

5/2/18 COW - Public Comment  
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Every 10 years, <sup>we</sup> Americans are asked to fill out and return their Census questionnaires. It's an important decennial event, given that population counts guide billions in federal spending, determine congressional apportionment and play a key role in shaping future policies. Census experts and <sup>community leaders</sup> public officials are expressing growing concerns that the bedrock mission of the 2020 census — an accurate and trustworthy head count of everyone in the <sup>state</sup> United States — is imperiled, with worrisome implications.

Civil liberties advocates <sup>like circle</sup> also fear that the Trump administration is injecting political considerations into the bureau, a rigidly nonpartisan agency whose population count will be the basis for redrawing congressional and state legislative districts in the early 2020s. And there is broad agreement that the administration's aggressive enforcement of immigration policies will make it even harder to reach minorities, undocumented immigrants and others whose numbers have long been undercounted.

Yet vast segments of the population often fail to respond. Greater racial and ethnic diversity, more nontraditional living arrangements, elevated poverty rates and a litany of other factors are also putting more people at risk of not being counted in 2020.

As state and local governments start to prepare for the next Census, making sure these communities participate is a priority. Newly released reports shed light on the places and the people least likely to be counted. Much of the disparities in Census participation are tied to demographics. Identifying "hard-to-count" Census tracts and found them in every state in the country. African-American and Hispanic neighborhoods, especially those with limited English proficiency, have historically been more difficult to count, as have low-income communities. Areas with more renters and transient households similarly tend to participate at lower rates.

Taken together, some experts say, those issues substantially raise the risk that the 2020 count could be flawed, disputed, or both. "If public confidence in the objectivity and quality of the 2020 census erodes, then another pillar of our representative democracy could be compromised.

The politicization of the census would erode what is already fragile trust and confidence in the integrity of the count. The Trump administration's heated rhetoric on immigration, race and the trustworthiness of government is fueling fears that minorities, legal and undocumented immigrants and others — from asylum-seekers to victims of the opioid crisis — will be even harder to locate and count.

Suggestions by Mr. Trump and others that the census includes a question about citizenship or immigration status are especially worrying to many. More than 11 million undocumented immigrants lived in the United States in 2016, eight million of them in the civilian work force. The administration's hard line on immigration already is having a chilling on immigrants.

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Community leaders and elected officials and other people who have indicated they're not convinced that they can stand up with confidence and tell their constituents that filling out the census form is safe and confidential. "There's just a great lack of confidence now." I would like to request an implementation plan for the 2020 census with focus on Hard to Count (HTC) communities.