USING THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY TABLE-BASED SUMMARY FILE: WHAT DATA USERS NEED TO KNOW

Introduction

The American Community Survey (ACS) Table-Based Summary File is a pipe-delimited text file that contains all the Detailed Tables from the ACS. Data users with programming skills and access to statistical software can use the Summary File to download and analyze ACS data for a wide range of geographic areas.

This guide provides an overview of the ACS Table-Based Summary File and how it can be used to access data on America's communities.

Starting with the 2022 ACS data releases, the table-based format will be the only format available. The 2021 data releases were the final releases of the original sequence-based format. For information about accessing the ACS Summary File in the original sequence-based format, refer to *Using the American Community Survey Summary File: What Data Users Need to Know*.[1]

What Is the ACS?

The ACS is a nationwide survey designed to provide communities with reliable and timely social, economic, housing, and demographic data every year. A separate annual survey, called the Puerto Rico Community Survey (PRCS), collects similar data about the population and housing units in Puerto Rico. The U.S. Census Bureau uses data collected in the ACS and the PRCS to provide estimates on a broad range of population, housing unit, and household characteristics for states, counties, cities, school districts, congressional districts, census tracts, block groups, and many other geographic areas.

The ACS has an annual sample size of about 3.5 million addresses with survey information collected nearly every day of the year. Data are pooled across a calendar year to produce estimates for that year. As a result, ACS estimates reflect data that have been collected over a period of time rather than for a single point in time, as in the decennial census, which is conducted every 10 years and provides population counts as of April 1 of the census year.

ACS 1-year estimates are data that have been collected over a 12-month period and are available for geographic areas with a population of at least 65,000. Starting with the 2014 ACS, the Census Bureau has been producing "1-year Supplemental Estimates"—simplified versions of popular ACS tables—for geographic areas with a population of at least 20,000. The Census Bureau combines 5 consecutive years of ACS data to produce multiyear estimates for geographic areas with fewer than 65,000 residents. These 5-year estimates represent data collected over a period of 60 months.

For more detailed information about the ACS—how to judge the accuracy of ACS estimates, understanding multiyear estimates, knowing which geographic areas are covered in the ACS, and how to access ACS data on the Census Bureau's website—refer to the Census Bureau's handbook on *Understanding and Using American Community Survey Data: What All Data Users Need to Know.*[2]

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[1] U.S. Census Bureau, *Using the American Community Survey Summary File: What Data Users Need to Know*, <www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/library/handbooks/summary-file.html>.

[2] U.S. Census Bureau, *Understanding and Using American Community Survey Data: What All Data Users Need to Know*, <www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/library/handbooks/general.html>.