

INFORM. INSPIRE. DEVELOP CIVIC LEADERS.

THE POLICY CIRCLE

THE DECENNIAL CENSUS



➤ WHAT IS THE U.S. CENSUS? ◀

IN 1790, THE FOUNDERS INCLUDED IN THE CONSTITUTION A PLAN “TO COUNT EVERY PERSON LIVING IN THE NEWLY CREATED UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, AND TO USE THAT COUNT TO DETERMINE REPRESENTATION IN THE CONGRESS.” THIS PLAN, CALLED THE CENSUS, IS THE “ONCE-A-DECADE POPULATION AND HOUSING COUNT OF ALL 50 STATES, THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, PUERTO RICO AND THE ISLAND AREAS AS REQUIRED BY THE U.S. CONSTITUTION.”

INFORMATION GATHERED FROM THE CENSUS IS USED TO ALLOCATE OVER \$1.5 TRILLION IN SPENDING, AND BILLIONS MORE IN PRIVATE SECTOR INVESTMENT. THIS INFORMATION ALSO DRIVES THE REDISTRIBUTION OF SEATS IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, THE FEDERAL LEVEL POLICYMAKERS CLOSEST TO THEIR CONSTITUENTS. THE POPULATION COUNT ANSWERS QUESTIONS FROM WHO WE ARE AND WHERE WE LIVE, TO WHICH COMMUNITIES NEED NEW SCHOOLS OR ROADS AND WHAT SERVICES SHOULD BE OFFERED BASED ON REGIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS. ALL OF THESE ANSWERS AFFECT THE NATION AT LARGE, AS WELL AS EACH COMMUNITY ACROSS THE COUNTRY AND ITS INDIVIDUAL RESIDENTS, BUSINESSES, AND POLICYMAKERS.

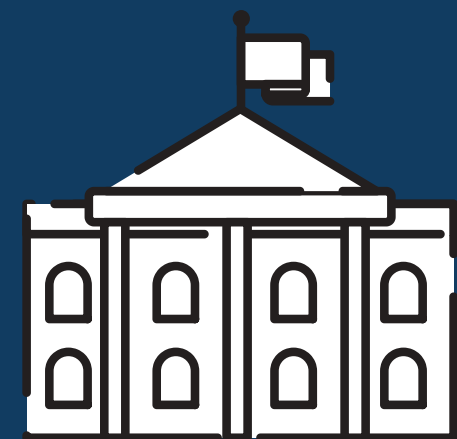


A CENSUS BUREAU REPORT FOUND CENSUS DATA IN 2015 HELPED ALLOCATE \$675 BILLION IN FEDERAL FUNDING FOR 132 PROGRAMS FROM MEDICARE AND MEDICAID TO SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP) AND HEAD START.

FEDERAL LAW MANDATES ALL HOUSEHOLDS PARTICIPATE IN THE CENSUS. ANY HOUSEHOLD MEMBER OVER 18 WHO DOES NOT PARTICIPATE CAN FACE MINIMUM FINES OF \$5,000, BUT THE LAST CENSUS FAILURE TO BE PROSECUTED WAS IN 1790.

POPULATION CHANGES MEASURED BY THE CENSUS ARE USED TO REDRAW BOUNDARIES FOR LEGISLATIVE DISTRICTS. AFTER THE 2020 CENSUS, 13 STATES EITHER LOST OR GAINED HOUSE SEATS/ELECTORAL VOTES. TEXAS GAINED 2; COLORADO, FLORIDA, MONTANA, NORTH CAROLINA, AND OREGON GAINED 1; CALIFORNIA, ILLINOIS, MICHIGAN, NEW YORK, OHIO, PENNSYLVANIA, AND WEST VIRGINIA LOST 1.

QUESTIONS ON THE CENSUS INCLUDE GENERAL CONTACT INFORMATION AND INFORMATION ON RESIDENCY, ETHNICITY, AND AGE. THE CENSUS BUREAU IS REQUIRED BY LAW TO PROTECT INDIVIDUALS' INFORMATION, ALL OF WHICH IS COMBINED TO ONLY BE USED FOR STATISTICAL PURPOSES. FOR THE 2020 CENSUS, INDIVIDUALS CAN FILL OUT THE FORM ONLINE, BY MAIL, OR BY PHONE.



GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT



THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS AND THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM, SPECIFICALLY THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON CIVIL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES, HAVE LEGISLATIVE AND OVERSIGHT JURISDICTION OVER THE CENSUS AND THE CENSUS BUREAU. FOR EXAMPLE, THE CENSUS BUREAU NEEDS TO SUBMIT TO CONGRESS THE QUESTIONS THAT WILL BE ON THE CENSUS FOR APPROVAL.

CENSUS INFORMATION IS USED TO SHAPE OTHER FEDERAL STATISTICAL SURVEYS AND TO GENERATE POPULATION PROJECTIONS TO BE USED IN ECONOMIC INDICES AND SPENDING MODELS. ADDITIONAL PUBLIC SECTOR USES FOR CENSUS DATA INCLUDE PROMOTING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SHAPING TAX POLICY. IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR, BUSINESSES FREQUENTLY USE CENSUS DATA TO MAKE DECISIONS ON INVESTMENTS, MARKETING, AND ADVERTISING.

CENSUS BUREAU DATA AFFECT FUNDS IN ONE OF THREE WAYS:

- **SELECTION OF RECIPIENTS:** CENSUS DATA DEFINE THE ELIGIBILITY CHARACTERISTICS FOR THOSE WHO RECEIVE SERVICES FROM SPECIFIC PROGRAMS, OR CHARACTERISTICS OF PUBLIC OR PRIVATE ENTITIES ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE FUNDS TO PROVIDE THOSE SERVICE.
- **ALLOCATION OF FUNDS:** CENSUS DATA DETERMINE HOW FUNDS ARE DISTRIBUTED TO ELIGIBLE RECIPIENTS.
- **ASSESSMENT OF PROGRAMS:** CENSUS DATA ENSURE PROGRAMS FUNCTION ACCORDING TO PLAN, AND EXPLORE POTENTIAL ALTERNATIVE METHODS OF DISTRIBUTING FUNDS.

EVERY TEN YEARS, STATES USE CENSUS DATA TO REDRAW DISTRICTS USED TO ELECT MEMBERS OF THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES AND OF STATE LEGISLATURES. CRITERIA FOR DRAWING DISTRICTS EXISTS, BUT THERE ARE NO CONSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENTS DICTATING HOW STATES SHOULD GO ABOUT REDISTRICTING. REDISTRICTING FALLS TO STATE LEGISLATURES, COMMISSIONS, OR A COMBINATION OF BOTH, DEPENDING ON THE STATE.



➤ FRAMING THE ISSUE ◀



THE CENSUS BUREAU EXISTS “TO SHARE AS MUCH USEFUL DATA AS POSSIBLE” WITH BUSINESSES AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES. THE AMOUNT OF DATA CAN BE CONCERNING; IN 2018, THE CENSUS BUREAU DISCOVERED ANYONE WITH THE PROPER DATA TOOLS COULD USE 2010 CENSUS STATISTICS TO IDENTIFY ONE IN SIX AMERICANS. THE CENSUS DEPENDS ON AMERICANS TRUSTING THE GOVERNMENT TO KEEP THEIR PERSONAL INFORMATION SAFE. FEDERAL LAWS PROTECT DATA COLLECTED BY THE CENSUS FROM ANY OTHER USE, EVEN IN COURT, AND THE CENSUS BUREAU HAS TAKEN STEPS TO PREVENT IDENTIFICATION OF SPECIFIC HOUSEHOLDS AND INDIVIDUALS.

