

Preparing the International Migration Questions for the 2006 American Community Survey Content Test

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I. Introduction

The American Community Survey (ACS) provides current demographic, socio-economic, and housing data for the United States. As the Census Bureau's replacement for the long form of the decennial census, the ACS will be the primary source for timely information on the foreign-born population, a demographically dynamic part of the U.S. population.

Over the past few years, Census Bureau analysts, as well as outside experts, have identified limitations to measuring the size and characteristics of the foreign-born population through the use of existing survey questions on place of birth, citizenship, and year of entry. These limitations are due to both the structure and content of the current survey questions and the changing nature of migration patterns to the United States.

II. Objective

In order to address these limitations, revised questions on place of birth, citizenship, and year of entry have been proposed. They will be tested in the 2006 ACS Content Test and the results will be used to examine the possibility of changing the international migration questions on the 2008 ACS. This paper contains an overview of the process of testing questions on the ACS Content Test and describes the proposed changes to the international migration questions, including the revisions made because of cognitive testing.

III. The Proposed International Migration Questions

The Content Test, a field test of the ACS questions, is currently planned to consist of a national sample of approximately 60,000 residential addresses with half of the sample receiving the current ACS question language and half of the sample receiving the proposed question language. The proposed question language underwent two rounds of cognitive research that was conducted by outside contractors.

A. The Place of Birth Question

Compared to the current ACS question, the proposed place of birth question includes a detailed place of birth questionnaire item for the foreign-born population.

B. The Citizenship Question

Compared to the current ACS question, the proposed citizenship question includes a year of naturalization questionnaire item.

C. The Year of Entry Question

The current year of entry question asks for a single year of entry. The proposed year of entry question asks for both the first and most recent year of entry.