

The Census Project and Census Counts Webinar

ACS: America's Essential Economic and Social Data at Risk

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Overview

1. Brief overview of the report's major findings on the value and many uses of the ACS.
2. Brief review of current limitations and key challenges in ACS design and data dissemination.
3. Highlight report recommendations to enhance and strengthen the ACS to enable it to better serve the nation.

Part 1

Value and Uses of the ACS

Value of the ACS

1. Largest annual nationwide survey that provides a wealth of timely and comparable social, economic, housing, and demographic data every year for every community across the country.
2. ACS data empower policymakers, businesses, journalists, researchers, and other citizens to make data-based decisions, and have an important role in fulfilling the ambitions of the Federal Data Strategy.
3. Ongoing data collection enables assessment of population and housing characteristics both before and after natural disasters, economic crises, and public health emergencies.
4. ACS data can be disaggregated by age group, race and ethnicity, sex, and many other characteristics to enable assessment of the status and well-being of population subgroups across geographic areas.
5. ACS data inform the annual allocation of over \$1.5 trillion in federal funding to states and localities.
6. ACS provides a testbed for innovative survey and data processing techniques.

Uses of ACS Data

- **Businesses**

Use the ACS for planning and economic investment including site selection, estimating sales potential, and creating marketing strategies

- **Market research and data analytics firms**

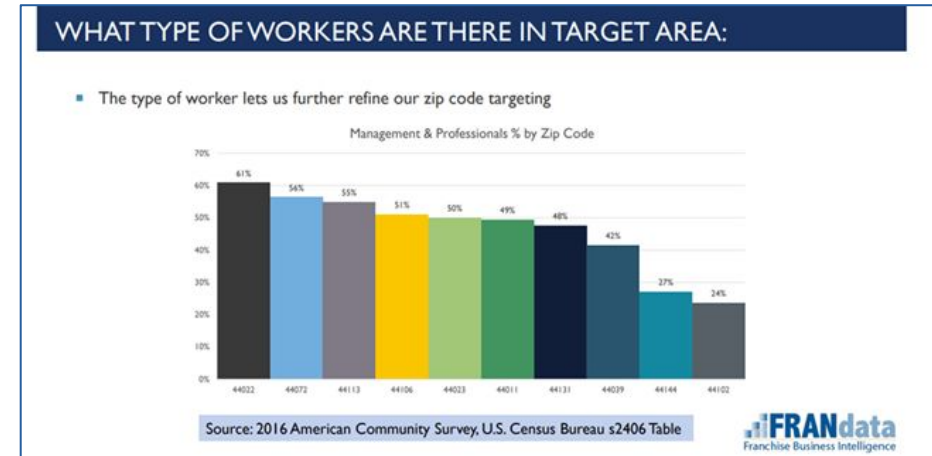
Use ACS data to measure the U.S. media audience and set rates for advertising

- **State, local, and regional planners**

Use ACS data for forecasting population and housing needs and conducting program and project evaluation

