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2018 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY RESEARCH AND EVALUATION REPORT MEMORANDUM
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MEMORANDUM FOR ACS Research and Evaluation Workgroup

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Subject: Analysis of Complaints Received

Attached is the final American Community Survey (ACS) Research and Evaluation report for “Analysis of Complaints Received.” We conducted an analysis of complaints received from respondents to determine the types of complaints and respondents’ demographic and geographic characteristics. This research used one full year of the 2016 controlled and non-controlled correspondence received directly from respondents and from their congressional representatives. We developed a complaints database to enter the type of complaints, demographic and socioeconomic statistics, and geographic location of respondents. This research shows the types of complaints expressed by respondents in their correspondence .

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Attachment

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ANALYSIS OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

FINAL REPORT



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1. INTRODUCTION

The American Community Survey Office (ACSO) engages in numerous activities to provide a positive experience for our respondents and to minimize the burden associated with participating in the American Community Survey (ACS). Understanding the respondent experience and the respondent's perceptions of burden involves understanding many different factors. This includes some concrete measures like the length of the questionnaire and the number of contacts with respondents, but also less quantifiable factors such as the way participation in the ACS is perceived by respondents and their attitudes about the importance of the ACS.

2. BACKGROUND

Based on a recommendation from the Committee on National Statistics (CNSTAT), we conducted an analysis of complaints received from respondents to understand more about the types of respondents and their perceptions of burden about the ACS. Our dataset was one full year of the 2016 controlled and non-controlled correspondence received directly from the respondents and from their congressional representatives. We checked the ACSO databases, Regional Office Survey Processing & Operations Tracking Tool (ROSPOTT) and Survey Processing & Operations Tracking Tool (SPOTT) to determine the stage the respondents were in after they sent the correspondence. We then examined any geographic clustering of the respondents and whether those who complained shared any common demographic characteristics.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Two Part Effort

This research consisted of two parts, with responsibilities split between two branches.

Part I

The Information Coordination and Engagement (ICE) Branch gathered and identified respondent complaints based on controlled and non-controlled correspondence received from respondents. The ICE Branch:

1. Determined at what phase of data collection the survey respondents were in by the time we received their correspondence.
2. Identified 25 categories of respondent complaints.

Part II

The Survey Analytics and Measures (SAM) Branch identified characteristics of respondents who sent us letters by using available ACS data on the respondents. The SAM Branch used respondent correspondence data to:

1. Obtain geographic information on respondents who complained.
2. Access survey responses to gather detailed information on the age, sex, race, and education level for those who sent us letters and responded to the survey.

3.2 Database

We developed a complaints database to capture and extract the information needed to conduct this research. The ICE Branch entered 2016 controlled and non-controlled correspondence data (509 records) into the complaints database. The SAM Branch then analyzed the data to determine respondent characteristics and geography levels.

Data were collected from one full year of the 2016 controlled and non-controlled correspondence received directly from respondents and their congressional representatives regarding the ACS. We used 2016 data because they were most recent complete year data available.

- Non-controlled Correspondence – Letters, phone calls, and emails that ACSO receives from the public. For this research project, we used only letters.
- Controlled Correspondence – Congressional correspondence assigned to ACSO directly by the Correspondence Quality Assurance Staff.

4. LIMITATIONS

1. Due to time constraints for research completion, we used only controlled and non-controlled correspondence data for the year 2016.
2. We assumed that the respondent was the person that should be used for the analysis.¹
3. Other sources of data such as Respondent Advocate and Customer Liaison and Marketing Services Office data were not incorporated in this research. Their databases were not compatible due to differences in the collection of complaint types and the unavailability of addresses associated with their data.
4. We intended to gather characteristics on respondents based on information they provided in their correspondence, such as language spoken at home, but did not include it as part of our research due to the small number of people that include self-identifying information in their correspondence.

¹ The respondent person is Person 1 as listed on the ACS form. Person 1 is the person living or staying at the address in whose name the house or apartment is owned, being bought, or rented.

5. We attempted to identify the congressional district for those who sent us correspondence, but did not include the data in the results because the congressional district data were minimal. Most congressional districts were not represented.
6. We planned to determine whether respondents had previously contacted the Census Bureau, but were unable to conduct this analysis due to resource and time constraints. This would have required several years of correspondence data.
7. From the receipt data of respondent correspondence we cannot determine if they had received the first or second mailing because we did not collect that information in our complaints database.

