

Census Bureau Income Data

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Census Bureau Surveys with Significant Income Content

- American Community Survey (ACS)
- Current Population Survey (CPS) Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC)
- Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP)

Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP)

- Panel survey in which respondents are followed for several years (length of survey varies by panel)
- Shorter reference period; more specific questions on income sources/benefits
- Combination of detailed “core” questions and topical modules (on disability status and net worth, for example) make SIPP a very rich data source
- SIPP sample size has varied by panel, but generally lower than the CPS
- Currently undergoing a major redesign

CPS ASEC

- Source of official national poverty estimates
- Sample size/design: 100,000 addresses, state-representative
- Census Bureau recommends using multi-year averages for states, because of relatively large standard errors
- Conducted in February-April and questions refer to previous calendar year
- Uses computer-assisted personal or telephone interviews
- Detailed questionnaire (over 50 different sources of income can be reported)

ACS

- Very large sample (about 3 million addresses annually)
- Able to publish data annually for all geographic areas with populations of 65,000 or more
- Conducted throughout the year; income questions refer to previous 12 months
- Mailout/Mailback survey with computer-assisted telephone/personal follow-up
- Much less detail than CPS ACS (collects income on 8 different income sources)

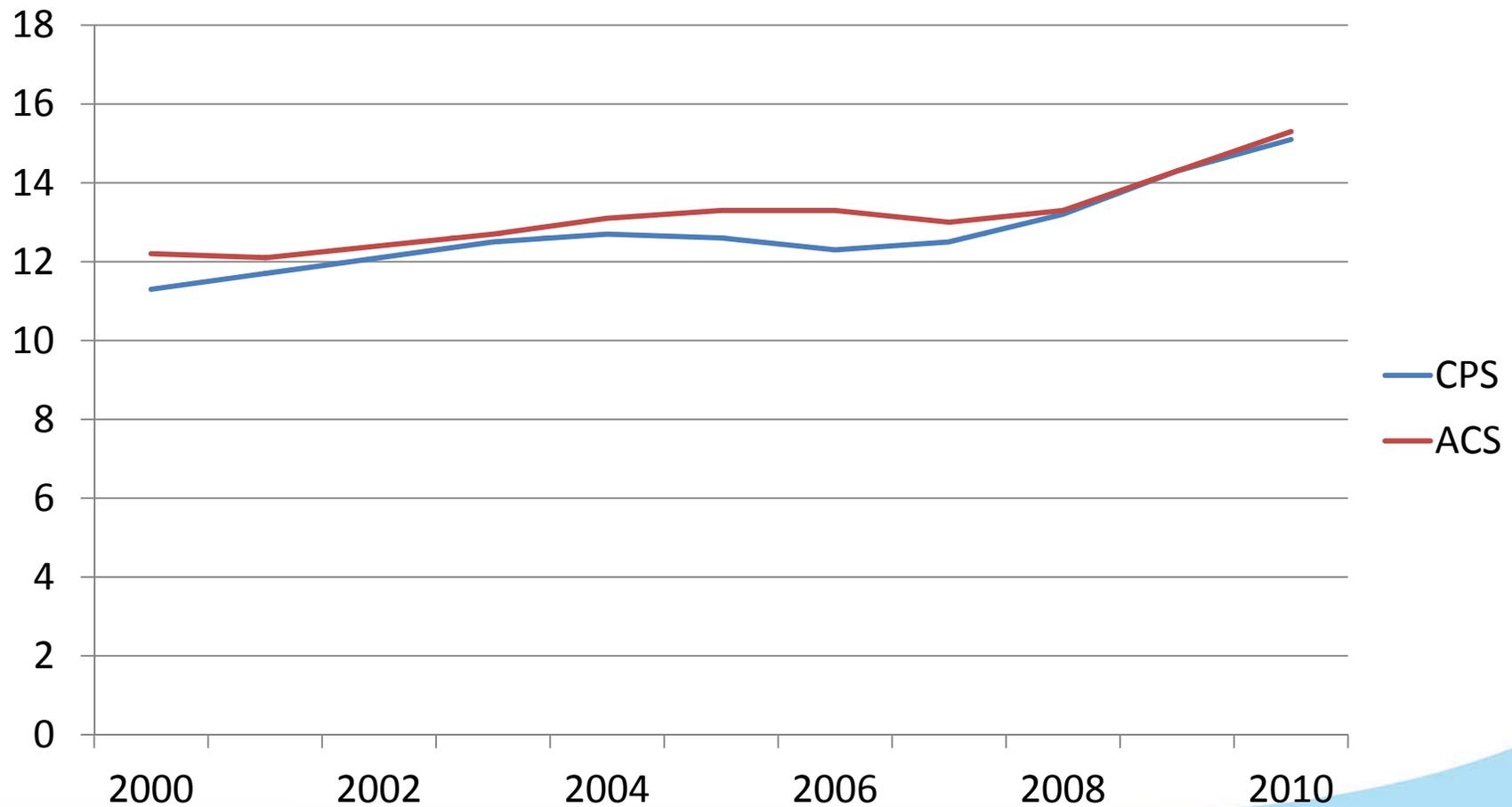
Comparing ACS and CPS Survey Income Questions

