WHO COUNTS? AND HOW & WHERE & WHY?
Taking the Census in a Pandemic

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Let’s explore a Whirlwind History of *How*, and *Where* and *Why* we take a Census Every 10 Years...and *How* History can guide us in a pandemic

- The Census was created in the 1787 Constitution to *apportion* seats in the House of Representatives and Electoral College among the states.
- The demographic history of the US, e.g., *population growth and change*, affects the political system
- *Diversity!* (And what does that mean?)
The U.S. has taken a census every ten years since 1790...let’s look back....
The Census is a ....

• Rare, Repeated, Unobtrusive event in American political life...

• Rare:
  • The 2020 Census is the 24th in 220 years.
  • By comparison the US has had 45 presidents, and 58 presidential elections. The 116th Congress is currently in session.
The Census is a ....

• Rare, Repeated, Unobtrusive event in American political life...

• Repeated:
  • Successfully every ten years since 1790, despite wars, including the Civil War, economic crises, political turmoil.
The Census is a ....

• Rare, Repeated, Unobtrusive event in American political life...

• Unobtrusive, Almost Invisible:
  • Most people don’t remember the last one, the one before that, the one before that...
The Census also is...Janus faced

• It always looks both backwards to where the country has been and forward to where it’s going
  • in methods and the questions asked,
  • the results,
  • and most clearly in the reapportionment and redistricting of political power each decade
Building the American State: Writing the Constitution of 1787
Article 1, Section 2, Paragraph 3 of the Constitution

• Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included within this Union, according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons. 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.
Importance of the Census

• The US was the **first nation in the world** to **take** a regular census and **use** it to allocate seats in a national assembly according to population.

• The U.S. has had one of the **most demographically dynamic and diverse populations** in the history of the world.

• Thus **the census is truly central to the successful functioning of the American political system.**
From 3.9 million to ~330 million: **Growth**

- 13 states have become 50 states.
- House of Representatives grew from 65 to 435 members.
- The average congressional district after the 2010 Census was larger than the total population of any of the original 13 states in 1790.
- Growth has been differential: some states and local areas lose while others gain.
Population, United States, Japan, United Kingdom, France, 1790-2010
Admitting States to the Union and Growth of the House of Representatives
Dynamism and Diversity
Changes in House Seats: 2010

Apportionment of the U.S. House of Representatives
Based on the 2010 Census

- State gaining 4 seats in the House
- State gaining 2 seats in the House
- State gaining 1 seat in the House
- No change
- State losing 1 seat in the House
- State losing 2 seats in the House

Total U.S. Representatives: 435
Numbers represent reapportioned totals of U.S. Representatives.
Geographic Diversity: Westward Expansion
Geographic Diversity and Legislative Redistricting: The First Gerrymander, 1812
Technical Change and Continuity in Taking the Census
Questions....

• Asked in every census since 1790 in some form:
  • Age,
  • Sex,
  • Race/Ethnicity,
  • Location,
  • Household composition
But....

• Questions change as society and economy change...
  • Most notoriously, the census identified people by slave or free status from 1790 to 1860.
• The level of detail in the answers change: e.g., pre coded or open ended.
• Not everyone is asked every question
  • For example, it doesn’t make sense to ask children about their incomes or occupations.
• Instructions say to skip a question if not relevant.
Technology
Univac, 1950 Census
Mapping the Old Fashioned Way...1960 Example
TIGER-MAF Arrives in 1990

A Topological Database for GIS

The basic structure of the TIGER database integrates the geometry of a map and attributes of its associated geographic features into a single, interoperable physical file. The design of the database adapted the theories of topology, graph theory, and associated fields of mathematics to provide a disciplined, mathematical description of the geographic structure of the entire United States and the subunits, which the database covers without any gaps or overlaps.

Following the development of GIS in the 1970s and 1980s, regional, state, and local governments, and civic organizations got into the act of using census data to support planning and analysis. Specialized areas (i.e., health districts, transportation zones, school districts, and police precincts) that fell within census boundaries required easy access to public data. GIS users needed an easy way to link or tabulate statistical data to all levels of census geography for geographical analysis.