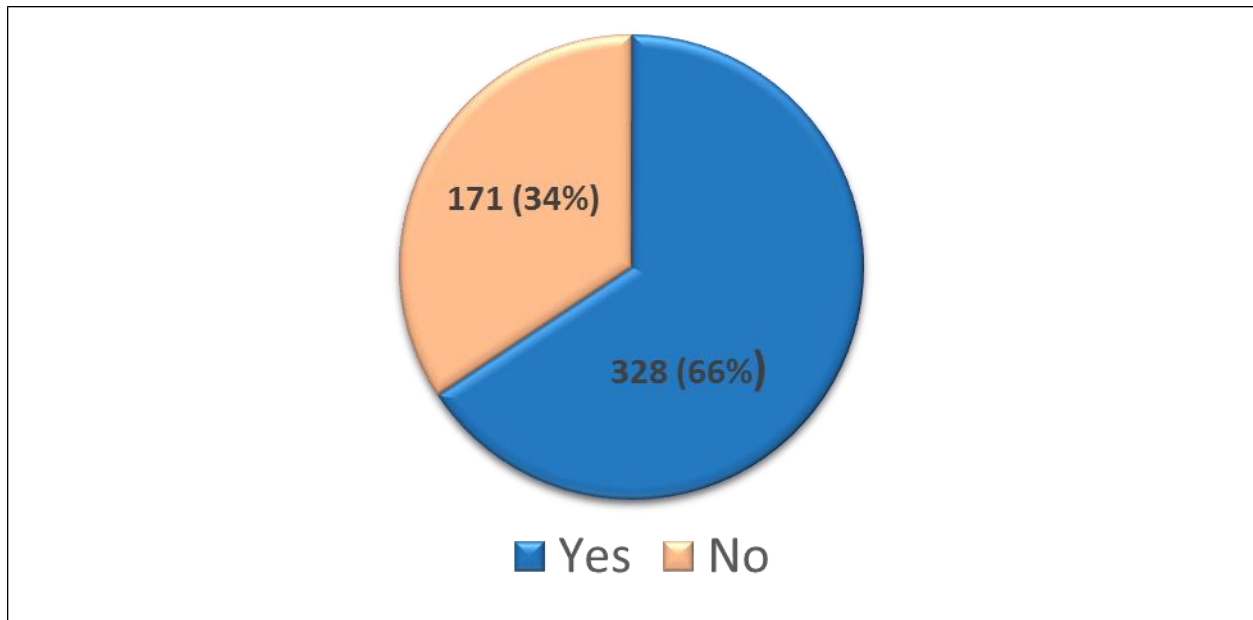
5. RESULTS

5.1 Part I

5.1.1 Determine what mode of data collection survey respondents were in when we received their letter of complaint (i.e., Mail stage, Internet stage, Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI), Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CAPI), and Telephone Questionnaire Assistance (TQA)).

The ICE Branch reviewed respondent correspondence and then accessed the ACSO databases ROSPOTT and SPOTT to determine what stage of the survey they were in after they sent in their correspondence.

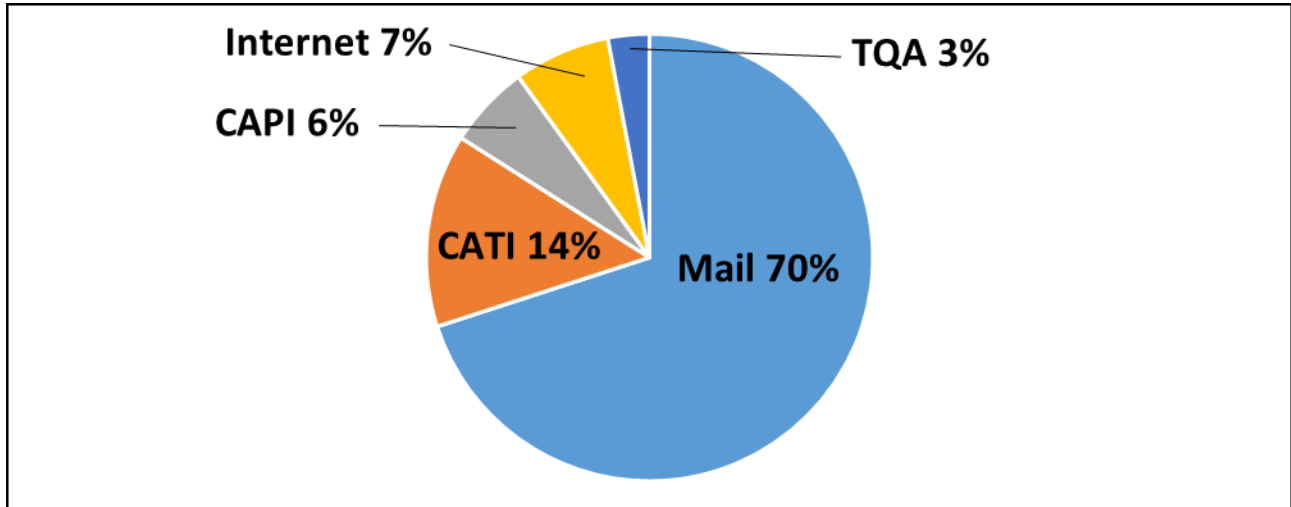
Figure 1: Percentage of Respondents Who Completed the ACS



