

Understanding American Community Survey Data

August 20, 2026

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American Community Survey Office

This webinar is being recorded. The recording will be available after the webinar.

About the U.S. Census Bureau

The U.S. Census Bureau is the federal government's largest statistical agency. Our mission is to serve as the nation's leading provider of quality data about its people and economy.



The U.S. Census Bureau conducts a variety of surveys and programs each year, including:

- **Decennial Census** – conducted every 10 years and counts each person residing in the U.S. and its territories
- **American Community Survey** – ongoing, annual survey of the social, economic, housing, and demographic characteristics of the nation's population
- **Economic Census** – official five-year measure of American businesses
- **Census of Governments** – identifies the scope and nature of the nation's state and local government sector

American Community Survey

Outline

- **American Community Survey (ACS) basics**
- ACS data products
- ACS data tools and demonstrations
- Resources for learning more

American Community Survey

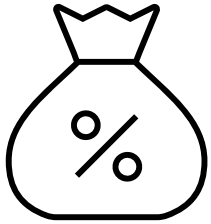
The Foundation

- Premier source of detailed information about the nation's people and housing
- Samples approximately **3.5 million** addresses and about **150,000** group quarters (GQ) residents
- Covers **40+ topics** — Collects detailed information previously collected by the decennial census each decade
- Helps inform how federal funds are distributed each year; supports over **300** evidence-based federal government uses
- Data released the year after collection as 1-year and 5-year estimates
- Officially started in 2005

The image displays two screenshots related to the American Community Survey. The top screenshot shows the website's login page, titled 'United States Census Bureau American Community Survey'. It includes a 'Welcome! Start here to respond:' section with a link to 'Respond online now!', a field for 'User ID', and a 'Login' button. A 'Can't find the User ID?' section explains that the 10-digit code appears above the address and to the right, with an example provided: '10000-00000' and '100 MAIN STREET ANYTOWN, MD 99997'. The bottom screenshot shows the 'Start Here' section of the survey form. It outlines two ways to respond: online at 'respond.census.gov/acs' or by mail. It also includes instructions on who is required to respond, including household members and those in the Armed Forces. The form includes fields for 'First Name', 'Last Name', 'Area Code', and 'Number'. It also has checkboxes for 'Include' and 'Exclude' certain household members. The form is labeled 'Form ACS-1 (2025)' and 'OMB No. 0607-0810'.

