



THE 2010 DECENNIAL CENSUS: AN OVERVIEW

The Constitution requires that a census be taken every ten years to apportion seats in the House of Representatives. The census documents the social, economic and demographic characteristics of all American households, defining our nation's growth and change. It is one of our nation's most important sources of information because it plays a major role in assuring that our government is truly "of the people, by the people and for the people."

**Apportionment in the U.S. House of Representatives
1790-2000 (selected years)**

	Northeast	Midwest	South	West	Total
1790	57	-	49	-	106
1810	97	8	81	-	186
1830	112	32	98	-	242
1850	92	59	83	3	237
1870	95	98	93	7	293
1890	99	128	112	18	357
1910	123	143	136	33	435
1930	122	137	133	43	435
1950	115	129	134	59	437
1970	104	121	134	76	435
1990	88	105	149	93	435
2000	83	100	154	98	435

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

- Over the course of 210 years, the census has collected information critical for decision-making at all levels of government. Based on court decisions in the last half century, the decennial census has played an increasingly pivotal role in implementing the principle of one person - one vote. And, although not its original intent, the census has evolved into a basis for allocating billions of federal dollars to states and local communities.
- State and local governments depend on census data for small geographic areas to provide required services and to plan for the future needs of their citizens. Local governments, in particular, require data at the neighborhood level for transportation, law enforcement, school planning, recreational facilities, economic development, and a host of other services. Census data also enable social and political scientists to understand how we evolve as a nation.

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- Businesses rely on census data to make short- and long-term decisions about the marketplace, including where to invest in new facilities, what kinds of goods and services to offer, and how best to meet the needs of the workforce.

The 2010 Census

- The 2010 Census will become the benchmark for the nation's transition into the technological age, just as the 1900 Census was the benchmark for documenting the nation's transition from a primarily agrarian society to a manufacturing economy.
- As with every decennial census, the Census Bureau has the triple challenge of improving its ability to count hard-to-reach populations, improving accuracy, and keeping costs under control for the 2010 Census.
- The 2000 Census appears to have been more accurate at the national level than the 1990 Census, with a net undercount close to zero. However, the number of miscounts (known as “errors”) remained high. Miscounts refer to people who were missed (omissions), counted twice (duplicates), or counted in the wrong location or included in the census by mistake (erroneous enumerations). The net undercount (or overcount) is the difference between the number of people missed and the number counted twice.

Decennial Net Undercount Score: 1940-2000

Year	Net Undercount
1940	7.5 million
1950	6.5 million
1960	5.7 million
1970	5.7 million
1980	2.8 million
1990	4.7 million
2000	3.3 million

Source: Newsweek

- Continuing a historic pattern, the 2000 Census missed racial minorities, especially Black men, and renters at higher rates than non-Hispanic Whites and those who owned their homes. For example, the estimated net undercount rate for non-Hispanic Blacks was 1.84 percent, compared to an overcount of 1.13 percent for non-Hispanic Whites. The Census Bureau estimates that 1.14 percent of renters were missed, while homeowners were overcounted.

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- In 2000, nearly 10 million people were double-counted or counted in the wrong place. People who own more than one home, college students who are mistakenly counted both at home and at school, and children in joint custody arrangements all contribute to overcounting in the census.

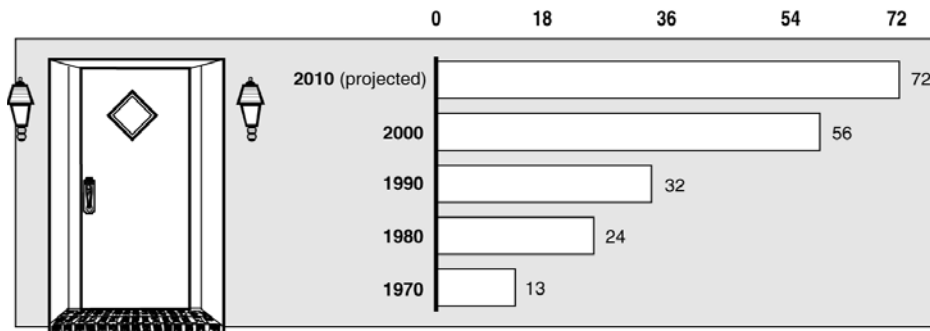
Plans for the 2010 Census

- The Census Bureau's plan for the 2010 Census incorporates both new and traditional data collection procedures. The major innovations for the 2010 Census are (1) replacing the long form with the American Community Survey (ACS); and (2) the use of GPS-equipped handheld computers to collect information in the field.
- The ACS will measure the socio-economic characteristics of the population, and physical characteristics of housing, using 27 subjects specifically required by law or required to implement federal programs. The ACS began nationwide in 2005 and samples 250,000 households a month, or 3 million per year. In 2006, group quarters – such as college dorms, military barracks, prisons, and nursing homes – were added to the survey.
- A short form-only 2010 Census will collect data on age, sex, household relationship, race and Hispanic origin, and home ownership from the nation's 130 million addresses and from people in group living arrangements. Most homes receive a form in the mail and are asked to mail it back. Census takers visit homes in remote areas, including Indian reservations, to drop off a form and confirm the location.
- To increase response rates, the Census Bureau will use multiple mailings, beginning with an advance notice letter, followed by the questionnaire and then a thank you/reminder postcard. Census forms with a dual English-Spanish format will be mailed in targeted areas. For the first time, the Census Bureau will mail a replacement questionnaire to all households that did not mail back the first form.
- The Census Bureau is developing the Master Address File (MAF), a list of all residential addresses (including group quarters) in the United States. The Bureau relies on address information from the U.S. Postal Service, as well as state, local and Tribal governments, to maximize the accuracy of the MAF. An accurate MAF is critical to the success of the census, because it sets the universe for mailing census forms to all housing units and group facilities.
- The Census Bureau will match returned census forms to the Master Address File in an effort to eliminate duplicate responses from the same household or person.

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Average Cost per Housing Unit in Constant Fiscal 2000 Dollars



Source: GAO analysis of Census Bureau figures.

- The estimated cost of 2010 Census is now \$11.5 billion. Historically, about one-half of the total census cost is spent in the census year alone.
- To help contain costs, the 2010 Census will be more automated than any previous enumeration. Census takers will be armed with GPS-equipped handheld computers, which will help them confirm the location of housing units and collect data from unresponsive households more efficiently and accurately. The Census Bureau estimates that using the new equipment will save more than \$1 billion.