Source: 2015/2016 panel households, 2016 Controlled, Non-controlled Correspondence, and ACS Database.

Figure 1 shows sixty-six percent of the respondents who wrote to us in 2016 had completed the ACS and thirty-four percent had not.

Figure 2: Distribution of Respondents' Response Mode When Complaint Received



Source: 2015/2016 panel households, 2016 Controlled, Non-controlled Correspondence, and ACS Database.

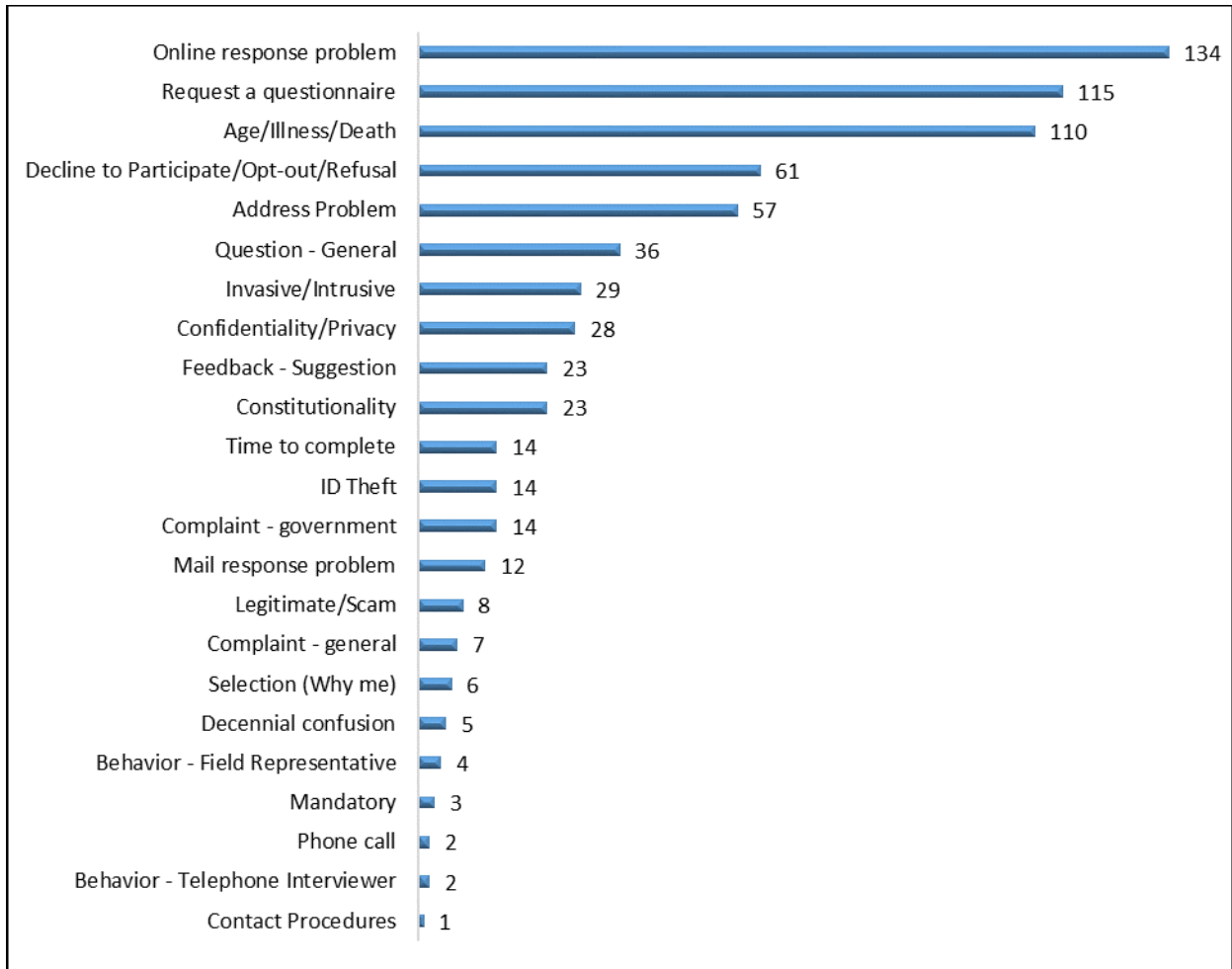
Figure 2 shows seventy percent of the respondents were in the Mail stage, fourteen percent were in CATI, six percent were in CAPI, seven percent were in the Internet stage, and three percent were in the TQA stage, at the time their correspondence was received.

