
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

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American Community Survey: Uses and Users

- 1) Widely used federal statistics and classifications, including intercensal population estimates, income, metro area definitions, and occupational employment projections, are reliant on ACS data, as the following documents demonstrate:
 - [Annual Population Estimates](#) for nation, states, metro areas, counties, cities and towns (Census Bureau)
 - [Title 13, Section 181](#) requires that the Secretary of Commerce “shall annually produce and publish for each State, county, and local unit of general purpose government which has a population of fifty thousand or more, current data on total population and population characteristics”
 - The ACS is used to determine the international immigration and emigration components of each annual population number. See the Census [methodology](#), pages four through six.
 - [OMB Standards for Delineating Core Based Statistical Areas \[Metropolitan and Micropolitan Areas\]](#)
 - “The Office of Management and Budget will delineate CBSAs in 2013 based on 2010 Census data and 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.” Specifically, OMB will use ACS commuting and employment data.
 - After 2013, OMB is to designate new Metropolitan Statistical Areas if the annual population estimates for such areas (based in part on the ACS, as noted above) meet OMB criteria.
 - “(OMB) will review the delineations of all existing CBSAs and related statistical areas in 2018 using 2011-2015 5-year commuting and employment estimates from the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey.”
 - [Total and Per Capita Personal Income](#) for states, metro areas, and counties (Bureau of Economic Analysis)
 - ACS commuting data are used to [shift income data collected by place-of-work to place-of-residence](#) (56 percent of personal income).
 - [Imputed rental income of owner-occupied housing](#) is determined using ACS data on the value of owner-occupied housing.
 - Per capita income is determined by dividing total personal income by population, which also depends on the ACS, as noted above.
 - [Household Income Levels](#) and [Poverty Rates](#) for all geographic levels (Census Bureau)
 - [Household income levels and poverty rates for the nation](#) are based on the Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) to the Current Population Survey. The poverty

rates are determined in part through the population estimates which, as noted above, rely on the ACS.

- The ACS directly provides [income](#) and [poverty estimates](#) for states, metro areas, counties, cities, and census tracts.
- [Employment Projections](#) (Bureau of Labor Statistics)
 - Every two years, BLS produces employment projections by occupation for the coming ten years.
 - ACS occupational data are used to help [determine occupational replacement needs](#) over that decade.
 - ACS occupational and educational attainment data are used to develop [descriptions of educational requirements by occupation](#). BLS notes that the ACS data are particularly useful in analyzing occupations with multiple entry-level education possibilities.
- [Standard Occupational Classification system](#) (Bureau of Labor Statistics)
 - The Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system is used for classifying all occupations in the U.S. economy, including private, public, and military occupations, in order to provide a means to organize occupational data. Occupational data are important to job training providers, employment agencies, jobseekers, students, business and government officials, and researchers who study the supply and demand of labor.
 - [ACS data by occupational title are used to periodically revise the SOC](#), in accordance with [SOC Classification Principle 9](#).
- [Regional Price Parities](#) for states and metro areas (Bureau of Economic Analysis)
 - BEA has developed preliminary Regional Price Parities (RPPs) that enable comparisons of overall price levels and price levels by expenditure class (such as housing, food, and education) among states and metropolitan areas. The agency plans to make RPPs a regular BEA data product.
 - [The ACS is the primary data source for the housing component of RPPs](#).

2) Federal program and civil rights uses of ACS data

- [Federal purposes of each ACS question](#) – every question on the ACS is used by federal agencies to better fulfill their respective missions (e.g., law enforcement, grants distribution, policy analysis)
 - [Population questions](#)
 - [Housing questions](#)
- [Geographic distribution of federal domestic assistance](#): In FY2008, federal agencies used ACS data to guide the distribution of over \$400 billion in grants and transfer payments across 184 programs (Metropolitan Policy Program, Brookings Institution).
 - Program-by-program use of ACS-related data is discussed in the [Overview of Census-Guided Federal Domestic Assistance Programs](#) (note to reader: see “Reference Document” link at the bottom of the page).

