

Details on Comparability of 2010 Census Data

Population and Household Characteristics

Basic population demographics

The 2010 Census, and all of the previous census short forms in recent history, collected information on the following basic demographic characteristics for all persons living in the U.S.

- Sex.
- Age/birth date.
- Hispanic ethnicity. (The Census Bureau asks about Hispanic origin and race in separate questions. Persons of Hispanic/Latino origin may be of any race.)
- Race

Marital status was previously asked for all persons, but was removed from the short form in the 2000 Census.

Changes to questionnaire items on race and Hispanic/Latino ethnicity.

Prior to the 2000 Census, respondents were only given the option to identify one race for each person. Beginning with the 2000 Census and continuing with the 2010 Census, the decennial Census questionnaire provides an option for respondents to select more than one race category for an individual. Starting in 2000, the 1990 race category “Asian and Pacific Islander” was split into two categories, “Asian” and “Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander.”

In 2000, the question asking about Hispanic or Latino origin was also moved so that it was asked before the question on race.

There were also changes to the Hispanic origin question and the Race question for the 2010 Census. These were not as substantial as the changes made between 1990 and 2000, but may still affect the comparability of the data. One of these changes made for the 2010 Census was the additional of specific examples to the “Other Asian” and the “Other Pacific Islander” response categories.

Relationship to householder (for persons living in a household)

In providing information on who is living in their household, Census respondents are asked to start with a person “who owns or rents this house, apartment, or mobile home.” The Census Bureau considers this person to be the “householder.” The questionnaire then asks about each additional person’s relationship to the householder. There have been changes over time in the “relationship to householder” response categories. For example, in the 2010 Census “Foster child” was removed as a separate response category.

As in the 2000 Census, the 2010 Census standard tabulations on use “spouse” to refer only to a person married to the householder who is of the opposite sex. In the standard tabulations, data for unmarried partners include both same-sex and opposite-sex partners. Although data on unmarried partners has been collected since the 1990 Census, the 1990 data was edited differently than more recent decennial data and is not comparable.

The Census Bureau released a special 2010 decennial census report with state estimates on same-sex married couples and unmarried partner households. The special report includes estimates on couples who identified on the Census questionnaire that they are same-sex spouses. However, the data in this special report do not go below the state level. (See news release from Bureau, “[Census Bureau Releases Estimates of Same-Sex Married Couples](#),” September 27, 2011.)

Living Quarters

All living quarters are classified in the Census as either housing units or group quarters.

Housing units and characteristics

The 2010 Census defines housing units the same way as the 2000 Census did. There were, however, changes between the 1990 and 2000 Censuses which moved the categorization of some living quarters (boarding homes, for example) from the group quarters category to housing unit category.

In addition to asking about tenure (i.e., whether a unit is owner- or renter- occupied), the Census also asks owners whether their unit is owned with a mortgage or loan, or is owned free and clear. In 2000, an instruction was added to the former answer choice to include home equity loans.

Changes were also made for the 2010 Census to enable tabulation of separate categories for “Rented, not occupied” and “Sold, not occupied.”

Some additional housing-related characteristics—units in structure, number of rooms, value of owner housing units, and monthly rent—had been on the census short form in 1990 but were moved to the long form in 2000)

Group quarters

Group quarters are places where an organization or entity provides housing and/or services to residents in a group living arrangement. There are two broad categories of group quarters: institutional and non-institutional. Some examples of institutional group quarters include skilled-nursing facilities, residential schools for people with disabilities, and correctional facilities. Instances of non-institutional group quarters include college residence halls, military barracks, group homes, and residential treatment centers.

Both the 2000 and 2010 Censuses streamlined the criteria for distinguishing between institutional and non-institutional group quarters and revised and consolidated some specific types of group quarters.

Additional Information

On changes to the decennial Census, including changes not mentioned here, please see in Appendix B in “[2010 Census Summary File 1—Technical Documentation](#),” prepared by the U.S. Census Bureau, 2001.

On the new American Community Survey, which has replaced the long-form portion of the decennial census, see the U.S. Census Bureau’s [guidance for data users](#) as well as more specific information on [making comparisons using ACS data](#).