

Ancestry

Why Ancestry?

For the 2001 Census the objective of this question is to gain a better understanding of a person's ethnic background, particularly for recent generation Australians. A person's ancestry, in conjunction with the person's birthplace and whether the person's parents were born in Australia or overseas, provide a good indication of the ethnic background of first and second generation Australians.

Ancestry data will also help to identify distinct ethnic or cultural groups within a country such as Maori or Australian South Sea Islander, and groups which are spread across countries such as Kurdish or Indian. Country of birth data alone cannot identify these groups. Identification of these groups is essential for planning and the effective delivery of services to particular ethnic communities.

Results from the 2001 Census ancestry question, together with information from the birthplace, language and religion questions, provide a snapshot of the ethnic background of the Australian population on Census Night.

Ancestry in previous censuses

Ancestry was first included as a question in the 1986 Census. The aim of the question was to measure the ethnic composition of the population as a whole. Evaluation showed that it was not useful for this purpose as there was a high level of subjectivity and confusion about what the question meant, particularly for those people whose families had been in Australia for many generations. Very little use was made of the ancestry data from the 1986 Census. As a consequence, ancestry was not included in either the 1991 or 1996 Censuses.

Ancestry in the 2001 Census

Responding to user demand, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) established a Census Consultative Group on Ancestry, with the objectives of:

- seeking user input;
- identifying user requirements for these data;
- researching international practices; and
- developing and testing questions which may provide acceptable and accurate data at a reasonable cost.

The conclusion of the Consultative Group was that the major policy issues required data for those people who were either born overseas, or whose parents were born overseas. For this purpose it was considered that an ancestry question, in combination with a question on whether the person's parents were born in Australia or overseas, would produce the desired information.

How responses were coded

For the 2001 Census respondents were asked to mark the ancestries they most closely identified with and to consider their ancestry back as far as three generations. Respondents had the option of reporting more than one ancestry but only the first two ancestries they reported were coded for the Census.

For example:

- *One ancestry reported:* where a person's ancestry on their mother's side is English and their ancestry on their father's side is also English they would state one ancestry i.e. English.
- *Two ancestries reported:* where a person's ancestry on their mother's side is English and their ancestry on their father's side is Italian they would state two ancestries i.e. English and Italian. Both responses would be processed for output purposes.
- *Three ancestries reported:* where a person's ancestry on their mother's side is English and Italian and their ancestry on their father's side is German they may state three ancestries i.e. English, Italian and German. The first two responses on the census questionnaire would be processed for output purposes. The tick boxes for English and Italian are before the tick box for Germany, so in this case the ancestries of English and Italian would be processed for output purposes.

The order in which ancestries are listed with tick boxes in the census questionnaire is *English, Irish, Italian, German, Greek, Chinese and Australian*, followed by *Other - please specify* where respondents may write in an ancestry not listed above.

More Than Two Responses

Preliminary investigations indicate that over 90% of people provided one or two ancestries in response to this question. A further 5% of people provided a third ancestry, which was British in origin. For example, if English, Irish and Scottish ancestries were provided, only the first two, English and Irish would be coded. The third response would be 'lost'. The Ancestry question is intended to identify distinct cultural and ethnic groups in order to facilitate effective delivery of services to these groups. As people of British origin do not have a high demand for such services, the non-coding of these responses is not considered to be a significant issue.

More detailed information on the quality of Ancestry data, and the coding of responses, will be provided in a Working Paper due for release in mid 2003.

Output Tables

The question on ancestry caters for multiple responses. As a result some people will be recorded with one ancestry while others will have two. Therefore in a table which shows a selection of ancestries, those people who reported two ancestries will be counted twice and the total for the table will be greater than the number of people in the selected geographic area. To assist users when analysing ancestry data in standard output, for example Basic Community Profile, tables display both total responses and total persons.

Ancestry data can also be disseminated by way of customised tables with data displayed according to preference. For example, the number of persons who have both Australian and Vietnamese ancestry.

Related Variables

The ancestry variable (ANCP) was coded using the Australian Standard Classification of Cultural and Ethnic Groups (ASCCEG). More detailed information relating to ethnic, cultural and religious identity can be obtained by combining Ancestry (ANCP) with variables such as Birthplace of Individual (BPLP), Birthplace of Male Parent (BPMP), Birthplace of Female Parent (BPFP) and Religious Affiliation (RELP).

The 'Ancestry' Classification

The ASCCEG is the statistical standard for classifying data relating to the ethnic and cultural composition of the Australian population. It is the classification used to code Ancestry in the 2001 Census.

ASCCEG is a classification of cultural and ethnic groups based on:

- the geographic area in which a group originated or developed; and
- the similarity of cultural and ethnic groups in terms of social and cultural characteristics.

The ABS has developed this classification to satisfy wide community interest in the ethnic and cultural composition of the Australian population and the characteristics of particular migrant community groups. The classification is intended to provide a standard to meet a growing statistical, administrative and service delivery need for data relating to these interests.

The ASCCEG classification for ethnicity is based on the self-perceived group identification approach, which is based on a self assessed response to a direct question. This approach measures the extent to which individuals associate with particular cultural or ethnic groups. More information on the classification can be found in the publication *Australian Standard Classification of Cultural and Ethnic Groups* (Cat. no. 1249.0) released in 2000 and available on the ABS web site at www.abs.gov.au.