

THE PURPLE AISLE ISSUE DOSSIER

U.S. CENSUS

2020

*How might we prevent undercounting
and increase participation in the 2020 Census?*



SEPTEMBER 2019

Thank you to
our partners:



California
Policy &
Research
Initiative



“The actual Enumeration shall be made within three Years after the first Meeting of the Congress of the United States, and within every subsequent Term of ten Years, in such Manner as they shall by Law direct. The Number of Representatives shall not exceed one for every thirty Thousand, but each State shall have at Least one Representative;”

ARTICLE 1, SECTION 2 OF THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION



16 M

people omitted in the 2010 census.

Twice as many black children were missed than white children in the 2010 Census.

2x



\$2B+

shortfall for the Census Bureau's budget

\$40M



estimated need in additional outreach funding to count New York's 4.8 million "hard-to-count" population

It costs the census bureau **\$.042** to send a mailer, but **\$25** to knock on a door

Each year, 325 federal programs use Census derived datasets to distribute more than

\$900B

\$25T

from 2021-2030 distributed to states and localities based off of Census data.

Estimated state gain/loss of seats in House of Representatives by from 2020 reapportionment:

GAIN

	Arizona	+1
	Colorado	+1
	Florida	+2
	Montana	+1
	North Carolina	+1
	Oregon	+1
	Texas	+3