- **Federal, state, and local agencies**

Use ACS data to inform policies and programs to meet Veterans' needs



Uses of ACS Data

- **Members of Congress**

Use ACS data to learn about their districts and conduct legislative research

- **Health officials and planners**

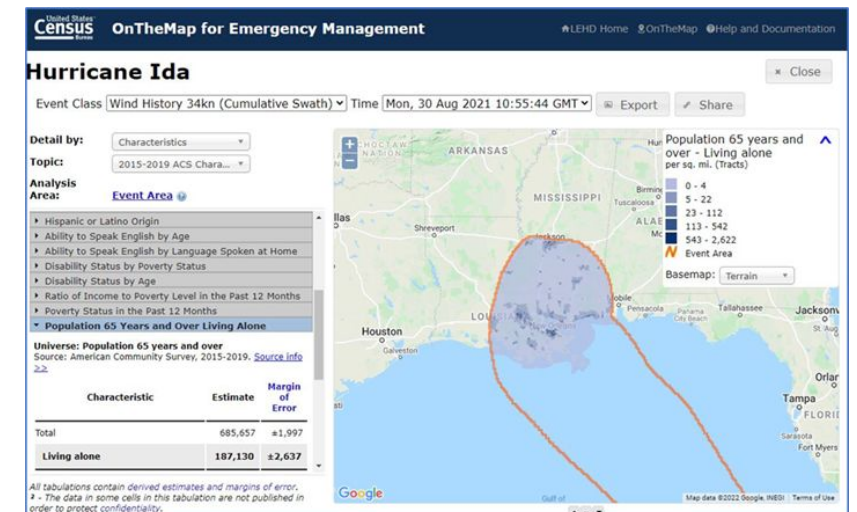
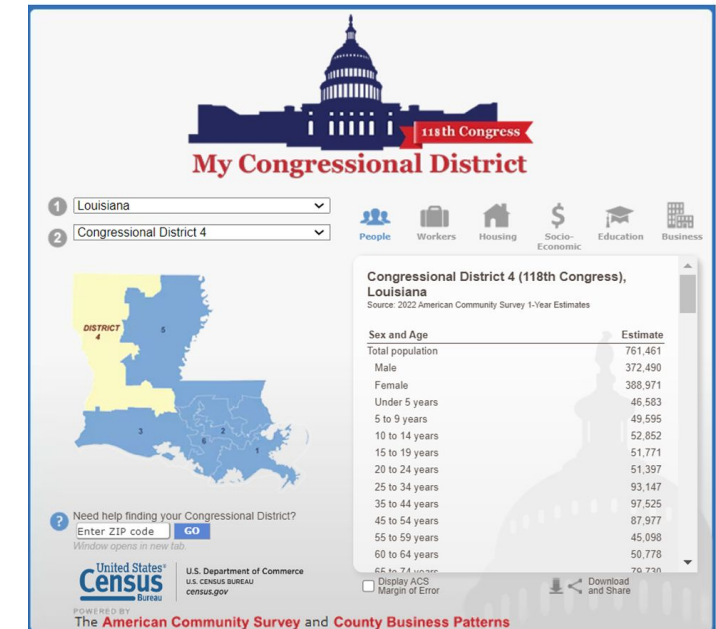
Use ACS data to inform health care policies and programs

- **Federal, state, and local officials**

Use ACS data to aid response to disasters and other emergencies

- **Federal agencies**

Use ACS data to protect people from employment discrimination, provide fair access to affordable housing, and help ensure fair political representation