ACS Questions	CPS Questions
Wages/salaries	Longest job wages/salaries, other wages/salaries
Self-employment	Longest job self-employment, other self-employment, other farm self-employment
Property income	Interest, dividends, rents/royalties, estates/trusts
Social Security Income	Social Security Income
Supplemental Security Income	Supplemental Security Income
Cash public assistance	TANF, general assistance, other public assistance
Retirement income	Retirement pensions, survivor pensions, disability payments/pensions
Other income	Unemployment Compensation, Workers' Compensation, Veterans' Payments, educational assistance, child support, alimony, financial assistance from outside the household, other income

How Much of a Difference Does the Added Question Detail Make?

- CPS 2006 aggregate of \$7.804 trillion was 3.7 percent higher than ACS aggregate of \$7.529 trillion
- CPS had higher aggregates for earnings (and wages), property income, Social Security, and “other” income (veterans’ payments, unemployment compensation, etc.)
- ACS had higher aggregates for self-employment income, public assistance income, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and retirement income

CPS and ACS Poverty Rates, 2000-2010



ACS Characteristics

Social	Economic	Housing
Education	Income/Poverty	Tenure
Marital Status/Fertility	Food Stamps/SNAP	Occupancy/Structure
Grandparent Caregivers	Health Insurance Coverage	Housing Value
Veterans	Employment Status	Taxes/Insurance
Disability Status	Work Status	Utilities
Place of Birth/Citizenship	Weeks Worked/Usual Hours Worked	Mortgage/Monthly Rent
Year of Entry	Place of Work	
Language Spoken at Home	Industry/Occupation/Class of Worker	
Ancestry/Tribal Affiliation	Commuting to Work	

American Community Survey Publication Population Thresholds

Estimated Population of Geographic Area	Type of ACS Estimates Released
65,000 or more	1-year, 3-year, and 5-year
20,000 to 64,999	3-year, and 5-year
Less than 20,000	5-year

What Source should I Use?

- Long-term trends
Use CPS
- Break-outs by demographic characteristics
National – **Use CPS**
State and Large Counties, current year - **Use ACS**
Counties and sub-county, multi-year – **Use ACS**
- Longitudinal estimates – **Use SIPP**

Use One Source – for any given project, determine the single, appropriate source for the analysis. Comparison between sources should be avoided.

Income Measurement Issues

Imputation Rates

- tend to be the higher than most other survey variables
- differ by income type
- ACS imputation rates much lower than CPS

