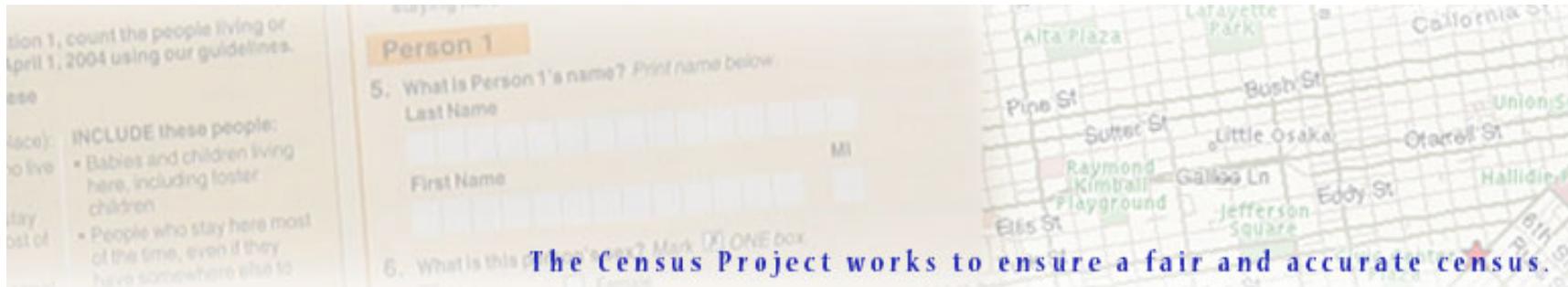




Webinar on the American Community Survey

April 10th, 2012

www.thecensusproject.org



ACS BASICS

Terri Ann Lowenthal
Legislative and Policy Consultant
Co-Director of the Census Project

ACS Basics

- Implemented nationwide in 2005
- Replaced traditional census 'long form'
- Part of decennial census; response required under 13 U.S.C. §141, §221
- Ongoing survey of 3.5 million households (295K/month)

ACS Basics

- *Only* source of consistent, small-area data for every U.S. neighborhood and community. Areas with:
 - 65K+ population: 1-year estimates
 - 20K – 65K population: 3-year estimates
 - <20K population (down to census tracts or block groups): 5-year estimates
- Data published annually (in Fall of year after collection)

ACS Basics

- Allocation of **\$416+ billion annually** through 184 federal domestic assistance programs, based in whole or in part on ACS data*
- Determination of areas needing language assistance under §203 of the Voting Rights Act
- All data gathered in ACS mandated by Congress to allocate federal funds or implement federal programs, or required for same purposes and ACS is only viable source, or to comply with judicial ruling

ACS Topics

Basic (Population)

- Age*
- Sex*
- Hispanic origin*
- Race*
- Household relationship*

Social (Population)

- Ancestry
- Citizenship status
- Disability
- Educational attainment
- Fertility
- Grandparents as caregivers
- Language spoken at home
- Marital history
- Marital status
- Period of military service
- Place of birth
- School enrollment
- Residence one year ago

- Undergraduate field of degree
- Veteran status
- VA service connected disability rating
- Year of entry

Financial (Housing)

- Business or medical office on property
- Cost of utilities
- Condominium fee
- Insurance
- Mobile home costs
- Mortgage
- Real estate taxes
- Rent
- Tenure (own or rent)*
- Value of property

ACS Topics (continued)

Physical (Housing)

- Acreage
- Agricultural sales
- Bedrooms
- House heating fuel
- Kitchen facilities
- Plumbing facilities
- Telephone service available
- Rooms
- Units in structure
- Vehicles available
- Year moved in to unit
- Year structure built

Economic (Population & Housing)

- Class of worker
- Food stamps benefit
- Health insurance coverage
- Income
- Vehicles available
- Work status last year
- Industry
- Journey to work
- Occupation
- Place of work
- Labor force status

Contact information

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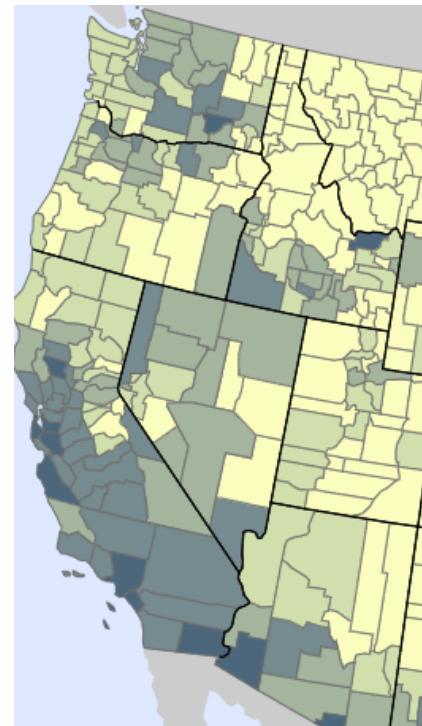
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AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY: A BRIEF GUIDE FOR JOURNALISTS

