The Uncertain Future of the American Community Survey

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Today’s Discussion

• Program status
• Outreach and Communication efforts
• Aspects of Uncertainty
• Effects of a Voluntary ACS
• What’s Next?
Current Status—Data Collection

- ACS currently remains mandatory
- Sample size—3.54 million addresses annually
- Response rates
- Addition of Internet option (January 2013)
- Addition of Computer Usage and Internet Access questions (January 2013)
Current Status—Outreach, Education, and Communications

- Confirming statutory uses (results due by September 14)
- “Eliminating America’s Playbook” (case studies)
- Revised [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov) (updated ACS page, infographics, videos linked to questions)
- NAS workshop and data user group
Aspects of Uncertainty

• Funding: Awaiting word on status of Continuing Resolution for FY13
• House vote to eliminate ACS; Senate action unscheduled
• Enforcement of penalties
Integrated Communications Plan

- Devote resources to educating congressional leaders, state/local/tribal officials, other stakeholders—Stakeholder Engagement under ACS Program Review
- Increase work with local and national partners
Effects of a Voluntary ACS

• 2003 test of voluntary response to ACS
• Voluntary response affects
  – Survey response
  – Survey costs
  – Reliability of survey estimates
Effects of a Voluntary ACS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Initial Sample Size</th>
<th>Reliability of Survey Estimates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Increase costs by $78-$103M</td>
<td>Increase sample size to 4.25M addresses per year.</td>
<td>Maintained at current levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Maintain Current Costs</td>
<td>Maintain initial sample size of 3.54M addresses per year, but reduce the proportion of cases that receive personal visit follow-up</td>
<td>Large reductions in reliability - 25 to 28 percent</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Maintain Current Costs</td>
<td>Reduce initial sample size to 2.9M addresses per year</td>
<td>Large reductions in reliability - 20 to 22 percent</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Increase Costs by $37-$58M$^1$</td>
<td>Maintain current initial sample size</td>
<td>Large reductions in reliability - 10 to 12 percent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^1$The lower bound of this cost estimate assumes a 20 percentage point reduction in mail response, similar to the 2003 test, whereas the upper bound assumes a more significant reduction in mail response of 30 percentage points.
Reliability of Survey Estimates

• Census Bureau Data Quality Standards
  – Implemented 2012
  – ACS applies standards to 17 key estimates
  – Data quality is determined by:
    • Coefficients of variation
    • Response rates
    • Coverage rates
Reliability of Survey Estimates

• Analysis of failure rates at the county level
  – With and without mandatory response requirement

• Threshold failure occurs if:
  – Majority of CVs at the tract level for the 17 key estimates are greater than 30 percent
Reliability of Survey Estimates
Reliability of Survey Estimates

2006-2010 ACS 5-Year Under Simulated Voluntary Methods
Fixed Budget - Reduced Sample Size

Percentage of Census Tracts with Acceptable Quality Data

- Under 20%, Total population of 61-25M in 911 counties
- 20-40%, Total population of 147.2M in 612 counties
- 40-60%, Total population of 73.5M in 675 counties
- 60-80%, Total population of 10.2M in 368 counties
- Over 80%, Total population of 5.5M in 510 counties