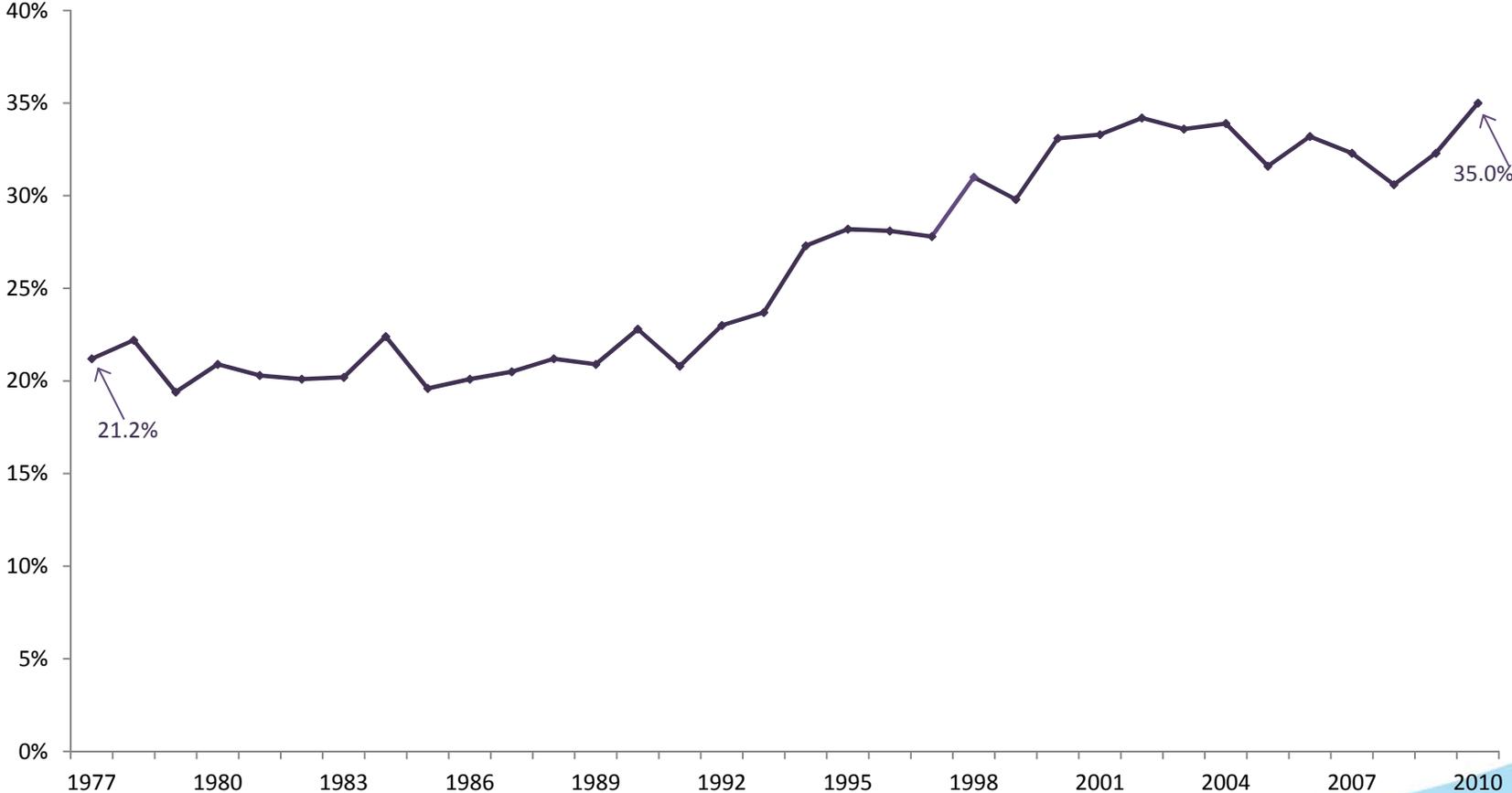
Net Underreporting

- varies widely by income type

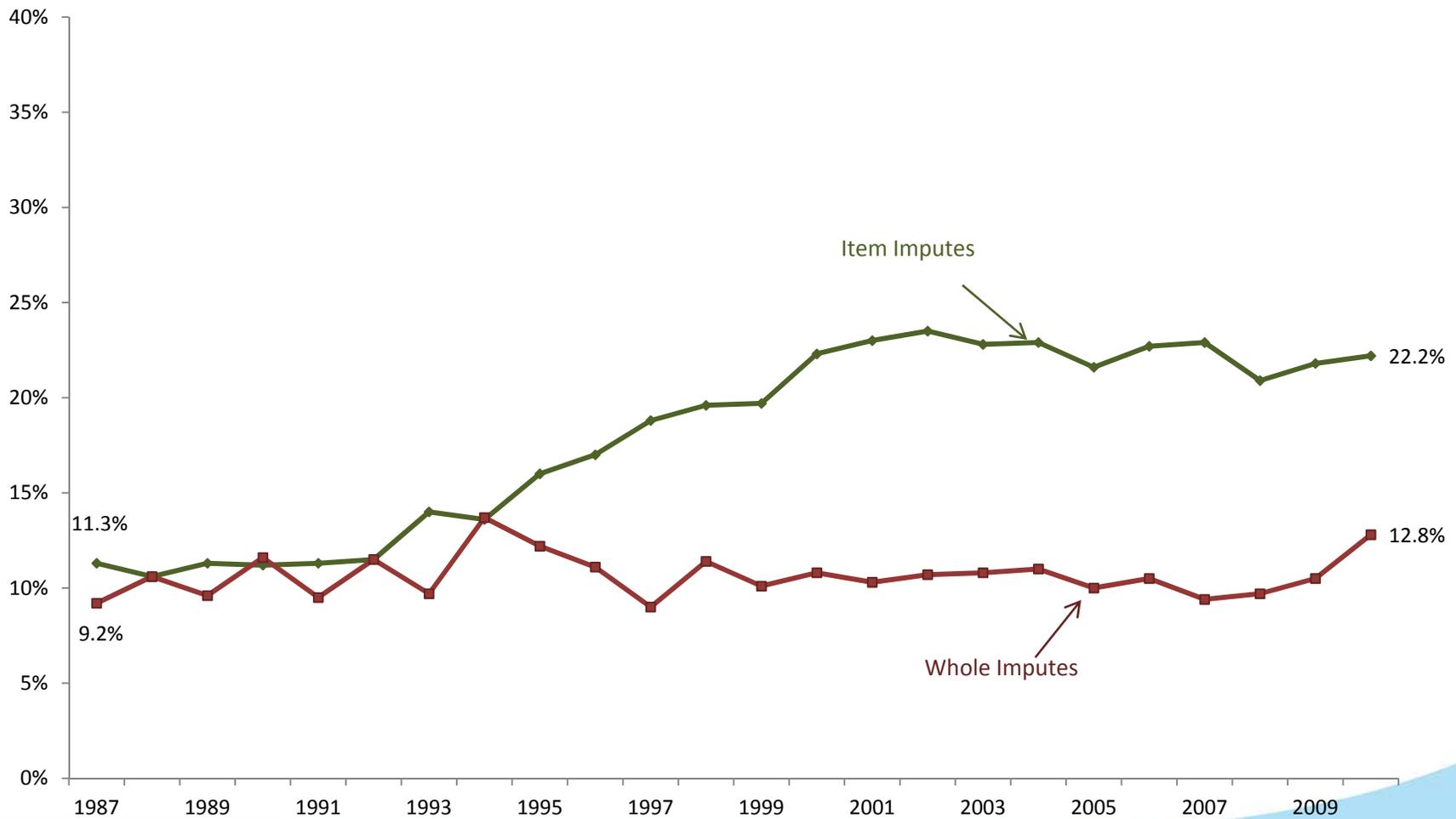
Net Under-Reporting: What do Comparisons with National Income and Product Account (NIPA) Data from BEA Tell Us?

- Earnings (particularly wages/salaries) are well-reported
- Transfer payments/benefits—results are mixed; some (like Social Security, SSI) are well-reported, others (TANF, SNAP) are not as well-reported
- Property Income and Pensions—not very well-reported
- Underreporting results tend to be pretty consistent across surveys, with some exceptions (SIPP is better on some types of transfer payments, CPS/ACS are better on wages/salaries)

Percent of Total Dollar Income Imputed for Persons with Positive Income by Year



Percent of Total Dollar Income Imputed for Persons with Positive Income by Imputation Status and Year



Observations About Income Imputation

- ACS income imputation rates are significantly lower than CPS imputation rates
- Recent joint research by ASPE/Census Bureau based on CPS data matched to SSA Detailed Earnings Records have not thus far indicated any systematic biases in CPS earnings imputations, though research continues
- Initial research has focused on the impact of earnings imputations on poverty status, and the preliminary results indicated that poverty impacts are small (and largely offsetting)

For more Information

- Visit the ACS website:
<http://www.census.gov/acs/www>
- Visit the CPS website:
<http://www.census.gov/cps/>
- Visit the Census Bureau income page:
<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/income.html>
- Visit the Census Bureau poverty page:
<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/>

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