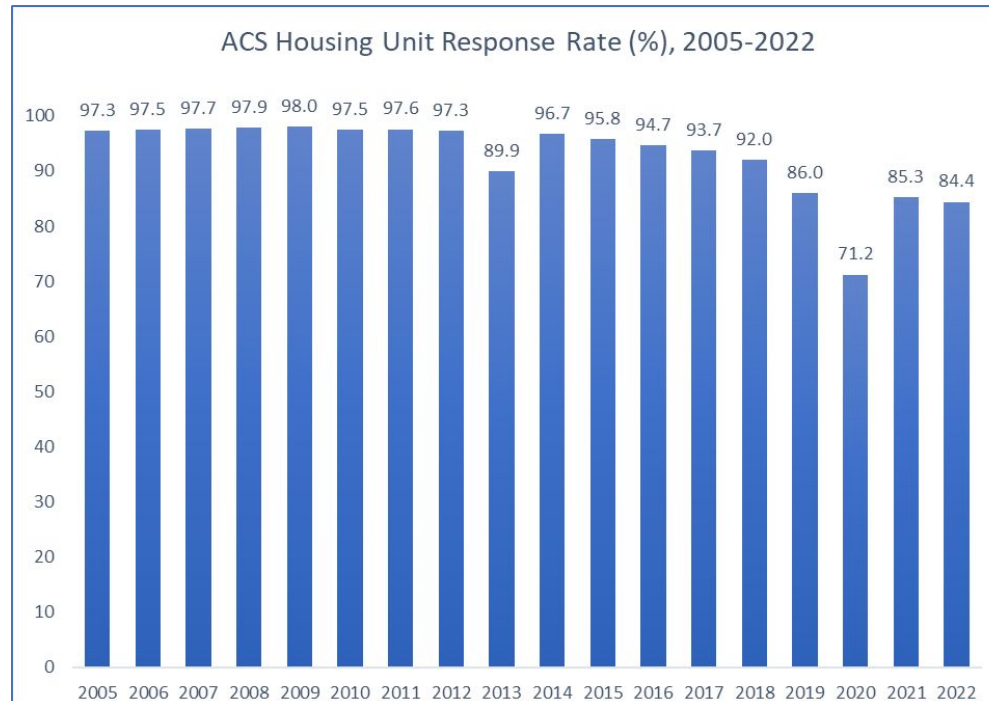


Part 2

Current ACS Limitations and Challenges

Current ACS Limitations and Challenges

1. ACS budget has been relatively flat or stagnant for years.
2. Survey and nonresponse follow up costs have been rising.
3. Survey response rates declined from 2014 through 2020 and did not rebound to pre-pandemic levels in 2021 or 2022.



Current ACS Limitations and Challenges (cont.)

4. Cooperation with nonresponse follow up has declined requiring more visits to complete an interview.
5. Current ACS sample size cumulated across five years is now much smaller than the 2000 decennial long form it was designed to replace.
6. Relatively high undercount rates for young children, racial and ethnic subgroups, and small geographic areas (such as rural America) risk reducing the representativeness and usability of ACS data.
7. Many data users continue to report difficulty in finding the ACS data they need on data.census.gov.

Part 3

Recommended ACS Enhancements

Recommended ACS Enhancements

1. **Fully integrate the ACS in the Census Bureau's enterprise transformation initiatives.**
 - ACS is prime beneficiary of enterprise-wide reforms including linked data assets, modernized data processing tools and enhanced analytical capabilities
 - ACS is heart of new data-centric ecosystem and critical to Bureau's modernization goals and the Federal Data Strategy
2. **Develop new ACS data products and tools to upgrade data users' access to ACS data and address more complex public policy challenges.**
 - New data products for small geographic areas derived from the combination of ACS and administrative records data
 - A product that would allow users to easily combine estimates to produce custom geographic areas and calculate corresponding margins of error
 - New features and functionality to improve access to data through data.census.gov interface

Recommended ACS Enhancements (cont.)

3. **Accelerate research to advance the use of administrative records and alternative data sources in the ACS to improve data quality and reduce respondent burden.**
 - Progress slow since 2018 report outlining plan to use administrative data
 - In 2024, began using adaptive approach for property acreage data
4. **Enhance ACS nonresponse follow up operations to achieve higher response rates and address inequitable data quality, and upgrade local community stakeholder engagement to promote response.**
 - ACS NRFU only reaches one-third of nonresponding housing units on average due to staffing, workload, and budget limitations
 - Bureau has implemented cost-saving strategies while trying to maintain data quality
 - In 2023 began using administrative data to inform contact strategies and operational decisions such as decreasing or stopping field interview efforts

Recommended ACS Enhancements (cont.)

5. Increase the annual survey sample size to better serve rural, remote and underserved areas of the country.

- Standard errors for median-sized census tracts are 60% larger in the ACS than in the 2000 Census
- Precision of ACS estimates for census tracts and small governmental units could potentially be improved by increasing the annual sample size
- Increasing the sample size will also increase the nonresponse follow up workload
- Increasing precision of estimates requires new and improved methods to address both survey and NRFU nonresponse rates to increase the number of **final interviews**

Recommended ACS Enhancements (cont.)

6. **Revise ACS content to improve data quality.**

- Bureau is revising instructions for the 2025 ACS household roster to improve coverage of young children, complex households, nonrelatives, and people with tenuous household connections.
- In March, OMB published revised standards for collecting race and ethnicity information which will improve the quality of racial and ethnic data in the ACS. Census Bureau is developing implementation plans.
- Cognitive testing of new questions to measure Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) is underway with self-response test on track for later this summer. Addition of SOGI questions would enable use of extensive social, economic and disability data in the ACS to evaluate the characteristics, well-being, and health disparities of sexual and gender minority populations.
- Revised disability questions were tested in National Content Test but were not proposed for 2025 ACS based on extensive stakeholder feedback. Meeting with disability community stakeholders planned for Sept. 30 in the D.C. area.

Recommended ACS Enhancements (cont.)