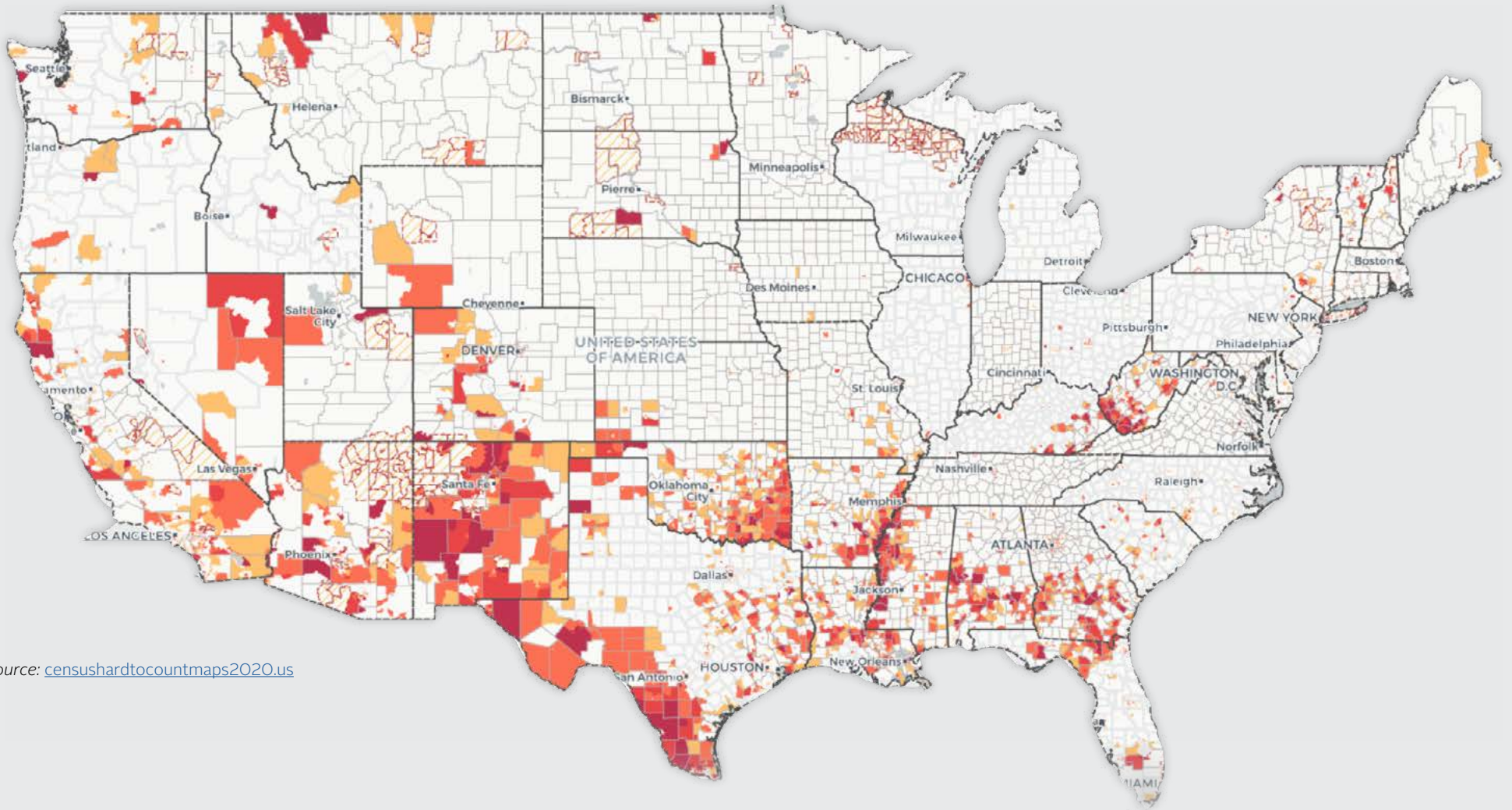
LOSE

	Alabama	-1
	California	-1/+0
	Illinois	-1
	Michigan	-1
	Minnesota	-1/+0
	New York	-2
	Ohio	-1
	Rhode Island	-1
	West Virginia	-1

7.8B

statistics generated from 308 million people in the 2010 census.

MAPPING HARD TO COUNT COMMUNITIES¹



Source: censushardtocountmaps2020.us

¹ <https://www.censushardtocountmaps2020.us/?latlng=37.70121%2C-91.76331&z=8&query=coordinates%3A%3A38.83543%2C-92.31262&arp=arpRaceEthnicity>



What is the Census and why is it important?

Mandated by Article 1, Section 2 of the United States Constitution, the decennial Census represents an enumeration, an actual count of people living in the United States. The Census determines federal Congressional reapportionment of seats in the House of Representatives among the states. It forms the basis upon which trillions of taxpayer money is distributed. Recent figures estimate \$900 billion dollars a year. Both public and private sector stakeholders rely on Census data for key decisions.

The Census Bureau spends billions of dollars in the preparation, execution, and aftermath of the decennial enumeration. In 2010 and prior, the Bureau has mailed forms to American households for residents fill out and send back. An army of 500,000 enumerators visited homes and conducted strategic interviews for quality control. These enumerators then target households that did not return the Census by knocking on doors.

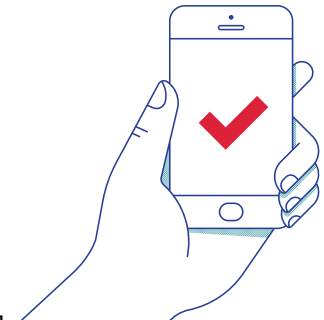
2020 is the first year that the Census will be available to fill-out online and via 1-800 number, using a code received in the mail. It costs the U.S. Census Bureau \$0.42 to send a mailer but \$25 to send a person to knock on a door for follow-up. Online access promises to reduce collection costs, but also presents its own new challenges, such as access to broadband, technological literacy, and cybersecurity. The advancement of technology represents a long-term trend that will continue to impact Census counts in years to come.

As mentioned, the Census impacts three large questions: 1) federal Congressional reapportionment, 2) federal appropriations, and 3) federal statistics that inform planning and strategy in the private sector and throughout government. To supplement the decennial census, the Census Bureau administers the ongoing American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS uses a sampling of data to extrapolate changes nationwide. The ACS relies on the decennial census to generate those projections, so mistakes are not easily corrected.

[Some states are projected to be affected by reapportionment](#) due to population growth or lack thereof.

Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Montana, North Carolina, Oregon, and Texas all stand to gain at least one seat in the House of Representatives. Florida could gain two seats. Texas could gain up to three seats. California, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Rhode Island, and West Virginia may lose one seat, while New York could lose up to two. Whether or not California and Minnesota lose a seat depends on the outcomes of the Census count -- to that end California [has invested over \\$150 million dollars](#) into additional Census outreach to distribute to local governments, community based organizations, and other outreach efforts.

