

# The American Community Survey

## Fact Sheet for Journalists

### WHAT IS THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY (ACS)?

The ACS provides statistics for every community on an annual basis for more than 40 topics.<sup>1,2</sup>

Since 2005, the ACS has become a valuable resource for data-driven journalism and is used in countless journalism pieces, ranging from local neighborhood news to breaking news stories. The ACS informs what has happened in the past and what is happening now. It also provides fresh statistics reporters need for strong, timely media coverage on a wide variety of topics.

ACS statistics help determine how more than \$675 billion in federal and state funds are distributed each year and provide communities the information they need to make important decisions.

A great resource for journalists about the ACS and its data is the handbook *“Understanding and Using American Community Survey Data: What Journalists Need to Know.”*<sup>3</sup>

ACS Topics	ACS Geographies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Over 40 topics.</li><li>• Social, economic, housing, and demographic characteristics.</li><li>• Examples: income, employment status, education, and language spoken at home.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 805,000+ geographic areas.</li><li>• Examples: nation, regions, states, counties, metropolitan areas, places (i.e. cities), census tracts, congressional districts, and block groups.</li></ul>

### 1-YEAR VS. 5-YEAR ESTIMATES

1-Year	5-Year
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 12 months of collected data.</li><li>• Statistics for areas with populations of 65,000+.</li><li>• Smaller sample size—less reliable.</li><li>• More current statistics.</li><li>• Best used when current data are more important, or for analyzing large populations.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 60 months of collected data.</li><li>• Statistics for all geographic areas down to the block group (sub-neighborhood) level.</li><li>• Larger sample size—most reliable.</li><li>• Less current statistics.</li><li>• Best used when precise data are more important, or for analyzing small populations.</li></ul>

The Census Bureau also produces 1-year supplemental estimates, which are simplified versions of popular ACS tables that are produced for geographies with populations of 20,000 or more. Guidance for all estimates is available and provides more information about when to use the different estimate types.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See <[www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs)>.

<sup>2</sup> See <[www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/guidance/subjects.html](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/guidance/subjects.html)>.

<sup>3</sup> See <[www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/guidance/handbooks/journalists.html](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/guidance/handbooks/journalists.html)>.

<sup>4</sup> See <[www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/guidance/estimates.html](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/guidance/estimates.html)>.

## WHEN ARE ACS STATISTICS RELEASED?

The Census Bureau releases ACS data annually, approximately one year following data collection. For upcoming dates, visit the American Community Survey Data Releases page.<sup>5</sup>

- September: 1-year estimates released.
- December: 5-year estimates released.

## HOW TO ACCESS STATISTICS

You can access this information using a variety of free tools and resources:

- Data Tables & Tools: overview of ACS data products and tools you can use to access the statistics.<sup>6</sup>
- QuickFacts: quick, easy way to access facts about people, business, and geography; and a great way to make comparisons between two geographies.<sup>7</sup>
- data.census.gov: the primary platform to access data from the Census Bureau.<sup>8</sup>
- Advanced data users can access the data through:
  - « Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) files: untabulated ACS data for users to create their own tables.<sup>9</sup>
  - « Summary File: set of comma-delimited text files that contain all of the Detailed Tables for the ACS data releases.<sup>10</sup>
  - « Application programming interface (API): data service that enables developers, data scientists, and others to access and use statistical data from the ACS.<sup>11</sup>

## EMBARGO POLICY

ACS statistics are typically embargoed 48 hours before the public release date.

Requesting embargo access:

- Guidelines: <[www.census.gov/newsroom/embargo/accreditation.html](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/embargo/accreditation.html)>.
- Embargo Policy: <[www.census.gov/newsroom/embargo/embargo-policy.html](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/embargo/embargo-policy.html)>.
- Sign up: <<https://registration.tco.census.gov/CPASS/subscriptions.jsp>>.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

To request assistance in finding statistics, data trainings, or to interview a subject-matter expert, please contact the Census Bureau's Public Information Office.

- Phone: 301-763-3030.
- Email: [pio@census.gov](mailto:pio@census.gov).
- Sign up for email updates at <<https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USCENSUS/subscriber/new?>>.

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<sup>5</sup> See <[www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/news/data-releases.html](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/news/data-releases.html)>.

<sup>6</sup> See <[www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/)>.

<sup>7</sup> See <[www.census.gov/quickfacts/](http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/)>.

<sup>8</sup> See <<https://data.census.gov/>>.

<sup>9</sup> See <[www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data/pums.html](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data/pums.html)>.

<sup>10</sup> See <[www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data/summary-file.html](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data/summary-file.html)>.

<sup>11</sup> See <[www.census.gov/developers/](http://www.census.gov/developers/)>.