



Census Overview: Basics, Decennial, ACS, and Estimates

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Terminology & Definitions

- Decennial Census: headcount taken every 10 years; mandated by Constitution for equal representation
- Short form: basic decennial Census questionnaire sent to most households in 2000 and all households in 2010; records simple demographics like age, gender, race, housing tenure (own/rent)
- Long form: detailed decennial Census questionnaire sent to a sample of households in the 2000 Census but not used in the 2010 Census; recorded socio-economic and detailed housing data
- American Community Survey (ACS): annual sample survey – provides current data; similar to long form (replaced it) – allowed 2010 Census to be short form only (simply a headcount)
 - 2010 ACS (and those in future years) continues monthly surveying even though 2010 Census is finished



Decennial Census Datafiles

- Summary File 1 (SF 1): Official head and housing unit counts as well as counts for basic demographic information from the short form such as age, race, and housing tenure (own vs. rent)
- Summary File 2 (SF 2): Companion file to SF 1 that allows tables to be presented by race, ancestry, or tribe
- Summary File 3 (SF 3): Detailed socio-economic and housing data from the long form; also includes figures for SF 1 items but these are based on a “weighted” sample—not the official counts

BE CAREFUL – You must go to the right source to get correct data!

- Summary File 4 (SF 4): Like SF 2, this is a companion file for tabulating by race, ancestry, or tribe but for those items found in SF 3 (income, education, marital status, housing year built, etc.)

Note: 1990 Census only has the primary SF 1 and SF 3 files online.



Geography

- Size continuum: large to small & small to large
- Legal/Administrative vs. Census/Statistical
 - Nation—State—County—City—Township
 - Block—Block Group—Census Tract—PUMA—Zip Code—Metro Area (MSA)—Division—Region

American FactFinder "homepage"

U.S. Census Bureau

American FactFinder

Main Search Feedback FAQs Glossary Site Map Help

Your source for population, housing, economic, and geographic data

POPULATION FINDER

FACT SHEET

PEOPLE

HOUSING

BUSINESS AND GOVERNMENT

ABOUT THE DATA

DATA SETS

DOWNLOAD CENTER

MAPS

TOOLS AND REFERENCES

Fast Access to Information

Get a **Fact Sheet** for your community...

city/ town, county, or zip

state

[or select a state using a map »](#)

Getting Detailed Data

Decennial Census - taken every 10 years to collect information about the people and housing of the United States
[learn more](#) | [get data](#)

See the [Count Question Resolution Program](#) for information on Census 2000 count corrections.

American Community Survey - an ongoing survey that provides data about your community every year
[learn more](#) | [get data](#)

Puerto Rico Community Survey - the equivalent of the American Community Survey for Puerto Rico
[learn more](#) | [get data](#) | [en español](#)

Population Estimates Program - population numbers between censuses
[learn more](#) | [get data](#)

Economic Census - profiles the U.S. economy every 5 years
[learn more](#) | [get data](#)

Annual Economic Surveys - data from the Annual Survey of Manufactures, County Business Patterns and Nonemployer Statistics
[learn more](#) | [get data](#)

Special Interest

Population Data

Population Finder
Use the [Population Finder](#) to view population trends for your community.

U.S. Population Clock
14:28 GMT (EST+5) Jun 19, 2008
304,381,237
[more population clocks »](#)

What's New

2007 Population Estimates are expanded to include the demographic characteristics of age, race, sex and Hispanic Origin.
[more »](#)

2006 Puerto Rico Community Survey data are now available for Puerto Rico in Spanish from the [Data Sets page](#).

2006 Annual Survey of Manufactures data are now available as [Data Sets](#) in American FactFinder.

2006 American Community Survey (ACS) Race, Ethnic, and Ancestry data complete the release of the 2006 American Community Survey (ACS). Click the Fact Sheet, People, and Housing links on the left menu.

Address Search...
Enter a [street address](#) to find Census 2000 data

- [Browser Notes](#)
- [Confidentiality](#)
- [Citing FactFinder](#)



Keyword Geography

Show more selection methods and more geographic types

Choose a selection method: list, name search, address search, map

Select year and program: Census 2000

Enter a street address, city and state, or a street address and zip code. Click 'Go'

Street Address: 13600 pierce
City: omaha
State: Nebraska
Zip Code:
Go









Geographies Containing 13600 Pierce St , Omaha , Nebraska , 68144:
Select a geographic area and click 'Go'

- County: Douglas County
County Subdivision: Omaha city
Census Tract: Census Tract 74.06
Block Group: Block Group 4
Block: Block 4001
Voting District/Remainder: Precinct 6-16





Map It
Go

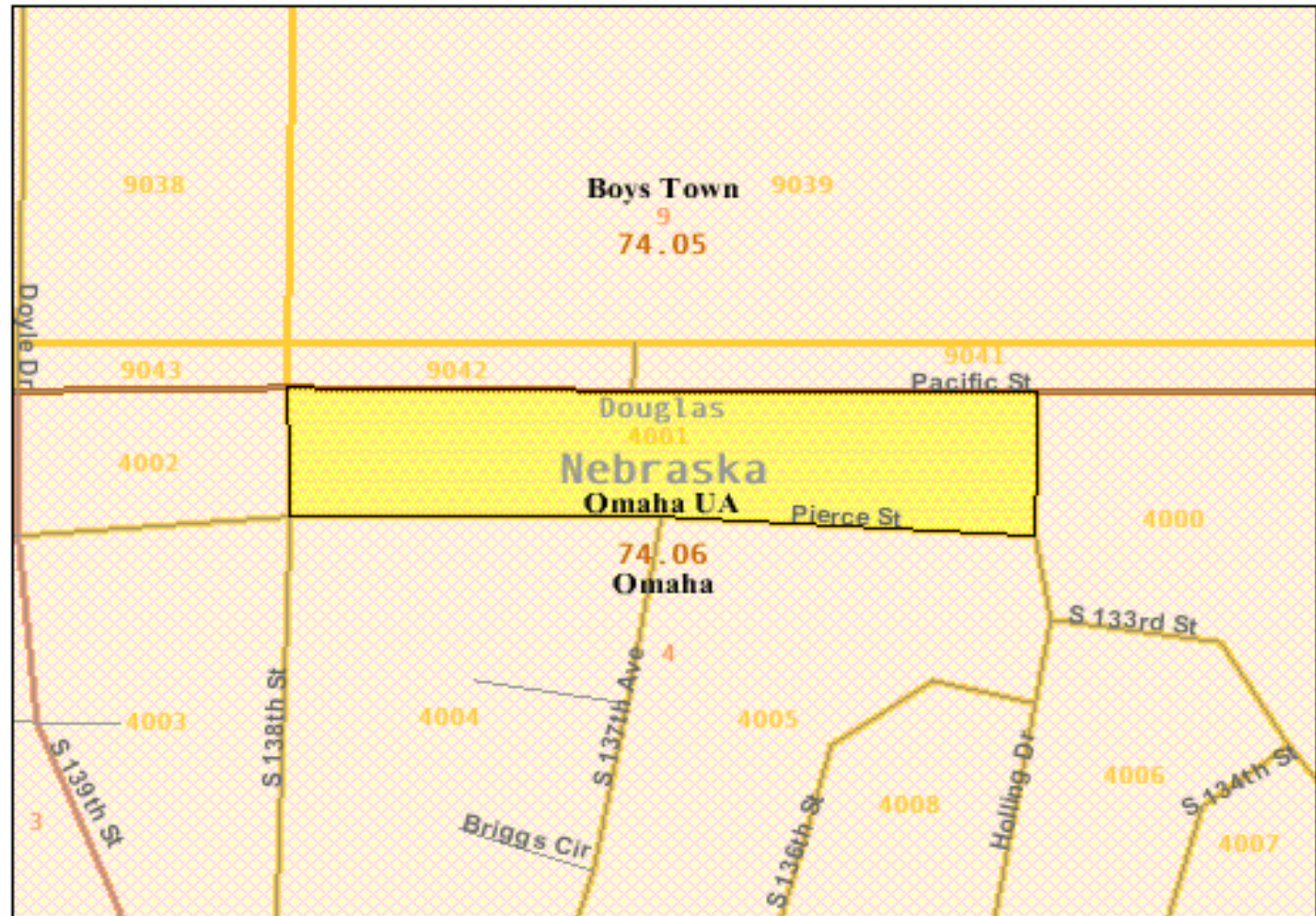
Block 4001, Block Group 4, Census Tract 74.06, Douglas County, Nebraska

