

Frequently Asked Questions About Same-Sex Couple Households

Fertility and Family Statistics Branch

When did the Census Bureau first start collecting data about same-sex couples?

In its demographic surveys, the Census Bureau collects the relationship of each member of the household to the householder (the person who owns or rents the home). In 1990, the category *unmarried partner* was added to the relationship item in the decennial census to measure the growing complexity of American households and the increasing tendency for couples to live together before getting married. The *unmarried partner* category was also added to the Current Population Survey (CPS) in 1995, the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) in 1996, and has been on the American Community Survey (ACS) since it began in 2005.

How has the editing of reports of same-sex married couples changed?

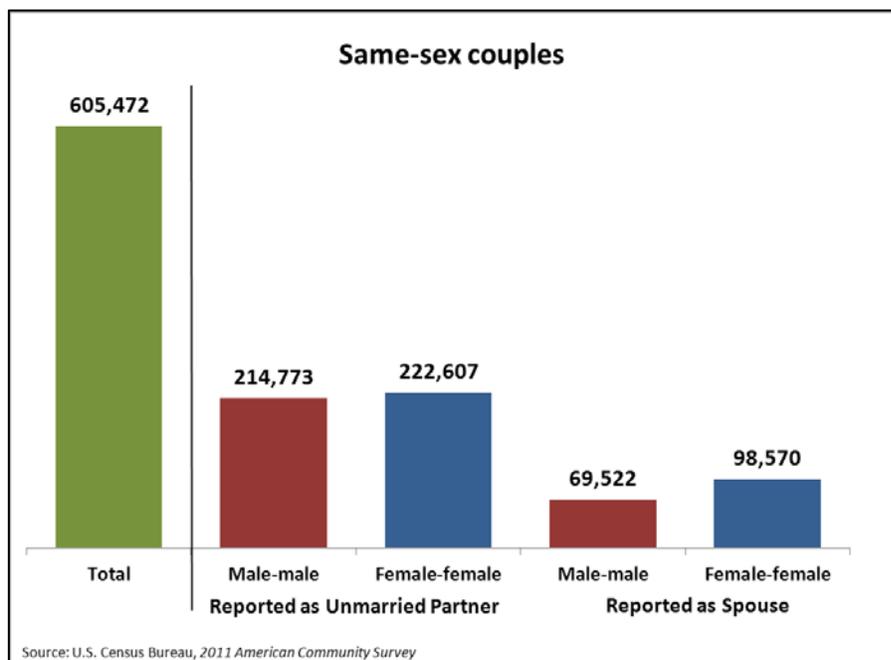
Editing the responses of those who reported being married to a same-sex partner has changed over time. For cases where no imputations are made due to non-response, for either person on the relationship or gender items, the partner who reports being a *spouse* of the householder is changed to an *unmarried partner* of the householder. This procedure has been in place since Census 2000. In the 1990 Census, the *relationship* category remained the same (spouse), but the *sex* of the partner was changed.

Does the Census Bureau have estimates of same-sex married couple households?

Census 2010 marked the first published reports of those who identified themselves same-sex married couples using decennial data. Data from Census 2000 reported all same-sex couples as unmarried couples, as no states performed same-sex marriages at that time. The Census Bureau has also released yearly estimates of same-sex married couple households since 2005, using ACS data.