D'Vera Cohn
Senior Writer
Pew Research Center

How to Find Stories and Do Them Well

- Browse the ACS questionnaire for topics
- It's about more than demographics
- Maps and other ways to view the numbers
- A few cautions
- Others have done this before (resources)



% foreign-born,
2005-2009 ACS

ACS Questions = Story Topics

- How is Person 2 related to Person 1? [Examples: Spouse, unmarried partner, child, father or mother]
- That means ACS estimates are available for married couples, cohabiting couples, homes with children, multi-generational homes with grandparents
- All can be analyzed by race, age, geography, etc.

Housing Questions

- How many rooms? How many vehicles are kept at home?
- What is the rent or mortgage? Cost of fuel, utilities, insurance?
- Does anyone in the home get food stamps?
- Stories: Where are the mansions? How many homes have three or more cars? What % of income do people spend on housing?

Immigrants, Migration, School

- Where was this person born? When did this person come to the U.S.? Citizenship? Language spoken at home?
- Where did this person live one year ago?
- Highest level of school completed?
- Stories: Portrait of immigrants, locate an enclave from one country. Who are your local newcomers? How educated are your residents?

Insurance, Disability, Family, Veteran

- Is this person covered by health insurance? Does this person have a [specific] disability?
- In the last 12 months, did this person marry? Divorce? Have a child?
- Is this person a grandparent caring for g-child?
- Was this person in the armed forces? When?
- Stories: People without insurance, newlyweds & recent moms, veterans in your community

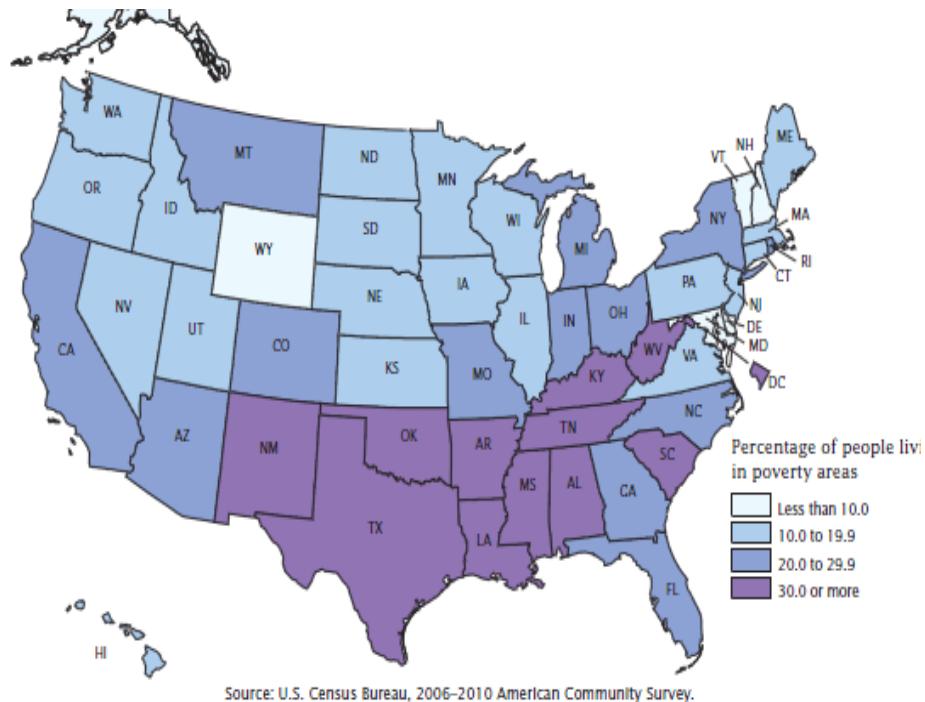
Work and Commuting

- Did this person work last week?
- Was this person self-employed, a govt. worker, worked for non-profit or a for-profit?
- How did this person get to work (car, bus, walked etc.) and how long did it take?
- What kind of business? What kind of work?
- Stories: Commuting times & trends, profile of the local workforce, compare genders, races