Boundaries

-  State
-  '00 County
-  '00 Census Tract
-  '00 Block Group
-  '00 Block
-  '00 Place
-  '00 Urban Area
-  '00 Urban Area

Features

-  Major Road
-  Street
-  Stream/Waterbody
-  Stream/Waterbody



0.4 mile across

[Close](#)

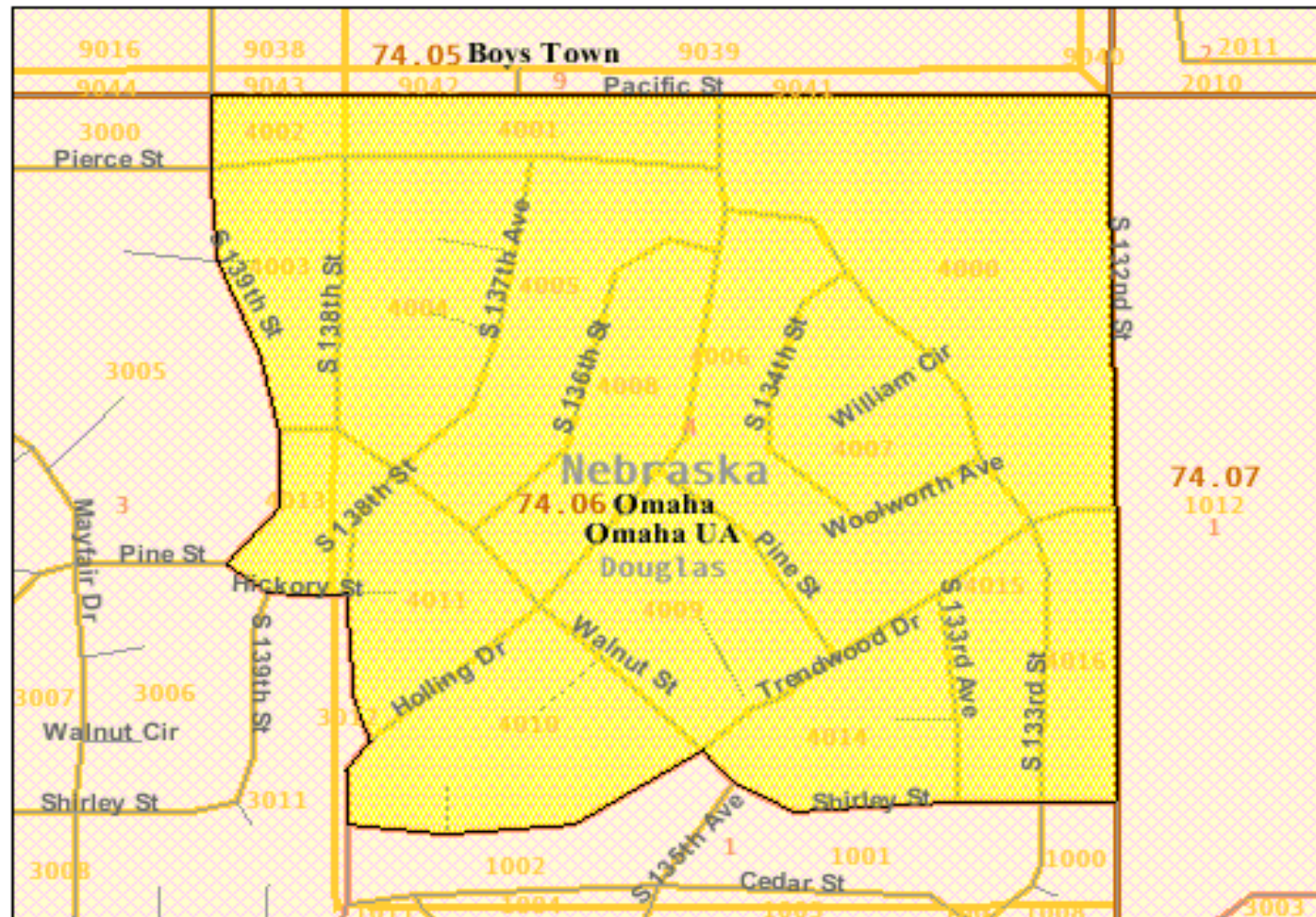
Block Group 4, Census Tract 74.06, Douglas County, Nebraska

Boundaries

- State
- '00 County
- '00 Census Tract
- '00 Block Group
- '00 Block
- '00 Place
- '00 Urban Area
- '00 Urban Area

