

Notice to Smoothed Series Data Users

BLS will no longer update the smoothed labor force and employment research series. These series, which run from January 1990–December 2017, were last updated in February 2018.

They will remain available online for interested data users, but no further extensions or revisions to the series are planned.

Labor Force and Employment Research Series Smoothed for Population Control Adjustments

Background

Population controls are independent estimates of population used to weight the Current Population Survey (CPS) sample results to reflect the civilian noninstitutional population age 16 and older.

The U.S. Census Bureau develops the population controls for the CPS. The controls are based on decennial census population counts, supplemented with birth and death data and estimates of net international migration. Each year, the Census Bureau adjusts the controls to include the latest information about population change and to incorporate any improvements in the estimation methodology.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) introduces the annual population control adjustments into the CPS estimates with data for January. BLS typically does not revise the historical CPS data series to reflect the updated controls because of the extensive effort needed to regenerate and verify the many time series produced from the CPS, and because the revisions tend to be negligible for most series.

Time series comparability issues and the introduction of smoothed series

Substantial adjustments to the population controls in some years resulted in December–January level shifts that created data comparability problems, particularly the national labor force and employment levels. In December 2003, as a convenience to data users, BLS outlined a method to smooth level shifts in these two series. The method distributes the amount of the level shift incrementally back to January of the relevant decennial census base year, rather than incorporating the entire change in January of the year in which it was implemented. (For more information, see Marisa L. DiNatale, [Creating Comparability in CPS Employment Series](#).) The smoothed series always ends with the December prior to the latest January population control adjustment, and is meant to be used with current-year data from the official series.

In the initial application of the smoothing method, BLS distributed the January 2000 and January 2003 level shifts that resulted from the introduction of Census 2000-based population controls over the relevant historical time periods for each. The January 2000 level shift, which represented the difference between the 1990 census-based estimates and those based to Census 2000, was smoothed from January 1990 through December 1999. The January 2003 level shift, which represented estimated population growth since Census 2000, was smoothed from January 2000 through December 2002.

BLS provided updated versions of these smoothed labor force and employment research series in subsequent years, following significant adjustments to the Census 2000 population base. Each time, the research series were smoothed from January 2000 forward. Data for 1990–1999 were not further revised.

With release of data for January 2012, BLS incorporated the first population controls based on Census 2010; following previous practice, this adjustment effect was smoothed from January 2000 through December 2011. Subsequent updates to the research series smoothed out the effects of intercensal adjustments to the Census 2010 population base made from January 2013–January 2018. Those adjustments represented estimated change in the population since Census 2010 and were therefore smoothed back to January 2010. Data for earlier years were not further revised.

The smoothings may be summarized as follows:

- Data from January 1990– December 1999 were smoothed for the Census 2000 population control adjustment.
- Data from January 2000–December 2010 were smoothed for intercensal adjustments to the Census 2000 population base implemented in January 2003–2011.
- Data from January 2000–December 2011 were smoothed for the Census 2010 population control adjustment introduced in January 2012.
- Data from January 2010–December 2017 were smoothed for intercensal adjustments to the Census 2010 population base implemented in January of 2013–2018.

In fall 2018, BLS announced the discontinuation of the smoothed labor force and employment research series. The last versions of the series, which run from January 1990–December 2017, will remain available online for interested data users, but no further extensions or revisions to the series are planned.

- Smoothed labor force research series: www.bls.gov/cps/smoothed_lf.xlsx
- Smoothed employment research series: www.bls.gov/cps/smoothed_emp.xlsx

Data users should note that the smoothed research series will not match the official CPS estimates in BLS publications and on the BLS website. In addition, these research data would differ from those calculated using other smoothing methods.