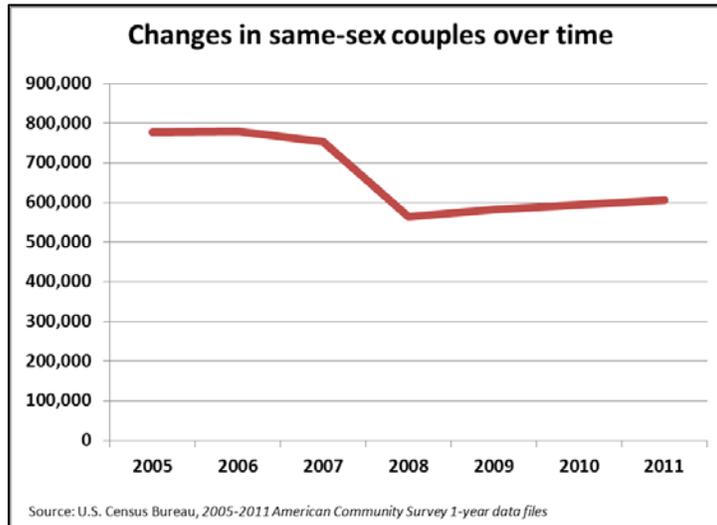
What is the most recent estimate of same-sex couple households?

The most recent estimate, from 2011 ACS data, shows 605,472 same-sex couple households. Of these, 168,092 reported being married couples. The figure below shows estimates of same-sex couples by relationship type (unmarried partner or spouse) and sex of the couple.