Features

- Major Road
- Street
- Stream/Waterbody
- Stream/Waterbody



0.8 mile across

Close

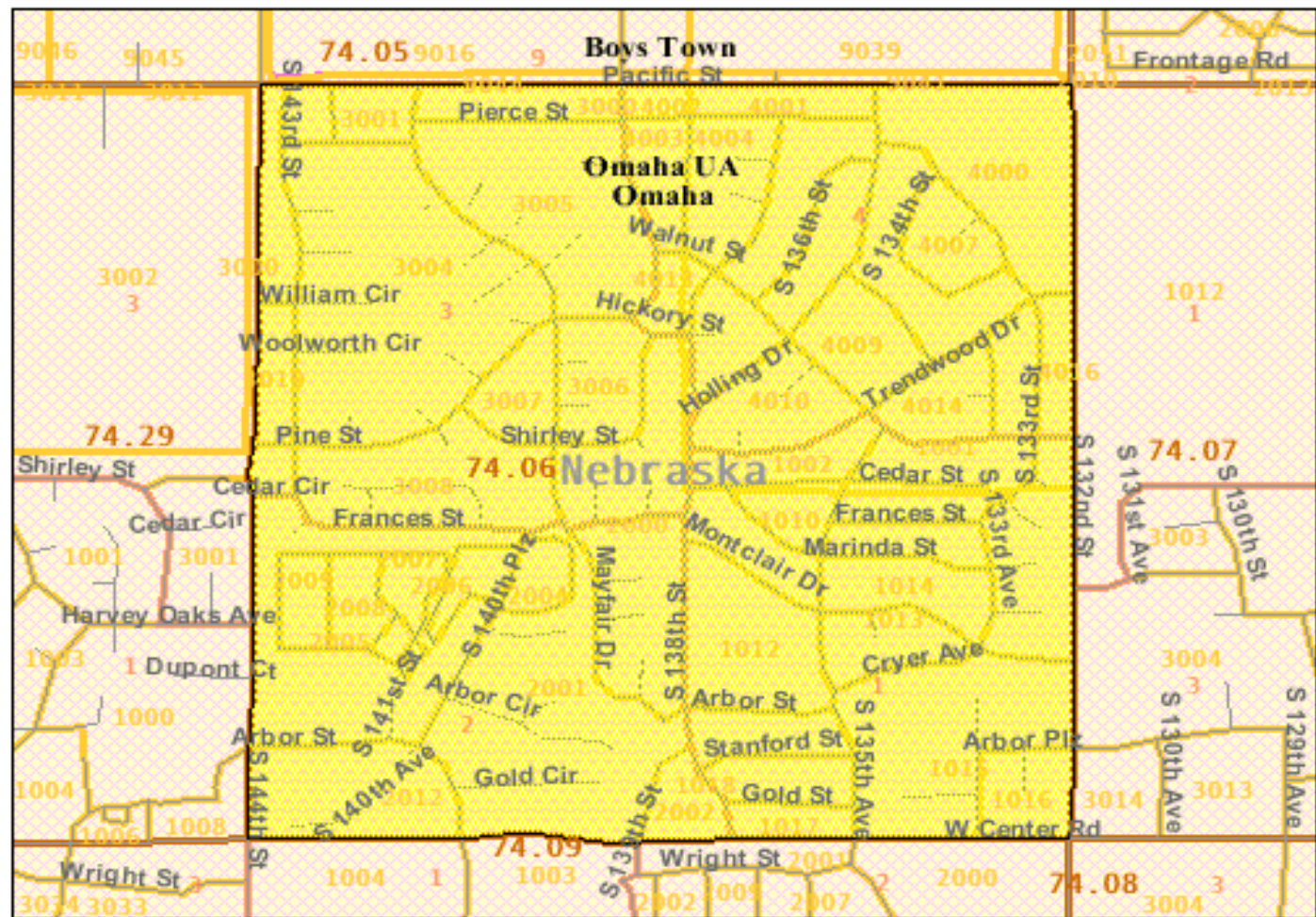
Census Tract 74.06, Douglas County, Nebraska

Boundaries

- State
- '00 County
- '00 Census Tract
- '00 Block Group
- '00 Block
- '00 Place
- '00 Urban Area
- '00 Urban Area

Features

- Major Road
- Street
- Stream/Waterbody
- Stream/Waterbody

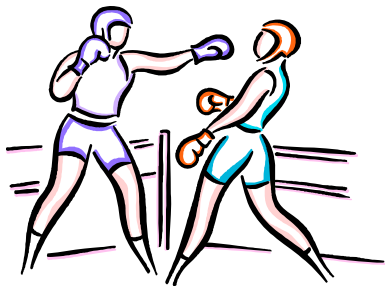


1.6 miles across

Close

Geography VS. Data (A Duel)

- There is always a tradeoff between available information and the geography for which it is available
 - Can be due to confidentiality restraints
 - More specific information may require expanding to a larger geography
 - Even if the data is provided, you must ask whether the data is “reliable” for that geography?
 - Are the figures based on a small number of cases where the sampling error could be large?
 - Sampling error shows how different the figures could be if different households/people were included in the sample.





Relationship between Data/Datafiles and Geography

- For blocks, you can only get SF 1 data
 - Confidentiality reasons: you'd know certain incomes on your block (also sampling/error issues)
- Block groups have most SF 3 data but no SF 2,4
 - No ancestry or unmarried partner data
- Census Tracts are a key geography as they are one of the smallest geographies to have most all data compiled
 - Special PCT and HCT tables, also have SF 2, 4 data
- Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs) are combined census tracts that contain at least 100,000 people and are the smallest geography for the PUMS files



PUMA geography

- Nebraska has 14 PUMA areas (4 in Douglas Co., 2 in Lancaster)
- Current PUMA boundaries for the ACS are the same as for Census 2000
 - Boundaries could change after Census 2010
- PUMA geography has more importance in the ACS
 - Data released annually since PUMAs exceed the annual ACS release population threshold
 - Not many Nebraska geographies get annual data; PUMAs are the smallest annual geography for making statewide comparisons
 - Breaks core metro counties into smaller areas and gives proxies for smaller counties that are similar to the larger PUMA area
- Reference Maps can be viewed on the internet
 - Organized by state
 - <http://www.census.gov/geo/www/maps/puma5pct.htm>



The American Community Survey: What is it?

- Nationwide written/mail survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau
 - Sent to a sample of households, not all households
- Similar to the sample portion of the decennial (10 year) census but is completed every year
 - Gives us more current information: annual data rather than 10 year intervals between data releases
 - Provides data on the same Census topic areas
 - Replaces “long form” of decennial census; 2010 Census primarily a population count
 - The “future” of socio-economic Census data



ACS Goals

- Provide federal, state, local, and tribal governments an information base for the administration and evaluation of programs
- Improve (simplify/streamline) the 2010 Census
- Provide yearly demographic, social, economic, and housing data that can be compared across states, communities, and population groups

NOTE: The ACS is not designed to count the population – use other sources for population counts. The ACS provides characteristics of the people living in an area.



ACS History and Timeline

- Development began in the mid 1990s.
- Data first collected in 1996 at 4 test sites. In 1997 there were 8 test sites including Douglas County, NE.
- Expanded to 31 test sites in 36 counties in 1999 for comparison to Census 2000.
- In 2002, the sample included 1,203 counties to provide accurate state data. Data released for areas with 250,000 people (Lancaster County).
- Survey fully implemented (all counties) in January 2005.
- Sampling of Group Quarters began in January 2006.

