

1. UNDERSTANDING THE PRCS: THE BASICS

What Is the Puerto Rico Community Survey?

The U.S. Census Bureau first conducted the Puerto Rico Community Survey (PRCS) in 2005—the same year the American Community Survey (ACS) was implemented for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The 2005 PRCS covered the household population and was expanded to cover the full population (including people living in group quarters such as college dormitories) the following year. In 2010, the PRCS, like the ACS, replaced the decennial census long form as the nation’s source of social and economic data for population and housing characteristics. The Census Bureau uses data collected in the PRCS to provide estimates for Puerto Rico, municipios, neighborhoods, and many other geographic areas.

The PRCS has an annual sample size of about 36,000 addresses. Because the PRCS is based on a sample, rather than all housing units and people, PRCS estimates have a degree of uncertainty, called sampling error, associated with them. In general, the larger the sample, the smaller the level of sampling error. To help

users understand the impact of sampling error on data reliability, the Census Bureau provides a “margin of error” for each published PRCS estimate. The margin of error, combined with the PRCS estimate, gives users a range of values within which the actual, “real-world” value is likely to fall.

TIP: In general, data users should be careful in drawing conclusions about small differences between two PRCS estimates because they may not be statistically different.

For more information about margins of error in the PRCS—and determining statistical significance—see the Census Bureau’s Accuracy of the Data documentation for PRCS multiyear and 1-year estimates.²

Users also should note that the PRCS was designed to provide estimates of the characteristics of the population, not to provide counts of the population in different geographic areas or population subgroups. For

² U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), Code Lists, Definitions, and Accuracy, <www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/technical-documentation/code-lists.html>.

Table 1.1. Population and Housing Data Included in Puerto Rico Community Survey

Social Characteristics	Economic Characteristics	Plumbing Facilities ⁶
Ancestry	Class of Worker	Rent
Citizenship Status	Commuting (Journey to Work)	Rooms/Bedrooms
Disability Status ¹	Employment Status	Selected Monthly Owner Costs
Educational Attainment	Food Stamps/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) ⁴	Telephone Service Available
Fertility	Health Insurance Coverage ²	Tenure (Owner/Renter)
Grandparents as Caregivers	Income and Earnings	Units in Structure
Language Spoken at Home	Industry and Occupation	Value of Home
Marital History ²	Place of Work	Vehicles Available
Marital Status	Poverty Status	Year Householder Moved Into Unit
Migration/Residence 1 Year Ago	Work Status Last Year	Year Structure Built
Period of Military Service		Demographics Characteristics
Place of Birth	Housing Characteristics	Age and Sex
School Enrollment	Computer and Internet Use ⁵	Group Quarters Population
Undergraduate Field of Degree ³	House Heating Fuel	Hispanic or Latino Origin
Veteran Status ²	Kitchen Facilities	Race
Year of Entry	Occupancy/Vacancy Status	Relationship to Householder
	Occupants Per Room	Total Population

¹ Questions on Disability Status were significantly revised in the 2008 survey to cause a break in series.

² Marital History, Veterans’ Service-Connected Disability Status and Ratings, and Health Insurance Coverage were added in the 2008 survey.

³ Undergraduate Field of Degree was added in the 2009 survey.

⁴ Food Stamp Benefit amount was removed in 2008. In Puerto Rico, the SNAP Program is called the Nutritional Assistance Program.

⁵ Computer and Internet Use was added to the 2013 survey.

⁶ One of the components of Plumbing Facilities, flush toilet, and Business or Medical Office on Property questions were removed in 2016.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

basic counts of Puerto Rico's population by age, sex, race, and Hispanic origin, visit the Census Bureau's Population and Housing Unit Estimates Web page.³

The content collected through the PRCS can be grouped into four main types of characteristics: social, economic, housing, and demographic (see Table 1.1). Various tables in the ACS/PRCS have different “universes,” or base reference totals against which all other characteristics are compared. Some tables cover population characteristics, while others cover housing characteristics. Among the population tables, some cover the entire population (such as tables of the population by age), while some cover only a subset of the population (such as tables on employment status, which include data only for the population aged 16 and older).