American Community Survey

Who Uses the ACS



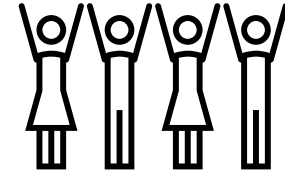
Federal
Government



American Indian &
Alaska Native Populations



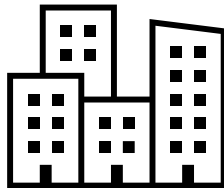
Businesses



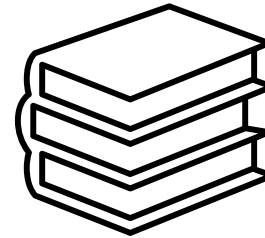
General Users



Media



Nonprofits



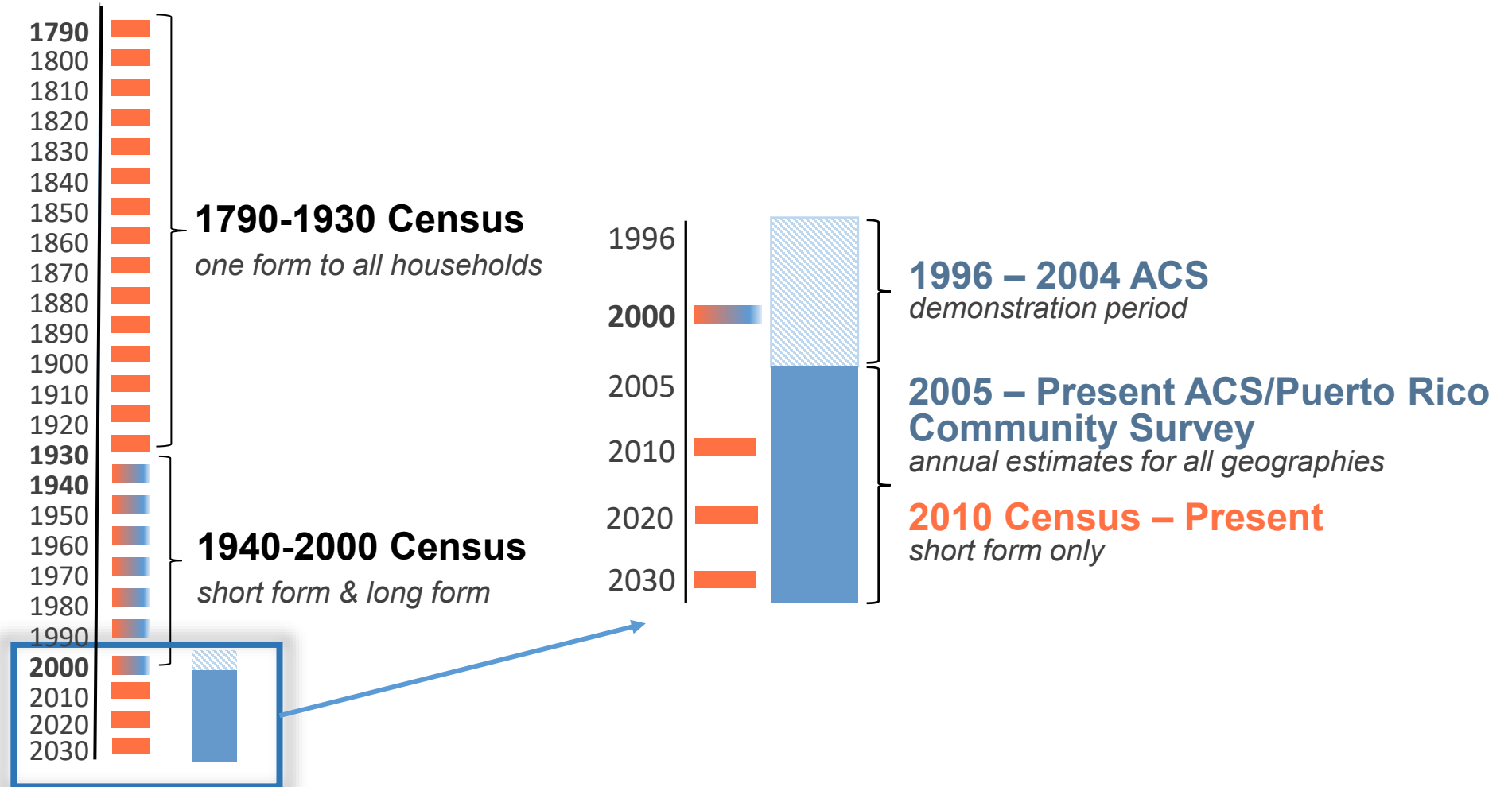
Researchers



State & Local
Government

American Community Survey

Census & ACS



American Community Survey

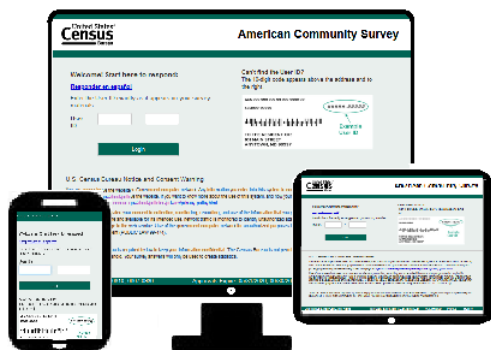
How is the ACS different from the Decennial Census?

ACS	Characteristic	Census
Sample estimates	Survey Purpose	Official counts
Detailed social, economic, housing, and demographic characteristics	Data Collected	Basic demographics
Population and housing characteristics	Statistics Produced	Population and housing totals and select characteristics
Yearly	Release Frequency	Every 10 years
A period of time	Time Reflected	A point in time

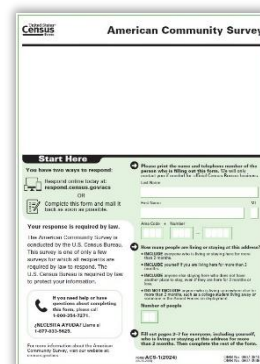
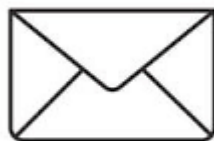
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ACS Data Collection Process

Online Response



Paper Questionnaire



Computer-Assisted Interviewing In-Person and Telephone



Self-Response
(about 8 weeks)

Nonresponse Follow-up
(about 4 weeks)

