

The Trials and Tribulations of Comparing Race and Ethnicity Data

Each decade the questions on the census forms vary to obtain more details about the population of the U.S. One of the major changes for Census 2000 was the modification to the questions on race. You will notice these differences when comparing 1990 data with the 2000 Census data, current year estimates and five-year projections in the Demographic Detail report in DataFinder.

Starting with the 2000 Census, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) requires federal agencies to use a minimum of five race categories, which differ slightly from the 1990 groupings, as seen in the figure below. More importantly, the respondents were allowed to select one or more race categories in which to identify (note the "Multi-Race" option in the figure below). Therefore, the race statistics from Census 2000 are not directly comparable with data from earlier censuses. The addition of the multi-race option tends to overestimate decreases and underestimate increases between a previous census and Census 2000, so use caution when analyzing differences in racial composition over time.

From a Demographic Detail Report

Race and Ethnicity	NEW LONDON	NEW LONDON
	1990	2003
Asian or Pacific Islander	2.2%	
Asian		2.1%
Pacific Islander		0.1%
American Indian, Eskimo, Aleut	0.7%	0.9%
Black	16.8%	18.8%
White	73.0%	63.2%
Other	7.3%	9.2%
Multi-Race		5.7%
Hispanic Ethnicity	12.1%	22.0%
Not of Hispanic Ethnicity	87.9%	78.0%

Separate from race data is Hispanic ethnicity. Hispanic or Latino is defined by the OMB as "a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race." Since ethnicity is separate from race, a person can be of Hispanic ethnicity and belong to any of the race groupings.

Visit <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/race.html> for more information on race. Or you can visit <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hispanic.html> for more information on Hispanic ethnicity.

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