

American Community Survey and Census Residence Rules: The Seasonal Vacant Effect

Jason Devine and Kirsten West
Population Analysis and Evaluation Staff

This paper assesses the impact of the difference between the American Community Survey (ACS) and the decennial census residence rules. The analysis focuses on the seasonal vacants in Census 2000 and the responses to a length of stay question on the ACS questionnaire.

Within the Census Bureau, the residency and temporal differences between the census-based intercensal population estimates and the ACS is an ongoing interdivisional research topic. In areas with large seasonal populations, these differences may affect the quality of the estimates as controls for the ACS. Seasonal populations consist of people who move to or depart from an area for a portion of the year, in regular patterns. These populations can consist of the same people each cycle or different people, and the portion of the year can be either consecutive or intermittent time periods. Seasonal residents may or may not maintain separate households elsewhere. Examples of seasonal populations include, but are not limited to, snowbirds, migrant workers, workers in vacation areas, and students.

Because the ACS should be representing “an average picture” of a locality rather than the point in time picture represented by the census, it is thought that there needs to be either some modification to the intercensal population controls or a modification in the way the ACS controls are used in weighting the ACS. Some modification is necessary because the intercensal estimates are based on the decennial census and although updates are made to the initial census counts, it is assumed that the estimates more strongly represent the census concept of residence than the ACS concept of average residence.