Money

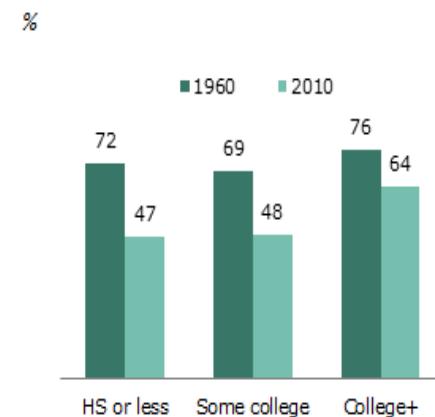
- Income in the past 12 months? Sources: Wages, self-employment, interest, Social Security, pensions, welfare
- Stories: Compare incomes of different groups or incomes in different places, look at patterns for income from work, retirement or government payments

Other Ways to Look at Data



People in Poverty Areas (%)

Share Currently Married by Education, 1960 and 2010



Note: Based on adults ages 18 and older.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of Census 1960 and ACS 2010, IPUMS.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Watch your step! A few cautions

- Margin of error
- Use the ACS to describe people, not count them (use pop. estimates or census itself for counts)
- Know your “universe” (who is included in data) and other terms in the census glossary



Margin of Error: What You Need to Know

- The ACS is a sample survey, not a total count, so its numbers are estimates with a margin of error (based on sound methodology)
- You know about margin of error from political surveys – if one candidate is ahead by 3 points but the margin of error is 3 points, it's a tie
- The Census Bureau has guidance to help you sort this out, but here's a simple rule: Don't make a big deal out of small differences

RONALD BROWNSTEIN & SCOTT BLAND - Ronald Brownstein is the political director of Atlantic Media and editorial director of National Journal Group. Scott Bland is a research assistant for *National Journal*.

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Obama's Key States Are Among the Hardest Hit by Recession

SEP 30 2011, 10:58 AM ET

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As the president embarks on a difficult re-election bid in 2012, the lagging economy will hurt him even worse in the places that count



New census data show that the Great Recession and its aftermath have battered virtually every state in the nation--and that some of the heaviest blows have landed on states that may loom the largest in the 2012 presidential election.

Even the more-recent trends, though, offer only limited fuel for that argument. From 2009 to 2010, the American Community Survey recorded increases in the median income in just five states (South Dakota, Maine, West Virginia, North Dakota, and Virginia), and, in each case, those improvements were so slight that they fell within the **survey's margin of error**. Since last December, employment has increased in 44 states, but generally by very modest amounts. Only six states have added as many as 50,000 jobs since then. Just four have increased their total employment by as much as 2 percent.

Where to Get Data

- Census Bureau: American FactFinder is gateway to ACS data: <http://factfinder2.census.gov>
- But it can be complex for new users so consider QuickFacts or news releases if you need basic data (links from census.gov page)
- State data centers (every state has one)
- Think tanks

Other Resources

- Census ACS page w/ user guides, etc. <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/>
- CQ Press Guide to the ACS
<http://acsguide.cqpress.com/>
- Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE)
- McCormick Foundation-funded videos
<http://cronkite.asu.edu/census2010>

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H.R. 931

A bill to make participation in the American Community Survey Voluntary

Mary Jo Hoeksema
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Co-Director of the Census Project

H.R. 931

- Introduced on March 3, 2011
- Sponsored by Congressman Ted Poe (R-TX)
- Two major objectives
 - Prohibits criminal penalty for refusing to answer ACS questions.
 - Applies four exceptions: name, contact information, date of response, and number of people living or staying at address

H.R. 931

- Bill Status
 - 59 Republican Cosponsors
 - Referred to two House Committees
 - Judiciary
 - Oversight and Government Reform
 - Government Reform and Oversight hearing held on March 6, 2012.
 - Committee may pass, or “mark up,” bill before the summer.
 - Bill would then go to full House for a vote.
 - No Senate companion bill currently.

H.R. 931

- Supporters of H.R. 931:
 - ACS is not “constitutional.”
 - ACS questions invade individual’s privacy.
- Opponents of H.R. 931
 - ACS questions are the result of congressional approval or a federal court ruling.
 - Penalty is a necessary incentive to ensure participation.
 - Responses are “aggregated” and cannot be linked to individuals.
 - ACS data are imperative for distributing over \$450 billion in federal funds and informing policy and marketing decisions in the private and public sector.

H.R. 931

- Census Bureau 2003 test on a voluntary ACS found four major disadvantages:
 - Increases annual survey costs by 30 percent or \$60 million (in 2003 dollars);
 - Decreases mail response rates by 20 percent;
 - Affects survey response bias;
 - Jeopardizes validity of data.

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