

Ken Hodges

BACKGROUND ON THE DECENNIAL CENSUS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Decennial Census Advisory Committee (DCAC) provides advisory input on the design of the 2010 census, the American Community Survey, and related programs. Committee members represent a range of census stakeholders, and APDU's seat on the Committee provides a channel for APDU members to weigh in from the data user perspective.

This meeting report is designed to keep APDU members informed on census activities, but also to encourage feedback. Your DCAC representative ([Ken Hodges khodges@claritas.com](mailto:khodges@claritas.com)) and alternate representative (Mark Salling mark@urban.csuohio.edu) encourage questions and participation among APDU members. We have posed questions at the end of this report, and look forward to all questions, comments, and resulting dialogue.

This report also includes a brief account of the May 13 hearing on the American Community Survey held by the House Subcommittee on Technology, Information Policy, Intergovernmental Relations and the Census.

MAY 8-9 MEETING OF THE DECENNIAL CENSUS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

In preparation for this meeting the Decennial Census Advisory Committee established four working groups that will devote specific attention to critical areas including:

1. Data Quality
2. Small Populations
3. Race and Ethnicity
4. Language

Each committee member was assigned to one group, and your APDU representative is on the Small Populations working group. Following Committee Chair Kim Coon's agenda review, we broke out for working group meetings, with the objective of reporting to the full Committee the next day.

Small Populations Working Group Meeting

Freddie Navarro, Mark Asiala, and Anthony Tersine—all from the Census Bureau's Statistical Methods Division—served as “resource” staff for the Small Populations Working Group. Navarro started by confirming that our focus today would be on the American Community Survey (ACS), and explained that the term “small populations” includes populations in small areas as well as populations that are small in terms of characteristics.

Navarro then described the ACS sampling process, which draws from the Census Bureau's Master Address File (MAF). Addresses eligible for selection are those not selected in the last four years, and those recently added in a "supplemental" phase. Immediate questions were raised concerning the accuracy of the MAF, and how it (and TIGER) are updated. The discussion was useful, but the group concluded that it needs a briefing from Geography Division.

As Navarro described it, the ACS "systematic sampling" process emulates that used for the long form. After a random start, every n th eligible address is selected according to a "base rate" designed to achieve the national annual sample of 3 million. Navarro acknowledged that, as total U.S. population and addresses increase, the sampling rate needed to achieve 3 million would decrease. In response to a question, Navarro indicated that plans to oversample in areas with low response rates have been delayed, but are still in place.

Mark Asiala then described the process in which ACS responses are weighted to 100 percent totals. In simplest terms, the weight is $(1 / \text{the probability of selection})$. A 1 in 6 selection probability (0.167) translates to an initial weight of $(1 / 0.167)$ or 6.0. But actual weights are usually more complicated. The initial weights are modified to account for CAPI sub-sampling (there is follow up on only a sample of non-respondents), non-mailable addresses, non-interview adjustments, and mode bias factors. Navarro said the Census Bureau is concerned that this is a very complex process that will be difficult to explain to users.

Next, we discussed housing unit and population controls. The ACS is designed to measure characteristics—not to establish counts—so the results are controlled to Census Bureau estimates of housing units and population. This is accomplished through further modification to the weights. For example, if the preliminary results are 10 percent lower than a county control total, the weights for respondents in that county are increased by 1.10. This discussion raised the inevitable question concerning the assumption that the Census Bureau estimates are more accurate than the pre-control survey results. And there was particular concern with the prospect of weights based on Census Bureau estimates of population by race and ethnicity. It was noted that these are as much policy as technical decisions, and that we look forward to more specific information on how the Census Bureau plans to integrate the ACS and its estimates program.

There was specific concern with the rules for assigning respondents reporting two or more races to a single race. Respondents reporting White and any minority race are assigned to the minority category, and minority combinations are assigned to the category with the smallest count. While this approach might be appropriate for applications involving civil rights monitoring and enforcement, the concern is that it is not mathematically justifiable, and does not provide the most accurate data. A proportional, or equal fractions approach was recommended.