THE COMMERCE DEPARTMENT UNDER THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION WANTED TO ASK A CITIZENSHIP QUESTION ON THE 2020 CENSUS, WHICH CREATED QUITE A BIT OF TURBULENCE. THREE COURTS BLOCKED THE ADMITTANCE OF SUCH A QUESTION TO THE CENSUS. ON JUNE 27, 2019, THE SUPREME COURT AGREED WITH THE LOWER COURTS IN A 5-4 DECISION. CRITICS ARGUED THE QUESTION WOULD “DETER IMMIGRANTS FROM TAKING PART IN THE POPULATION COUNT FOR FEAR OF DEPORTATION...TO ENGINEER A DELIBERATE UNDERCOUNT OF PLACES WITH HIGH IMMIGRANT AND LATINO CONCENTRATIONS.” IF THIS REASONING IS CORRECT, INCLUDING THE QUESTION WOULD RESULT IN COMMUNITIES WITH LARGE IMMIGRANT POPULATIONS RECEIVING LESS POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AND GOVERNMENT FUNDING. AT THE SAME TIME, NOT RESPONDING TO THE CENSUS VIOLATES FEDERAL LAW.

COMPETITIVENESS IS SOMETIMES A CRITERIA FOR REDISTRICTING, “WITH THE GOAL OF CREATING DISTRICTS THAT WILL BE AS EVENLY SPLIT IN TWO-PARTY PARTISANSHIP AS POSSIBLE,” BUT IT IS ALSO HIGHLY CONTROVERSIAL BECAUSE IT REQUIRES WHOEVER DRAWS THE LINES “TO ACTIVELY CONSIDER THE IMPACT OF THE DISTRICTS ON ELECTORAL OUTCOMES.” MORE OFTEN, WHOEVER DRAWS THE LINES IS EXPLICITLY FORBIDDEN FROM CONSIDERING PARTISANSHIP DATA LIKE VOTING HISTORY OR VOTER REGISTRATION. ANOTHER CONSIDERATION IS MAJORITY-MINORITY DISTRICTS. THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT MANDATES “THAT ELECTORAL DISTRICT LINES CANNOT BE DRAWN IN SUCH A MANNER HAS TO ‘IMPROPERLY DILUTE MINORITIES’ VOTING POWER.” IN MAJORITY-MINORITY DISTRICTS, “A RACIAL OR LANGUAGE MINORITY GROUP COMPRISES A VOTING MAJORITY.”

GERRYMANDERING IS “THE PRACTICE OF DRAWING ELECTORAL DISTRICT LINES TO FAVOR ONE POLITICAL PARTY, INDIVIDUAL, OR CONSTITUENCY OVER ANOTHER.” THE NATION’S HISTORY IS FULL OF EXAMPLES OF LAWMAKERS REDRAWING ELECTORAL DISTRICT MAPS IN SUCH A WAY THAT GIVES THEIR RESPECTIVE PARTIES MORE ELECTORAL POWER. ELECTION REFORMERS SAY STATE LEGISLATURES REDRAW DISTRICTS “TO CEMENT THEIR GRIP ON POWER AND DILUTE THE VOTING POWER OF PEOPLE WHO SUPPORT THE RIVAL PARTY,” WHICH AFFECTS VOTING RIGHTS. REGULATION IS DIFFICULT IN THAT THERE IS NO WAY TO RELIABLY IDENTIFY PARTISAN GERRYMANDERING, NOR IS THERE A SINGLE WAY TO CORRECT GERRYMANDERING.





SOLUTIONS



IN 2018, RUMORS ON SOCIAL MEDIA SPREAD THAT CENSUS TAKERS LOOKING TO CONFIRM ADDRESSES WERE ACTUALLY ROBBERS SCOPING OUT NEIGHBORHOODS. THE CENSUS BUREAU IMPLEMENTED A TRUST AND SAFETY TEAM TO COMBAT THIS KIND OF FALSE CLAIM, AND OTHER MISLEADING INFORMATION ABOUT THE CENSUS. THE NEW TASK FORCE PARTNERS WITH SOCIAL MEDIA SITES INCLUDING TWITTER AND FACEBOOK, WHICH “HAVE BEEN GRAPPLING WITH REPEATED ATTEMPTS BY PEOPLE TO USE THEIR PLATFORMS TO CREATE FALSE NARRATIVES TO SWAY POPULAR OPINION,” PARTICULARLY DURING THE 2016 ELECTION. THESE COMPANIES HAVE THE ABILITY TO “REMOVE OR LOWER THE RANKING OF CONTENT THAT IS CONSIDERED HARMFUL TO THE COUNT.” ADDITIONALLY, THE CENSUS BUREAU INITIATED A \$500 MILLION COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGN TO SUPPLY FACTS TO COUNTER ANY FALSE CLAIMS AND EDUCATE PEOPLE ON HOW THE POPULATION COUNT WORKS AND WHAT IT ENTAILS.

