

# 2020 Census Update Discussion

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Given that we are now less than a year away from the first phase of the census, this discussion will focus on risk assessment and risk mitigation.

# 1. The Potential Addition of the Citizenship Question:

Given the possibility that the Supreme Court rules in favor of adding the question, here are some issues that the Census should already be considering:

- Does the Census have a default question ready to “plug in”?
- Does the Census have the ability, either now or in post-processing census data, to determine how the addition of the question would affect response rates, across the general population, across the states, and across sub-populations?

- Does the Census have a policy and methodology available to determine how the differential effects of large-scale non-response across the different states would be taken into account in recommending apportionment counts, etc to the President in December 2020?
- It is a near certainty that the level of non-compliance would spike dramatically, relative to historic norms. Does the Census have a budget and strategy for hiring the additional field enumerators that would presumably be needed to contact non-compliant households?

- Suppose that there is a mass movement in which individuals decide to not answer the citizenship question. Will the online census form allow individuals to submit their form without answering all the questions?

## 2. Non-Compliance Simulation

- While there will be more discussion of CBAMS this afternoon, even in the absence of an additional citizenship question, the CBAMS survey indicates that the public's willingness to respond has dropped dramatically since the 2010 Census (86% to 67%).
- It may therefore be desirable to do a “what if” simulation of how the Census would adapt to indications, based on information gathered (say) in early 2020, that the non-compliance rates are likely to be higher than anything the Census has planned for (say 50% higher, 100% higher, etc).
- Such a simulation could give Census leadership some opportunity to think through how/whether adjustment of the resources/ protocols necessary for Non-Response Follow-up (NRFU) could then be adapted in such close proximity to the actual census.

### 3. Vulnerability to Cyber-Warfare

- Foreign interference in the 2016 election impacted people's faith in our elections. Manipulating the 2020 census either directly (through direct incursions into Census systems) or indirectly (by using social media to encourage non-compliance) could undermine faith in the reapportionment process, and would represent a national security issue.
- Addressing these issues would require the cooperation and support of other US government agencies. (For example, social media companies and the US government would need to be proactive in monitoring social media for such manipulation.)
- Is the Census taking such measures in coordination with other agencies and in cooperation with social media platforms?

## 4. The Reduction in the Number of Test Sites from Three to One

- Presumably, the provision of three test sites in the original plan for the 2020 census had to do with the additional experience and knowledge that would be gained from three sites. In the end, only one site was used (Providence, RI).
- Has the additional uncertainty generated by gathering less data and experience been factored into the planning of the 2020 census? Are there other data sources that can be used as surrogates for the knowledge/experience that would have been gained through the two additional sites?

## 5. Paying Close Attention to End-to-End Testing

- Full-scale system testing almost always exposes unexpected issues. The 2018 end-to-end testing is a good opportunity for the Census to identify weaknesses and vulnerabilities. What has been learned?
- Did the end-to-end test include use of the dynamic scaling feature of the cloud-apps? How has this been tested?

## 6. Best Practices from Censuses Elsewhere

- To the extent that other countries have moved to online data capture and to the use of mobile phone technology to support enumerators, the US Census has an opportunity to discover what unexpected issues arose in their deployment of these systems.

# 7. Quality of the 2020 Workforce

- Given the low unemployment rate, one might anticipate this will have an impact on the nature of the workforce the Census can recruit for 2020. It seems that the number of applicants is exceeding the levels expected.

Are the quality levels also exceeding what was expected?