These GIS users also needed a geospatial framework to relate census geography to their administrative areas and boundaries. Improved and customized GIS software required a database that could adapt and grow, but building a seamless database with wall-to-wall coverage of every state in the nation was impossible for startup companies to generate themselves. The Census Bureau recognized this demand for data for geospatial analysis, and also needed to establish consistency in its own database. New development and modernized processes were put in place.
What’s Happening in 2020?
From Paper to Smart Device
Monitoring Daily Response Rates from Internet, Phone, Mail, and In Person Modes
Issues **BEFORE** the 2020 census

- How much will it cost?
- Will Congress or the President have different ideas for 2020?
- Will Americans respond as they have in the past?
- What impact will the count have on reapportionment and redistricting?
- Citizenship controversy
- Litigation
- Accuracy
Issues **DURING** the 2020 census

• The covid-19 pandemic hit as the census was starting in January 2020

• First counting done in Alaska:
  • “**2020 Census Kickoff of First Count in Alaska:** The U.S. Census Bureau held a news conference to kick off the 2020 Census. Census Bureau Director Steven Dillingham gave an update on the first enumeration in Toksook Bay, Alaska, which begins on Jan. 21.”
Progress of the enumeration: March 15, 2020

• Unobtrusive response options opened in mid March:

  • “The U.S. Census Bureau is monitoring coronavirus (COVID-19) carefully, and the health, safety and well-being of the public and our staff is our top priority.
  • The 2020 Census is underway and the most important thing you can do is respond online, by phone, or by mail when you receive your invitation. Responding now will minimize the need for the Census Bureau to send census takers out into communities to follow up. Please check this page for regular updates.”
The issues: operational and political

- The labor intensive phase of census taking was postponed or dramatically modified.
- The deadlines changed over the summer. The Census faced more court challenges.
- The field enumeration ended October 11.
- The census is now in the “post processing” phase.

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**2020 Census Operational Adjustments Due to COVID-19**

The 2020 Census is underway and more households across America are responding every day. Online, phone, and mailed self-responses will continue throughout the data collection process. In light of the COVID-19 outbreak, the U.S. Census Bureau is adjusting 2020 Census operations in order to:

- Protect the health and safety of the American public and Census Bureau employees.
- Implement guidance from federal, state, and local authorities regarding COVID-19.
- Ensure a complete and accurate count of all communities.

Under the adjusted 2020 Census operational plan, field activities would resume after June 1, 2020, as area census offices begin returning to full staff capacity. In-person activities, including enumeration, office work, and processing activities, will incorporate the most current guidance from authorities to ensure the health and safety of staff and the public.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity/Operation</th>
<th>Original Schedule</th>
<th>NEW SCHEDULE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Response Phase</strong></td>
<td>March 12-July 31</td>
<td>March 12-October 31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Online, phone, and mailed self-responses continue throughout the data collection process.</td>
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<td><strong>Group Quarters (e-Response and Paper Enumeration)</strong></td>
<td>April 2-June 5</td>
<td>April 2-September 3</td>
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<td>Many group quarters have already begun responding through our e-response enumeration option.</td>
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<td><strong>Remote Alaska</strong></td>
<td>January 21-April 30</td>
<td>Tentatively January 21-June 19</td>
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<td>Field operations for parts of Alaska.</td>
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What’s Next...AFTER the Census

• The Trump administration wants the counts for the 50 states for congressional reapportionment reported by December 31, 2020.

• By executive order, the Trump administration says it will remove ‘illegal aliens’ from the counts for the states. Plaintiffs in several states sued successfully to block this plan. Case will be heard at the Supreme Court at the end of November.

• Census Bureau officials report they are already seeing an impact of the pandemic on the results, particularly for college student counts.

• How any of this will evolve and be resolved, given the presidential election results, is not clear.
Stay Tuned! There’s a lot more to come....

• Current reporting deadlines:
  • December 31, 2020 for congressional reapportionment;
  • April 2021 for redistricting data;
  • Later for other “use cases.”

• Decisionmakers and Users:
  • What will Congress do?
  • What will the courts rule?
  • How accurate will the data be and how will we know?

• We have to “use” these numbers for the next 10 years!