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Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement Frequently Asked Questions

Office of Research and Evaluation
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Introduction

The Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering (CEV) Supplement is the most robust longitudinal survey about volunteerism and other forms of civic engagement in the United States. Produced in partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau, the CEV takes the pulse of our nation's civic health every two years. The data have various uses, such as supporting evidence-based decision making and efforts to understand how people make a difference in communities across the country.

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Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is civic engagement?

A: The term [civic engagement](#) has no standard definition, but AmeriCorps uses it to describe the constellation of activities individuals engage in to make a difference in their communities and promote the common good.

Q: What is the Current Population Survey?

A: The [Current Population Survey](#), often referred to as the CPS, is a large, longitudinal¹ federal survey that has been the primary source of United States labor force statistics since the 1940s. Each month, the U.S. Census Bureau administers the core module – which is the source of key indicators like the national unemployment rate – along with supplemental questions about a variety of topics such as education, voting, and fertility. Many supplemental surveys are administered on a regular basis, but the frequency and content depend on the needs of the supplement sponsor.

Q: What is the Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering (CEV) Supplement?

A: The Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering (CEV) Supplement is the most comprehensive longitudinal survey about volunteerism and other forms of civic engagement in the United States. Sponsored by AmeriCorps and produced in partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau, the CEV has taken the pulse of our nation's civic health every other September since 2017 with related datasets going back to 2002. Taken together, these surveys inform [AmeriCorps' Volunteering and Civic Life in America research](#).

Q: What is the relationship between the Current Population Survey CEV, Volunteer, and Civic Engagement supplements?

A: Between 2002 and 2015, AmeriCorps sponsored two separate supplements to the Current Population Survey about volunteerism and other forms of civic engagement.

1. The [Volunteer Supplement](#), which asked about formal volunteering, attending public meetings, and charitable giving, was administered annually in September from 2002-15.
2. The [Civic Engagement Supplement](#), which asked about various forms of civic engagement, was administered in November 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2013.

In 2010, AmeriCorps convened a group of experts to examine how federal surveys can contribute to the measurement of constructs related to social capital, civic engagement, and social cohesion. The resulting [2014 National Research Council report](#) proposed consolidating these two supplements into one. AmeriCorps implemented these recommendations by launching the CEV in 2017.

¹A longitudinal survey involves multiple points of data collection over a period of time. The Current Population Survey has a unique research design that allows panel analysis at one-year intervals. For details, see <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/about.html>

Q: Who might find CEV data useful?

A: The CEV can support a variety of [actionable insights and data-driven decisions](#) to promote community well-being. For example, local nonprofits might use CEV data to better understand the landscape of civic participation in their state. Policymakers might use CEV data to inform strategies to encourage service. Researchers might use CEV data to examine questions about how different types of civic engagement are interconnected. Media professionals might use CEV data to craft evidence-based stories about civic life in America.

Q: Where can I find basic statistics like the national formal volunteering rate and number of Americans who informally help their neighbors?

A: AmeriCorps publishes [summary statistics](#) for all measures in the CEV in each wave at the national level, within demographic subgroups, and by state.

Select statistics are also available through [AmeriCorps' Volunteering and Civic Life in America research](#).

Q: What is the CEV survey sample size?

A: The survey universe includes the entire United States civilian noninstitutional population living in households. The U.S. Census Bureau selects a probability sample of approximately 50,000 households to represent this universe and administers the CEV to household members aged 16 and up. About 47,000 individuals typically respond in each wave.

Q: What measures are available in the CEV?

A: The CEV asks about [various forms of civic engagement](#) related to engaging with organizations, neighbors, politics, economic institutions, friends, family, and social issues.

The table below includes the wording for each measure in the 2023 CEV. Please see the [analytic codebook](#) for variable names and other details.

Type of civic engagement	Measure	Question(s) wording	
Organizational engagement	Organizational membership	In the past 12 months, did you belong to any groups, organizations, or associations?	
	Number of organizational memberships	How many groups, organizations, or associations would you say you have belonged to over the past 12 months?	
	Formally volunteering through organizations		In the past 12 months, did you spend any time volunteering for any organization or association?
			Some people don't think of activities they do infrequently or for children's schools or youth organizations as volunteer activities. In the past 12 months, have you done any of these types of activities?
	Frequency of formal volunteering	In the past 12 months, how often did you volunteer?	
	Total hours formally volunteered	In the past 12 months, approximately how many hours did you volunteer?	

Type of civic engagement	Measure	Question(s) wording
	Virtual volunteering	Thinking about the organization or association with which you most actively volunteer, which best describes the proportion of your in-person volunteering to online volunteering?
	Donating to charity	In the past 12 months, did you give money or possessions with a combined value of more than \$25 to a non-political group or organization, such as a charity, school, or religious organization?
Engaging with neighbors	Talking with neighbors	In the past 12 months, how often did you have a conversation or spend time with your neighbors?
	Informally helping neighbors	In the past 12 months, how often did you and your neighbors do favors for each other such as house sitting, watching each other's children, lending tools, and other things to help each other?
	Discussing social issues with neighbors	In the past 12 months, how often did you discuss political, societal, or local issues with your neighbors?
	Taking collective action with neighbors	In the past 12 months, did you get together with other people from your neighborhood to do something positive for your neighborhood or the community?
Political engagement	Voting in local elections	In the past 12 months, did you vote in the last local elections, such as for mayor or school board?
	Donating to political campaigns or organizations	In the past 12 months, did you give money or possessions with a combined value of more than \$25 to a political organization, party, or campaign?
	Attending public meetings	In the past 12 months, did you attend a public meeting, such as a zoning or school board meeting, to discuss a local issue?
	Contacting elected officials	In the past 12 months, did you contact or visit a public official – at any level of government – to express your opinion?
Engaging with friends, family, and social issues	Talking with friends and family	In the past 12 months, how often did you talk to or spend time with friends or family?
	Learning about social issues through the news	In the past 12 months, how often did you read, watch or listen to news or information about political, societal, or local issues?
	Discussing social issues with friends and family	In the past 12 months, how often did you discuss political, societal, or local issues with friends or family?
	Posting about social issues on social media	In the past 12 months, how often did you post your views about political, societal, or local issues on the internet or social media?
Economic engagement	Values-based buying or boycotting	In the past 12 months, did you buy or boycott products or services based on the political values or business practices of that company?