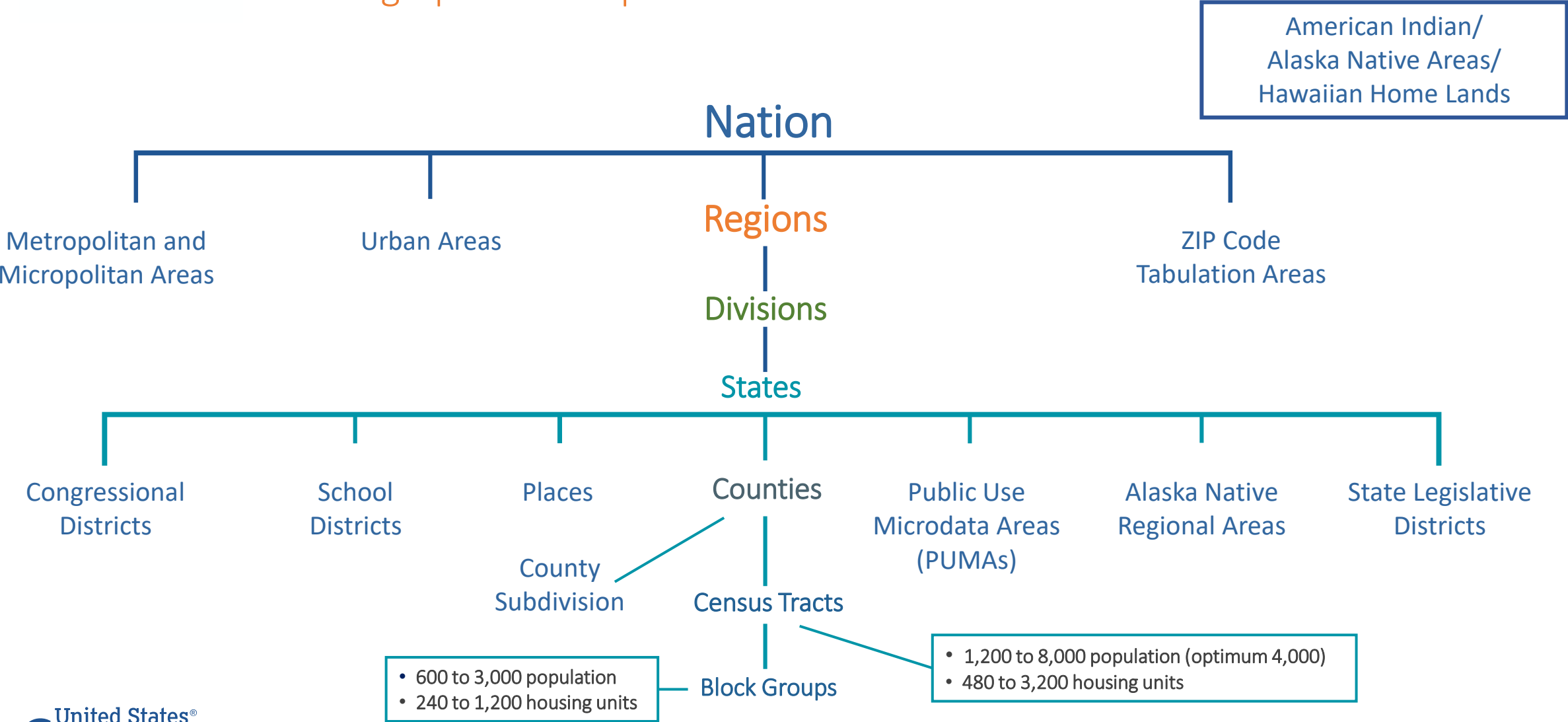
American Community Survey

Content Overview

POPULATION			HOUSING
Social	Economic	Demographic	
• Ancestry • Citizenship Status • Citizen Voting-Age Population • Disability Status • Educational Attainment • Fertility • Grandparents as Caregivers • Language Spoken at Home • Marital History and Status • Migration/Residence 1 Year Ago • Place of Birth • School Enrollment • Undergraduate Field of Degree • Veterans Status; Period of Military Service • Year of Entry	• Class of Worker • Commuting and Place of Work • Employment Status • Food Stamps (SNAP) • Health Insurance Coverage • Income and Earnings • Industry and Occupation • Poverty Status • Weeks Worked Last Year	• Age • Group Quarters Population • Hispanic or Latino Origin • Race • Relationship to Householder • Sex • Total Population	• Bedrooms • Computer & Internet Use • Costs (Mortgage, Rent, Taxes, Insurance) • Electric Vehicles • House Heating Fuel • Kitchen/Plumbing Facilities • Occupancy/Vacancy Status • Occupants per Room • Rooms • Solar Panels • Telephone Service Available • Tenure (Owner/Renter) • Units in Structure • Value of Home • Vehicles Available • Year Householder Moved Into Unit • Year Structure Built

American Community Survey

Selected Census Geographic Concepts



American Community Survey

Selected Census Geographic Concepts

STATE



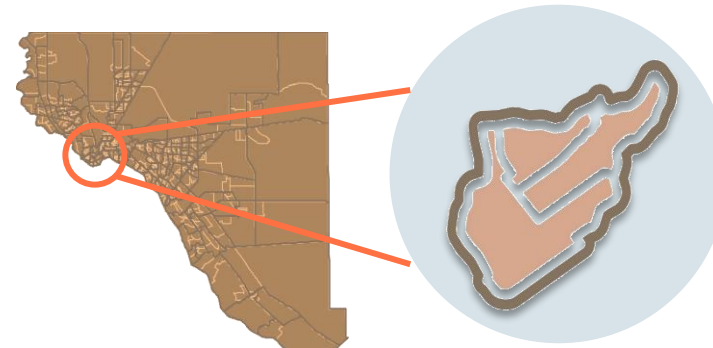
COUNTY



CENSUS TRACT



BLOCK GROUP



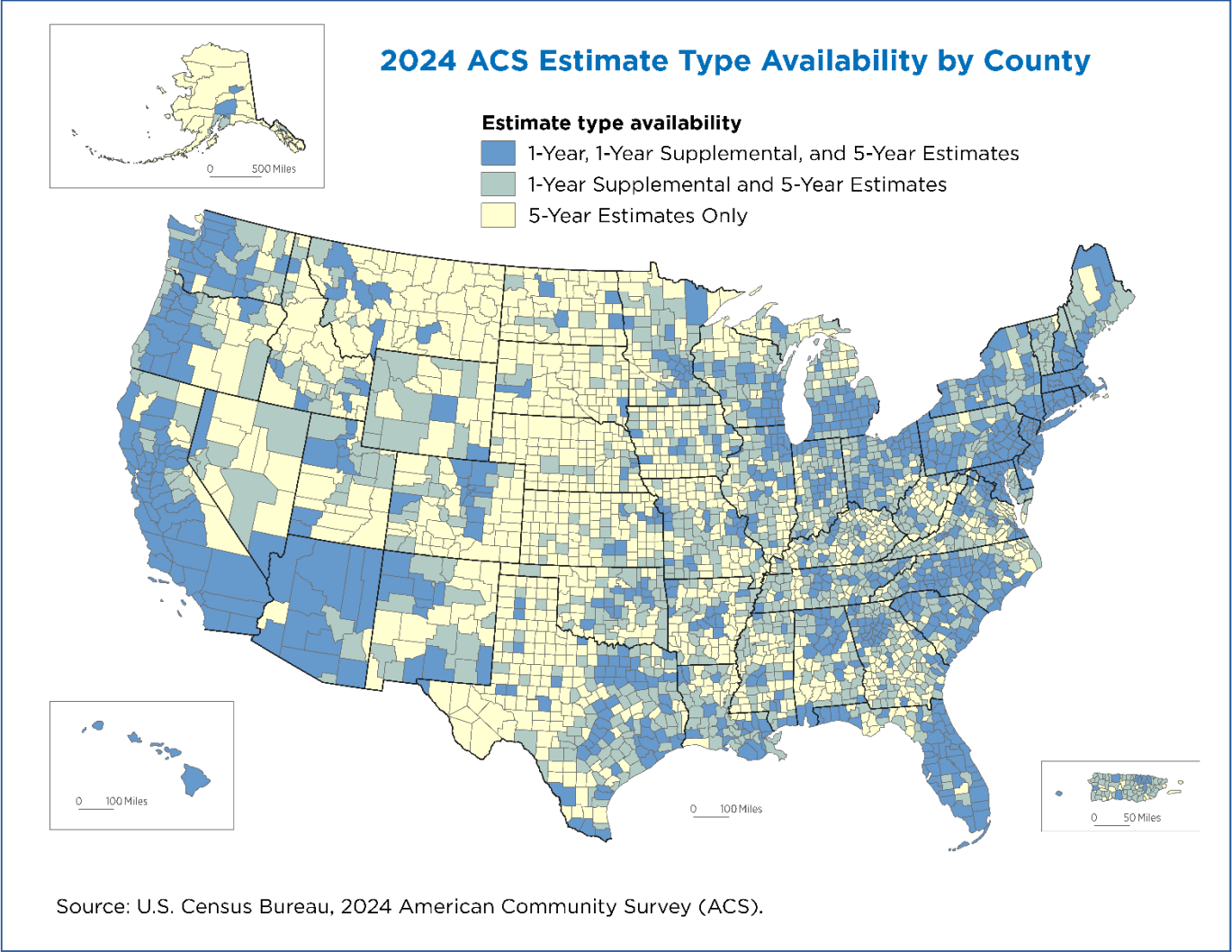
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Availability of Data Products