- Frequent and/or important ACS-determined measures guiding federal funds distribution include population, poverty rate, school enrollment, disability, state per capita income, median family income, area median rent, and metropolitan area status. Examples include:
 - [Medicaid reimbursement formulas by state](#) depend on the ACS to determine state per capita income (state personal income divided by population, both ACS-dependent measures). Federal Medicaid expenditures in FY10 were \$285.6 billion, or 8.7 percent of total federal direct expenditures.
 - [Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates](#) (Census Bureau) are used to allocate federal grant funds, largely for poor children. The ACS provides base data for this effort; see the [methodology](#).
 - [Developing and Evaluating Methods for Using American Community Survey Data to Support the School Meals Programs](#), Committee on National Statistics, National Academies of Science, for USDA, Food and Nutrition Service – a study that looks at using ACS data to estimate the number of students who are eligible for free and reduced-price meals for schools and school districts.
 - [Fair Market Rents](#), HUD – ACS housing data are used to determine the upper limits of federal rental assistance to lower-income households.
- ACS uses for civics/ democracy:
 - Voting Rights Act compliance: The U.S. Department of Justice uses the ACS to determine compliance with the Voting Rights Act in three ways:
 - Newly designed districts cannot “pack” or “fracture” minority populations. Compliance is determined using measures of [citizen voting age population \(CVAP\)](#). The ACS, not the decennial Census, gathers information pertaining to citizenship.
 - The Census Bureau generates a [special CVAP tabulation](#) at the request of the Department of Justice.
 - The Texas Legislative Council was able to draft "[Using Citizenship Data for Redistricting](#)" through use of the ACS.
 - Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act requires that bilingual election materials be made available in jurisdictions in which there is a significant number or proportion of language minority citizens.
 - Non-English voting materials must be made available in jurisdictions in which five percent of the voting age population consists of a single language, limited English-proficient minority and in which there is a literacy rate below the national average, or in which more than 10,000 citizens who meet those criteria reside.
 - Section 8 of the [2006 Voting Rights Act reauthorization](#) (P.L. 109-246), introduced by Congressman Sensenbrenner (WI), requires the use of ACS primary language and English proficiency data to determine if bilingual election assistance is required. The [House Judiciary Committee report](#) charges the director of the Census Bureau with determining “coverage under Section 203 . . . based upon information compiled by the ACS on a rolling 5-year average.”

- Political polling: New polling methods rely on American Community Survey data:
 - A [YouGov](#) poll for the November 2012 presidential and senatorial races used “a random sample (stratified by age, gender, race, education, and region) . . . from the 2010 American Community Survey.”
 - [HUD’s new Consolidated Planning Process tool](#), based in part on the ACS, assists areas which must produce a plan to receive HUD grant funding. “HUD is launching the eCon Planning Suite, a set of 21st Century data and technology tools to help communities make sure scarce federal dollars are targeted to where they are needed most and can achieve the biggest impact. And on top of that, it’s estimated this new approach will save state and local communities at least 65,000 staff hours each year and THOUSANDS of dollars in consultant fees.”
 - [Congressional uses of the ACS](#), Population Reference Bureau (slides 9-10) – Members of Congress rely on ACS data to guide analysis and decision-making.
- 3) State and local uses. State and local governments use the ACS data to guide programs in every policy realm, including redistricting, housing, health, education, transportation, and criminal justice.
- ACS use for state budget purposes
 - In 23 states, [constitutional or statutory limits on state government revenue and spending](#) are determined on the basis of one or two ACS-reliant measures: state personal income as computed by the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) and annual state population growth as computed by the Census Bureau.
 - A majority of the states use BEA’s quarterly estimates of state personal income to [project tax collections](#).
 - ACS use in redistricting (in addition to Voting Rights Act compliance)
 - The National Council of State Legislatures has hosted [redistricting meetings, seminars, and presentations](#) that include discussion of how ACS socioeconomic data are useful in district design. For instance:
 - In a January 2011 NCSL redistricting seminar, [Polidata](#) discussed the usefulness of the ACS for “the redistricting community,” particularly pointing out that “for the first time, we will be able to see demographic characteristics, other than race and Hispanic origin, that are relatively current for many levels of census geography, including the current districts.”
 - Election Data Services’ presentation on ["Building a Redistricting Database"](#) includes the ACS among valuable datasets (see linked presentation slides 9 and 16).
 - The CVAP calculation is central to the design of good districts, irrespective of “one person, one vote.”
 - [Communities of interest](#) – Many state redistricting laws require redistricting decision-makers to preserve “communities of interest” to the extent possible. The ACS is useful in determining communities of interest, which “can be taken to mean anything from ethnic groups to those with shared economic interests to users of common infrastructure to those in the same media market.”
 - The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund outlines [uses of the ACS for redistricting](#) and [traditional redistricting principles](#).