The Census strives to count everybody where they live. That policy informs prison gerrymandering, or [considering incarcerated people as residents](#) of the town where the prison is located. Because states use Census data to draw their own districts, prison gerrymandering can warp local and state representation. The Prison Policy Initiative's Prison Gerrymandering Project notes that [60% of Illinois prisoners are from Cook County](#), but 99% of those prisoners are counted outside of the county. In this way, incarcerated populations can distort the political map and government funding formulae.



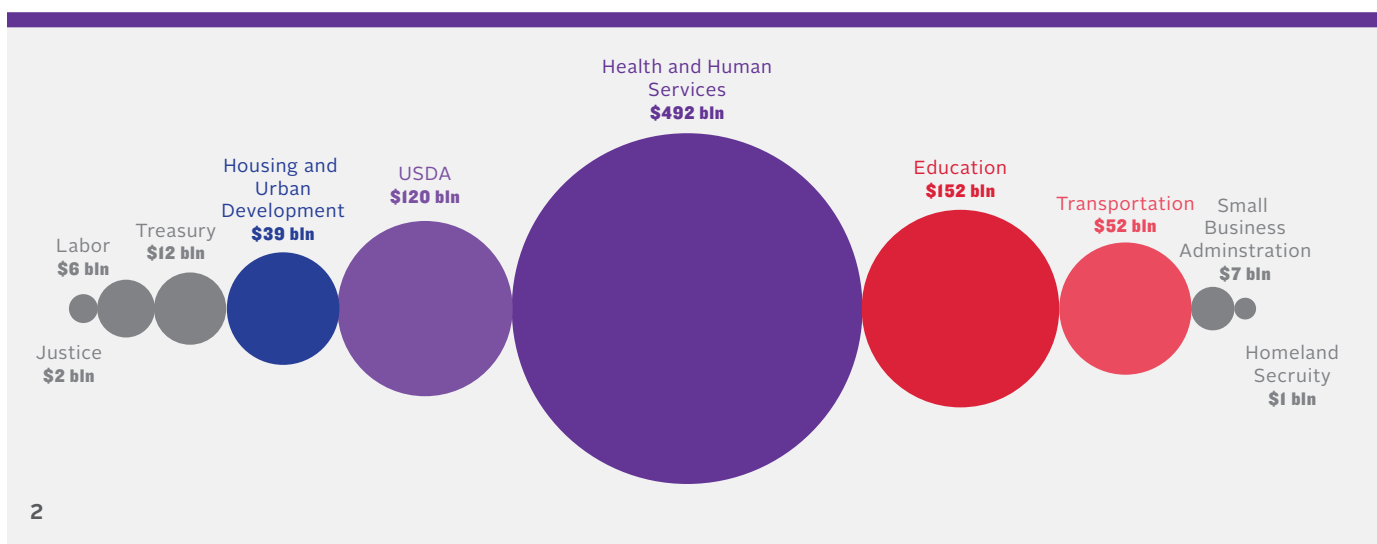
2020

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phone or mobile.

Census data impacts federal funding in [four ways](#):

- Eligibility Criteria - ex. USDA assistance programs for farmers or HUD rental assistance
- Census-related Formulae - ex. Block grants to states based on population size, poverty rates, etc.
- Selection Preferences - in the award of government contracts and projects
- Census-related data - interest rates for federal loans are determined with Census data

States and cities risk losing out on a considerable amount of federal appropriations when their populations are undercounted. The graphic illustrates the amount of money large federal departments divvy up to states based on census derived data.



Funding for the Children's Healthcare Insurance Program (CHIP) is distributed with Census data, directly impacting [one in every eight](#) American children.

Census funding implicates many sectors and historically under-counted populations suffer the most from inaccuracies. Census data directly impacts how the government [approaches](#):

- Voting rights
- Fair housing
- Employment discrimination
- Health disparities

- Tribal Resource Allocation
- Environmental Justice (through EPA's environmental justice mapping and screening tool)
- School funding and bilingual programs

Many companies rely on Census data for business decisions. Data sold by vendors draws on foundational Census and ACS data. Accurate Census data is invaluable to local and regional planners. Inaccuracies obscure both threats and opportunities to the private and public sectors alike, from the federal to the local level.



