

Introduction

Sometimes there is no substitute for a book. For those perusing the government's vast collection of demographic and socioeconomic statistics, the Internet is a goldmine. Yet the Internet's adoption has meant the disappearance of the government's once regular and reliable publications. Printing and distributing those trusty sources of insight into American life became too costly—and increasingly no longer cost effective. But the replacement—the vast storehouses of data on the Internet—is not the same.

Those plunging into the Internet often find themselves having a Goldilocks experience—too much of one thing, too little of another, and a lot of effort needed to find something just right. Additionally, screens of information do not allow the kind of thoughtful thumbing and reflection required for business and policy research and analysis. Especially when one tries to gain insight into ongoing trends, diving into what is available on the Internet can be an exercise in frustration. The Bureau of Labor Statistics, for example, replaces its annual labor force data with new numbers each year, making it difficult to find comparable historical labor force tables. The Census Bureau has so many areas of historical data on its web site that users almost have to don a pith helmet to find what they need.

The third edition of *Demographics of the U.S.: Trends and Projections* is the “just right” bowl of porridge, presenting the most important historical statistics and providing the kind of insight difficult to wring from screens of data. *Demographics of the U.S.* collects, in one volume, much of the demographic information that can be found only hit or miss elsewhere. New Strategist's editors scoured web sites and government reference books to locate the most revealing trend data. The result is a compilation of statistics that cannot be found in one single volume anywhere else, documenting the demographic and socioeconomic trends that have transformed the United States since 1950. *Demographics of the U.S.* is a reference book for those who want perspective on the many changes in American life—a perspective critical for understanding what the 21st century will hold.

In this edition of *Demographics of the U.S.* you will find comprehensive coverage of historical statistics, including single-year data on many topics, such as educational attainment, SAT scores, college costs, health insurance, cigarette smoking, homeownership, household income, earnings, poverty rates, labor force participation, self-employment, households by type, living arrangements of children, marital status, immigration, geographic mobility, and more. In addition, *Demographics of the U.S.* presents important trend data on race and ethnicity, homeownership, and

household wealth and spending—a compilation of historical statistics and a discussion of the trends unavailable anywhere else.

How to use this book

Demographics of the U.S. is designed for easy use. It is divided into 10 chapters, organized alphabetically: Attitudes and Behavior, Education, Health, Housing, Income, Labor Force, Living Arrangements, Population, Spending, and Wealth.

Most of the tables in *Demographics of the U.S.* are based on data collected by the federal government, in particular the Census Bureau, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the National Center for Education Statistics, the National Center for Health Statistics, and the Federal Reserve Board. The federal government continues to be the best source of up-to-date, reliable information on the changing characteristics of Americans.

To explore changes in attitudes, New Strategist extracted data from the nationally representative General Social Survey of the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center. NORC conducts the biennial survey through face-to-face interviews with an independently drawn, representative sample of 1,500 to 3,000 noninstitutionalized people aged 18 or older who live in the United States. The GSS is one of the best sources of attitudinal data on Americans available today. Now it is more accessible than ever, with the University of California at Berkeley putting the historical dataset online, allowing users to access this valuable resource like never before. The results are available in the Attitudes and Behavior chapter.

Several government surveys are of particular importance to *Demographics of the U.S.* Most important is the Current Population Survey. The CPS is a nationally representative survey of the civilian noninstitutionalized population aged 15 or older. The Census Bureau takes the survey each month to determine the unemployment rate, collecting information from 50,000 households. Each year, the March survey includes a demographic supplement that is the source of most national data on the characteristics of Americans, such as their incomes, educational attainment, and living arrangements. The CPS is one of the best sources of historical data, with information about various aspects of American life extending back for decades.

The American Community Survey is becoming another important source of demographic data, although it is still too new to provide much historical information. The ACS, an ongoing nationwide survey of 250,000 households per month, provides detailed demographic data at the community level since 2001. Designed to replace the census long-form questionnaire, the ACS includes more than 60 questions that formerly appeared on the long form, such as inquiries about the language spoken at home, or householders' income and education. ACS data are available for the nation, regions, states, counties, metropolitan areas, and smaller geographic units.

The Consumer Expenditure Survey is the data source for the Spending chapter. Sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the CEX is an ongoing study of the day-to-day spending of American households. The data collected by the survey are used to update prices for the Consumer Price Index. The CEX includes an interview survey and a diary survey administered to two separate, nationally representative samples. The average spending figures shown in the Spending chapter of this book are the integrated data from both the diary and interview components of the survey. For the interview survey, about 7,500 consumer units are interviewed on a rotating panel basis each quarter for five consecutive quarters. For the diary survey, another 7,500 consumer units keep weekly diaries of spending for two consecutive weeks.

The Survey of Consumer Finances provides the data for the Wealth chapter. The SCF is a triennial survey taken by the Federal Reserve Board. The SCF collects data on the assets, debt, and net worth of American households. *Demographics of the U.S.* presents SCF data from 1989 through 2004, the latest year for which data are available.

Whenever possible, *Demographics of the U.S.* presents data from 1950 to the latest available. For most demographic and socioeconomic topics, however, it is not possible to find data going back to 1950 because many demographic concepts and classifications have emerged only in the past few decades or have changed so much that comparable historical data are nonexistent. Modern racial and ethnic classifications, for example, did not exist before the late 1970s and 1980s, and they changed again with the 2000 census, which allowed people to choose more than one racial category for the first time in modern history. Several household types now considered important received little attention until the 1960s and 1970s. The obsessive focus on generations and age groups occurred after the birth of the baby-boom generation. Analysts revised educational attainment categories in 1991, so data collected before and after that year are not strictly comparable. Important health indicators were unknown in the mid-20th century and therefore untracked. Modern-day spending and wealth data were not collected until the 1980s. Metropolitan boundaries change continuously. Occupational categories have been updated and reclassified. Despite these limitations, however, *Demographics of the U.S.* reveals much about our past and clarifies our future. It informs without overwhelming through a combination of tables, texts, and charts.

While the federal government collected most of the information published here, the tables in *Demographics of the U.S.* are not simply reprints of government spreadsheets as is the case in many other reference books. Instead, New Strategist's statisticians individually compiled and created most of the tables, adding percent change, index, and other calculations to reveal the stories behind the numbers. Each chapter of *Demographics of the U.S.* includes the demographic and lifestyle information most important to researchers. A page of text accompanies many of the tables,

analyzing the data and highlighting the trends. Readers who want more statistical detail than the tables provide can plumb the original sources listed at the bottom of each table. The book contains a comprehensive table list to help researchers locate the information they need. For a more detailed search, use the index at the back of the book. Also at the back of the book is the glossary, which defines the terms commonly used in tables and text.

Demographics of the U.S.: Trends and Projections explains our complex, confusing, and ever-changing society. It makes sense of our past and sheds light on our future.