

What is the difference between the American Community Survey and the 2010 Census?

The American Community Survey and the decennial Census are two entirely different survey instruments. They use different methodologies. While the Census does a complete count of populations every ten years, the ACS uses sample populations to determine estimates on a more regular basis.

From 1940 through 2000, there were two key components to the Decennial Census:

- The “short form” survey was comprised of approximately 7 items asked of every household, the results sometimes known as Summary File 1
- The “long form” survey was comprised of approximately 40 items asked of about 1 in 6 households, the results sometimes known as Summary File 3

The two components are linked in that data from the “short form” are used to adjust results from the “long form” by age, race, housing units, etc. There was no 2010 Census long form data on income, poverty, housing values, and dozens of other socio-economic characteristics of persons, households, and housing units. Instead, this data collected using the ACS. The ACS will now serve as the “long form” for the Census by asking the more detailed questions.

The ACS will be conducted in 1, 3 and 5 year averages to provide up-to-date information about the social and economic needs of the communities. How often the survey will be conducted is based on population; for Jefferson County, the ACS will be conducted yearly. Three year averages will be released for the City of Watertown and the Town of LeRay as their respective population totals are over 20,000. Five year averages will be released for the remaining municipalities in the County.

Type of Data	Population Size of Area	Data For The Previous Year Released In The Summer Of:								
		2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010+	
Annual estimates	250,000+	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Annual estimates	65,000+				■	■	■	■	■	■
3-year averages	20,000+						■	■	■	■
5-year averages	Census Tract and Block Group*								■	■

■ Data reflect American Community Survey testing through 2004

* Census tracts are small, relatively permanent statistical subdivisions of a county averaging about 4,000 inhabitants. Census block groups generally contain between 600 and 3,000 people. The smallest geographic level for which data will be produced is the block group; the Census Bureau will not publish estimates for small numbers of people if there is a probability that an individual can be identified.

