

Housing

Vacancy Rate Fact Sheet

Differences between the *Vacancy Rate* Estimates from the American Community Survey, the Current Population Survey/Housing Vacancy Survey, and the American Housing Survey

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The American Community Survey (ACS) is the largest household survey in the United States and Puerto Rico. The ACS provides estimates of vacant units by type of vacancy and calculates estimates of rental and homeowner vacancy rates for most areas included in the decennial census. Estimates are not available at the individual block level from the ACS as they are from the decennial census. At this level, confidentiality is a major cause for concern. In addition, since the ACS surveys only a sample of the population, the ACS cannot produce reliable results for individual blocks. The 2011 ACS (available in 2012) will provide estimates for zip code tabulation areas. Estimates are updated each year with annual estimates for smaller geographies being averaged over the current and two or four previous years.

The Current Population Survey/Housing Vacancy Survey (CPS/HVS) produces estimates of rental and homeowner vacancy rates each quarter for the United States, four census regions, states, and the 75 largest metropolitan areas (MAs).

The American Housing Survey (AHS) is designed to provide current information on the size and composition of the housing inventory, the characteristics of its occupants, indicators of housing and neighborhood quality, and the characteristics of recent movers. AHS is conducted every other year and produces estimates for the United States, four census regions, and selected metropolitan areas. In the past, the AHS was two surveys conducted independently of each other. The National survey was enumerated every other odd-numbered year and the Metropolitan survey occurred in selected areas on a rotating basis. Starting in 2007, the National and Metropolitan surveys were conducted in the same time period (odd-numbered years) to reduce costs. For a complete list of AHS metropolitan areas and the years in which they were surveyed see <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/ahs/>.

This chart summarizes the key differences between the ACS, the CPS/HVS, and the AHS:

	American Community Survey	Current Population Survey/Housing Vacancy Survey	American Housing Survey
Principal Purpose	Replace the decennial census long form by providing annual (or multi-year average) estimates of selected social, economic, and housing characteristics of the population for many geographic areas and subpopulations.	Provide specific socioeconomic estimates for the United States and estimates for regions of selected characteristics and subpopulations. Provide timely estimates of the homeownership rate and rental and homeowner vacancy rates each quarter.	Provide a current and ongoing series of data on the size, composition, and state of housing in the United States and changes in the housing stock over time. Collect housing statistics that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) uses to evaluate and develop its federal housing programs.
Geography	Most of the decennial census geographies, including nation; states, counties, and places in the United States; municipios and zonas urbanas in Puerto Rico; census tracts, and census block groups. Beginning in 2012, zip code tabulation areas.	Nation, regions, states, and 75 largest metropolitan areas (which have a population of 600,000 or more).	Nation, regions, selected metropolitan areas, and either (1) HUD-defined zones within metropolitan areas on the Public Use File, or (2) subareas within metropolitan areas in the publication tables.
Sample Size	About 3 million addresses per year. Data are collected from about one-twelfth of the sample each month.	About 72,000 addresses per month. A unit is in sample for 4 consecutive months, out for 8 months, back in sample for 4 months, and then retired from the sample.	Sample size is dependent on HUD budget and has varied over the years. In 2009 about 62,000 addresses were selected for the National survey. The AHS is longitudinal—each sample unit from the basic sample has been visited every other year since

			1985. New addresses are added to the sample at each iteration to ensure representativeness.
Data Collection Method	Mail and computer-assisted telephone and personal-visit interviews. All group quarters responses are obtained by personal visit interview. Most vacant units are not identified until the third month of data collection (the first personal visit). In that month, a 1-in-3 subsample of all addresses for which responses have not been obtained are visited by field representatives.	Computer-assisted telephone and personal visit interviews. All units in sample are visited if a telephone interview is not obtained. The CPS/HVS is a voluntary survey.	Computer-assisted telephone and personal-visit interviews. The AHS is a voluntary survey.
	The ACS is a mandatory survey.		
Residency Status	The ACS includes people at the address where they are at the time of the survey if they have been there or will be there more than two months. A housing unit occupied at the time of interview entirely by people who will be there for 2 months or less is classified as "Vacant - Current Residence Elsewhere". Such units are included in the estimated number of vacant units.	The CPS/HVS includes people if they consider the unit to be their place of usual residence (where they spend most of the time during the year). If they have more than one home, the interviewer has to determine if the sample unit is their usual residence, that is, where they spend most of their calendar year.	Same as CPS/HVS.
Population Universe	The ACS includes both civilian and military population living in the United States and Puerto Rico (resident population). It includes both <i>households</i> (people living in housing units) and the <i>group quarters</i> population. The group quarters population consists of the institutionalized (such as people in correctional institutions or nursing homes) and the noninstitutionalized (most of whom are in college dormitories). The weighting is controlled to population and housing unit estimates as of July 1 (e.g., July 1, 2010 for the 2010 ACS).	The CPS/HVS includes the civilian noninstitutionalized population. This universe includes civilians in households, people in noninstitutional group quarters (other than military barracks) and military in households living off post or with their families on post (as long as at least one household member is a civilian adult). The universe excludes other military in households and in group quarters (barracks), and people living in institutions. The weighting is controlled to independent counts of housing units for the month of the estimate.	The AHS includes occupied and vacant housing units and all people in housing units. The universe excludes all people in group quarters. The weighting is controlled to independent counts of housing units.
Time Period Covered	Monthly interviews are conducted and units are classified as of the day they are first contacted; nearly all vacant units in the ACS are not contacted until the third month of data collection.	Monthly interviews are conducted and information on the vacancy status of the unit are collected and processed as of the interview week, which is normally the week containing the 19th of each month.	The interviewing period may vary from year to year. In 2009, interviews were conducted from June to September and classified by tenure status as of the day they were first contacted.
Length and Detail of Questions	Same as CPS/HVS.	The question on vacancy status includes the categories 'rented, not yet occupied' and 'sold, not yet occupied', which is used in the computation of the rental and homeowner vacancy rates.	Same as CPS/HVS.