5.1.2 Determine the types of respondent complaints.

Each letter was analyzed and 25 existing categories were used to characterize the type of complaint. Each letter contained at least one type of complaint. Data were gathered from one full year of the 2016 controlled and non-controlled correspondence received from respondents and their congressional representatives. Data were obtained from the Communications Log maintained by ICE Branch. The complaint types are: Address Problem, Addressed to Resident, Age/Illness/Death, Behavior - Field Representative, Behavior - Telephone Interviewer, Complaint - general, Complaint – government, Confidentiality/Privacy, Constitutionality, Contact Procedures, Decennial confusion, Decline to Participate/Opt-out/Refusal, Feedback - Suggestion, ID Theft, Invasive/Intrusive, Legitimate/Scam, Mail response problem, Mandatory, Online response problem, Personal visit, Phone call, Question - general, Request a questionnaire, Selection (Why Me), and Time to complete.²

² For this year, no complaints were received in Addressed to Resident and Personal Visit categories.

Figure 3: Number of Complaints by Type



Source: 2015/2016 panel households, 2016 Controlled, Non-controlled Correspondence, and ACS Database.

Figure 3 shows the number of complaints by type, which were extracted from the 509 pieces of controlled and non-controlled correspondence from the Complaints Database. This shows Online response problem, Request a questionnaire, and Age/Illness/Death were the most common categories expressed by these respondents.