Estimated Population of Geographic Area	1-year Estimates	1-year Supplemental Estimates	5-year Estimates
65,000 or more	X	X	X
20,000 or more		X	X
Less than 20,000			X
Typical Release Month (Occurs in the calendar year after data collection)	September	October	December

American Community Survey

Estimate Type Availability by County



American Community Survey

Outline

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American Community Survey

Data Product Types

Pre-Tabulated Profiles and Tables

- Profiles contain the most frequently requested social, economic, housing, and demographic data
 - Profiles Include: Data Profiles (DP), Comparison Profiles (CP), Selected Population Profiles (S0201), and Narrative Profiles
- Tables offer a precise or detailed view of a subject
 - Tables Include: Detailed Tables (B or C), Supplemental Tables (K20), Subject Tables (S), Ranking Tables (R), and Geographic Comparison Tables (GCT)

Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) Files

- Allow users to create custom tables that are not available through pre-tabulated data products

American Community Survey

Table/Profile Numbering



	Element 1	Element 2	Element 3	Element 4	Element 5
Table ID	B	06	004	A	PR
Description	Table Type	Subject	Sequential Number	Race Iteration	Puerto Rico Geographies Only

American Community Survey

What is the Margin of Error (MOE)?

Definition: An MOE is a measure of the possible variation of the estimate around the population value.

- At a given confidence level, the estimate and actual population value will differ by no more than the MOE.
- 90% confidence level is the Census standard and ACS MOEs are provided in the same unit as the estimate.

Example: What number of males under 5 years live in MD?

Lower bound = $177,047 - 2,250 = 174,797$

Upper bound = $177,047 + 2,250 = 179,297$

We are 90% confident the true number of males under 5 in Maryland falls **between 174,797 and 179,297**.

Label	Maryland	
	Male	
	Estimate	Margin of Error
✓ Total population	3,038,142	±3,523
✓ AGE		
Under 5 years	177,047	±2,250
5 to 9 years	189,746	±6,701
10 to 14 years	200,672	±6,610
15 to 19 years	208,199	±3,310
20 to 24 years	189,614	±2,990

American Community Survey

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American Community Survey

Selected Ways to Access Data



data.census.gov



My Congressional District



QuickFacts



OnTheMap
for Emergency Management



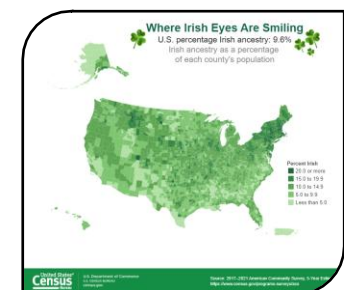
My Tribal Area



My Community Explorer



Census Business Builder



Application
Programming Interface

American Community Survey

Narrative Profiles

Narrative Profiles

Narrative Profiles are short, analytic reports derived from the ACS 5-year estimates. Each Narrative Profile covers 18 different topic areas and provides text and bar charts to display highlights of selected social, economic, housing and demographic estimates for a selected geographic area.

To learn more, watch our Data Gem [How to Get a Statistical Snapshot of Your Community with a Narrative Profile](#).

