

**AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY NONINTERVIEW RATES
DUE TO LANGUAGE BARRIERS**

**Meetings of the Census Advisory Committee on the African American Population, the
American Indian and Alaska Native Populations, the Asian Population, the Hispanic
Population, and the Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Populations**

April 25 - 27, 2005

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This draft document is being provided to the Census Bureau's Advisory Committees prior to upcoming meetings. It is preliminary in nature and in the early stages of development. As such, it is subject to revision. Our intent in making this working document available at this time is to inform ongoing discussions related to the American Community Survey.

Questions for working group members:

1. Do the data in Table 1 sufficiently address your question about the degree of language barrier noninterviews in the ACS?
2. Do you have any comments on the list of counties identified in Table 2 ?
3. Do you think that this type of information should be produced periodically as feedback to the regional offices? Would you suggest that any additional information be added?

April 1, 2005

*American Community Survey Research and Evaluation Program
Discussion Paper*

American Community Survey Noninterview Rates due to Language Barriers

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Abstract: Survey response rates are produced annually for the American Community Survey (ACS). The complement of the response rate is the noninterview rate which can be partitioned into a set of reasons for noninterviews. One reason, language barriers, is a measure of the proportion of eligible sample units that could not be interviewed due to a language barrier. At national and state levels the language noninterview rates are essentially 0.0 percent. This analysis was undertaken to assess if problems may be masked at high geographic levels such as state but found to exist at county levels. The results show that in 2003 about 97 percent of all counties had language noninterview rates of 0.0 percent and that only 2 counties (out of 1240) had rates exceeding 1 percent.

Keywords: nonresponse error, quality

These discussion papers include preliminary results that have not undergone detailed review. They are intended for internal use only and should not be cited. These reports are produced to inform interested parties of issues related to the American Community Survey and to encourage discussion.

1. Background

U S C E N S U S B U R E A U

Along with each annual data release, the American Community Survey (ACS) web site includes a set of quality measures that summarize several key assessments of survey quality. One of these rates is the rate of survey noninterviews - the complement of the response rate. This rate is broken out by the reason for the noninterview. One of the reasons that an ACS interview may not be completed is due to a language barrier. This means that an interviewer was unable to conduct the interview in the necessary language and was also unable to obtain an interpreter to provide language assistance.

At the national and state levels, language noninterview rates are very low. The web page shows that in 2003 the national response rate was 96.7 percent. Of the 3.3 percent noninterviews, most were due to respondent refusals. At the national level in 2003 the noninterview rate due to language was 0.0 percent meaning that the rate was less than 0.05 percent. Similar low levels are seen at the state level with only a few states showing a non zero rate. In discussions with the advisory committee language working group it was noted that language barrier problems may be masked at higher geographic levels but found to exist at lower levels such as counties. To address this concern we reviewed county-level data from 2003.

2. Results

Table 1 summarizes the distribution of county-level noninterview rates due to language barriers for the 1240 counties included in the 2003 ACS. For example, the row titled, “greater than 0.2, less than 0.3 percent” identifies the number (8) and the percent (0.6 percent) of these 1240 counties where the proportion of the total eligible sample units in that county that could not be interviewed due to language barriers was greater than 0.2 percent and less than or equal to 0.3 percent. The data are weighted to reflect the probabilities of selection, including the sub-sampling prior to personal visit followup. About 97 percent of the counties had rates equal to 0.0 percent. Only two counties had rates greater than 1.0 percent.

Table 1. Distribution of 2003 ACS county-level language barrier noninterview rates

Rate of ACS noninterviews due to language barriers	Number of Counties	Percent of all Counties
0.0 percent	1201	96.9
greater than 0.0, less than or equal to 0.1 percent	13	1.0
greater than 0.1, less than or equal to 0.2 percent	10	0.8
greater than 0.2, less than or equal to 0.3 percent	8	0.6
greater than 0.3, less than or equal to 0.4 percent	2	0.2
greater than 0.4, less than or equal to 1.0 percent	4	0.3
greater than 1.0 percent	2	0.2
TOTAL	1240	100.0

Source: Weighted results from the 2003 ACS

Table 2 lists the specific counties that had language noninterview rates of 0.3 percent or greater. These counties include areas with varying levels of nonEnglish speakers. Some of these counties are quite small. With the exception of the first few counties, we do not consider these 16 counties to have rates warranting special attention. Nonetheless, we think it will be very useful

to review the characteristics of these counties and to analyze other information about these noninterviews to help us to better understand the reasons for these higher rates.

Table 2. 2003 ACS Language Noninterview Rates - Counties Exceeding 0.3 Percent

County	State	Language Noninterview Rate (in percent)
Danville City	VA	2.7
Jasper County	SC	2.4
Berkeley County	SC	1.0
Big Horn County	WY	0.8
Rutherford County	TN	0.7
Davidson County	TN	0.5
Essex County	NJ	0.4
Richmond County	NY	0.4
Passaic County	NJ	0.3
Denton County	TX	0.3
Benton County	WA	0.3
Aransas County	NJ	0.3
Phillips County	AR	0.3
Bristol County	MA	0.3
Kent County	MI	0.3
Kings County	NY	0.3

Source: Weighted results from the 2003 ACS

3. Conclusions

The county-level results confirm the state-level findings that efforts by bilingual field staff, assisted by interpreters, lead to a high level of completed interviews regardless of language spoken. We identified very few counties with relatively high levels of nonresponse due to language barriers.