Current Concerns

16 million people were missed in the 2010 Census. In the lead up to 2020, several factors give those interested in an accurate Census concern:

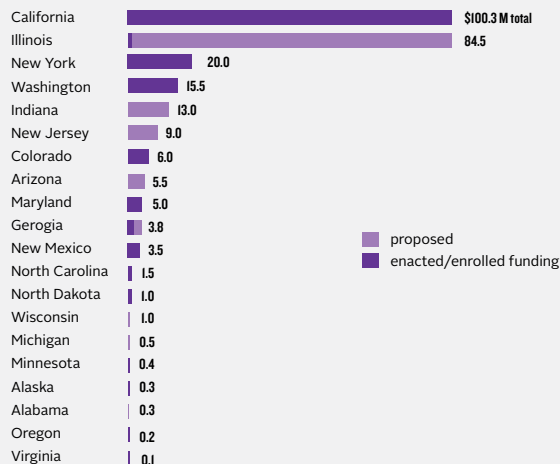
- Funding Shortfall
- Omissions
- Climate of Fear
- Technology

FUNDING

Historically, states have abdicated Census responsibilities to the federal government. Recently, states have begun to seriously invest in achieving complete counts. The New York Legislature founded the first Complete Count Committee for the 1990 Census. The Fiscal Institute of New York projected that the state would need to invest an additional \$40 million dollars to reach its hard-to-count (HTC) populations on top of federal efforts. As shown below, California has invested significantly, but the spread of state investment remains both low and uneven.

States to spend big on census prep³

Anticipating a drop in federal funding, states have proposed and enacted millions of dollars to prepare for the 2020 census.



Source: National Conference of State Legislators Jacob Fischler and Randy Leonard/CQ Roll Call

This funding push from States comes amid the threat of an underfunded Census. As the below charts show, spending did not match historic levels in the run-up to the 2020 Census and the Bureau is expected to hire 40% less enumerators. A test conducted by the Census Bureau in 2018 in Rhode Island to estimate response rates for the 2020 Census found [worryingly low response rates](#). A constrained budget also meant that the Bureau could not conduct similar tests in other contexts, like rural communities.

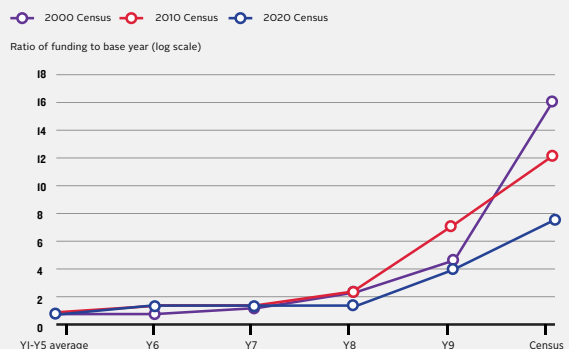
Number of census enumerators in 2010 vs. 2020