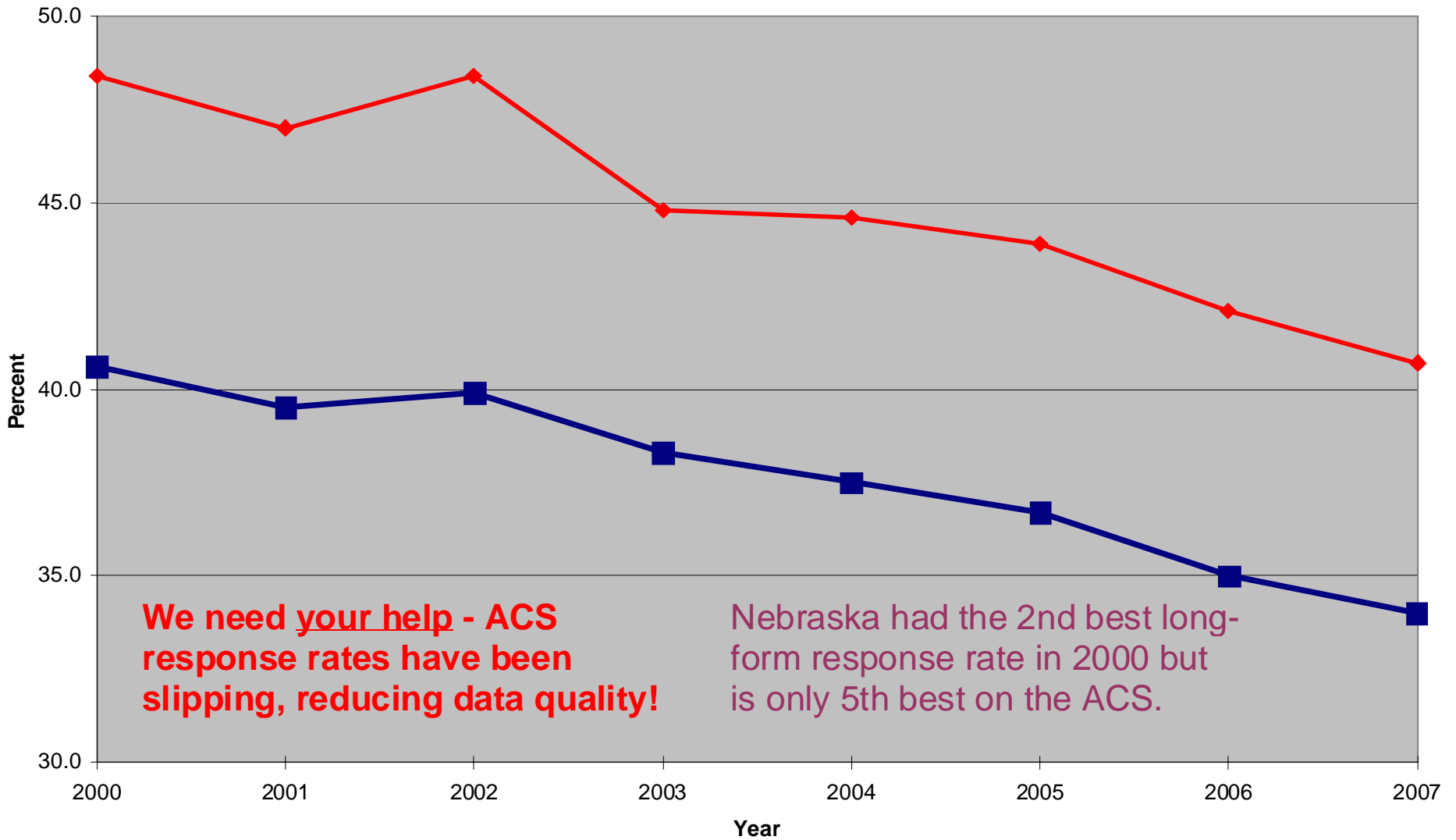
Note: All past and future ACS products and sampling rates were/are subject to funding levels approved or adjusted by Congress and the Commerce Dept.



ACS Methodology in Brief

- Surveys mailed out & received back each month
 - 3 million surveys annually nationwide
 - Sample about 1 in 40 housing units (1 in 8 over five years of survey collection – Census 2000 long form was 1 in 6)
 - Census assigns both household and person weights. Summing these weights produces the estimates.
 - Monthly surveys are combined to estimate figures for the year as a whole.
 - Nebraska response rate is in the top 5 (but has been slipping—help promote participation)
 - 1 in 3 non-respondents are personally interviewed to get info. (very important—improves its data over others)

Initial ACS Mail Response Rates, U.S. and Nebraska: 2000 to 2007



We need your help - ACS response rates have been slipping, reducing data quality!

Nebraska had the 2nd best long-form response rate in 2000 but is only 5th best on the ACS.

Source: 2008 American Community Survey Variance Memorandum Series #ACS-V-01

■ United States ◆ Nebraska

Compiled and Prepared by: David Drozd, UNO Center for Public Affairs Research, May 7, 2009



Differences between Census 2000 and the ACS

- 1. Timeframe
 - The Census was a point in time estimate (4-1-00); the ACS accumulates 12 months of surveys for a calendar year estimate
- 2. Some questions and answer choices differ
 - Change of residence
 - Census: 5 years ago; ACS: 1 year ago
- 3. Different estimates and how to use them
 - Smaller sample—larger error possible
 - Year over year comparisons; statistical differences
 - 3 or 5 year-estimates for less-populated areas




ACS New Subject Areas:

- Food stamp reciprocity of households
- Fertility (women age 15-50 giving birth in the last year)
 - Note: These items were not asked on Census 2000 but have been asked since early-on in the ACS

See pages 6 and 9 of survey questionnaire for exact question wording.

KEY POINT: Remember that the goal of the ACS is not to make exact counts of the population or an item like the number of births (other sources for that), but to provide information on the characteristics of the population or those giving birth – information you can't find elsewhere!