PRCS and ACS content is designed to meet the needs of federal government agencies, and every question on the survey is asked for a reason. For example, questions about how people get to work and the length of their commutes are used for planning emergency response routes and improvements to roads, highways, rail lines, and bus routes. The responsibility of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) under the Paperwork Reduction Act requires that new questions demonstrate the practical utility of the data and minimize “respondent burden.” Respondent burden can be defined in different ways, but is often related to the length of the interview or questionnaire, or the extent to which questions are viewed as being intrusive or too personal. Because participation in the PRCS and ACS is mandatory, the OMB will only approve necessary questions for inclusion on the surveys.

Some people are reluctant to respond to the PRCS because of concerns about the confidentiality of the data. However, strict confidentiality laws protect all PRCS and ACS information that could be used to identify individuals or households under Title 13 of the U.S. Code.⁴ This is true even for interagency communication; other government agencies do not have the legal right to access individuals' confidential information from the PRCS or the ACS.

Who Uses the PRCS?

The PRCS provides vital information on a yearly basis about Puerto Rico and its people, in order to help local officials, community leaders, businesses, and the public plan and make decisions based on the changes taking place in their communities. Through the PRCS, we know more about demographic trends, jobs

³ U.S. Census Bureau, Population and Housing Unit Estimates, <www.census.gov/popest/>.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, Title 13, U.S. Code—Protection of Confidential Information, <www.census.gov/history/www/reference/privacy_confidentiality/title_13_us_code.html>.

and occupations, educational attainment, veterans, homeownership, and many other topics. Because data collection is ongoing, the PRCS also provides essential, up-to-date information about population and housing characteristics both before and after natural disasters (like hurricanes) or economic shifts, like the recession in Puerto Rico that began in 2006.⁵

Here are some examples of how PRCS data are being used for reporting and decision-making:

- The daily newspaper *El Nuevo Día* used PRCS data to show that Puerto Rico had experienced net out-migration of 67,000 people to the U.S. mainland in 2016.⁶
- The Youth Development Institute of Puerto Rico (Instituto para el Desarrollo de la Juventud) uses PRCS data for several of the indicators it uses to monitor child and family well-being in the Commonwealth and its municipios, including child poverty, single-parent family status, and access to health insurance.⁷
- The Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College, City University of New York, used PRCS data to project the number of people who may migrate from Puerto Rico to the United States in the wake of Hurricane Maria, as well as which states are likely to feel the greatest impact.⁸
- The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development used PRCS data to analyze aspects of the housing market in Puerto Rico, including the share of homeowners living in single-family homes and median rental costs.⁹

⁵ Mary Williams Walsh, “How Puerto Rico Is Grappling With a Debt Crisis,” *New York Times* (May 16, 2017), <www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/business/dealbook/puerto-rico-debt-bankruptcy.html>.

⁶ “Unas 67,000 personas en la isla emigraron a Estados Unidos en 2016,” *El Nuevo Día* (September 14, 2017), <www.elnuevodia.com/noticias/locales/nota/unas67000personasenlaislaemigraron-naestadosunidosen2016-2357680/>.

⁷ Instituto para el Desarrollo de la Juventud, <<http://juventudpr.org/en/data/statistics/>>.

⁸ Center for Puerto Rican Studies (Centro), Hunter College, CUNY, “Estimates of Post-Hurricane Maria Exodus from Puerto Rico,” Centro RB2017-01 (October 2017), <https://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/RB2017-01-POST-MARIA%20EXODUS_V3.pdf>.

⁹ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research, (September 1, 2017), “Comprehensive Housing Market Analysis” for Puerto Rico, <www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/pdf/PuertoRico-comp.pdf>.