



A Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile of Allen County, Indiana
based on the 2010 Census and the American Community Survey

Reengineering the Census

The Decennial Census and the American
Community Survey



Prepared by
The Community Research Institute at IPFW

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CENSUS HISTORY AND THE INTRODUCTION OF THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

The U.S. Government took its first Census just years after fighting for independence. In 1790, federal marshalls went house-to-house counting residents. This took 18 months, and resulted in a count of 3.9 million people. As early as 1810, questions were added to the Census that were not strictly related to a count of residents- questions concerning manufacturing and agriculture production, for example. From this beginning, non-population count questions were added, revised, or changed over the decades. What we refer to as the “long form” census got its start in 1940 when a sample of the population received a much longer census form to complete. This could be done due to advances in sample statistical techniques. By the 1990s, both the unpopularity of the long-form census and the need by many agencies for a more timely release of data prompted the development of the American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS basically replaces both the long form census and the product of those results- Summary Files 3 and 4 tables¹. While approximately one out of every six households received the “long form” census survey in 2000 with data ready for public consumption by 2003, the ACS was in demonstration phase in 2000, and data from this survey was available as early as 2001. After changes in methodology were refined, full implementation of the ACS began in 2005². The ACS is an on-going survey with approximately 1 out of 55 households in the United States and Puerto Rico returning an American Community Survey each month. The sampling errors were much smaller with the decennial census long form since more households were surveyed as part of the decennial census at a point in time.

Due to the much smaller sample size, data is released depending on the size of population in the survey area. For some areas, such as states and larger counties, data is available annually. For other areas (at least 20,000 in population size), three years of data are required for a data release. For areas smaller than 20,000 in population size, such as small counties and census tracts, five years of survey returns are required to generate a statistically valid survey response.

The ACS is also generally appreciated for its ability to investigate potential items of interest faster than the decennial census. New questions can be added on an annual basis rather than once a decade.

2010 was the year celebrated by all data lovers. The first 2010 Decennial Census data was released in December, the 1-year ACS estimates for large areas with populations greater than 65,000 was released for 2009 data, 3-year ACS 2007-09 estimates for areas greater than 20,000 were released, and finally, 5-year ACS estimates were released for areas smaller than 20,000. For the first time since the release of the 2000 Census, data is available at the census tract (and block) level, and we can look at changes within our county at this level.

This data, known as 2005-2009 ACS, comes with some cautions and restrictions. First of all, it represents the surveys taken during the period January 2005 through December 2009; the Census cautions us not to consider these as a moving average. They also caution us not to compare overlapping years, e.g. they suggest that we not compare 2005-09 with 2006-2010 data. Secondly, the data collected at this level is matched back to Census estimates and therefore we will not be seeing any revelations about population size or race through the 2005-09 ACS data. We will have to wait for 2010 Census data to get good data on our population numbers and racial component. The Census advises us to think of these programs in the following way: the Census shows the number of people; the ACS shows how people live. The Census also provides us with margins of error for each piece of data. These errors existed in the 2000 Census; we were just blissfully unaware of them. Not only will the Census be suppressing data of its own volition when it considers the data unusable, but the user may be hesitant to put much

¹ Officially, the Census Bureau conducts this survey as part of the decennial census program under authorization contained in Title 13 of the United States Code.

² Although some components of this survey were not included until later, such as the population living in Group Quarters.

faith in the numbers when the margins of error are displayed right next to the data. In some cases, we can see that the data being provided is not that helpful, and it is now our call as to how to report or treat that information. Some of these cautions are outlined more fully in Appendix A.

This report makes use of the 2009 ACS single year data, the five year 2005-2009 ACS data, and the 2010 Census data. When we can analyze the county using census tract³ information, the 2005-09 data is generally used since the 2010 Census data is limited by its 10 questions concerning population, race, age, household relationship, and home ownership. This 2005-09 data set is used for many other comparisons, except for those times that we believe there is value in presenting the most recent data. An example of this concerns the poverty data. Due to the 2008-09 recession, the 2005-09 ACS has three and a half years of non-recession data included within it. When the data is not needed at a census tract level, we use the 2009 data.

Due to the release schedule of the Census 2010 data, this report has been released in two sections. The data initially available from the ACS on Income, Poverty, Workforce-type data, and Education was presented in our June 2011 release. Basically, this data is as good as it gets. From a perspective of availability at a census tract level, or making available the most recent data on Allen County, it not going to get any more recent or detailed than what is presented in this Allen County profile for this point in time. In addition, some of 2010 Census data on Population and Housing has been released, and whenever possible, that data has been incorporated into this report.

Between June 2011 and April 2012, the Census has been releasing most of the detailed information from Census 2010. Data on population, age, and households is now available for Allen County by census tract. This entire document has been reviewed and updated using the recently release 2010 Census data, and much of these updates involve the newly released 2010 data by census tract. With these updates, we are including a final project which involves ranking the census tracts by risk factors. While it is highly likely that our ranking of census tracts by risk factors comes as no surprise to the social workers in Allen County, we do include them not only for educational purposes and planning tools to these organizations, but to promote discussion in the community.

One final word of note: we believe that the American Community Survey data that we used in this report will be updated at some point using data from the 2010 Census- a revised control file which may change some weights. We are hopeful that this will shed more light on some factors which may have been in flux during the 2000-2010 period. An example of this is the Burmese population in Allen County. We do not believe that the ACS data has, to date, correctly incorporated the influx of these migrants and immigrants. This is briefly addressed in Appendix A.

³ Census tracts are geographical areas defined by the Census which generally have populations of 3,000-6,000. The 2009 and 2005-2009 ACS data used in this analysis are based on the 2000 census tracts. When we make comparisons to 2010, we have to take into account changes in tracts. While these are generally consistent for each decennial Census, changes do occur, and Appendix D identifies the changes in the Allen County tracts from 2000 to 2010 and our method of bridging the data.