Source: Data from the US Census Bureau and Mother Jones

Census 2020 Funding Lags over the Decade

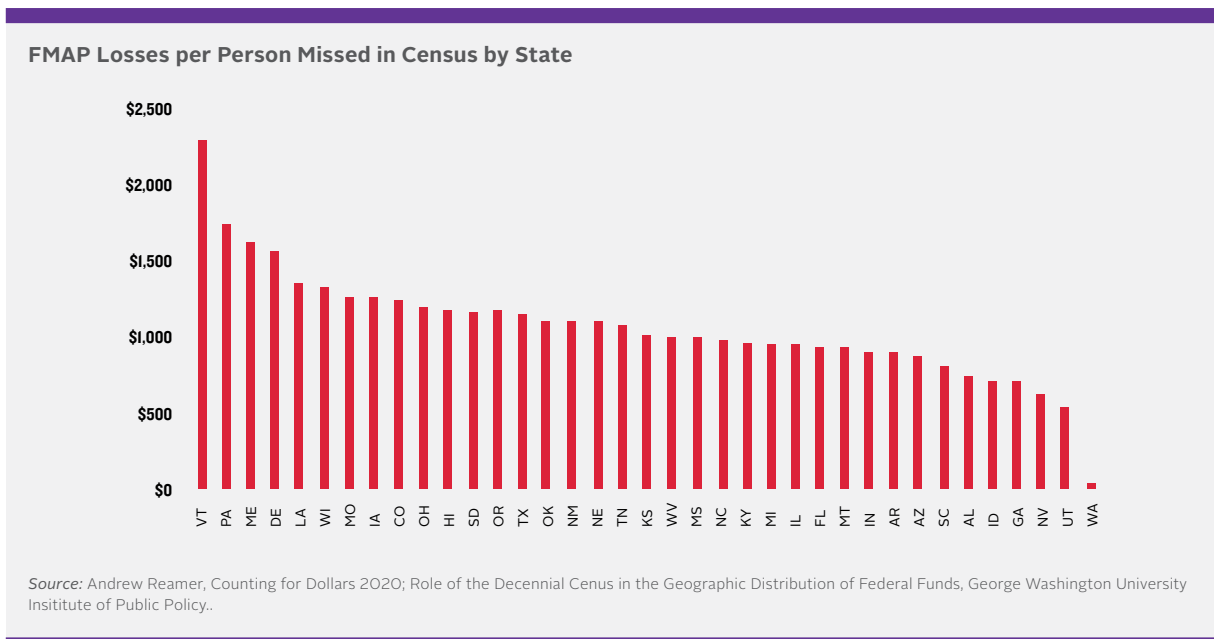
Authorized presidential budget for Census Bureau, 1991-2020



Source: "Budget Authority" Excel file available at "Public Budget Database," US Office of Management and Budget, accessed March 18, 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/supplemental-materials/>

Note: Authorized budget reflects the amount of funding Congress allows a federal agency to spend.

Wide coalitions have emerged to address the funding shortfall. State and municipal governments, the private sector, and foundations have all contributed money to fund efforts across the country. Minnesota, New York, and California enjoy robust Complete Count Committees. But not all states and localities have committed in the same way. That results in omissions and less funds appropriately distributed. See the relationship between Census counts and the Family Medical Assistance Program:



OMISSIONS

While net undercount is calculated by subtracting the amount of people over counted from the amount of people omitted. The issue lies in which demographics get over counted and which communities the Census historically misses.

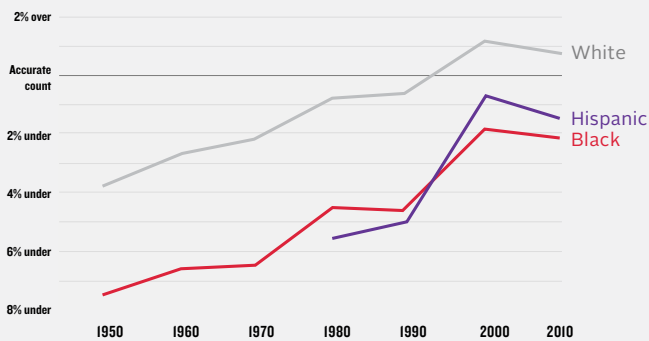
Who is under-counted?

- Ethnic minorities
- Urban pop.
- Rural pop.
- Renters
- Poorer folk
- Non-English speakers
- Young children
- Complex households

Who is over-counted?

- White pop.
- Homeowners
- Suburban
- Wealthier

How much racial groups have been under-or overcounted since 1950⁴



Source: Data from the US Census Bureau's Population Division and Mother Jones

A multiplicity of reasons lurk behind the disparities demonstrated above. A lot of government mistrust is expressed by [Indigenous Americans](#) and non-White Hispanic/Latinx populations. [32% of Arab Americans](#) reported being unlikely to answer the census, while [55% of Asian Americans](#) did not know of the census. Many do not understand how the Census impacts their communities. Outreach specifics may look different across communities, but messaging emphasizing the impact of the Census on community resources and the future tests well.

An inaccurate Census endangers children in particular. Children suffer from extreme rates of omission. The Annie E. Casey Foundation estimates that the 2020 census risks undercounting children younger than five by [2 million](#). Compounding factors [include](#) whether a child lives with their grandparents or non-relatives, in a linguistically isolated home, and is a person of color. Inaccuracies devastate children because federal investment in their communities - or the lack thereof - impacts them for the most formative decade of their lives.

