

Census Data: Access, Importance, and the Future

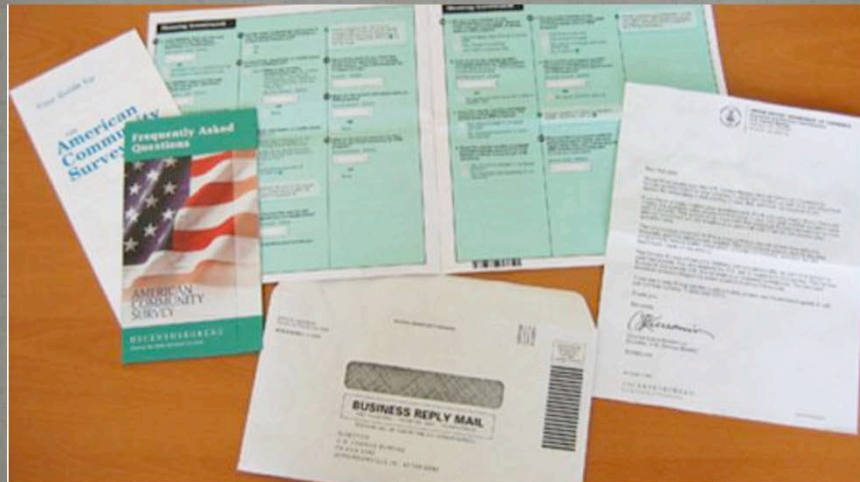
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1860 Census Questions

- Number of dwelling home in order of visitation by the enumerator
- Number of family in order of visitation by the enumerator
- Name
- Age
- Sex
- Color
 - Enumerators could mark "W" for Whites, "B" for Blacks, or "M" for Mulattos.
- Profession, Occupation, or Trade of each person, male and female, over 15 years of age
- Value of person's real estate
- Value of person's personal estate
- Place of birth
- Enumerator could list the state, territory, or country of the person's birth
- Was the person was married within the last year?
- Did the person attend school within the last year?
- If the person was over 20 years of age, could he not read or write?
- Was the person deaf and dumb, blind, idiotic, pauper, or convict?

With time and the growth of our country, it became clear to the government (both local and federal) that the Census was a valuable resource and the amount and types of questions asked expanded. Here are some of the questions asked in one of the Census questionnaires for 1860. There were several questionnaires this year such as one for slaves. As you can see the questions have expanded beyond the basics asked in 1790.

American Community Survey (ACS)



The Census is an evolving questionnaire. Questions have not been asked continuously over time, they may have altered in their wording or their options one can choose from or the question may have been deleted. Additionally for those studying race and ethnicity, the way these categories are broken down also changes. These factors make using the Census for historical comparison tricky. For example, in 2000, the Census asked 52 questions, while in 2010 only 10 questions were asked. The key reason for this drastic shift was because of the introduction of the American Community Survey or ACS. The ACS replaced the long form of the Census, so now the Decennial Census, which surveys the entire population, is much shorter. The ACS goes out to a subset of the population and is collected far more frequently than once every 10 years – instead it's collected yearly and data sets are released in groups of 1 year, 3 year, and 5 year groups. By increasing the frequency of data collection and distribution, federal and state governmental bodies are able to make appropriate budgetary changes based on more accurate data. The increased frequency of data collection and release because of the ACS provides better insight into our communities such as jobs and occupations, educational attainment and enrollment, the number of home owners or renters, the usage of social welfare programs such as SNAP, and many other important household and demographic aspects.

Potential Risks

- Potential use of untested technology to conduct 2020 Census
 - <http://www.gao.gov/assets/690/682765.pdf>
- Presidential administration interference with proposed questions
 - <http://www.thetaskforce.org/breaking-trump-administration-omits-lgbtq-people-from-2020-census-and-american-community-survey/>
- Data is getting harder and harder to find

Due to budgetary constraints the Census Bureau had to cut testing for their online data collection system that was supposed to occur in 2017. Because there won't be testing of this system and while the Census prides itself on keeping personally identifiable data private, the Government Accountability Office listed this system as risky to use for the 2020 Census.

LGBTQ are equal members of our society, but when the Census Bureau sent a list of proposed questions for 2020 to the Trump administration for approval, these questions were removed by the administration. How are we expected to get a picture of our own society when we are unable to get accurate counts of those living here?

And lastly, data is getting harder and harder to find. This event which is part of endangered data week makes it pretty clear that data is at risk and that data is governmentally collected or funded. Websites are being scrubbed of datasets, federally funded grant agencies might not be funded, websites on certain topics are vanishing, key data-related positions in this administration are not being filled. While the Census has been given an increased budget for this year, the Director of Census has voiced concern because right before the decennial census, the budget needs to ramp up substantially to fund such a massive undertaking. But because the budget is high this year, it may be hard to ramp up in the upcoming years when the funding is needed the most. This puts the Census at risk.

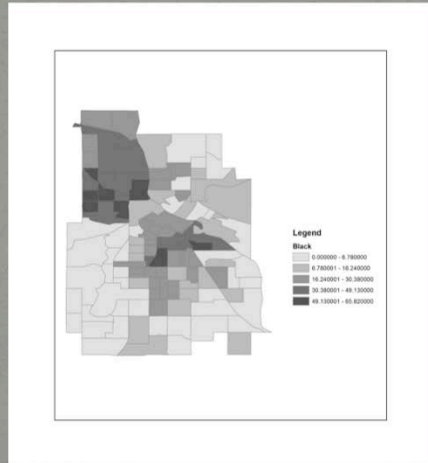
Data Usage

- Distribution of over \$400 billion in state and federal funds
 - Add hospitals, schools, transit systems and transportation infrastructure, elder care
 - Provide funding for social welfare programs (SNAP, reduced school lunches, etc.)
- Measuring migration
- Employment information, including potential for growth

The Census provides great spatial data

- Census Blocks are at a neighborhood scale
- TIGER files = shapefiles of census blocks
- **TIGER** = Topologically Integrated Geographic Encoding and Referencing
- Where on the web:
- <https://www.census.gov/geo/maps-data/data/tiger.html>

Example Map - Minneapolis



Other Census Data Providers

- Free, historical census data = NHGIS from U of MN:
- <https://www.nhgis.org/>
- Social Explorer, MSU subscription (Search the catalog for Social Explorer)
- <http://catalog.lib.msu.edu/record=b5326031~S399>
- Simply Map, MSU subscription
- <http://libguides.lib.msu.edu/c.php?g=210008>
- Policy Map, MSU subscription