

Request for Non-Substantive Change to 2017 American Community Survey (ACS)
OMB Control No. 0607-0810
U.S. Department of Commerce
U.S. Census Bureau

Purpose

This request concerns the Census Bureau’s 2017 ACS and Puerto Rico Community Survey (PRCS) questionnaires under OMB clearance 0607-0810. Specifically, based on the results of research and analysis, the Census Bureau is requesting approval to revise the wording order of the fertility question, and to modify the Spanish wording of two response categories for the relationship question.

Background

Fertility

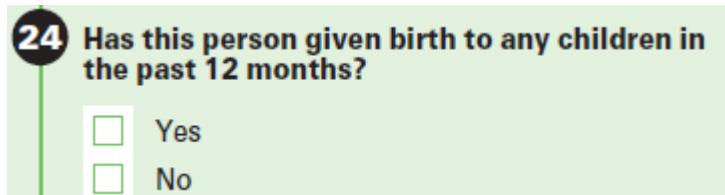
The Census Bureau identified potential issues with the ACS fertility question in the report “Investigating the 2010 Undercount of Young Children – Examining Coverage of Young Mothers” (Deborah Griffin, Heather King, Eric Jensen and Howard Hogan, 2016-forthcoming). Specifically, the report found evidence of overcoverage of older mothers with a recent birth. The ACS fertility question asks all females between the ages of 15 and 50, “*Has this person given birth to any children in the past 12 months?*” Given that the format of the question on the paper form has the phrase, “in the past 12 months” on the second line of the question, it is possible that it is missed.

Interviewers may also truncate this question in error without recognizing the critical nature of the “past 12 months.” In the past few years, Census Bureau data review analysts noted unusually high ACS fertility rates in some areas. An investigation determined that a small number of interviewers did not ask the question correctly and falsely identified women as giving birth in the past 12 months when they really had given birth at any earlier point in time. The Census Bureau suppressed the fertility data for these areas and retrained the interviewers.

These results explain some of the measured overcoverage of older mothers with a recent birth found in the report cited above. It is believed that the vital statistics numbers are lower than the ACS estimates due to errors by older women who incorrectly report giving birth in the past 12 months. These data point to a potential measurement error problem with the ACS fertility question across all modes. While the report by Griffin et al. focused on older women, it is possible that women in any age group could be over reporting births if they fail to read the reference period in the question. The mode-level results point to mail responses (self-response) as especially concerning. While this type of error must be low overall, since the estimates for women with a recent birth compare reasonably well with the vital statistics numbers of births, some improvements to ACS data quality may be gained by maximizing the chance that respondents notice the ‘past 12 months’ phrase in the question.

Therefore, the Census Bureau is proposing to revise the fertility question in 2017 to move the phrase "in the past 12 months" to the beginning of the sentence and capitalize "PAST 12 MONTHS". In addition to making the presentation of the reference period more consistent with other ACS questions, it will emphasize that it is only within the past 12 months.

2016 Version:

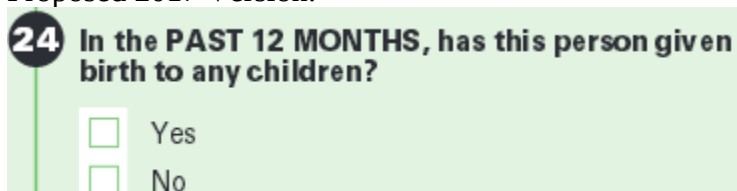


24 Has this person given birth to any children in the past 12 months?

Yes

No

Proposed 2017 Version:



24 In the **PAST 12 MONTHS**, has this person given birth to any children?

Yes

No

Relationship

In preparation for the 2020 Census, the Spanish translation of relationship was reviewed. An expert panel and cognitive testing by RTI found some issues with how the translations of the roomer/boarder and housemate/roommate categories were being interpreted by respondents.

In three rounds of usability testing, we have documented respondents' difficulties interpreting the phrase "compañero de casa o de cuarto" [housemate or roommate] as intended. And, in two subsequent rounds of testing, we have documented that respondents successfully understood the term as intended after the phrase "o de cuarto" [removed] was removed.

Our testing showed that, for some respondents, there is an implication that "roommates" share the same bedroom, which can be sensitive depending on the relationship between the two people. For some respondents, the word "compañero" [companion] in the phrase "compañero de casa o de cuarto" implied a level of closeness not required in the English term. Usability test respondents described the relationship as being between "close friends," having a connotation of "trust," or even having a "romantic" meaning. In addition to implying a certain emotional closeness, the phrase "compañero de cuarto" [roommate] in particular was interpreted literally as describing people who not only live together but also sleep in the same "cuarto" [room]. For instance, one respondent reported living with two coworkers who contributed to household expenses. One coworker shared a bedroom with him and another slept in the living room. The coworker who slept in another room was described as a "roomer or boarder" because he did not sleep in the same room as the respondent, while the coworker who shared the same room was classified as a "roommate." Both types of misunderstandings restrict respondents' application of the term "compañero de cuarto" to their living situations in ways in which the term is not

restrictive to speakers of English (e.g. emotional closeness and physical proximity while sleeping).¹

Specifically, during usability testing for the 2014 Census Test Internet Self-Response Instrument², three respondents had a literal interpretation of the translation for “roommate,” and stated that this term means two people who share a bedroom. One respondent said that putting “roommate” in the same option as “housemate” was confusing. She gave the example of having a male cousin who lived with her, but would certainly not be her “roommate” since they did not share the same bedroom, and she implied that she would not be able to choose the option for “housemate” since it was paired with roommate. The recommendation that was put forth from this usability testing was to remove “o de cuarto” [or roommate] and just have the category refer to a housemate “compañero(a) de casa.”