Type of civic engagement	Measure	Question(s) wording
	Views on whether one's workplace or work contributes to the community	Now I'm going to read you a list of statements that might or might not describe your main job. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each of these statements. ... My workplace contributes to the community ... I contribute to the community through my work
	Views on whether one's work is a source of pride or satisfaction	Now I'm going to read you a list of statements that might or might not describe your main job. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each of these statements. ... I am proud to be working for my employer ... My main satisfaction in life comes from work
	Whether one's workplace encourages volunteering or charitable giving	In the past 12 months, has your workplace or employer asked or encouraged employees to volunteer or contribute to a specific cause, for example by participating in an employer-sponsored volunteering day, providing pro bono services, or donating to a charity?

Q: Where can I find technical documentation for the CEV?

A: Analytic codebooks produced by AmeriCorps and full technical documentation produced by the U.S. Census Bureau are available for each wave of the CEV on [AmeriCorps' Open Data](#) portal.

Q: Where can I access CEV data?

A: Analytic data files for Stata, R, and SPSS are available for each wave of the CEV on [AmeriCorps' Open Data](#) portal. Please email AmeriCorpsCEV@americorps.gov to request CEV data in other file formats.

Raw data files in ASCII and .csv formats are available on the [Census website](#).

Select CEV data is also available via [ICPSR](#) and [NBER](#).

Q: How do I convert ASCII files from the U.S. Census website into a form my statistical program will recognize?

A: Historically, the U.S. Census has released Current Population Survey supplement data in ASCII format (.dat) with no headers. Converting these files into SPSS, SAS, Stata, R, or other programs requires using a "read in" file that matches the data with the correct variable names specified in a "data definition file."

To facilitate public use of CEV data, AmeriCorps posts the [read in and data definition files](#) documenting the code needed to read ASCII files into Stata. Users can also download analytic versions of the dataset ready for use. Stata has a built-in function that allows users to export datasets to other common statistical programs.

Q: Which weight(s) should I use with CEV data?

A: Although weighting procedures vary with the research question, CEV users should always apply the appropriate supplement-specific weight to account for the random selection of individual respondents and missing data due to nonresponse.

- Use the nonresponse supplement weight (*PWNRWGT* in the Census documentation; *supwgt* in the AmeriCorps analytical dataset and codebook) for CEV variables that allow for proxy respondents: *pes1* through *pes18* and *peswp2*
- Use the self-response supplement weight (*PWSRWGT* in the Census documentation; *ssupwgt* in the AmeriCorps analytical dataset and codebook) for CEV variables asked only of self-respondents: *peswp1a* through *peswp1d*

Q: Why do some records have missing values for the self-response supplement weight?

A: A typo in the original read-in code for the 2021 and 2023 CEV analytical data files created erroneous missing values on the self-response supplement weight variable (*PWSRWGT* in the Census documentation; *ssupwgt* in the AmeriCorps analytical dataset and codebook). AmeriCorps posted corrected versions of the 2021 and 2023 CEV files on January 16, 2025. If you accessed the analytic dataset prior to January 16, 2025, please re-download the files from data.americorps.gov and confirm that there are no missing values on the self-response supplement weight variable.

Q: What is the smallest geographic unit I can analyze in the CEV?

A: Current Population Survey sampling and weighting procedures are redesigned after each decennial Census to ensure that estimates are reliable at the national and state levels (including the District of Columbia), as well as in the largest 12 Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) where the sample size is sufficient to minimize nonresponse bias.

The latest redesign took place in [2014-15](#). To identify the largest 12 MSAs for CEV waves between 2017 and 2023, please reference 2014 estimates in [Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Metropolitan Statistical Areas in the United States and Puerto Rico: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2019](#). The next redesign will be phased in between April 2024 and the end of 2025.

CEV estimates at smaller geographic units (county, city, census tract, etc.) do not meet Census' technical definition of reliability. Furthermore, CEV data is not publicly available for about 60 percent of counties due to confidentiality laws. This means that the CEV can only generate reliable estimates at the national level, within states and the District of Columbia, and in the largest 12 MSAs.

Q: Can I obtain CEV estimates for my city or county?

A: Due to Current Population Survey [sampling and weighting procedures](#), the CEV cannot generate reliable estimates at the city or county level even when data is pooled across years.

Q: Who can I contact with questions?

A: Please consult the [U.S. Census Bureau's FAQ](#) to learn about other aspects of the Current Population Survey such as response rates, modernization efforts, and survey administration processes.

For more information about the CEV data and insights it yields, please reach out to the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation at AmeriCorpsCEV@americorps.gov.

About the Office of Research and Evaluation

The [AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation](#) assists AmeriCorps and its partners in collecting, analyzing, and disseminating data and insights about AmeriCorps programs and civic life in America.

About AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps, the federal agency for national service and volunteerism, provides opportunities for Americans to serve their country domestically, address the nation's most pressing challenges, improve lives and communities, and strengthen civic engagement. Each year, the agency places more than 200,000 AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers in intensive service roles; and empowers millions more to serve as long-term, short-term, or one-time volunteers. **Learn more at AmeriCorps.gov.**