Changes for the 2008, 2009 ACS

- Additions
 - Health Insurance Coverage
 - Who is covered & type of coverage (employer, private, etc.)
 - Marital History
 - Change in past 12 months, # of marriages, length of current marriage
 - Veteran Service Connected Disabilities
 - For 2009, majors of any Bachelor's Degrees
- Deletion of Years of Military Service
- Various Changes:
 - No dollar amount of food stamps
 - Disability questions revamped (breaks time series)
 - Example: Sensory disability separated into vision & hearing
 - Relationship detail returns (children, in-laws)
- Questionnaire @ <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/>



ACS Subject Areas: #1 Demographic

- Population and Housing Unit Totals
- Sex
- Age
- Race
- Ethnicity (Hispanic origin)

These are tied or weighted to the data coming from the Census Estimates Program – that, or the 2010 Census, is the official source for “count” data (totals, age, sex, race), not the ACS



ACS Subject Areas: #2 Social

- Household type, size, and relationships
- School enrollment
- Educational attainment
- Marital Status
- Fertility (women ages 15-50 who have given birth in the past 12 months)
 - Item not asked on Census 2000
- Disability Status
- Mobility (residence change from 1 year ago)
- Place of birth, ancestry, language spoken



ACS Subject Areas: #3 Economic

- Employment/Unemployment
- Commuting to Work
- Occupation, Industry
- Class of worker
 - (Government, self-employed, etc.)
- Income and sources
- Poverty
- Food stamp reciprocity of households
 - Item not asked on Census 2000



ACS Subject Areas: #4 Housing

- Housing tenure (owning vs. renting)
- Number of units in structure
- Year structure built, Year moved into
- Rooms, Occupants per room
- House characteristics
- Vehicles available
- Home Value (self-reported)
- Mortgage status, amount, and burden
- Rental status, amount, and burden

Let's view these profiles on the web: www.census.gov



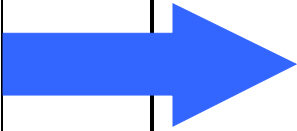


Nebraska ACS Data: Current Time Series

- Omaha city and Douglas County (test site):
1997-2008
- Lancaster County (250,000 people):
2002-2008
- Nebraska (state):
2000-2008
- Other areas with 65,000+: 2005-2008

Note: 2005-2008 figures for Lancaster Co. and Nebraska are from the larger “full” sample, meaning more accuracy. Douglas Co. has always been at full sampling rate. Only 2006 - 2008 data has group quarters.

ACS Data Release Schedule (full implementation in 2005)

Type of Data	Population of Area	Previous Year's Data Released in the Fall of:					
		2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Annual Estimate	65,000+						
3-year aggregate	20,000+						
5-year aggregate	Under 20,000; Census Tracts, Zip Codes						

We have to wait for data for smaller areas, but we will get annual data after the initial release (rolling timeframe as new data is released: 2005-2009 then 2006-2010).



2009 ACS Data Release

- All the annual data for 2009 will be released at one time (for areas with 65,000+ persons)
 - Tuesday Sept 28, 2010
 - ACS income and poverty tables (which used to be released early with data from the Current Population Survey)
 - The first expanded health insurance and marital history data
- The first 5-year aggregate estimates (2005-09) will be released in December 2010 (all geographies)
 - First data since 2000 for many areas – a KEY release!!
 - Basically “Census style” socio-economic data will come out prior to 2010 headcounts becoming available in March 2011
- The 3-year aggregate estimates (2007-09) will be released in January 2011 (20,000+ persons)
 - It will not have health insurance, disability data



Multi-year Aggregate Estimates: Advantages

- The aggregates provide data for more geographies
 - Annual data for NE: 3 counties (Douglas, Lancaster, Sarpy)
 - 3-yr aggregate: 16 counties
 - 5-yr aggregate: all 93 counties
- For areas that get annual data, the aggregates based on more completed questionnaires will be more accurate and have smaller margins of error (MOE)
 - Especially important for sub-groups—data by race, age
 - Will help reduce variability in year-to-year figures
 - Some FactFinder tables are prepared but not released annually because of inaccuracy concerns—some of those tables will now have data released



Detailed Tables

You are here: [Main](#) ▶ [Data Sets](#) ▶ [Data Sets with Detailed Tables](#) ▶ [Geography](#) ▶ [Tables](#) ▶ **Results**

Use the links above to change your results

| [Options](#)

| [Print / Download](#)

| [Related Items](#)

[B22005A. RECEIPT OF FOOD STAMPS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS BY RACE OF HOUSEHOLDER \(WHITE ALONE\) - Universe: HOUSEHOLDS WITH A HOUSEHOLDER WHO IS WHITE ALONE](#)

Data Set: [2006 American Community Survey](#)

Survey: 2006 American Community Survey

NOTE: For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see [Survey Methodology](#).

	PUMA 00903, Nebraska	
	Estimate	Margin of Error
Total:	21,850	+/-1,687
Household received Food Stamps in the past 12 months	2,171	+/-731
Household did not receive Food Stamps in the past 12 months	19,679	+/-1,610

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey

[B22005C. RECEIPT OF FOOD STAMPS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS BY RACE OF HOUSEHOLDER \(AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE ALONE\) - Universe: HOUSEHOLDS WITH A HOUSEHOLDER WHO IS AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE ALONE](#)

Data Set: [2006 American Community Survey](#)

Survey: 2006 American Community Survey

NOTE: Data for the following geographic area(s) cannot be displayed because the number of sample cases is too small.

Geography:

