Today’s Talk: A Whirlwind History of How, and Where and Why We Take a Census Every 10 Years...and Why It’s Important

- Quick Answer: The Census was created in the 1787 Constitution to apportion seats in the House of Representatives and Electoral College among the states.
- Quick Answer: The demographic history of the US, e.g., population growth and change, affects the political system.
- Quick Answer: Diversity! (And what does that mean?)

- So...to begin.....
The Census is a ....
- Rare, Repeated, Unobtrusive event in American political life...

- Rare:
  - The 2020 Census will be the 24th in 230 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

Importance of the Census

- The United States was the first nation in the history of the world to take a regular population census and use it to allocate seats in a national assembly according to population.

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 U.S. has had one of the most demographically dynamic and diverse populations in the history of the world.
• The combination of the census as mechanism to adjust power and resources each decade, in conjunction with the demographic dynamism and diversity, made the census and the statistical system truly central to the functioning of the society and state.

Importance of the Census

• Dynamism is measured by patterns of population growth and change
• Diversity involves geographic diversity, group diversity, and different rates of change for different parts of the country, and among the groups.
  • Numerical growth
  • Geographic diversity
  • Racial and ethnic diversity
• Technical change in Taking the Census

Numerical Growth

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

2010
Admitting States to the Union and Growth of the House of Representative

Geographic Diversity: Westward Expansion

2010 Center of Population
Geographic Diversity:
The First Gerrymander, 1812

Racial and Ethnic Diversity

Click to see Table
Click to see Redistricting Info (PL-94-171)
Click to see Census Bureau Web Home Page
Click to see Census 2000 Brief

http://census.gov/clo/www/redistricting.html
http://www.census.gov/

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Asian as a Percentage of County Population, 2010

Technical Change and Continuity in Taking the Census

Continuity

• Counting has always been done by household
• Tabulation and publication have always been done by the federal government in Washington
Change

- The questions! Both the number and the content
- The time it takes to take the census, from several years to several months
- How the responses are summed up: by hand, on paper (until 1880), or by mechanical tabulation (until 1950), or by computer (ever since).
- How the majority of the results are published: in books (until ~1990); on computer punch cards, tapes or disks (1960s-1990s); on the internet (since the 1990s).

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.

American Community Survey

- Until 1940, every household was asked the same set of questions
- From 1940 to 2000, a “sample” form asked some questions of a smaller proportion of households, say 5% - 25%.
- The two different questionnaires came to be called the “short form” and the “long form.”
- After 2000, the “long form” questions were shifted to a “continuous measurement survey” called the American Community Survey, which is surveys ~3.5 million households a year and reports yearly.

Questions about People

- Asked in varied form, and not in every census:
  - Work,
  - Education,
  - Disability,
  - Family Relationships,
  - Wealth and Income,
  - Domestic and International Migration,
  - Political and Civic Participation

Questions about Housing

- Asked in varied form, and not in every census:
  - Type of residence,
  - Ownership,
  - Dwelling characteristics,
  - Appliances
Examples

• Work: occupation, industry, slave status, unemployment, commuting
• Education: literacy, school attendance, educational attainment,
• Disability: whether sick, maimed, insane, idiotic, blind or vision impaired, deaf or hearing impaired, work disability,
• Wealth and income: personal and real property owned, income, income sources

Examples

• Family relationships: type of family, number in family and household, relationship to ‘head,’ fertility, mortality
• Migration: place of birth, place of birth of parents, residence 5 or one year ago, ancestry
• Assimilation, Political and Civic Participation: voting eligibility, veteran status, naturalization status, mother tongue, speaks English, years in US

Housing Question Examples

• Type of residence: farm status, business, house, institution, homeless location
• Dwelling Ownership: rent or owner status, mortgage status, taxes paid
• Dwelling characteristics: age, rooms, plumbing, quality
• Appliances: radio, phone, TV, kitchen equipment, heating system, washer/dryer

Technology

Univac, 1950 Census

Mapping the Old Fashioned Way...1960 Example
TIGER-MAF Arrives in 1990

What is in Store for 2020?

From Paper to Smart Device

Issues to Date....

• 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
• Cybersecurity
• Accuracy

Demographic Context of the Citizenship Question

• Worldwide, there are 258 million international migrants, according to U.N.
• U.S. has largest international migrant population (~50 million) of all the countries in the world, according to the U.N.
• Census Bureau current estimates of foreign born are a bit lower, at 44.5 million, or ~14-15% of the total population

The Proposed Census Citizenship Question...