2024 2023 2022 2021 2020 2019 2018 2017 2016 2015

2020 - 2024 ACS 5-Year Narrative Profile

✔ Use Geography Selector

- or -

Use Address Lookup

Select a Geography Type

- ☒ Nation
- ☐ State
- ☐ County
- ☐ County Subdivision
- ☐ Place
- ☐ Census Tract
- ☐ ZIP Code Tabulation Area
- ☐ Metropolitan/Micropolitan Statistical Area
- ☐ American Indian Area/Alaska Native Area/Hawaiian Home Land

Selected Geography: United States

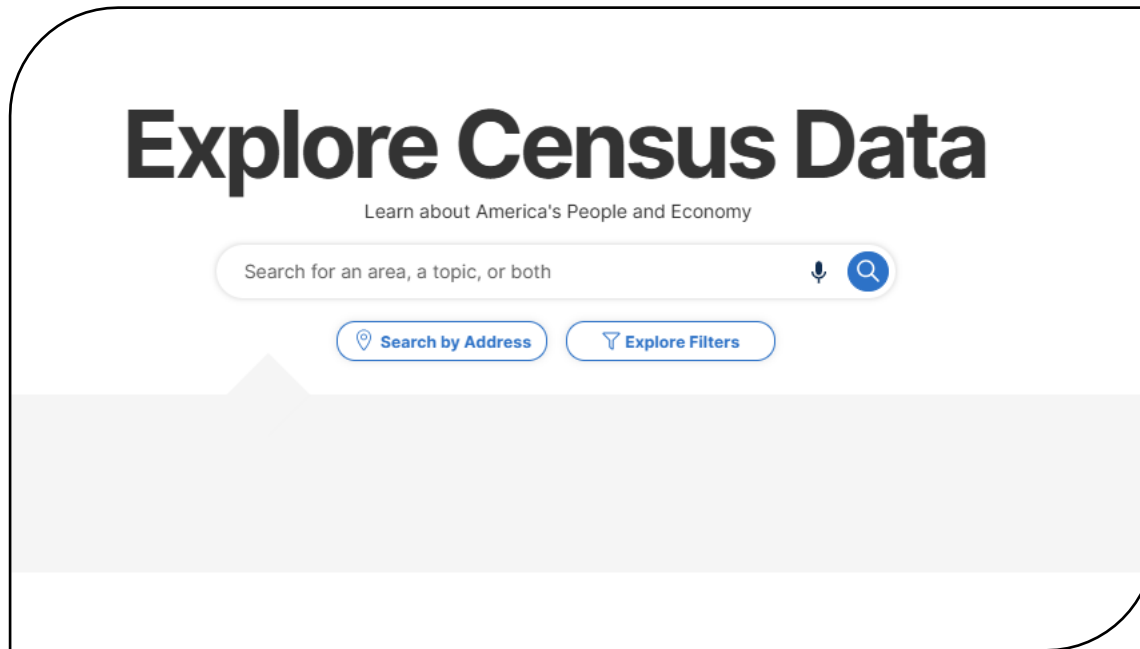
GET NARRATIVE PROFILE

Features:

- Easy way to access facts about the social, economic, housing, and demographic aspects of a geography
- Include all states, counties, cities, and towns, and more geographies
- Address lookup option helps you find nested geographies
- Include data from ACS 5-year estimates

American Community Survey

data.census.gov



Features:

- Census Bureau's main data dissemination platform
- Filter by geography, surveys, topics, and years
- Download data files and/or create customized maps and charts
- Includes ACS data from 2010 to present

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Quick Demo

Narrative Profiles

Narrative Profiles are short, analytic reports derived from the ACS 5-year estimates. Each Narrative Profile covers 18 different topic areas and provides text and bar charts to display highlights of selected social, economic, housing and demographic estimates for a selected geographic area.

To learn more, watch our Data Gem [How to Get a Statistical Snapshot of Your Community with a Narrative Profile](#).

2024

2023

2022

2021

2020

2019

2018

2017

2016

2015

2020 - 2024 ACS 5-Year Narrative Profile

Use Geography Selector

- or -

Use Address Lookup

Select a Geography Type

☒ Nation

☐ State

☐ County

☐ County Subdivision

☐ Place

☐ Census Tract

☐ ZIP Code Tabulation Area

☐ Metropolitan/Micropolitan Statistical Area

☐ American Indian Area/Alaska Native Area/Hawaiian Home Land

Selected Geography: **United States**

GET NARRATIVE PROFILE

census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/narrative-profiles

Explore Census Data

Learn about America's People and Economy

Search for an area, a topic, or both



Search by Address

Explore Filters

data.census.gov

American Community Survey

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- **Resources for learning more**

American Community Survey

ACS Main Page



PartnersResearchersEducatorsSurvey Respondents

NewsNAICS CodesJobsAbout UsContact UsHelp

TopicsData & MapsSurveys & ProgramsResource Library

Search data, events, resources, and more

// Census.gov / Our Surveys & Programs / American Community Survey (ACS)

Within American Community Survey (ACS)

About the ACS

Respond to the ACS

News & Updates

Data

Microdata

Guidance for Data Users

Geography & ACS

Technical Documentation

Research & Methodology

Information For...

Library

Contact Us

American Community Survey (ACS)

The [American Community Survey](#) (ACS) is the premier source of detailed information about the nation's people and housing. As an ongoing survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau since 2005, the ACS collects detailed social, economic, housing, and demographic information from a sample of households across the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

The ACS provides up-to-date information annually, which helps local officials, community leaders, and businesses make informed decisions.

Covering more than 40 topics—including education, employment, income, housing, and transportation—the ACS provides crucial insights into the changing needs and conditions of communities. Its data are used for countless reasons, such as to plan roads, schools, and emergency services, and to guide the distribution of government funding.

Featured

Respond to the ACS

Learn the different ways to respond to the American Community Survey –



Related Information

[Respond to the ACS](#)

[American Community Survey Data](#)

 High school Graduate or Higher
89.9%
S1501 | 2024 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

 Income and Poverty
Median Household Income

American Community Survey

ACS Data Stories

ACS Data Stories

The American Community Survey (ACS) works for you, your organization, and your community. Explore our collection of featured ACS data stories to learn about our data in action.

We want to hear how you use the American Community Survey too.

[SHARE YOUR STORY TODAY!](#)

ACS Stories by State

Choose a State to View.