In further usability testing for the 2015 Content Test Internet Self-Response Instrument³, we found similar results. Some respondents interpreted “compañero...de cuarto” [roommate] to mean that the two people literally shared a room. This understanding is problematic, since the term “roommate” in English does not have the same specificity. This more narrow interpretation of the Spanish translation for “roommate” may prevent respondents living in roommate situations from selecting this category. Also in this round of testing, some respondents had difficulty with this question because they did not perceive a difference between “compañero de casa o de cuarto” [housemate or roommate] and “inquilino” [renter], which is a new translation for the “roomer/boarder” category. One respondent said that “inquilino” [renter] and “compañero de casa o de cuarto” [roommate/housemate] were the same. Another respondent indicated that housemates/roommates share other rooms of the house but other nonrelatives were like renters but not like roommates. A third respondent said an “inquilino” [renter] is someone who pays rent for living in someone’s house, and housemate/roommate is different because they may not pay rent. The final recommendation from this testing was to delete the term “de cuarto” from the housemate/roommate category, as “compañero de casa” [housemate] is understood broadly to include people who share a housing unit and contribute toward the rent without specifying that they share a room.

Historically the translation for roomer/boarder in the 2010 Census and the ACS has been “Inquilino(a) o pupilo(a)” which translates literally as “renter or student.” Previous ACS testing recommended removing the term ‘pupilo’ from the relationship question since results indicated that most respondents interpreted this to mean “student” or they did not understand it at all.⁴ Based on that testing, this category was revised to read “Inquilino(a)” starting with the 2014 Census Test, and has continued that way in later tests preparing for the 2020 Census. The ACS instruments should also be updated to reflect the corrected translation.

¹ “Cognitive & Usability Results from Spanish Pre-Testing of the 2015 National Content Test.” Meyers, M., Holliday, N., Lykke, L., García Trejo, Y., & L. Fernandez. (Forthcoming)

² Survey Methodology Research Report Series: “Usability Results for the 2014 Census Test in Spanish.” Goerman, P., Meyers, M., & Simmons, D. (Forthcoming)

³ Survey Methodology Research Report Series: “Mini Round 2 Usability Testing Results with Spanish-Speaking Non-ID Respondents for the 2015 April Census Test.” Meyers, M., Fernandez, L., and P. Goerman. (Forthcoming)

⁴ “Census American Community Survey CAPI/CATI Instrument Testing Phase I - Final Report.” Goerman, P., Quiroz, R., McAvinchey, G., Reed, L., & S. Rodriguez. (2009)

Based on these findings, we propose the following changes be made to these Spanish translations of the relationship answer categories:

Change: "Inquilino(a) o pupilo(a)"

To: "Inquilino(a)";

Change: "Companero(a) de casa o de cuarto"

To: "Companero(a) de casa".

2016 Version:

2 ¿Cómo está relacionada esta persona con la Persona 1?
Marque (X) UNA casilla.

<input type="checkbox"/> Esposo(a)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yerno o nuera
<input type="checkbox"/> Hijo(a) biológico(a)	<input type="checkbox"/> Otro pariente
<input type="checkbox"/> Hijo(a) adoptivo(a)	<input type="checkbox"/> Inquilino(a) o pupilo(a)
<input type="checkbox"/> Hijastro(a)	<input type="checkbox"/> Compañero(a) de casa o de cuarto
<input type="checkbox"/> Hermano(a)	<input type="checkbox"/> Pareja no casada
<input type="checkbox"/> Padre o madre	<input type="checkbox"/> Hijo(a) de crianza (foster)
<input type="checkbox"/> Nieto(a)	<input type="checkbox"/> Otro no pariente
<input type="checkbox"/> Suegro(a)	

Proposed 2017 Version:

2 ¿Cómo está relacionada esta persona con la Persona 1?
Marque (X) UNA casilla.

<input type="checkbox"/> Esposo(a)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yerno o nuera
<input type="checkbox"/> Hijo(a) biológico(a)	<input type="checkbox"/> Otro pariente
<input type="checkbox"/> Hijo(a) adoptivo(a)	<input type="checkbox"/> Inquilino(a)
<input type="checkbox"/> Hijastro(a)	<input type="checkbox"/> Compañero(a) de casa
<input type="checkbox"/> Hermano(a)	<input type="checkbox"/> Pareja no casada
<input type="checkbox"/> Padre o madre	<input type="checkbox"/> Hijo(a) de crianza (foster)
<input type="checkbox"/> Nieto(a)	<input type="checkbox"/> Otro no pariente
<input type="checkbox"/> Suegro(a)	

Burden

There is no change to the burden to the public associated with this change.

Attachments

ACS-1(2017) ACS English Questionnaire

ACS-1(2017)SP ACS Stateside English Questionnaire

ACS-1(2017)PR(SP) PRCS Questionnaire Spanish

ACS-1(GQ)(2017) ACS Group Quarters Questionnaire
ACS-1(GQ)PR(2017) PRCS Group Quarters Questionnaire