

Behind the Numbers takes a look at specific measures or indicators to provide a better understanding of what the data for the indicators mean, how data are used and where you can get them.

Behind the Numbers

Race, Ethnicity and Ancestry

Dictionary definitions

Webster defines race as “a division of mankind possessing traits that are transmissible by descent and sufficient to characterize it as a distinct human type”; ethnicity as “a quality or affiliation relating to large groups of people classed according to common racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural origin or background”; and ancestry as “line of descent.” In other words, race depends on the biological or physical traits of the people from whom you come, ethnicity depends on more non-physical aspects of the people from whom you come, and ancestry depends simply on from whom you come.

Census Bureau explanations

The definitions above correspond, for the most part, with Census Bureau tabulations of three characteristics: ancestry, Hispanic origin, and race. However, the Census Bureau uses the term “ethnicity” when discussing both ancestry and Hispanic origin.

Ancestry

- Ancestry refers to a person’s ethnic origin or descent, “roots,” heritage, or the place of birth of the person, the person’s parents, or their ancestors before their arrival in the United States and includes things like German, Egyptian, or even Cajun.
- Ancestry should not be confused with a person’s place of birth, although a person’s place of birth and ancestry may be the same.
- Although some people consider religious affiliation a component of identity, the ancestry question included in the Census was not designed to collect any

What is the difference between race, ethnicity, and ancestry?

Race encompasses inherited, characteristic traits. Ethnicity refers to cultural origin. Ancestry is simply a line of descent.

How are data collected?

Usually self-reported in a survey.

Where can I get data on race, ethnicity and ancestry?

The U.S. Census Bureau, various Pennsylvania Departments for particular programs, and others.

When do I use the data:

As one measure of community diversity.

information concerning religion. Thus, if a person cited his religion as an answer to the ancestry question, that answer was tabulated in the “other groups” category.

Hispanic origin

In addition to race and ancestry, the Census Bureau collects information on Hispanic origin, which it considers a specific ethnicity. Origin can be viewed as the heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person’s parents or ancestors before their arrival in the United States.

People who identify their origin as Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino may be of any race.

Race

- The concept of race reflects self-identification by people according to the race or races with which they most closely identify.

• These categories should not be interpreted as being scientific or anthropological in nature.

• The racial classifications used by the Census Bureau adhere to those issued by the federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB). These include:

- ♦ White,
- ♦ Black or African American,
- ♦ American Indian or Alaska Native,
- ♦ Asian, and
- ♦ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.

Beginning with the 2000 Census, respondents may select all races with which they identify. There has also been an option for “other” that may be dropped in future censuses.

Most federal data distinguishes Hispanic origin separate from race, as someone with origins in Spain is likely to be White Hispanic, whereas someone from Guatemala is likely to be American Indian Hispanic.

Be aware in using multiple data sets that some entities classify Hispanic as a race, requiring a Black Hispanic, for example, to choose the one aspect with which she most identifies.