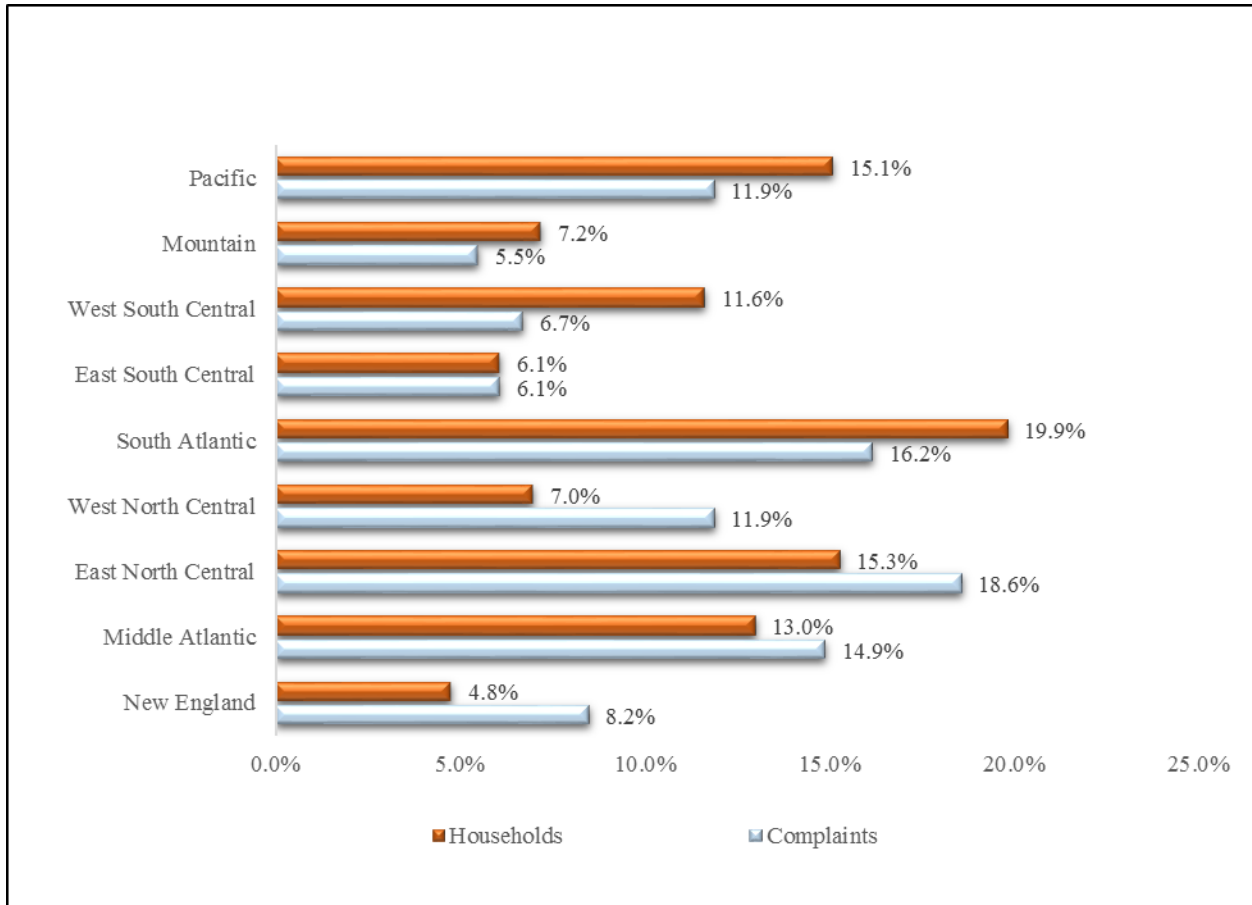
5.2 Part II

5.2.1 Determine the respondent's state and division of residence.

Using data from the complaints database and unedited response data, we were able to identify some basic demographic information about households that complain about the ACS, but complete the survey. We were able to match 65.7% of respondents, who wrote to us in 2016, with their ACS data.

Figure 4 shows the percentage of complaints by geographic division, as well as the percentage of U.S. households estimated to be in those geographic divisions.³ The decision was made not to show the data down at the state level due to some states having very few complaints. The results of this analysis suggest a larger proportion of complaints come from households in the West North Central, East North Central, Middle Atlantic, and New England divisions than other areas.⁴

Figure 4: Percent of ACS Households and Complaints by Geographic Division



Source: 2015/2016 panel households, 2016 Controlled, Non-controlled Correspondence, and ACS Database.