CALIFORNIA WAS ONE STATE CONCERNED ABOUT UNDERCOUNTING, AND BUDGETED \$187 MILLION ON A CAMPAIGN TO GET ITS 40 MILLION RESIDENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE 2020 CENSUS. THIS INCLUDED CUSTOM MARKETING CAMPAIGNS AND PARTNERSHIPS WITH NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS THAT HAVE BEEN “SHOWERED WITH GRANTS TO BOOST RESPONSE IN HARD-TO-COUNT AREAS.” IN RURAL CALIFORNIA, FOR EXAMPLE, WHERE LACK OF INTERNET SERVICE COULD IMPEDE RESPONSES, EFFORTS FOCUSED ON COMMUNITY EVENTS AND USING BILLBOARDS. ABOUT HALF THE STATES ALLOTTED CLOSE TO \$300 MILLION FOR SIMILAR CENSUS CAMPAIGNS.

THE OTHER HALF OF THE STATES WERE MORE LIKE TEXAS (WITH 29 MILLION RESIDENTS, SECOND IN POPULATION BEHIND CALIFORNIA), WHERE “A VOLUNTEER CORPS OF CIVIC GROUPS, PHILANTHROPIES, LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, AND OTHERS” TRIED TO REACH THOSE WHO COULD BE UNDERCOUNTED. THE TEXAS LEGISLATURE FAILED TO PASS A BILL THAT WOULD HAVE COMMITTED \$50 MILLION TO CENSUS RESPONSE EFFORTS. FOR MANY OF THESE STATES, EFFORTS PROVIDED BY THE PRIVATE SECTOR FILLED GAPS IN TIGHT STATE BUDGETS.

➤ WHAT YOU CAN DO ◀

MEASURE -

DO YOU KNOW HOW THE CENSUS AFFECTS YOUR COMMUNITY OR STATE? THE CENSUS BUREAU'S QUICKFACTS PROVIDES STATISTICS FOR STATES AND COUNTIES. WHAT ARE YOUR STATE'S CRITERIA ON REDISTRICTING? WHO IS IN CHARGE OF REDISTRICTING?



IDENTIFY -

WHAT COORDINATING AND AFFILIATE AGENCIES IN YOUR STATE WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE CENSUS BUREAU? WHAT STEPS HAVE YOUR STATE'S OR COMMUNITY'S ELECTED AND APPOINTED OFFICIALS TAKEN? FIND YOUR REPRESENTATIVE AND LOOK AT DISTRICT BOUNDARIES WITH GOVTRACK'S CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS MAP.



REACH OUT -

FIND ALLIES IN YOUR COMMUNITY OR IN NEARBY TOWNS AND ELSEWHERE IN THE STATE. FOSTER COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH LOCAL BUSINESSES, COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, AND SCHOOL BOARDS.



PLAN -

SET MILESTONES BASED ON YOUR STATE'S LEGISLATIVE CALENDAR OR LOCAL COMMUNITY CALENDAR.



EXECUTE -

FIND ACTIVE ORGANIZATIONS IN YOUR COMMUNITY. EDUCATE YOURSELF AND OTHERS ON HOW REDISTRICTING WORKS WITH BALLOTPEDIA OR THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES. SEARCH "CENSUS" ON YOUR STATE GOVERNMENT HOMEPAGE TO SEE WHICH COMMITTEES OR AGENCIES IN YOUR STATE AND COMMUNITY ARE INVOLVED WITH THE CENSUS. FIND OUT HOW MANY ELECTORAL VOTES AND REPRESENTATIVES YOUR STATE HAS, AND HOW THAT MIGHT CHANGE. KEEP UP TO DATE WITH DATA FROM THE 2020 CENSUS WITH BALLOTPEDIA OR REDISTRICTING ONLINE. TRY YOUR HAND AT DRAWING A REDISTRICTING PLAN FOR YOUR STATE WITH THE PUBLIC MAPPING PROJECT.