The meeting concluded with a listing of the group's next steps. These included:

- Arrange a briefing from Geography Division on the MAF/TIGER update process.
- Further consideration of the use of Census Bureau estimates as control totals.
- An update on the Census Bureau's "Program for Integrated Estimates"
 - Integrating the ACS and estimates programs.
- Exploring the release of ACS research files (not released to the public).
 - The Census Bureau had described plans to release annual small area data for research purposes, and the working group expressed interest in further research files—such as pre-control ACS results.
- The types of small area data products that would be released.
 - The discussion of sampling prompted comments about not releasing data when variances are too large. Your APDU representative took note, and will keep data availability the our agenda.
- Further consideration of the allocation of the multi-race population.

Race and Ethnic Advisory Committee Update

The afternoon session started with Robert Hill's update on activities at the Race and Ethnic Advisory Committee. Hill reported the Hispanic groups' interest in preserving the "Some other race" category, and for re-instating the listing of examples in the Hispanic question. He also described arguments for an "Other Black" race category for Blacks (such as Ethiopians) who do not identify with the term "African American." Hill also described concern with "a new form of undercounting blacks." The concern traces to the use of the "Black alone" tabulation, and became a sore point when the diminished count led to news reports that Hispanics now outnumber Blacks.

Census Bureau Update

Census Bureau Director Louis Kincannon was unable to attend, so Deputy Director Hermann Habermann provided the update. Habermann announced the ongoing/imminent release of products including SF4, one percent PUMS, and the subcounty estimates. He then described the progress of 2010 census planning, where a budget "ramp up" is needed for the planned launch of full ACS implementation in the fourth quarter of Fiscal Year 2004. Congressional action is critical, and Habermann noted the upcoming ACS hearing by the new House oversight subcommittee.

Turning to privacy and confidentiality, Habermann said he understands concern that the Patriot Act puts the confidentiality of census data at risk, but argued that existing laws (Title 13) provide adequate protection. He stressed the importance of the commitment of the Census Bureau's staff and leadership—in particular Director Kincannon—to preserving confidentiality.

The Committee's ACLU representative expressed appreciation for this commitment, and asked if the Census Bureau had received any requests to release confidential data in support of the war on terrorism. Habermann said he was not aware of any such requests, and noted that all Census Bureau employees would be undergoing Title 13 training

(repeated every year), and that the Census Bureau has established a data stewardship board to ensure that all data requests comply with Title 13.

Samia El-Badry, representing the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, described a recent experience in which she was asked by the FBI if she could identify Arab Americans with terrorist connections. In pressing the issue, the FBI agent reportedly disputed the confidentiality of census data. The comment could be dismissed as coming from an uninformed source, but Habermann described such reports as troubling, and stressed the Census Bureau's keen awareness of the need to preserve confidence in the confidentiality commitment.

Re-Engineered 2010 Census—American Community Survey Update

Nancy Gordon (Associate Director for Demographic Programs) reminded us of the three components of the re-engineered census—the short-form-only 2010 census, the ACS, and MAF/TIGER enhancements—and described the current plan to initiate full ACS implementation in the fourth quarter of FY'04 (with the bulk of costs hitting in FY 2005). Gordon conceded that the plan might sound strange, but called it an operational blessing that would give the Census Bureau time to hire and train the field staff required for full ACS implementation. She also described plans to update the group quarters list, and to start collecting ACS group quarters data in January 2005.

At the request of Congress, the Census Bureau is testing the collection of ACS data on a voluntary basis, and they are committed to reporting test results by August—in time for the appropriations cycle. We heard no preliminary results, but informal indications confirm that the tests will reveal that voluntary response decreases ACS response rates, increases costs, and may impair data quality.

For those interested in testing ACS versus 2000 long form data for census tracts and block groups, the Census Bureau is preparing special versions of the 2000 census tables—with group quarters removed to make them more comparable to ACS test data. And in response to a question, Gordon noted that there is currently no channel for data users to have input on the preparation of five-year averages for small areas, but commented that this would be a very good idea.