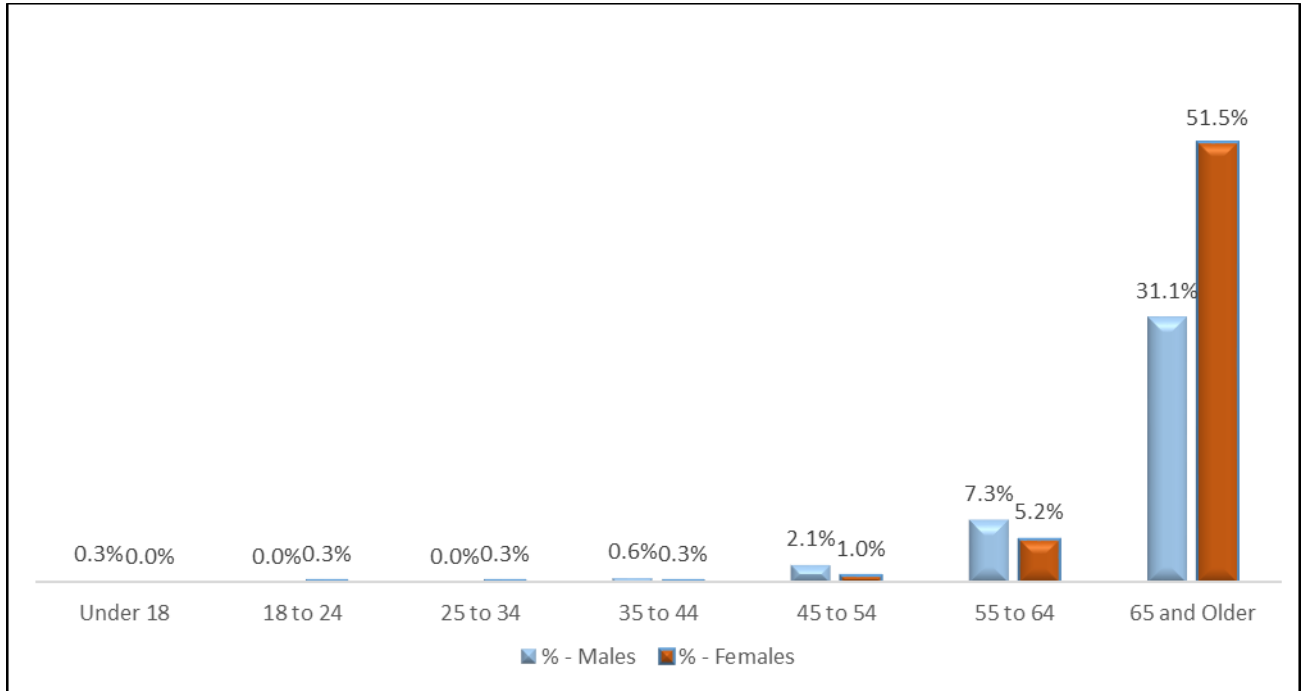
5.2.2 Gather information on age, sex, race, and educational attainment for those respondents who sent us letters and responded to the ACS.

Most (82.6 percent) of the respondents who contacted us to complain about the ACS, but did complete the survey were aged 65 and older.

³ A list of the Census Bureau Regions and Divisions is available at: https://www2.census.gov/geo/docs/maps-data/maps/reg_div.txt.

⁴ Statistical testing was not conducted.

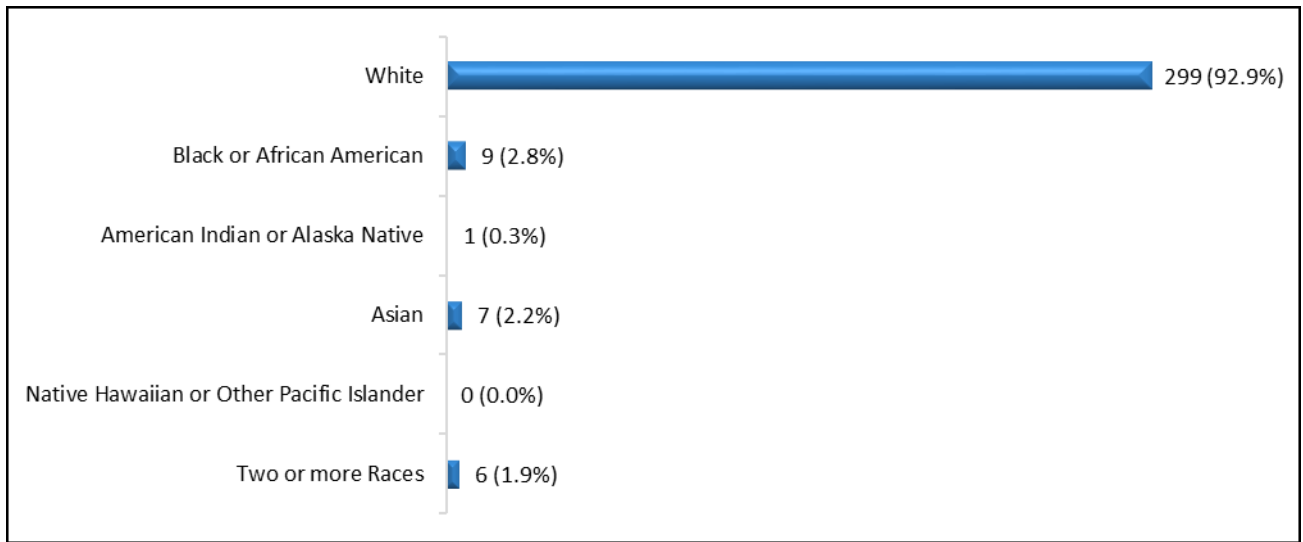
Figure 5: Distribution of Complaining Respondents by Age and Sex



Source: 2015/2016 panel households, 2016 Controlled, Non-controlled Correspondence, and ACS Database.