- Redistricting software rely on ACS data.
 - [Maptitude for Redistricting](#), by far the [most popular](#) redistricting software, includes [ACS data](#).
 - [DistrictBuilder](#), open source redistricting software developed with [The Public Mapping Project](#), relies on ACS data. The PMP says, "The ACS data are important for redistricting because they may be used to provide evidence to define a community of interest, where this is a state redistricting criterion."
- The ACS is used in community indicators and profiles such as the following:
 - [Community Indicators Consortium](#)
 - [CIC Indicator Projects Database](#)
 - [National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership](#) (Urban Institute)—36 metro area indicators, major users of ACS data
 - [American Community Survey](#)—a significant bibliography of publications using ACS
 - [American Community Survey: Where Do We Go From Here? Framing Paper](#)
 - [American Community Survey: Advocacy for Neighborhood-Level Data](#)
 - Baltimore Metropolitan Council, [American Community Survey maps](#)
 - Department of Community Planning, Housing and Development, Arlington, VA, [community profiles using ACS](#)
 - City of Minneapolis, [ACS data](#)
 - Puget Sound Regional Council, [ACS data](#)
- The following links provide examples of ACS use in economic development:
 - [Testimony](#) by Patrick Jankowski before House Subcommittee on Health Care, District of Columbia, Census and the National Archives
 - PRB briefing on [Economic Development and the American Community Survey](#)
 - [Duluth Prosperity Index](#), City of Duluth
 - [Talent Dividend Orlando](#), CEOs for Cities
 - [Ohio Valley Regional Development Commission](#)
 - [Summary of the 2010 American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates](#), Economic Development & International Trade, Miami-Dade County
 - Chambers of commerce community profiles
 - [Manhattan Chamber of Commerce](#)
 - [Youngstown Warren Regional Chamber](#)
- The ACS is frequently used in education planning, as is evident in the following documents:
 - [School District Demographic System](#), National Center for Education Statistics
 - [Planning and Funding Your Child's Education—Post-Secondary Schools Part 1](#), Possibilities: A Financial Resource Guide for Parents of Children with Disabilities, National Endowment for Financial Education
 - [Use of the American Community Survey For Educational Planning in Portland Public Schools](#), Population Research Center, Portland State University
 - [Creating Pathways for Adult Learners](#), Illinois Community College Board