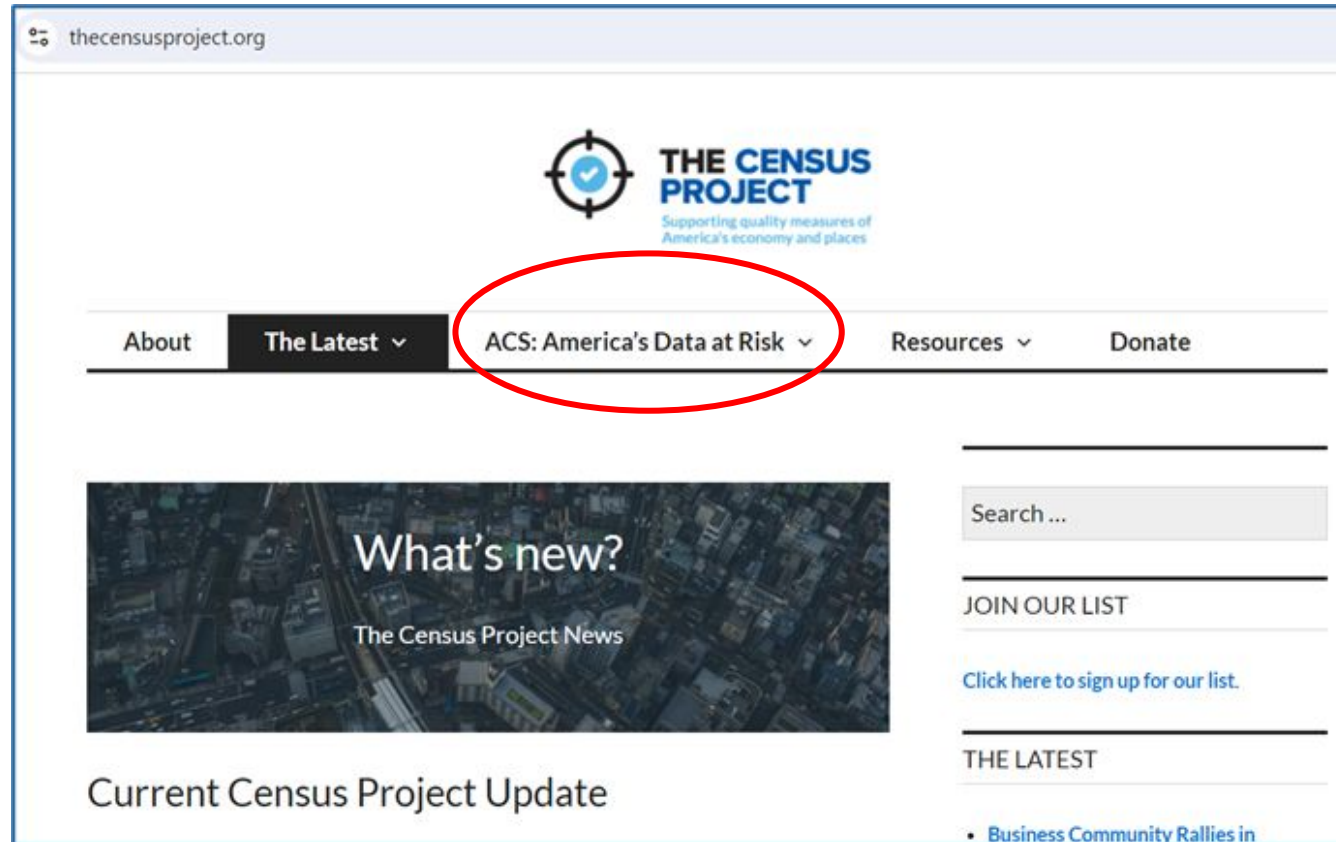
6. Revise ACS content to improve data quality (cont.)

- Add questions to the ACS that capture the relationships between **all** household members—not just those to Person 1. At a minimum, add questions like the “parental pointers” in the CPS to determine the relationship of children to *all* adults in a household.
- Add questions on father’s and mother’s place of birth so ACS data can be used to study characteristics, geographic distribution, and well-being of second- and third-generation immigrants over time.

7. Increase funding by Congress to the ACS program overall.

- The Census Project encourages the Census Bureau to share with Congress the substantial benefits that could be derived from investing in the ACS.
- The Census Project also urges Congress to consider the huge return on investment that increased ACS funding would deliver for the nation.

For 2024 Report (available soon)



<https://thecensusproject.org>



Thank You

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