There has been comment that the ACS and long form have been asking questions relevant to past decades, and that content needs to be updated to reflect current needs. Gordon touted the ability of the ACS to add questions, but said there is concern that the questionnaire could become overloaded if too many agencies get laws passed requiring the addition of questions.

Jay Waite (Associate Director for Decennial Census) gave us an update on the 2010 short-form-only census. The national content test—mailed out in January—includes tests of alternate response options (such as Internet and interactive voice recognition or IVR),

as well as different versions of the race and ethnicity questions. Test results are not yet available, but Waite described a few things learned so far.

For example, it appears that a second mailing could boost response rates by about 10 percent. A second mailing in a full scale census would be a major challenge, but the cost savings could be huge. And it appears that telephone reminders work even better than mail reminders. On the “downside,” Internet response appears to be a great idea that people have little interest in using. Respondents will use Internet and IVR, but mostly if they are the only options provided. Speculation is that the short form is so short that respondents can fill it out in less time than it takes to get on the Internet. And there is always the confidentiality concern.

Looking to the 2004 test, the Lake County, IL site was dropped, but the test still includes very diverse areas in Queens, NY and rural Georgia. The test will emphasize the use of hand-held mobile computing devices (MCDs) for field work, and will be “working without a net,” as the MCDs will be the sole vehicle for follow up. The Census Bureau will also use the test to work on ways to reduce duplication, and to improve group quarters data. As Waite put it, the group quarters problems “have bedeviled us, and now we’re mad,” and will do serious testing.

Waite described the test of counting Americans overseas as a response to congressional interest, and confided that “to say we are reluctant is an understatement.” “We don’t think we can do this, but we will collect the data to help Congress make an informed decision.” In a May 23 Federal Register Notice, the Commerce Department seeks to expand the membership of the Decennial Census Advisory Committee by adding an organization representing the interests of Americans overseas. Waite concluded by touching briefly on MAF/TIGER enhancement—noting that the program is going forward, and that work has been completed in the test areas.

Waite introduced the discussion of the Accuracy and Coverage Evaluation (A.C.E.) Revision II estimates by proclaiming that, while these estimates are not perfect, they are the best we have, they are final, and the Census Bureau will not talk about them anymore.

Donna Kostanich (Assistant Division Chief for Sampling and Estimation) noted that the evaluation method as very complex, and faced the first time challenge of dealing with a very small net national difference, combined with a heightened need to account for erroneous enumerations and omissions. She described the results, which moved us from a 3.3 million net undercount to an estimated overcount of 1.3 million. The major factors contributing to this change were corrections for duplications, data collection error and residence issues—which reduced estimated undercount by a combined 6.3 million persons. The correction for correlation bias increased estimated undercount by 1.7 million, and the net reduction of 4.6 million (6.3 million – 1.7 million) yields the revised estimate of a 1.3 million person overcount.

Kostanich noted that the A.C.E. Revision II results are believed to be superior to previous estimates, and reflect a reduction in both net coverage errors and differential coverage errors relative to 1990. She acknowledged that technical concerns remain, and that data based on the A.C.E. revisions should not be used as the base for intercensal estimates.

John Long (Chief, Population Division) then spoke on the continuing challenges posed by correlation bias, synthetic estimation, loss function analysis, and inconsistencies with estimates based on Demographic Analysis. An extended discussion of technical issues followed, and concluded with a reiteration of the recommendation against the use of adjusted data as the base for estimates.

Privacy and Confidentiality

We concluded the day with discussion of a letter to Census Bureau Director Kincannon from the American Civil Liberties Union and the Privacy Rights Clearinghouse. The April 29, 2003 letter expressed alarm at Administration plans to use individual level government and private data for purposes of preventing terrorist attacks, and alleged that several government agencies have approached the Census Bureau about data sharing. The letter calls on Census officials to publicly confirm that individual census responses are not under consideration for the Administration's data mining endeavors.

Hermann Habermann had confirmed the Census Bureau's commitment to confidentiality earlier, and Gerald Gates (Chief of the Census Bureau's Policy Office) elaborated from the audience on the confidentiality policy, and the data stewardship board. Again, the Census Bureau reported that it has not been approached about the release of confidential information.