• “Is this person a citizen of the United States?”
• Yes, born in U.S. or U.S. territory
• Yes, born abroad of U.S. citizen parent[s]
• Yes, citizen by naturalization
• No, not a U.S. citizen
• The question as Ross proposed it in 2018 did not ask specifically where a person was born, any process of migration, or the legal status of an alien, i.e., a non-citizen.
• In June 2019, the Supreme Court ruled that Ross had violated the Administrative Procedures Act. The Trump administration sent the forms for printing without the question in July.
Refocusing on the complex situation of immigrants...
• Immigrants are people born abroad, i.e., foreign born.
• Immigrants may be citizens or aliens.
• Aliens may be legal aliens or unauthorized or undocumented aliens.
• So some numbers...

Details
• Of the 44.5 million immigrants in the U.S.:
  • 22 million are naturalized citizens
  • 22.5 million are aliens
  • Estimated 11.3 million of the aliens are unauthorized or undocumented
  • 13.2 million aliens are green card holders
  • 8.9 million green card holders are eligible to naturalize

Details...
• There are currently 89.4 million immigrants and their children in the U.S. [28% of the population]
• There are 28 million immigrants in the labor force [17% of the labor force].
• There are an estimated 16.7 million people living in households with an unauthorized immigrant [i.e., considerably higher than the number of unauthorized immigrants].

Examples of Past Census Controversies
• Is the Census Fair?
  • Undercount Controversy, 1970-2000
  • 1920 Census Non Reapportionment
  • Confidentiality Breaches
  • “Census Fraud” -- Tacoma, WA 1910

Popular Images of Census Taking
• Cartoons
• Paintings
• Comedy Routines
• Maps and Media
• Artifacts

Enumerators
"It's just a simple little question about your citizenship status. What harm could it possibly do...?"

"My daddy says grandma is in the census, but I am sure mummy said she is in Iowa."

The “Ghost” of the 1920 Census: No Reapportionment That Decade

Much more to come as the count approaches....

• Thank You!
Funding

- Health care (Medicaid)
- Nutrition (SNAP, school lunch program, WIC)
- Education (student loans, Pell Grants)
- Affordable housing (LIHTC, USDA loans, Section 8, HOME)
- Transportation (highways, transit)
- Childcare (Head Start)

Representation

- = 2001-2011 Aldermanic Districts
- Colors = 2012-2021 Aldermanic Districts

Hard-to-Count Populations

- People of color
- Young children (under 5)
- College students
- Renters
- Low income households
- Recent immigrants
- Non-English language households
- Homeless
- Households without internet access

Undercounting

**2012 CBS News report:** “... the census missed about 2.1 percent of black Americans and 1.5 percent of Hispanics, together accounting for some 1.5 million people. The percentages are statistically comparable to 2000, despite an aggressive advertising and minority outreach effort in 2010...”

**2018 WPR report:** “... the 2010 census missed almost 1 million children younger than age 5 in its count and is likely to do the same in 2020.”
Estimated 2020 Census Response by Census Tract

What the City has done

- Formed a Complete Count Committee
- Formed a City Staff team: Mayor’s Office, Library, Metro Transit, Clerk, IT, Senior Center, Planning, Community Development, Civil Rights
- Working with UW, MMSD on outreach to students
- Metro Ride Guide, transfer pass ads
- Distribution of half-page census flyers
- 2020 Census web page and email list
What the City has done

- Engagement with residents at community events
  - Juneteenth
  - Dane Dances
  - Outreach Magic Festival
  - AfricaFest
  - Warner Park Family Fun Night
  - Summer concert at Warner Park
  - Etc....

What the City has done

- Funding for Community Partners to undertake 2020 Census outreach:
  - Centro Hispano
  - Hmong Institute
  - Latino Academy of Workforce Development
  - Latino Chamber of Commerce
  - Freedom Inc.
  - Rebalanced Life Wellness Association
  - North Side Planning Council

What the City will do

- PR assistance: ads/stories in traditional and community news sources
- Outreach via “traditional” city media, social media, newsletters, blog avenues
- Presentations at some community events
- Water bill, property tax bill inserts

What the City will do

- Grocery bag inserts
- Outreach through major employers
- Work with City Channel on 2020 Census video
- Work with houses of worship, community centers, homeless shelters, apartment associations, landlords, food pantries and more

City of Madison
2020 Census Contacts

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