



FACT SHEET: THE CENSUS AND CIVIL RIGHTS

Why is the 2020 Census a Civil Rights Issue?

Fair, proportionate voting representation in our democracy depends on valid census data. That's why the census is required by the U.S. Constitution.

Federal agencies rely on census and American Community Service (ACS) data to monitor discrimination and implement civil rights laws that protect voting rights, equal employment opportunity, and more.

Census and ACS data also determine federal funding for health care, education, housing, food and income security, rural access to broadband, and other services.

Communities of color, urban and rural low-income households, immigrants, and young children are all at risk of being missed at disproportionately high rates. Being undercounted deprives already vulnerable communities of fair representation and vital community resources.

Why is the Census an Urgent Issue Right Now?

2020 may seem far off, but decisions being made now will determine whether planning and funding are sufficient to do the job right.

Decisions made this year by the Census Bureau, the Office of Management and Budget, Congress, and other policymakers will have a huge impact on the accuracy of the 2020 census and the effective collection and broad dissemination of ACS data.

Congress must oversee census planning and allocate enough money to ensure that the 2020 census counts everyone fairly and accurately, including historically undercounted population groups.

First Principles for a Fair and Accurate 2020 Census

Decisions about the conduct of the 2020 census must be driven primarily by the need to get the count right.

Congress, which has the constitutional responsibility for the census, must provide sufficient oversight and funding to support a robust and transparent planning process.

The Leadership Conference Education Fund builds public will for federal policies that promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States. The Education Fund's campaigns empower and mobilize advocates around the country to push for progressive change in the United States. For more information on The Education Fund, visit <http://leadershipconferenceedfund.org/>.



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Policymakers must consider the value of obtaining accurate census data, as well as the dire consequences of failing to reach hard-to-count populations and produce high-quality data needed to enforce civil rights protections.

Needs, Stakes, and Risks

The Census Bureau must have a significant “ramp-up” in funding to build the IT and operational infrastructure in time for the 2020 census dress rehearsal – called the End-to-End Census Test – in 2018. Failure to fully fund these critical activities now will jeopardize an accurate count and could increase census costs by billions of dollars.

The American Community Survey (ACS)— the only source of reliable, comparable community-level data for the implementation of civil rights laws and for the analysis of emerging needs of neighborhoods, which helps community leaders plan for the future, and locate new schools, recreational areas, hospitals, transportation, and police and fire departments— is threatened by proposed budget cuts and efforts to make participation optional. The ACS is the ongoing survey that updates information for all communities between censuses.

Any new approaches adopted by the Census Bureau (including an Internet response option, use of administrative records, and revised census questions on race and ethnicity) must help ensure that the 2020 census and the ACS collect and produce the most accurate, detailed, and useful information about the nation's diverse population. The 2020 census must be as or more accurate than the 2010 Census.

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