The letter also calls on the Decennial Census Advisory Committee to establish a working group on privacy and confidentiality. There was consensus among Committee members on the importance of the topic, but discussion as to whether it should be a separate working group or a responsibility assigned to an existing working group. Chairman Kim Coon indicated that he and Vice Chairman Sonny Flores would work with the Census Bureau to identify the best way to go.

Working Group Reports

Day two started with reports from the four working groups

Race and Ethnic Working Group

Ramona Douglass (Association of Multi-ethnic Americans) reported that Samia El-Badry had been selected to chair the Race and Ethnic Working Group. The group had a lively discussion, and identified priorities including:

- Returning the term “origin” to the census question on Hispanic ethnicity.
- The importance of keeping the “Some other race” category.
- The exploration of response mode preferences by race and ethnicity.
- A recommendation that the ancestry question be moved to the short form.
- A recommendation that further work on a combined race and Hispanic ethnicity question be given low priority.

A lively discussion followed, in which several Committee members spoke in favor of a combined race and Hispanic ethnicity question.

Data Quality Working Group

Linda Gage (National State Data Center/Business and Industry Data Center Programs) reported that the group had reviewed material on response rates and coverage in the ACS tests—noting their general improvement, but variation by state. They also reviewed rates of item non-response, then turned to 2010 planning, and the possible reconsideration of residence rules.

Working group priorities include:

- Comparisons of ACS and census data, and comparisons of ACS data over time.
- A closer look at residence rules and their impact on data quality.
- A closer look at erroneous enumerations.
- How to sample and incorporate group quarters into the ACS.
- The integration of the ACS and Census Bureau estimates program.
- The impact of a voluntary ACS—a review by the full Committee is recommended for the October meeting.

Language Working Group

Henry Der (National Coalition for an Accurate Count of Asian and Pacific Americans) noted that this is the smallest of the Working Groups, but his presentation conveyed that it is second to none in enthusiasm. Der commented that there is no longer debate about the need for census outreach to non-English speaking respondents, and that the question now is how many and which alternative languages to target. Der noted that the languages most frequently spoken in linguistically isolated households are Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, and Russian.

The group is looking at language barriers in the major census response modes. Noting the high proportion of Spanish speaking linguistically isolated households responding via personal interviews (CAPI), the group wonders if the one-in-three CAPI sample should be increased for such households. They also noted that once a non-English speaking linguistically isolated respondent is contacted and responds, rates of item nonresponse are actually a bit better than those for English only respondents. The group views this a further evidence of the power of the personal interview mode, and suggested the Census Bureau consider personal interview as the primary data collection method for linguistically isolated households.

Small Populations Working Group

Paul Voss (Population Association of America) reported for the Small Populations Working Group. Paul's report covered the major points detailed in the description of this group's meeting (above).

Congressional Update

Jeff Taylor (the Census Bureau's Chief of Congressional Affairs) introduced Chip Walker (majority staff with the House Subcommittee on Technology, Information Policy, Intergovernmental Relations and the Census) and David McMillen (minority staff with the Committee on Government Reform and Oversight).

Walker noted that Adam Putnam (R-FL), Chairman of the House Subcommittee, is only 28 years old, but very bright, and has a firm grasp of the issues. Walker expressed understanding for the Census Bureau's reluctance in counting Americans abroad. He acknowledged the difficulties in such a count, but explained that this is a political issue, and that we need the research to back up the final decision.

Turning to the ACS, Walker commented that "we're in the home stretch," and that if Congress wants the ACS, it will have to commit to it soon. He looks for a make or break decision in the coming budget cycle. Walker then weighed in on confidentiality, asserting that the Census Bureau has not been approached concerning the release of protected data, and that Congress is solidly behind Title 13. He argued that this commitment "at the highest levels" is what matters most.