- The ACS also has numerous applications for health and human services, as is demonstrated in the following documents:
 - [Youth Status Report](#), Covenant House Institute (note to reader: review any of the status reports for references to the American Community Survey)
 - [“Focus on Poverty in Travis County: Snapshot from the American Community Survey,”](#) Research & Planning Division, Travis County (TX) Health and Human Services & Veterans Service
 - [State Health Access Data Center](#), Health Policy and Management Division, School of Public Health at the University of Minnesota – SHADAC relies on ACS data for tables and reports on health insurance coverage for states and areas
- The ACS’s contributions to criminal and civil justice research and practice include the following:
 - [To Take a Bite Out of Crime: Safeguard the Census](#) (discusses Illinois State Police use of data to identify places with high likelihood of meth labs)
 - [“Fewer English Speakers Cause Crunch In Nevada Courts,”](#) NPR
 - [Crime Mapping Research Conference, Eleventh Conference: Crime, Social Ills, and Place-based Solutions](#), (Note to reader: in the conference program, search for “census.”)
 - Crime forecasting software:
 - [Predictive Modeling Combining Short and Long-Term Crime Risk Potential](#), Temple University: \$241,194 grant from DOJ, NIJ, and the Office of Science and Technology Continuations. “The company [Azavea] is currently partnering with Taylor and Ratcliffe at Temple University to develop a free tool that uses American Community Survey and current crime data to forecast crime levels based upon the various neighborhoods in Philadelphia. Funded by the extraneously named Predictive Modeling Combining Short and Long Term Crime Risk Potential grant from the National Institute of Justice, the project should, in Taylor’s explanation, allow for more accurate predictions because it will function based off various historical and current demographic and crime data sets. ‘It’s going to improve the way in which police departments put cops on dots,’ Taylor said.”
 - [ACS Alchemist](#), Built by Azavea to predict changing crime levels. The tool creates Shapefiles of ACS variables.
 - [CAP Index](#), “Based upon the criminological theory of social disorganization, which states that there is a proven correlation between the social disorganization in a neighborhood and the amount of loss that occurs there. By analyzing neighborhood demographics (excluding race, religion, and gender), crime statistics and other databases with known indicators of crime, we are able to provide precise scores indicating a site’s risk of a crime in comparison to national, state and county averages.”
- The ACS is used in disaster planning and recovery:
 - [Anticipating the Unimaginable: The Crucial Role of the Census in Disaster Planning and Recovery](#), Andrew Reamer

- Greater New Orleans Data Center, [2005 Brookings event slide show](#) on the pre- and post-Katrina uses of Census small area data for community development and recovery
 - [The American Community Survey and Enhanced Community-Level Social Vulnerability Assessment](#), Institute for Homeland Security Solutions
 - ACS data are also used in transportation planning:
 - [Census Transportation Planning Products](#), American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials
 - [“A Guidebook for Using American Community Survey Data for Transportation Planning,”](#) National Cooperative Highway Research Program, Transportation Research Board, National Academies
 - [New commuting data based on the ACS](#), American Association of Geographers conference
 - The ACS is integral to state demographic analysis:
 - [State Data Centers](#) (intermediary Census data providers, including state agencies, universities, libraries, and regional and local governments)
 - [State population projections](#)
 - The ACS provides an understanding of state and local workforce and employment trends:
 - [“11% of local employees work from home,”](#) Beth Potter, Boulder County Business Report
 - [“Map Shows the Worst State for Women to Make Money: Gender income inequality by state and county,”](#) Chris Kirk, Slate
 - [“Women short-changed in Northeast Pennsylvania,”](#) Denise Allabaugh, thetimes-tribune.com
- 4) Think tanks, trade groups, and related organizations rely on ACS data for research and advocacy purposes:
- American Enterprise Institute
 - [“The State of Our Unions”](#), Karlyn Bowman
 - [“FHA Watch: Special Update-Five reasons President Obama’s mass refinance plan should be non-starter and two modest alternatives,”](#) Edward Pinto
 - Heritage Foundation
 - [“Urban Transportation Policy Requires Factual Foundations,”](#) Wendell Cox
 - [“Marriage: America’s Greatest Weapon Against Child Poverty,”](#) Robert Rector
 - [“Obama Administration’s Plan to Coerce People out of Their Cars,”](#) Ronald Utt
 - [“Who Serves in the U.S. Military? The Demographics of Enlisted Troops and Officers,”](#) Shanea Watkins and James Sherk
 - [“A Good Job Is Not So Hard to Find,”](#) James Sherk
 - [Improving Education in the Nation’s Capital: Expanding School Choice](#), Dan Lips, Evan Feinberg
 - [The Subprime Mortgage Market Collapse: A Primer on the Causes and Possible Solutions](#), Ronald Utt