These barriers have a cumulative effect. For example - Black millennials who tend to live and rent in urban areas, may be unfamiliar with the census, may have mistrust of government - face serious risk of omission. Barriers to minority homeownership and other “overcount” factors

compound these issues. Online access is intended to appeal to millennials and hard-to-count populations in general, like rural communities. With the risk of omissions looming so large, how might we ensure a vulnerable segment’s participation in the Census to minimize undercounts?

CLIMATE OF FEAR AND POLITICIZATION

The 2020 Census arrives in an environment poisoned by a climate of fear. [Trust in government has reached historic lows](#). This lack of trust is a driving force behind reluctance to fill-out and return the Census, especially among specific minority segments. When the Bureau studied barriers to participation, they found that [a quarter of respondents perceived that the information would be used against them](#).

In this context, the “citizenship question” proposed by the current administration complicated the already challenging quest for a complete enumeration. Organizers saw a significant reduction in likelihood to return the Census when a citizenship question was included. Latinx focus groups in the San Joaquin valley found that probability to answer the Census fell from [84% to 46%](#) when the citizenship question was included.

Unlike the Census, the ACS gathers citizenship data. Because the ACS uses sampling to extrapolate data based on decennial Census information, it does not threaten response rates as the citizenship question on the enumeration would. Moreover, citizenship data from the ACS is [not especially reliable](#).

Finally, the 2020 Census is in rare company in that it is one of the few Censuses in U.S. history to coincide with a presidential election. This element sharpens the partisan stakes, particularly given the contemporary focus on immigration policy.

⁴ <https://www.vox.com/2018/5/7/17286692/census-republicans-funding-undercount-data-chart>

TECHNOLOGY - CYBERSECURITY AND PRIVACY

Technologically, the Census Bureau has taken many steps to protect individual Census data from exploitation. Advances in data science, such as database reconstruction theory, threaten to overcome traditional measures of data privacy. Bureau experts seek to address these concerns in 2020 by implementing “differential privacy”. Differential privacy is a set of constraints on data algorithms that limits publication of private, sensitive information stored in a statistical database.

However, critics have expressed concern that differential privacy measures will needlessly obscure localized data, posing a significant cost to smaller, municipal governments, planners, and businesses. New constraints could significantly impede the flow of information between end users and institutions and companies that provide Census-linked data. In a most extreme case scenario, access to full sets of Census data [could be limited to secure, site-specific access](#).

Privacy concerns persist as well. Differential privacy does not address the cybersecurity implications of filling out Census information online via mobile. At the same time, online integration may be key to accessing traditionally hard-to-count populations, such as urban, millennial, and renter demographic segments. How might technology improve Census access, accuracy, and utility while protecting data privacy and cybersecurity?



Conclusion

The 2020 Census poses both old and new challenges. Historically hard-to-count populations face a climate of fear and a lack of comprehensive funding in a context of declining responses and networks of misinformation. New technology brings the danger of cybersecurity exploitation and privacy safeguards precluding the use of relevant data. These factors and more present a constant communication challenge for advocates, funders, and implementers. The success of the 2020 Census, and its failures, will echo for the next decade and beyond.

Civil society and community-based organizations have convened in broad coalitions regionally and nationally, including partners from local and state governments. Such organizing bodes well for the future. Leaders in the field, like New York, California, and Minnesota establish best practices. The political nature of the Census has fueled greater pushes for independent redistricting committees. And the advent of new technology offers an opportunity to expand access and increase accuracy while forcing policymakers to consider new risks and challenges.

To that end, how might we lower barriers to Census participation in hard-to-count communities to achieve a fair, accurate, and secure enumeration in 2020 and beyond?

A SPECIAL THANKS TO THE ORGANIZATIONS WHO WERE CONSULTED IN THIS DOSSIER'S CREATION:

[Census Counts](#)

[Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics](#)

[Demos](#)

[Minnesotans for the American Community Survey](#)

[National Association of Counties](#)

[National Coalition on Black Civic Participation](#)

[National Conference on State Legislatures](#)

[New York Counts 2020](#)