Select a State

View All Stories

Arlington, Texas Uses ACS Data for City Planning

April 24, 2026

Learn how Arlington, Texas uses American Community Survey data for housing grants applications, community outreach, and attracting new businesses.

[➔](#)

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Related Information

[Share Your ACS Data Story](#)

[Contact Us](#)

Arlington, Texas Uses ACS Data for City Planning

April 24, 2026

Laura Dávila, Strategic Initiatives Analyst, City of Arlington



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Related Information

[Share Your ACS Data Story](#)

[Subjects Included in the Survey](#)

Data Story

The City of Arlington, Texas is committed to making data-driven decisions that enhance the quality of life for its over 400,000 residents. Arlington is located between Dallas and Fort Worth, in north Texas. City staff heavily rely on the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) to gather critical information for grants, economic development projects, and city planning.

Since 2017, the Office of Strategic Initiatives (OSI) has produced the annual [Arlington Socioeconomic Profile](#), a comprehensive report that highlights the city's demographic, economic, and housing trends using the ACS 5-year data along with local GIS data. The Socioeconomic Profile serves as a citywide report, offering policymakers, city staff, and residents an overview of Arlington's key demographic metrics.

In 2023, the OSI team expanded this initiative by launching the [Socioeconomic Profile Dashboard](#). This tool transformed what was once static data into dynamic interactive visualizations and maps that are easily accessible and user-friendly. This dashboard not only enhances the existing data but also makes complex information more accessible by allowing users to explore smaller geographic areas within the city. For example, users can now view income levels across different census tracts instead of only having the information for the entire city. Since the initial launch, staff have also added a comparison tool that allows users to compare Arlington's data with other cities in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Other cities have reached out to the City of Arlington for guidance on how to replicate this dashboard for their own city.

American Community Survey

Why We Ask

[← BACK TO TOPICS PAGE](#)

Why We Ask Questions About... Housing Costs for Owners

We ask questions about the use and cost of common utilities, any applicable condominium and mobile home fees, taxes, insurance, mortgages and home loans to produce statistics about selected monthly owner costs.

Federal agencies use these data to analyze whether adequate housing is affordable for residents and to provide and fund housing assistance programs. These statistics also help enforce laws, regulations, and policies against discrimination in government programs and in society.



Your privacy concerns

We use your confidential survey answers to create statistics like those in the results below and in the full tables that contain all the data—no one is able to figure out your survey answers from the statistics we produce. The Census Bureau is legally bound to strict confidentiality requirements. Individual records are not shared with anyone, including federal agencies and law enforcement entities. By law, the Census Bureau cannot share respondents' answers with anyone, including companies, other federal agencies, and law enforcement.

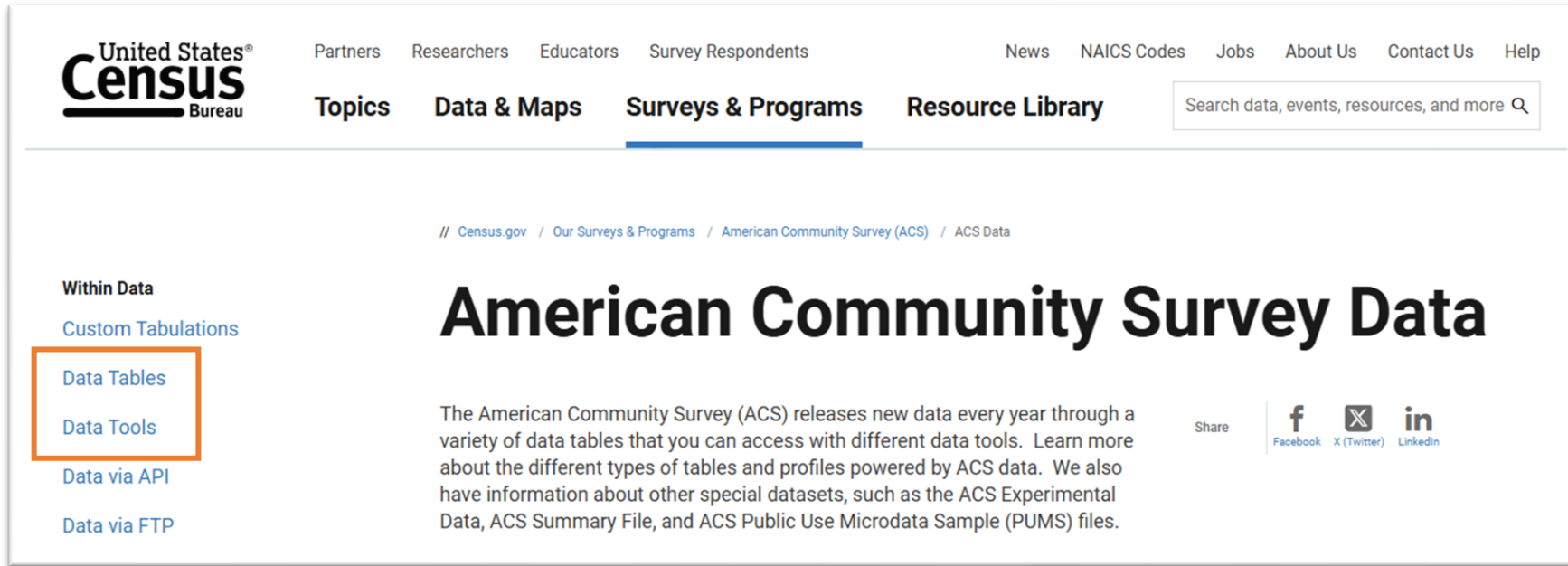
Questions as they appear on the form

We ask seven questions that cover the cost of utilities, condominium fees, taxes, insurance, mortgages, and home loans to create a profile of a community's housing costs.