- [Center for Education and the Workforce](#), Georgetown University
 - [What's it Worth: The Economic Value of College Majors](#), Anthony P. Carnevale, Jeff Strohl, and Michelle Melton (see link to methodology at bottom, all ACS)
 - [Hard Times, College Majors, Unemployment and Earnings: Not All College Degrees Are Created Equal](#), Anthony P. Carnevale, Ban Cheah, and Jeff Strohl (all ACS)
 - Contacts: Tony Carnevale (202) 687-4984 apc39apc@gmail.com, Jeff Strohl (202) 687-4945 js787@georgetown.edu
- Upjohn Institute for Employment Research
 - [Using the American Community Survey to Build a Dashboard of Regional Economic Indicators](#), Randall W. Eberts
- National Bureau of Economic Research
 - [Heterogeneity in Human Capital Investments: High School Curriculum, College Major, and Careers](#), Joseph G. Altonji, Erica Blom, and Costas Meghir
- Cornell University
 - [Using the American Community Survey \(ACS\) Multi-Year Estimates in State Programs](#), Warren Brown and Robert Scardamalia
- Metropolitan Policy Program, Brookings Institution
 - [Where the College Graduates Are: Degree Attainment in Metropolitan Areas](#), Alan Berube
 - [Immigrant Workers in the U.S. Labor Force](#), Audrey Singer
 - [The Re-Emergence of Concentrated Poverty: Metropolitan Trends in the 2000s](#), Alan Berube, Elizabeth Kneebone, and Carey Nadeau
 - [The State of Metropolitan America](#), William H. Frey, Audrey Singer, Alan Berube, Howard Wial, Elizabeth Kneebone, and Robert Puentes
- Pew Research Center
 - [A Tale of Two Fathers: More Are Active, but More Are Absent](#), Gretchen Livingston and Kim Parker
 - [Maps and Data about the Hispanic Population](#), D'Vera Cohn
 - [The States of Marriage and Divorce](#), D'Vera Cohn
 - ["The Boomerang Generation: Feeling OK About Living with Mom and Dad,"](#) Kim Parker
 - [Marrying Out: One-in-Seven New U.S. Marriages is Interracial or Interethnic](#), Jeffrey S. Passel, Wendy Wang, and Paul Taylor
 - [Barely Half of U.S. Adults Are Married – A Record Low](#), D'Vera Cohn, Jeffrey Passel, Wendy Wang, and Gretchen Livingston
- Children's Defense Fund
 - [Children in the States Factsheets 2012](#)
- Annie E. Casey Foundation
 - [Kids Count Data Center](#)
 - [Stepping Up for Kids: What Government and Communities Should Do to Support Kinship Families](#)

- [Rent Burden, Housing Subsidies and the Well-being of Children and Youth](#), Yumiko Aratani, Michelle Chau, Vanessa R. Wight, and Sophia Addy
- [Working Poor Families Project](#)
- League of American Bicyclists, [2010 Bike Commuters by Place](#)
- Concerned Women for America
 - [Marriage is not Dead](#), Janice Shaw Crouse
- National Healthy Marriage Resource Center
 - [National Research Studies](#)
- [The National Marriage Project](#), University of Virginia
- [The Future of Children](#), Princeton University and the Brookings Institution
- Center for Marriage and Families at the Institute for American Values
 - [Wanna Support Marriage? End The Drug War. Fight Unemployment.](#), Barry Deutsch
- Population Health Institute, University of Wisconsin
 - [County Health Rankings and Roadmaps](#)
 - [Family Inequality](#), Philip Cohen, University of Maryland, College Park
- Migration Policy Institute
 - [MPI Data Hub](#)
- Economic Policy Institute
 - [2011 American Community Survey shows continuing hardship throughout the U.S.](#)
- Williams Institute
 - [Census & LGBT Demographic Studies](#)
- Rural Policy Research Institute
 - [The American Community Survey and Rural Data Analysis](#)