David McMillen started with a pitch for ACS authorizing legislation (an initiative previously promoted more by Chip Walker), commenting that it would make it more difficult for Congress to cut back on ACS funding or content. McMillen then agreed that privacy is something the Committee should pay attention to, and suggested that the Patriot Act has implications for the census, even with Title 13 protection in place. He said we can expect pressure on Title 13, argued that a vocal public is the best protection, and commented that the Committee can play a valuable role in this effort.

Questions and Discussion

Walker responded to a question on the dubious quality of data on Americans abroad by stressing that we are just testing now, and noting that Congress has not yet decided if this is a good thing to do.

In further discussion of ACS funding, it was noted that funding for current test levels is about \$64 million per year, and that full implementation would require a jump to about \$150 million per year—starting in FY 2005.

Walker had cautioned that he saw no scenarios in which we would get both an ACS and 2010 long form. Asked if he saw any scenarios in which we would get neither an ACS

nor a long form, he said he did not, and expressed confidence that Congress understands that the 2010 census would require a long form unless it is replaced (by the ACS). McMillen said he is not as optimistic, and worries that if Congress decides in 2008 that it cannot afford the ACS, it could be too late to add a 2010 long form. In short, McMillen sees the possibility that we could end up with “half an ACS” and no long form.

Responding to a question on how federal agencies would make the transition from long form to ACS data, Nancy Gordon described a federal interagency committee that is focusing on technical issues, and a separate effort focusing on agency management issues. She hopes to have more to report on these efforts at the October meeting.

Hearing on the American Community Survey

On May 13, the House Subcommittee on Technology, Information Policy, Intergovernmental Relations and the Census held a hearing on “The American Community Survey: The Challenges of Eliminating the Long Form from the 2010 Census.” Chairman Adam Putnam (R-FL) presided, and was joined by ranking minority member William “Lacy” Clay (D-MO).

The word going in was that the hearing was largely an educational effort for the new Subcommittee, made up of members (with the exception of Clay) with little or no census experience. Major decisions on the ACS are coming up, and the Subcommittee needs to be brought up to speed.

Testifying first were Under Secretary of Commerce for Economic Affairs Kathleen Cooper and Census Bureau Director Louis Kincannon. They were followed by a second panel consisting of Thomas Reardon from the Fulton County, PA Partnership (one of the first ACS test sites), Joe Salvo from the New York City Department of City Planning, Joan Naymark from Target Corporation, Ken Hodges from Claritas, and Richard Ogburn from the South Florida Regional Planning Council. Three of the five members of this panel (Joe Salvo, Joan Naymark and Ken Hodges) are APDU members. All panel members spoke in support of the American Community Survey from the perspective of their applications and user groups. Copies of the written testimony are available from APDU.

The Census Bureau was very pleased with the testimony and the Subcommittee’s response to it. One informal assessment is that the Subcommittee has decided that it wants the ACS, and is “looking for cover,” or support, as it prepares to recommend it to the appropriators. Such a recommendation would be encouraging for the ACS, but suspense over funding remains high.

Questions for APDU Members

As in previous meeting reports, we are posing questions to promote dialogue, and to help ensure that your views are represented to the Decennial Census Advisory Committee.

Please send your thoughts on these or other census data issues to your APDU representative, Ken Hodges at khodges@claritas.com and/or alternate representative Mark Salling at mark@urban.csuohio.edu. Your responses will keep us aware of APDU interests and insights, and provide us with specific feedback to relay to the Committee.

1. Are you aware of, or have you heard allegations that the Census Bureau has been approached about the release of data protected by Title 13?
2. At the ACS hearing, Subcommittee Chairman Putnam was impressed with the support for the ACS, and asked if there were any user groups opposed to it. No major examples were cited. Are you aware of APDU members who do not support the ACS, or who have a preference for the long form—for reasons other than uncertainty over funding? If so, please let us know so we can understand and represent these interests.
3. The collection and reporting of data on group quarters has become an issue for the ACS as well as some Census 2000 data products.

In your applications, do you need data describing A) the population in group quarters or B) household population only (total population minus group quarters)?

4. Do you have other comments or issues relative to this most recent DCAC meeting?