Figure 5 shows that 51.5 percent of respondents who wrote to us in 2016 were female and age 65 years and older.

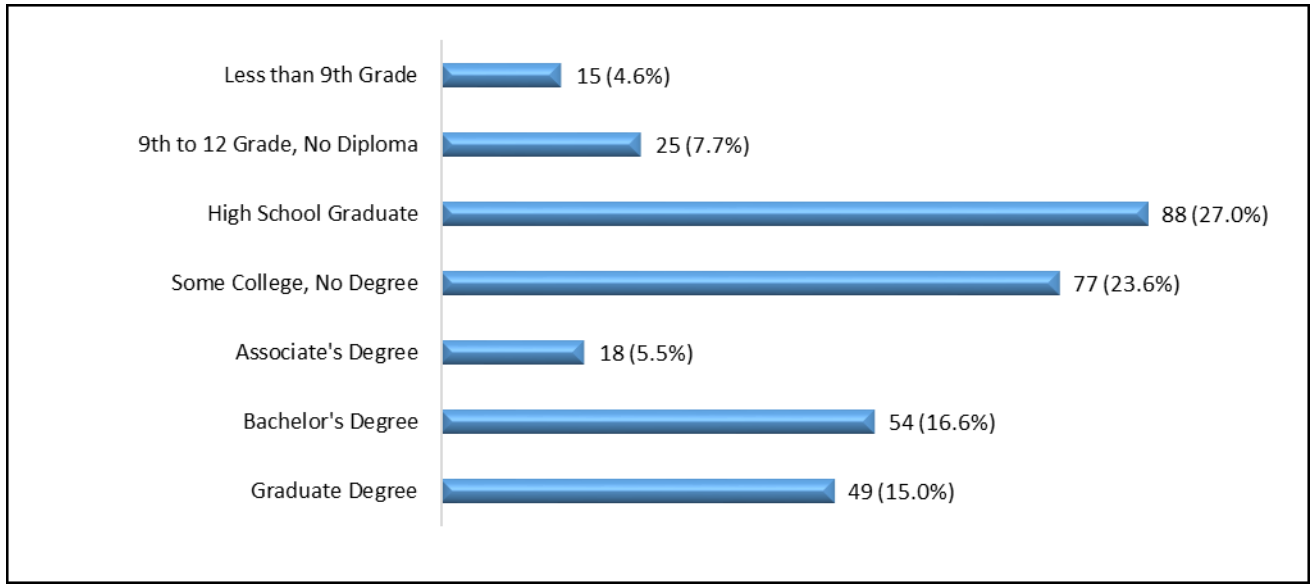
Figure 6: Distribution of Complaining Respondents by Race



Source: 2015/2016 panel households, 2016 Controlled, Non-controlled Correspondence, and ACS Database.

Figure 6 shows the race of respondents who wrote to us in 2016. The majority of respondents (92.9 percent) were White. A very small percentage of respondents were Black or African American (2.8 percent) or Asian (2.2 percent).

Figure 7: Distribution of Complaining Respondents by Educational Attainment



Source: 2015/2016 panel households, 2016 Controlled, Non-controlled Correspondence, and ACS Database.

Figure 7 shows the educational attainment distribution of the respondents who ultimately completed the survey. Most fall into the categories of “High School Graduate” or “Some College, No Degree.”

6. CONCLUSIONS

This research improved our understanding of the perceived burden reported by ACS respondents as well the characteristics of those respondents who wrote to complain about the ACS, but ultimately responded to the survey. Most respondents wrote to the Census Bureau or their congressional representatives in 2016 regarding the ACS to complain about an online response problem, to Request a questionnaire, or to request to opt out of the survey due to age, illness, or death. The analysis of race showed that the largest group of the respondents were White. The analysis of age showed that most of the respondents were 65 years and over. The analysis of education showed that most of the respondents were high school graduates. Also, we received more complaints from the Midwest and Northeast regions of the country than we would have expected based on the number of households estimated to be in those areas.⁵ Further research could include expanding the database to include additional calendar years of controlled and non-controlled correspondence to provide additional data points and

⁵ There has been no statistical testing of these differences.

allow us to draw statistically significant conclusions. We are committed to being responsive to our respondents to improve their experience with the ACS and ensure a quality experience when they interact with the Census Bureau.