[VIEW QUESTIONS](#)

American Community Survey

Data Tables and Tools



The screenshot shows the 'American Community Survey Data' page on the United States Census Bureau website. The page features a navigation bar with links to 'Partners', 'Researchers', 'Educators', 'Survey Respondents', 'News', 'NAICS Codes', 'Jobs', 'About Us', 'Contact Us', and 'Help'. Below this, there are tabs for 'Topics', 'Data & Maps', 'Surveys & Programs' (which is highlighted), and 'Resource Library'. A search bar is located on the right side of the navigation bar. The main content area has a breadcrumb trail: '// Census.gov / Our Surveys & Programs / American Community Survey (ACS) / ACS Data'. The title 'American Community Survey Data' is prominently displayed. Below the title, a paragraph explains that the ACS releases new data every year through various data tables and profiles, and provides information about special datasets like the ACS Experimental Data, ACS Summary File, and ACS Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) files. On the left side, there is a sidebar with links: 'Within Data', 'Custom Tabulations', 'Data Tables' (highlighted with an orange box), 'Data Tools' (also highlighted with an orange box), 'Data via API', and 'Data via FTP'. On the right side, there are social media sharing icons for Facebook, X (Twitter), and LinkedIn.

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Topics Data & Maps **Surveys & Programs** Resource Library

Search data, events, resources, and more 🔍

// Census.gov / Our Surveys & Programs / American Community Survey (ACS) / ACS Data

American Community Survey Data

The American Community Survey (ACS) releases new data every year through a variety of data tables that you can access with different data tools. Learn more about the different types of tables and profiles powered by ACS data. We also have information about other special datasets, such as the ACS Experimental Data, ACS Summary File, and ACS Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) files.

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Within Data

Custom Tabulations

Data Tables

Data Tools

Data via API

Data via FTP

American Community Survey

Comparison Guidance

Do	Do Not
Use ACS for population characteristics (i.e., percentages, means, medians, rates)	Use ACS for population totals (instead use decennial census or the Population Estimates Program)
Compare non-overlapping datasets (i.e., 2014-2018 to 2019-2023)	Compare overlapping datasets (i.e., 2018-2022 to 2019-2023)
Compare similar period lengths (i.e., 1-year to 1-year and 5-year to 5-year)	Compare estimates from different period lengths (i.e., 1-year to 5-year)
Conduct statistical testing when making comparisons between estimates	Look at estimates alone to decide if they are higher or lower than one another

American Community Survey

What is Statistical Testing?

- **Definition:** A test to determine if a difference is unlikely to occur by chance.
- To be “significantly different” there must be statistical evidence that there is a difference between two estimates.
- Testing should be conducted for all comparisons.

American Community Survey

Statistical Testing Tool

Algebraically, the significance test can be expressed as follows:

$$\text{If } \left| \frac{\hat{X}_1 - \hat{X}_2}{\sqrt{SE_1^2 + SE_2^2}} \right| > Z_{CL}, \text{ then the difference}$$

between estimates $\hat{X}_1$ and $\hat{X}_2$ is statistically significant at the specified confidence level, CL

where $\hat{X}_i$ is estimate i ($i=1,2$)

SE_i is the SE for the estimate i ($i=1,2$)

Z_{CL} is the critical value for the desired confidence level (=1.645 for 90 percent, 1.960 for 95 percent, 2.576 for 99 percent).

// Census.gov / Our Surveys & Programs / American Community Survey (ACS) / Guidance for Data Users / Statistical Testing Tool

Within Guidance for Data Users

Comparing ACS Data

Handbooks

Recorded Webinars

Subjects Included in the Survey

Statistical Testing Tool

Using ACS Data with Open-Source Software

Using 1-Year or 5-Year American Community Survey Data

Which Data Table or Tool Should I Use?

Statistical Testing Tool

Comparing American Community Survey (ACS) estimates involves more than determining which statistic is higher or lower. Users should also conduct statistical testing to make sure differences are statistically significant and are unlikely to have occurred by chance. This testing takes into account the margin of error (MOE) associated with survey estimates, which are based on responses from a sample of the full population.

Looking for an easy way to conduct statistical testing? Try the Census Bureau's [Statistical Testing Tool](#). Simply copy or download ACS estimates and their MOEs into the spreadsheet to get instant results of statistical tests.



 **Statistical Testing Tool**
[2.5 MB]

- Compares up to 3,230 pairs of estimates at once
- Compares multiple estimates simultaneously (up to 150 estimates)
- Displays statistical testing results ("Yes", "No") automatically
- Handles special formatting and characters, such as the '±' in front of the MOE, without additional editing by the data user
- Uses the Census Bureau's standard 90% confidence level, but can also process statistical testing at 95% or 99% confidence levels
- May be used to conduct statistical testing for other Census Bureau surveys

Share

Related Information

VIDEO
[Population Reference Bureau: Assessing ACS Reliability](#)

RANDOM SAMPLINGS BLOG
[Using Census Bureau Data Made Easier: New Statistical Testing Tool](#)

American Community Survey

Statistical Testing Tool

// Census.gov / Census Bureau Data and Maps / Census Academy / Webinars / Using American Community Survey Estimates and Margins of Error

Using American Community Survey Estimates and Margins of Error

March 11, 2026

Description

Explore the importance of margins of error (MOE) that are provided for every American Community Survey (ACS) estimate. This webinar will cover how to use MOEs for statistical testing, how to approximate the MOE for an estimate, and how to locate online resources for further information.