PUMA 00903, Nebraska

Example of Standard Table without Data Released



Small Area Data for Test Sites

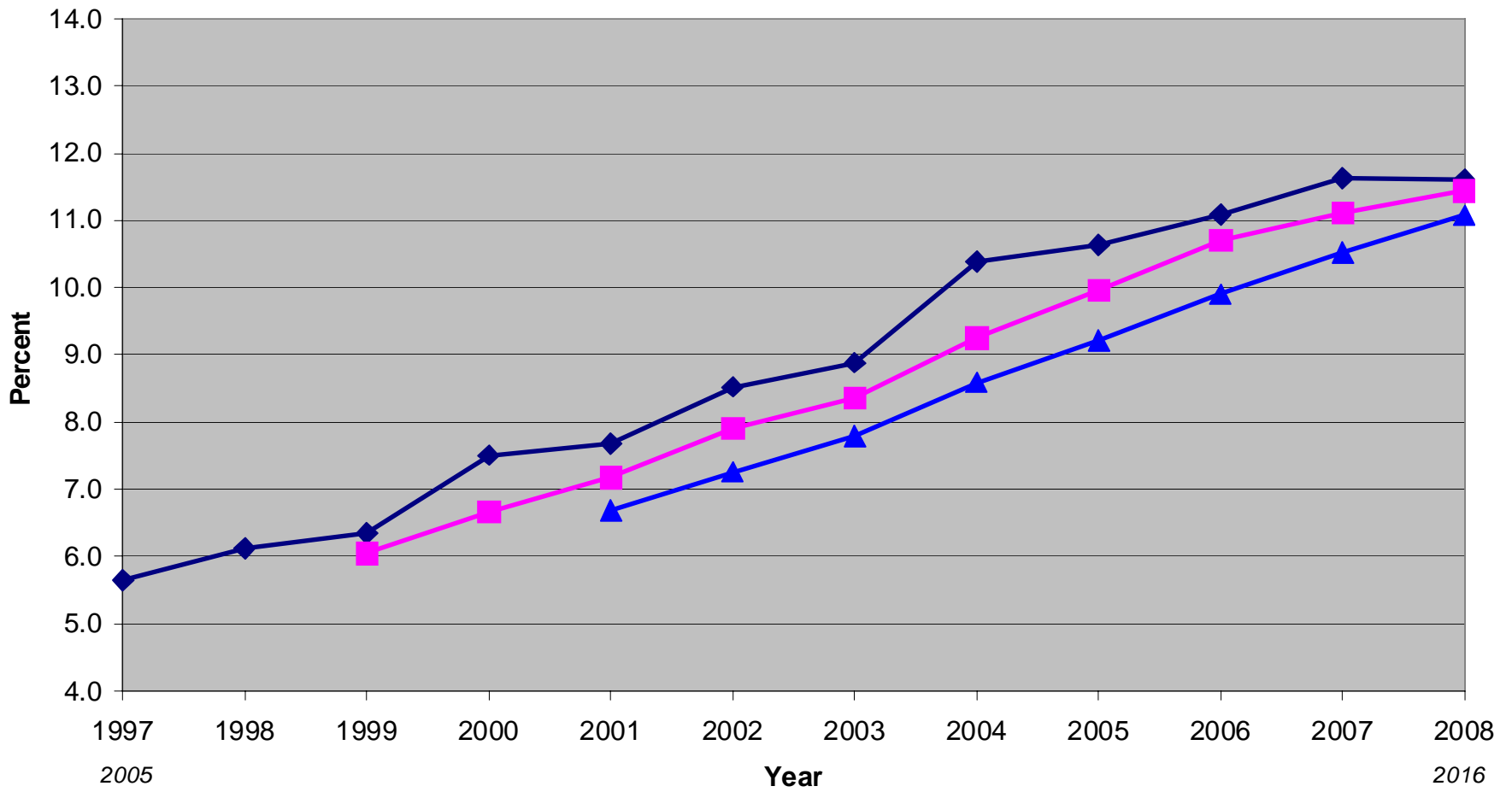
- Recall that Douglas County and other test sites have been at the full sampling rate since at least 1999.
 - Thus, 5 year aggregations can be made and therefore there's no reason why census tract and other data for areas with < 20,000 persons can't be released.
- We pushed for this data release so that you could use it – our first look at many items for small areas since Census 2000.
- Data were released April 27, 2007 on the ACS website (not American FactFinder).



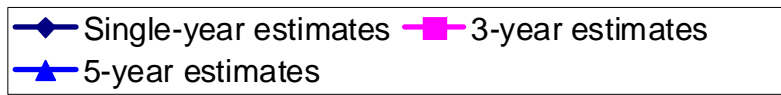
Small Area Data for Test Sites (continued)

- Only the 4 data profiles (DP-1 to DP-4) were released – no detailed or subject tables
- All possible 3 and 5 year aggregate profiles were presented
 - Total of three different 5-year time frames
 - 1999 – 2003; 2000 – 2004; 2001 – 2005
- Data are for school districts, census tracts, zip codes, etc. In addition, 3 and 5 year profiles for Douglas County and Omaha were provided so that we can compare “apples to apples”.
 - Data only for areas entirely contained in Douglas Co.
- Use the data cautiously, “error” (MOE) can be large

Percentage of Omaha Population with Hispanic/Latino Origin
 (Only 5-year estimates available if Omaha had less than 20,000 people)

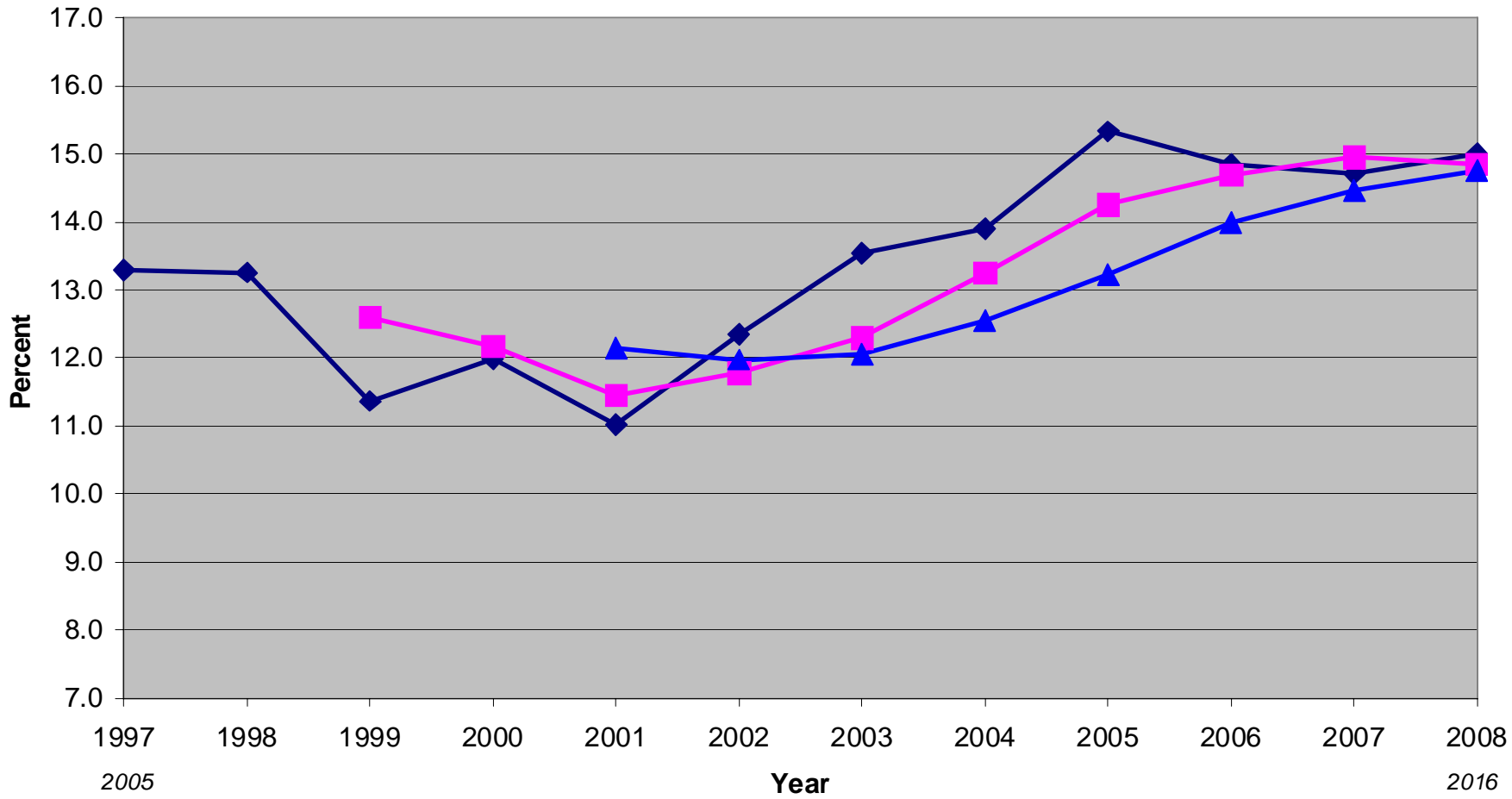


Source: American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, 1997-2008

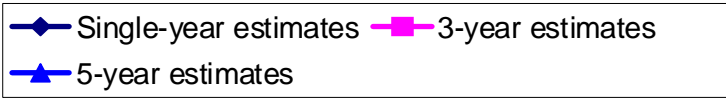


Note: Only since 2006 has the ACS included the group quarters population.