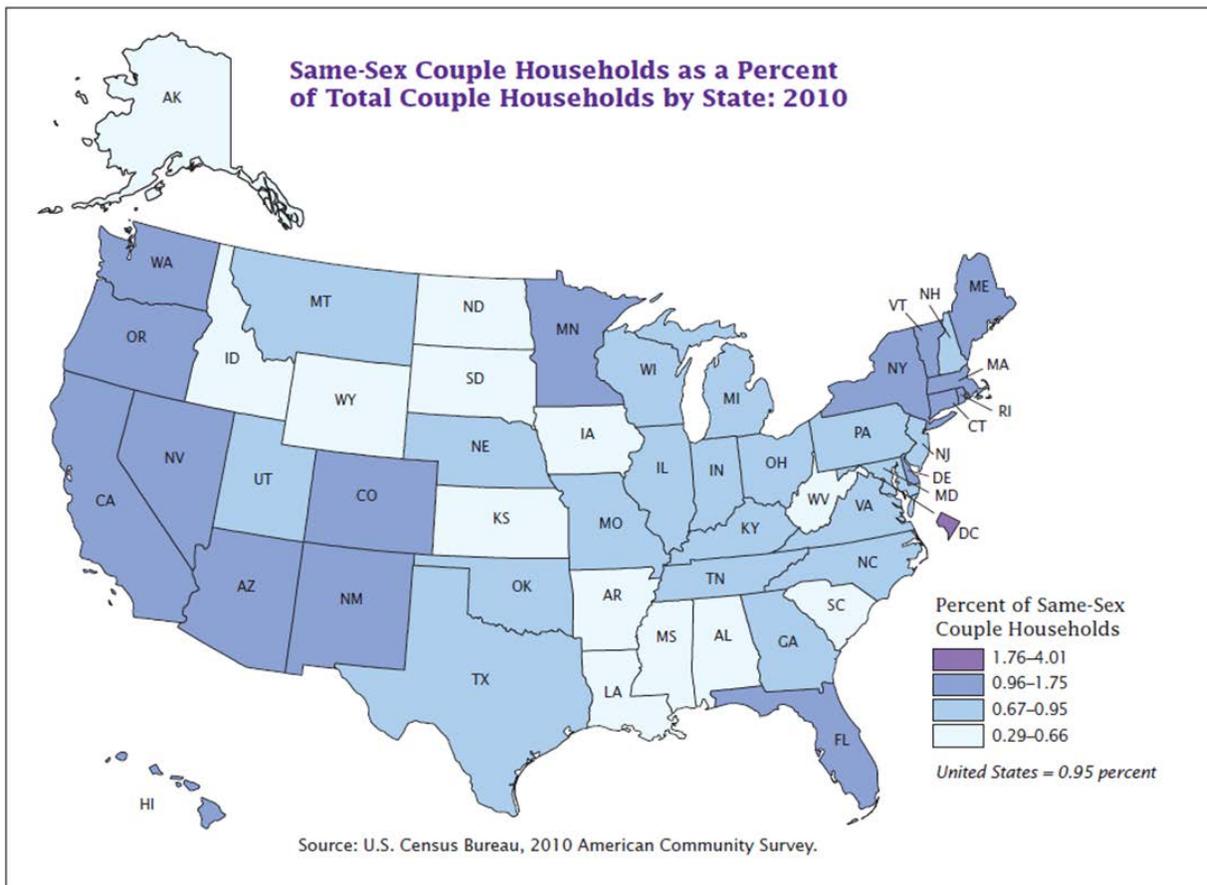


How has this estimate changed over time?

Two basic kinds of change occurred between 2007 and 2008: (1) processing and editing changes and (2) formatting changes to the questionnaire. The first reflects technological improvements in data collection by interviewers and efforts to make the processing and editing more consistent between data in the ACS and the 2010 Census. The second changes the layout of the gender question to make it more difficult to accidentally mark both male and female. The drop in the reported number of same-sex couples between 2007 and 2008 can be attributed to these changes, which have resulted in a more reliable estimate of same-sex couple households.



Where do same-sex couples live?

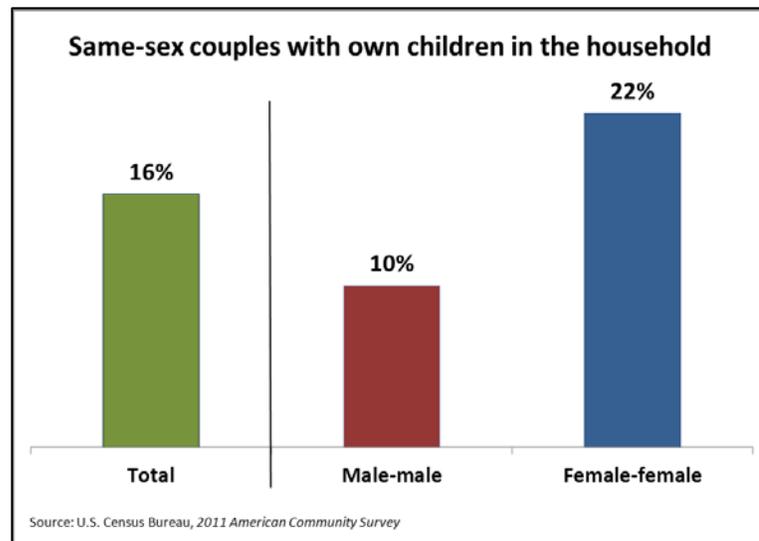


In 2010, approximately 594,000 same-sex couple households lived in the United States. Nationally, about 1 percent of all coupled households were same-sex couples. The percentage of same-sex couple households for the 50 states and the District of Columbia ranged from 0.29 percent for Wyoming to 4.01 percent for the District of Columbia (see map above). Seventeen states and the District of Columbia had higher percentages of same-sex couple households than the nation overall.

Fourteen areas currently recognize same-sex marriage. States (or equivalents) are listed with the year they legalized same-sex marriage: Massachusetts (2003), California (2008; 2013), Connecticut (2008), Iowa (2009), Vermont (2009), New Hampshire (2009), Washington, DC (2009), New York (2011), Washington (2012), Maine (2012), Maryland (2012), Rhode Island (2013), Delaware (2013), and Minnesota (2013).

How often do same-sex couples have children in the household?

Sixteen percent of same-sex couple households had an own child (biological, step, or adopted child of the householder) in their household in 2011 (see graph below). When broken out by sex of the couple, 10 percent of male-male couples had an own child in the household compared to 22 percent of female-female households.



What work has the Census Bureau done to improve measurement of same-sex married couples?

