census Bureau will also release ACS data for 4,500 geographic areas that meet the 20,000 or more population threshold for the 3-year estimate. To access these data products, please visit the following link:

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