Share [Facebook](#) [X \(Twitter\)](#) [LinkedIn](#)

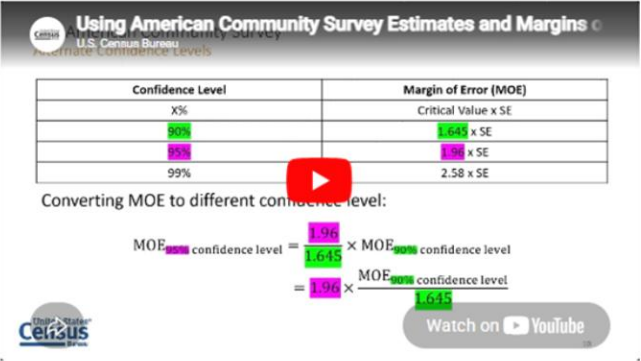
Related Information

[Recorded Webinars](#)

[American Community Survey \(ACS\)](#)

[DATA GEM](#)

[What Is the Margin of Error?](#)



Confidence Level	Margin of Error (MOE)
X%	Critical Value x SE
90%	1.645 x SE
95%	1.96 x SE
99%	2.58 x SE

Converting MOE to different confidence level:

$$\text{MOE}_{90\% \text{ confidence level}} = \frac{1.96}{1.645} \times \text{MOE}_{95\% \text{ confidence level}}$$
$$= 1.96 \times \frac{\text{MOE}_{95\% \text{ confidence level}}}{1.645}$$

[Watch on YouTube](#)

Webinar Materials

[Presentation \[2.2 MB\]](#)

[Transcript \[1.0 MB\]](#)

American Community Survey

Technical Documentation

The screenshot shows the 'Technical Documentation' page for the American Community Survey (ACS) on the United States Census Bureau website. The page features a top navigation bar with the Census Bureau logo, a search bar, and links for Partners, Researchers, Educators, Survey Respondents, News, NAICS Codes, Jobs, About Us, Contact Us, and Help. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with links for Topics, Data & Maps, Surveys & Programs (which is highlighted), and Resource Library. The main content area has a breadcrumb trail: // Census.gov / Our Surveys & Programs / American Community Survey (ACS) / Technical Documentation. On the left, a sidebar titled 'Within Technical Documentation' lists links for Code Lists, Definitions, and Accuracy; Data Release Rules; Errata Notes; Table & Geography Changes; Table Shells and Table List; and User Notes. The main heading 'Technical Documentation' is prominently displayed. Below it, a paragraph explains that the ACS provides various documentation to assist users with data releases. To the right of this text are social media sharing icons for Facebook, X (Twitter), and LinkedIn. Further down, there are three main sections: 'Code Lists, Definitions, and Accuracy' with a description and a right-pointing arrow; 'Data Release Rules' with a date of October 18, 2024, a description, and another right-pointing arrow; and a 'Related Information' sidebar on the right containing links for American Community Survey Data, Guidance for Data Users, and Contact Us.

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// Census.gov / Our Surveys & Programs / American Community Survey (ACS) / Technical Documentation

Within Technical Documentation

- [Code Lists, Definitions, and Accuracy](#)
- [Data Release Rules](#)
- [Errata Notes](#)
- [Table & Geography Changes](#)
- [Table Shells and Table List](#)
- [User Notes](#)

Technical Documentation

The American Community Survey (ACS) provides various documentation to assist users with our data releases. Click on the links below to learn more about these resources.

Share

Code Lists, Definitions, and Accuracy

View the detailed codes and definitions for variables, statistical testing, and an explanation of sample design, methodology, and accuracy for the ACS.

[➤](#)

Data Release Rules

October 18, 2024

Understand American Community Survey data release rules for tabulated data products and what to do when the ACS data you need are missing.

[➤](#)

Related Information

- [American Community Survey Data](#)
- [Guidance for Data Users](#)
- [Contact Us](#)

American Community Survey Information for...

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The main content area is titled "Information by ACS User Type". It features a left sidebar with a list of user types: American Indian and Alaska Native Populations, Businesses, Congress, General Users, Hispanohablantes, Law Enforcement Organizations, Media, Nonprofits, Puerto Rico, Researchers, and State and Local Governments. The main content area contains three sections, each with a title, a brief description, and a right-pointing arrow:

- Information by ACS User Type**: The U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) provides a detailed portrait of the social, economic, housing, and demographic characteristics of America's communities. Explore the links below to quickly find resources and information by ACS user type.
- American Community Survey Resources for AIAN**: Explore resources for Tribal officials, government agencies, and organizations using ACS data about American Indian and Alaska Native populations & geographies.
- American Community Survey Resources for Businesses**: Explore resources for business users of ACS data.
- American Community Survey Resources for Congress**: Explore resources for congressional offices helping constituents participate in the ACS and make an important contribution to their community.

On the right side of the main content area, there is a "Related Information" section with links to "American Community Survey Data", "Respond to the ACS", and "ACS Data Stories".

American Community Survey

Stay Connected



**Share Your ACS
Data Story**

census.gov/acs-data-stories



**Sign Up for
Email Updates**

public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USCENSUS/signup/12426

American Community Survey

Find Answers, Get Support

Website

census.gov/acs

ACS Data User Support

acso.users.support@census.gov

Census Customer Service Center

800-923-8282

Census Academy

census.gov/academy

Social Media

@uscensusbureau

#ACSdata

Source Us

U.S. Census Bureau, [YYYY – YYYY]

American Community Survey

[1/5]-year [estimates/statistics/data release]