The Census Bureau conducts ongoing research to improve measurement. For this topic, recent work began in earnest in the mid-2000s, when studies began to investigate whether estimates of same-sex couples based on the sex and relationship questions were inflated due to accidental mismarking of sex by a very small proportion of opposite-sex married couples. Since opposite-sex couples are far larger in number than same-sex couples, this would result in a large overcount of same-sex couples. Other Census Bureau research showed that form layout changes made in the ACS, along with processing changes, resulted in a decline in the number of same-sex spouses reported between 2007 and 2008. These changes appeared to reduce mismarks on sex by opposite-sex married couples. This mismark problem was evident in Census 2010 data, and an adjusted set of estimates were released. These preferred estimates were adjusted using the probability that the first names of the members of the couple were the sex that was reported for them. When a name had at least a 95 percent chance of being male, but female was reported, for example, the gender of that spouse was changed. This reduced the number of same-sex married couples reported, since the mismarks had inflated the number by roughly 28 percent.

In 2010, as part of the interagency group on Measuring Relationships in Federal Household Surveys led by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the Census Bureau conducted focus groups and cognitive interviews to see how

respondents viewed the relationship question categories. Key findings from this research included: 1) respondents desire new categories to reflect legal unions for same-sex couples (e.g., civil unions and domestic partnerships); 2) respondents desire to move the *unmarried partner* category next to *spouse* in the list; and 3) while some persons interpreted the term *partner* to apply more to same-sex intimate relationships, opposite-sex unmarried couples were generally comfortable selecting *unmarried partner* as their relationship category.

Within-household relationships are also defined by cohabiting couples' legal relationship statuses. In cognitive testing, participants usually interpreted the marital status question to be asking about a legally-defined marriage sanctioned by the state. However, same-sex couples that had been legally married anywhere tended to select *now married* even when the marriage was not recognized by their state of residence. Finally, respondents complained that the current categories do not accommodate same-sex couples who are not legally married but wish to indicate a committed relationship status.

Based on this work, the Census Bureau developed and is currently testing revised answer categories for the relationship question, and two additional questions to follow the marital status question. The first follow-up question directly captures cohabitation, whereas the second measures domestic partnerships and civil unions. The new/revised questions appear below:

How is this person related to Person 1? Mark (X) ONE box.

<input type="checkbox"/> Opposite-sex husband/wife/spouse	<input type="checkbox"/> Grandchild
<input type="checkbox"/> Opposite-sex unmarried partner	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent-in-law
<input type="checkbox"/> Same-sex husband/wife/spouse	<input type="checkbox"/> Son-in-law or daughter-in-law
<input type="checkbox"/> Same-sex unmarried partner	<input type="checkbox"/> Other relative
<input type="checkbox"/> Biological son or daughter	<input type="checkbox"/> Roomer or boarder
<input type="checkbox"/> Adopted son or daughter	<input type="checkbox"/> Housemate or roommate
<input type="checkbox"/> Stepson or stepdaughter	<input type="checkbox"/> Foster child
<input type="checkbox"/> Brother or sister	<input type="checkbox"/> Other nonrelative
<input type="checkbox"/> Father or mother	

Is this person currently living with a boyfriend/girlfriend or partner in this household?

Yes
 No

Is this person currently in a registered domestic partnership or civil union?

Yes
 No

What does the Census Bureau plan to do moving forward?

Currently, the Census Bureau is testing the newly developed questions in several places: the 2013 ACS Questionnaire Design Test, the 2013 test of the Survey of Income and Program Participation, and the 2013 American Housing Survey. The Census Bureau also plans to test the new relationship question at the first opportunity in the decennial testing program in preparation for the 2020 decennial census. Typically this would involve a large-scale test in multiple modes. A split-panel study is planned, comparing the new question, which has explicit categories for opposite-sex and same-sex spouses or partners, with a control question that has only one category each for spouse or partner.

Where can I find Census Bureau data on same-sex couples?

A variety of data tabulations and research papers are available on our Same Sex Couples page, at: <https://www.census.gov/topics/families/same-sex-couples.html>.