The General Social Survey

GSS

Construction of Two New Migration Variables

GSS Methodological Report #144 (Preliminary) March 2026

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CONSTRUCTION OF TWO NEW MIGRATION VARIABLES

Ahead of the public release of the 2024 General Social Survey (GSS), NORC introduced increased protective measures regarding disclosure to protect respondents. These measures included the coarsening of select variables and the removal of others from the public data file that may pose a greater disclosive risk to respondents. The follow-up question about the detailed length of stay in the U.S. by those born outside of the country (YEARSUSA and MNTHSUSA) was one of these removals from the public data file. In place of these variables in the public data file, the GSS team has constructed two new variables that measure a timeframe of migration based on U.S. migration policy (MIGHIST) and age at migration (MIGAGE). Exhibit 1 shows the value labels for each new variable.

Exhibit 1. Constructed Migration Variables (MIGHIST and MIGAGE).

Migration Period (MIGHIST)		Age at Migration (MIGAGE)	
Value	Label	Value	Label
1	Migrated to the U.S. between 2012 and today	1	Migrated before age 6
2	Migrated to the U.S. between 2002 and 2011	2	Migrated between ages 6-17
3	Migrated to the U.S. between 1996 and 2001	3	Migrated between ages 18-29
4	Migrated to the U.S. between 1982 and 1995	4	Migrated between ages 30-39
5	Migrated before 1982	5	Migrated 40 or older

For MIGHIST, we use MNTHSUSA and YEARSUSA and survey year to present five periods of time significant to U.S. migration policy. The five groupings are as follows:

1. Migration between 2012 and today: This category uses the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), a U.S. immigration policy passed in 2012. While there is some debate on whether DACA impacted new immigration to the U.S., this provides a good boundary while also ensuring sizable cells limit disclosure risk.

2. Migration between 2002 and 2011: The Patriot Act of 2001 introduced new and broader restrictions on immigration in the aftermath of 9/11. Though it included new restrictions on the number of migrants coming to the U.S., the policy increased immigration to the country (Vernon E. Jordan Law Library n.d.; MPI n.d.).

3. Migration between 1996 and 2001: Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRAIRA) added a new set of laws, primarily sanctions and penalties, against undocumented immigrants (LII n.d.).

4. Immigration between 1982 and 1995: Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) was passed in 1986, but the amnesty period started in 1982 (PRB 2024).

5. Immigration prior to 1982: While there are other notable pieces of legislation (e.g., Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965), topping the category at 1982 allows for minimized disclosure risk and will provide some longevity to this variable as we get further away from this point in time.

Exhibit 2 reports the unweighted frequencies and weighted proportions of MIGHIST beginning with the 2018 GSS, the first year length of time in the U.S. (YEARSUSA and MNTHSUSA) was asked on the GSS questionnaire.

Exhibit 2. MIGHIST Frequencies and Weighted Proportions (2018-2024).

Migration Period (MIGHIST)	2018 (n=301)		2021 (n=447)		2022 (n=356)		2024 (n=343)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Migrated to the U.S. between 2012 and today	39	14.3	96	22.4	104	28.6	135	38.2
Migrated to the U.S. between 2002 and 2011	67	25.9	91	23.8	74	20.9	56	18.2
Migrated to the U.S. between 1996 and 2001	55	18.5	58	13.2	51	12.8	46	13.0
Migrated to the U.S. between 1982 and 1995	65	19.9	91	21.5	66	22.1	64	21.6
Migrated before 1982	75	21.5	111	19.1	61	15.7	42	9.0

Note: Proportions weighted with GSS weight WTSSNRPS. Missing values (e.g., "skipped on web") are not shown.

The second newly constructed variable, MIGAGE, uses AGE, MNTHSUSA, and YEARSUSA to determine age at migration to the U.S. We create five categories representing children before school-age, school-age, and important stages of adulthood. The age categories are as follows: migrated before age 6, migrated between ages 6-17, 18-29, 30-39, and migrated at age 40 or older. Exhibit 3 reports the unweighted frequencies and weighted proportions of MIGAGE beginning with the 2018 GSS, the first year length of time in the U.S. (YEARSUSA and MNTHSUSA) was asked on the GSS questionnaire.

Exhibit 3. MIGAGE Frequencies and Weighted Proportions (2018-2024).

Age at Migration (MIGAGE)	2018 (n=299)		2021 (n=403)		2022 (n=336)		2024 (n=332)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Migrated before age 6	46	14.6	74	19.3	46	10.5	40	12.8
Migrated between ages 6-17	57	18.6	91	25.2	73	21.6	54	18.1
Migrated between ages 18-29	117	39.6	130	32.3	130	42.6	141	43.4
Migrated between ages 30-39	46	14.1	79	17.1	57	15.8	66	17.3
Migrated 40 or older	33	13.2	29	6.2	30	9.5	31	8.4

Note: Proportions weighted with GSS weight WTSSNRPS. Missing values (e.g., "skipped on web") are not shown.

The construction of these two new variables allows increased protection for respondents, while also allowing the topic of migration to continue to be researched with new data. Importantly, these variables will allow the GSS to continue providing migration history information about respondents and enhance the offering of migration data for GSS data users while minimizing disclosure risks.

Newly constructed migration variables MIGHIST and MIGAGE were made available in Release 3 (R3) of the 2024 GSS. Researchers interested in the restricted data of YEARSUSA and MNTHSUSA can email gss@norc.org or learn how to prepare a GSS Sensitive Data Application here.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The recommended citation for this report is:

Sparkman, R. (2026). *Construction of Two New Migration Variables.* (General Social Survey Methodological Report No. 144). NORC at the University of Chicago. https://gss.norc.org/content/dam/gss/get-documentation/pdf/reports/methodological-reports/GSS%20MR144%20Migration%20Variables.pdf

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