Percentage of Omaha Population in Poverty (Individuals)
 (Only 5-year estimates available if Omaha had less than 20,000 people)



Source: American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, 1997-2008



Note: Only since 2006 has the ACS included group quarters. (not a big impact on poverty)



Point Estimates, MOE and Confidence Intervals

- The ACS data provide point estimates for various characteristics. ACS data also include a margin of error (MOE) for finding a lower and upper bound.
 - Why?
 - The ACS is a sample and subject to sampling error.
 - Is the data representative of the entire population?
 - Census 2000 long form also a sample—1 in 6 sampling rate made sampling error small and MOE was not released.
- Adding and subtracting the MOE to/from the point estimate creates a range called a confidence interval.
 - ACS displays the MOE for a 90% confidence interval.
 - The bounds tell us that we are 90% confident that the figure for the entire population would be in this range if all households were surveyed.

View this table...

▶ for states

▶ from 2005

from [2004](#)

from [2003](#)

[without statistical significance](#)

View...

as a [chart](#)

Other tables...

[Select another ranking table](#)

- [Subject Definitions](#)
- [Quality Measures](#)



United States and States

R2004. Percent of Households With Cash Public Assistance Income: 2005

Universe: Households

Data Set: 2005 American Community Survey

Survey: 2005 American Community Survey, 2005 Puerto Rico Community Survey

Select a state and click 'GO', or click a row of the table to see statistical significance.

Nebraska

The presence of a * indicates geographies whose estimates are **not** statistically significantly different from the estimate for the selected geography. ** indicates the selected geography.

NOTE. Data are limited to the household population and exclude the population living in institutions, college dormitories, and other group quarters. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see [Survey Methodology](#).

Rank	State	Percent	Margin of Error
1	Alaska	6.6	+/-0.8
2	Maine	4.9	+/-0.4
3	District of Columbia	4.6	+/-0.6
4	Vermont	4.2	+/-0.6
5	Washington	3.8	+/-0.2
6	Oklahoma	3.7	+/-0.2
7	Hawaii	3.5	+/-0.5
8	California	3.4	+/-0.1
8	New York	3.4	+/-0.1
10	Michigan	3.2	+/-0.2
10	Pennsylvania	3.2	+/-0.1
12	* Minnesota	3.1	+/-0.2
12	* New Mexico	3.1	+/-0.3
14	* Iowa	2.8	+/-0.3
14	** Nebraska	2.8	+/-0.3
14	* Oregon	2.8	+/-0.2
14	* Tennessee	2.8	+/-0.2
18	* Connecticut	2.7	+/-0.3
18	* New Hampshire	2.7	+/-0.4
18	* Rhode Island	2.7	+/-0.4
	* United States	2.6	+/-0.1
21	* Idaho	2.6	+/-0.3
21	* Indiana	2.6	+/-0.2
21	* Mississippi	2.6	+/-0.2
21	* Missouri	2.6	+/-0.2
21	* Ohio	2.6	+/-0.1
26	* Kansas	2.5	+/-0.2
27	Massachusetts	2.4	+/-0.2
27	* South Dakota	2.4	+/-0.3
29	Arizona	2.3	+/-0.2
29	* Delaware	2.3	+/-0.4
29	Illinois	2.3	+/-0.1
29	Kentucky	2.3	+/-0.2
29	* Montana	2.3	+/-0.4
34	Utah	2.2	+/-0.3

Statistical differences are impacted by the MOE and the sampling rate.



Population Estimates Program: Basics

- The population estimates program provides the official head and housing unit counts as well as counts by age, sex, and race in non-census years
 - Shows how the population has changed since the Census
- As of July 1 of the specific year
- Staggered releases throughout the year
 - Large geographies first, most detailed data last
- The current release/vintage always supersedes prior
 - Can create confusion for why one 7-1-06 estimate will differ from another—cite the source and release date
- Estimates differ from projections
 - Estimates are the newest look at our current population
 - Projections predict the population structure in the future



Population Estimates Program: Methodology in Brief

- Start with the Census 2000 headcount (4-1-00)
- Adjust for headcount revisions, boundary changes (annexations) so that everything is consistent over time
 - This is called the Estimates Base (refers to 4-1-00)
- Add births, subtract deaths from vital records
- Make estimates of domestic and international migration
 - Partner with IRS to show changes in where people file
 - Limited to filers, doesn't account for people leaving the U.S. real well
 - Use Medicare records to be more precise in 65+ population
- Use various methods for estimating changes in group quarters and military populations (deployment affects)
- Use building permit data and recorded demolitions
 - Tornados/Hurricanes don't file demolition permits!! (Hallam)



CPAR compiles the Estimates Program Data

- Have been making an annual Nebraska Population Report
 - Is a good reference document as data changes year to year
 - Some of the compiled data is in your packet
- View the full report at:
http://www.unomaha.edu/cpar/data_reports.php



Data Questions to Ask

- What would I like to have ideally?
 - Exact data items (variables)
 - Geography
 - Timeframe
- What source do I use to get that – Census (decennial), ACS, or Estimates Program
- Is that data available? Is it accurate or have large error factors?
 - If not, what are my best tradeoffs?
 - Is it more important to have that exact geography or can I use a larger one as a proxy? (Douglas County census tract 11 versus PUMA 903)
 - Do I want the most current data or can I extend to a longer timeframe (to increase accuracy or availability)? (2008 versus 2006-08)
 - Any item split by age or race should use 3-yr unless geography is sufficiently large (State level might not be large enough)

The End

*Thanks for coming, and feel
free to contact me any
time for Census data or to
answer questions
(contact info on slide #1)*

Overview of the American Community Survey

See: <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/SBasics/What/What1.htm>

The American Community Survey was developed by the Census Bureau to **replace the decennial census “long form,”** that is, the demographic, social, economic, and housing characteristics of the population and housing stock that is required by hundreds of federal laws and court cases.

