What's at Stake for Census 2020

The 2020 Census

The census is a constitutionally required, once-a-decade count of every person living in the United States and has a fundamental role in our democracy. This massive effort is the largest peace-time mobilization undertaken by our country to "count everyone once, only once, and in the right place." The census is critical to our democracy for three primary reasons:

1. Census data are used to reapportion seats in the House of Representatives, and to draw state and local legislative districts, ensuring fair political representation.

2. Census data are used to allocate over $800 billion in federal programs and resources to states, localities and our most vulnerable families.

3. Governments, businesses and other decision-makers use census data to make critical economic decisions and to inform public policy solutions.

To achieve its constitutional mandate, the census must be fair and accurate or risk undermining this indispensible population data for the next 10 years.

Census and Philanthropy

The philanthropic community relies on census data to guide philanthropic reach, impact and effectiveness. Philanthropic leaders use census data to understand community and demographic trends and inform fact-based decisions on long-term investments and grants. Inaccurate census data could divert federal resources from communities in need, forcing philanthropy to fill these gaps, while decreasing the effectiveness of these investments.

Threats to the 2020 Census

Unfortunately, the 2020 Census is facing unprecedented challenges, including:

1. **Chronic Underfunding**: Insufficient funding has caused the Census Bureau to to delay, cancel or postpone key practice tests and preparation activities.

2. **Decreasing Public Trust:** The projected self-response rate for 2020 has fallen to 55 percent due to confidentiality concerns, distrust of the government and fears surrounding the addition of a question on citizenship status.

3. **Delayed IT Systems:** The Government Accountability Office has deemed the 2020 Census "at high risk" of failure due to delayed implementation of its IT systems. The top threats are cyber-security, denial-of-service attacks and infiltration of IT systems.

Harm of an Undercount

These threats heighten the risk that the census will fail its constitutional mandate to count every person living in the US. Critically, a disparate count of any one population threatens the integrity and effectiveness of some of the government's basic missions.

1. **Unequal Representation:** The 2020 Census is at risk of disproportionately undercounting certain "hard to count" (HTC) communities, increasing inequality in political representation for these already at-risk groups.

2. **Reduced Funding**: Without accurate data, the federal government will [misallocate funds to states and localities](#) for education, Medicaid, highways, law enforcement and other programs, denying communities the full funding they deserve and need.

3. **Economic Impact**: [Business leaders rely on census](#) demographic and economic data to inform development projections, marketing strategies and investment opportunities. Inaccurate data will derail potential economic growth for 10 years.

4. **Higher Cost**: Lower self-response rates require more expensive and time-consuming follow-up enumeration activities, such as phone interviews or home visits. The [Census Bureau](#) estimates that a one percentage-point increase in non-response would raise costs by $55 million.

5. **Inaccurate Data**: A high undercount would result in a flawed census that yields lower quality and skewed data, and would significantly harm public confidence in the integrity of the Census Bureau for future generations.

Without accurate census data, some communities could see less investment in vital public and private resources.

Impact of a Citizenship Question
The addition of a new and untested [question about citizenship status](#) to the 2020 census form is one of the most detrimental decisions to undermine the 2020 census, drawing [bipartisan concern](#). It is likely to:

1. **Depress participation**: [Qualitative evidence](#) suggests the addition of the question will significantly decrease household willingness to participate in the census.

2. **Increase Inaccuracy and Inequity**: The addition of a controversial question that is expected to impact only certain households may [unconstitutionally](#) fail to produce an "actual enumeration" of the U.S. population.

3. **Increase Costs**: The Census Bureau [conservatively estimates](#) that the additional cost of the new question is $27.5 million. However, without testing the impact on participation rates, in the current environment, the actual cost increase is unknown.

4. **Damage Trust**: [Public disclosure](#) that partisan efforts influenced the decision to add the question on citizenship damages the integrity of the Census Bureau and erodes public trust in how their information will be used by the federal government.

There is [no programmatic or legal reason](#) for the addition of a citizenship question. Now, it may undermine the credibility of the statistical population information we all rely on.

The 2020 Census is just one year away and the time to act is now! Although philanthropy cannot and should not supplant the government's responsibility, given the challenges facing the 2020 Census, funder engagement in supporting a fair and accurate 2020 Census is more important than ever. Additional resources include the [Funders Census Initiative](#) and [United Philanthropy Forum](#). For more questions, contact [Meredith Higashi](#) at Philanthropy Northwest.

Population- and Issue-Specific Information

State-Specific Data (use Counting for Dollars and HTC map)
Census data are used to distribute more than $800 billion dollars to states and local communities for critical programs and services.

Kids
In 2010, more than 2.2 million kids under age five were not included in the census. For more information, including state-specific data, please visit the Leadership Conference for Civil and Human Rights (LCCHR) Census webpage or see the 2018 KidsCount Databook.

Latinos
Latinos have been undercounted for decades. In 2010, Hispanic children under age five were missed at twice the rate of non-Hispanic White children. For more, including state-specific data, visit the LCCHR Census webpage.

Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders
Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders have been undercounted for decades. Roughly one in five Asian Americans and one third of NHPIs live in HTC census tracts. For more, including state-specific data, visit the LCCHR Census webpage.

African Americans
African Americans have been undercounted for centuries. More than two percent of African Americans and 10 percent of Black men aged 30-49 were missed in 2010. More than one in three African Americans live in HTC census tracts. For more information, including state-specific data, visit the LCCHR Census webpage.

American Indians and Alaska Natives
American Indians and Alaska Natives have been undercounted for centuries. Today, roughly one quarter of Native Americans live in HTC census tracts. For more information, including state-specific data, visit the National Congress of American Indians webpage.

Healthy Communities
Census data are used to distribute billions for federal public health programs, including $312 billion to Medicaid, $69 billion to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and $11 billion to the State Children's Health Insurance Program. For more information, see the Counting for Dollars analysis.

Education
Census data are used to distribute billions for educational programs, including $14 billion to Title I grants, $11 billion to the National School Lunch Program and $11 billion to special education grants. For more information, see the Counting for Dollars analysis.

Housing
Census data are used to distribute billions to prevent homelessness and for other housing programs, including $10 billion to Section 8 housing programs. For more information, see the Counting for Dollars analysis.