5) Journalists use the ACS for database analysis:

- [USA Today](#)
 - [Middle class' share of the nation's income is shrinking](#), Paul Overberg (poverber@usatoday.com)
 - Overberg co-presented on the use of [ACS for business writing](#) at the Reynolds Center for Business Journalism.
- [New Geography](#)
 - Education
 - [Debating Higher Ed: STEMs, Skills, Humanities, and Hiring](#), Joshua Wright
 - [America's Biggest Brain Magnets](#), Joel Kotkin
 - [A Decade in College Degree Attainment](#), Aaron M. Renn
 - Migration
 - [Domestic Migration: Returning to Normalcy?](#), Wendell Cox
 - Housing
 - [More Americans Move to Detached Houses](#), Wendell Cox
 - Transportation
 - [Commuting in New York City, 2000-2010](#), Aaron M. Renn

- [How Lower Income Citizens Commute](#), Wendell Cox
 - [Surprise: Higher Gas Prices, Data Shows More Solo Auto Commuting](#), Wendell Cox
 - Dawn.com
 - [Dollars and sense of American desis](#), Murtaza Haider
- 6) Journalists write media stories based on ACS
- [A Gap in College Graduates Leaves Some Cities Behind](#), Sabrina Tavernise, New York Times
 - Reports on foreign-born people in the U.S:
 - [Foreign-born population in U.S. higher than ever](#), Stephanie Siek, CNN
 - [Most foreign-born Americans since 1920](#), Rebecca Trounson
 - [Census Bureau: Foreign-Born Population in U.S. Reaches Record 40 Million](#), Chosun, via Voice of America
 - [Which College Majors Pay Best?](#), Phil Izzo, Wall Street Journal
 - [Younger Echo Boomers to Drive Future of U.S. Housing Market](#), Scott Kauffman, World Property Channel
 - [Census Bureau releases detailed statistics on smaller Inland areas](#), David Olson, The Press-Enterprise
 - [Seven of nation's 10 most affluent counties are in Washington region](#), Carol Morello and Ted Mellnik, The Washington Post
- 7) Businesses use ACS data, annual population estimates, metro area definitions, and total personal income estimates to evaluate markets for new or established products and determine areas for the location, expansion, and contraction of their activities. Examples of business uses include:
- Marketing Research Association [blog on elimination of the ACS](#)
 - National Association of Home Builders, [Building Stronger Industries and Communities: The Role of the American Community Survey](#), David Crowe
 - Retail
 - National Retail Federation [statement on ACS](#), J. Craig Shearman
 - JC Penney on [ACS uses for retail](#)
 - International Council of Shopping Centers
 - [Preserving Census Data](#)
 - [Target and the American Community Survey](#)
 - Value-added commercial data vendors, used by businesses to make site/market decisions
 - Nielsen Claritas, [SiteReports](#)
 - [Demographic Methodology](#)
 - Synergos Technologies, 2012 Annual PopStats Research Conference "[The Impact of the American Community Survey](#)"
 - GeoLytics, [ACS](#)
- 8) The ACS is also the foundation for numerous reference resources, such as FindTheData's [State and City Facts](#).

9) For more in-depth background and reference materials on the ACS, please see:

- [Overview of ACS history](#), chapter 2
- [Better Data for Better Decisions: The Value of the American Community Survey to the Nation](#), a Brookings briefing sponsored by the House Committee on Government Reform
- [American Community Survey Data for Community Planning](#), Cynthia Taeuber
- [CQ Press Guide to the American Community Survey \(ACS\) of the U.S. Census Bureau](#)
- [Workshop on the Benefits \(and Burdens\) of the ACS](#), National Academies of Science

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Additional ACS resource materials available at <http://www.gwu.edu/~gwipp/reamerresearch.html>

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