- ✓ The American Community Survey is the decennial long form spread out over 10 years – that is, the **data collection occurs throughout the decade** rather than just once in ten years. Traditionally, the states and communities have had to use an aging snapshot for 10-to-12 years until the next census was taken.
- ✓ The American Community Survey replaces the old snapshot with a video. Eventually, the American Community Survey will provide **estimates, updated every year,** of the distribution of **characteristics** of the population and housing in geographic areas.
- ✓ What communities have not had previously to inform policy issues and evaluate results, but what the American Community Survey will provide, are estimates of population and housing *characteristics*, and **measurements of the level and direction of change among areas.**
- ✓ The questions and the data products are essentially the same as those you saw for Census 2000.

The ACS provides profiles of *small population groups* in states and regions, such as poor children under age 5, or teenage mothers and whether they are in school, working or unemployed. With the ACS, you will be able to track trends and the direction of change for population groups.

NOTICE

How many people? What are they like?

Be sure you got the point that, starting in 2010, the decennial census **counts** people and housing units only. The American Community Survey does not count -- it is a sample that gives you estimates about the **characteristics** of the population and the housing stock. – what the survey estimates they are like.

In the years between the censuses, the Census Bureau's has a partnership program with the states to **estimate** how the number of people and housing units change in counties and states (see: <http://www.census.gov/popest/estimates.php>). Between censuses, the American Community Survey may improve current estimates of the *number* of people in small areas (such as census tracts and school districts) by furnishing current demographic distributions for use in the population estimate models.

2010 Census – counts people and housing units

Population estimates – estimates number of people

American Community Survey – estimates demographic, social, economic characteristics of people and the housing stock

the population and housing information to help community officials visualize differences among areas and to actively manage programs for results.

Which dataset should you choose?

Surveys and administrative records often cover the same topics – when do you use the American Community Survey and when do you use the decennial census? Population estimates? Other surveys? Administrative records? Obviously, it depends on what you are trying to do but here are my recommendations for ways to start choosing among them.

- ✓ **Number of people – The official sources for counts are the decennial censuses and population estimates – not the American Community Survey.** Starting in 2010, the decennial census will provide a count of the number of people, basic demographic characteristics (age, sex, race, Hispanic origin, and family statuses), and provide a count the number of housing units and the number that are occupied by owners, occupied by renters, and the number that are vacant as of April 1, 2010.
- ✓ **Estimates of the number of people,** down to county level, are available in years between the censuses. Population estimates come from a cooperative program between states and the Census Bureau -- the estimates are models that start from the head counts from the most recent census, add births, subtract deaths, and use various sources to estimate net migration. Eventually, the ACS will be added to the model to improve the migration component.
- ✓ **The American Community Survey does NOT replace the decennial census job of counting people.** Census 2000 did two jobs: (1) counted the number of people and housing units (the short form); and (2) estimated the distribution of characteristics of the population and of housing based on a sample of housing units (the long form). The ACS takes over that second job. The 2010 census will do the first job – it will count the number of people and housing units – the 2010 census is the short form only, a "100-percent" count of people and housing units, not a sample survey.
- ✓ **The ACS gives estimates about population and housing characteristics** only -- It does not count the number of people. It does not estimate how many people there are. The American Community Survey controls its sample to the census and population estimates of the number of people in a county each year. The estimated characteristics are controlled to those official counts.
- ✓ **Basic demographic characteristics (age, sex, race, ethnicity, family status) –** Generally, use the 2010 census for several years after it is released and then switch to the updated estimates from the American

Community Survey. That's because the census is a complete count and the ACS is a sample of the population. There is one major exception – if you need a characteristic for a denominator of a percentage, use consistent data sources if at all possible – if the numerator is from the ACS, the denominator should also be from the ACS.

- ✓ **Social, economic, and housing characteristics** – the American Community Survey is one of many sources of such data.
 - *Geographic level* might make the choice for you – the American Community Survey has a much larger sample than other surveys and it is a nationally comparable source for data below the state level.
 - The *tabulations* you want, and the detail available differs among data sources.
 - *Definitions* differ among data sources. See which meets your particular needs.
 - *Topic* – the American Community Survey is a general survey and the questions are not detailed on any particular topic. Surveys, such as the American Housing Survey and the Current Population Survey, asked very detailed questions and provide in-depth and high quality information on the topics they cover. If you are working at the national level on a topic that is covered in depth, this factor may outweigh the benefit of the larger sample size of the ACS.
 - *Unemployment* statistics – the official source of statistics on unemployment are those provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.
 - *Poverty* - The official source of national statistics on poverty is from the Current Population Survey. For lower geographic levels, you may prefer to use the American Community Survey because of its larger sample size. Keep checking the “Income” section of the Census Bureau’s website for their recommendations (which could change).
- ✓ **Universe differences** - There are essential differences in the universes between the ACS and the decennial census. As a result, comparisons between the two data sets are not straight-forward:
 - Through 2005, the ACS universe is based on households only. Starting with the 2006 data collection, the Census Bureau added the population living in group quarters. The decennial censuses

have always included both the household and the group quarters population – that is, the total population.

- Residence rules differ -- “Residence rules” define whether people at an address are supposed to be included in the survey. The first step on both the ACS and the decennial census questionnaires is to list the residents at the address. Respondents are given instructions for who to list and who they should not list as a household member.

American Community Survey – Current residence for 2 or more months (<http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/SQquest05.pdf>)

The ACS uses a “current residence” rule. It instructs the household member filling out the questionnaire to “List everyone who is living or staying here for more than 2 months.” It also asks the respondent to list anyone who has been there less than two months but who has no other permanent place to stay.

Decennial censuses – Usual residence on Census Day (<http://www.census.gov/dmd/www/pdf/d02p.pdf>)

The Census asked for a list of “people staying at the address on April 1, 2000 who have no other permanent place to stay.”

Why the difference? Local areas with seasonal populations (e.g., college towns, resort areas) have been asking for information about the characteristics of their permanent population compared with the seasonal population and the ACS is trying to find ways to address this. Along with the 2-month residence rule, Question H25 (page 6) on the American Community Survey questionnaire asks whether any household member lives or stays at the address year round, and if not, how many months a year do household members stay at the address. That gives researchers the opportunity to start working on those issues. Census 2000 did not ask a question such as H25.

The differences in the residence rules mean that there are critical differences in the universes between the Census 2000 and the ACS. That, along with the household/GQ differences, are why the Census Bureau tells you not to make a direct comparison between Census 2000 data and the ACS. Rather, compare the ACS 2000 with subsequent ACS years. As a practical matter, unless your area has a substantial seasonal population, there isn’t much difference between the two residence rules.