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Research Policy Update

Decennial Census: Key Uses of the Data

Main Points - Decennial Census Data is used for key purposes that impact tribal nations:

- Apportionment and Redistricting
- Tribal Governance and Policy Decisions
- Federal Funding Formulas
- Research

U.S. Census Bureau – Overview of Censuses and Surveys

The U.S. Census Bureau collects data from the United States population through more than 130 different surveys and programs every year.¹ Not all Census Bureau surveys are conducted each year; some occur every five years and some occur every ten years (Decennial Census).² The questions in the surveys, the types of data collected by the surveys, and how the data are collected during the survey can vary between each survey and census. This brief identifies key differences between the Decennial Census and other Census Bureau surveys, and highlights key uses of the Decennial Census data.

The **Decennial Census** is a complete population count that occurs every ten years in the United States and its goal is to enumerate or count every single person living within the nation. The 2020 Census is one of the Decennial Censuses. Everyone living in the United States is required by law to complete the Decennial Census.³ The ten year population count is required by the U.S. Constitution and the results are used to determine how many representatives each state receives in the U.S. House of Representatives.⁴ Decennial Census data is also used in funding formulas, determining legislative districts (apportionment), tribal governance, and more.



The U.S. Constitution does not require specific questions to be asked in the Decennial Census; it only requires that the population is counted. As a result, Decennial Census questions change over time.⁵ The 2020 Decennial Census is similar to the old “short form” census and will ask each household up to 12 different questions, and if only one person lives in the household only nine questions will be asked.⁶ The next page details the questions that the 2020 Decennial Census will ask of each household.

2020 Decennial Census Questions

The 2020 Census asks one person in the household (Person 1) to answer these questions:

1. How many people were living or staying in the residence on April 1, 2020?
2. Were there any additional people staying in the residence on April 1, 2020 that were not included in the previous question?
3. Is the house, apartment, or mobile home owned with a mortgage/loan, owned without a mortgage/loan, rented, or occupied without payment or rent?
4. What is your telephone number?

The following questions are repeated for every person counted in the household:

5. What is your first and last name?
6. Are you male or female?
7. What is your age and date of birth?
8. Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?
9. What is your race? [American Indian or Alaska Native, enrolled or principal tribe(s)]

Additional questions only for each additional person in the household:

10. Does this person usually live or stay somewhere else?
11. How is this person related to Person 1?

To view a sample copy of the 2020 Census Questionnaire visit: <http://bit.ly/2vxRCRR>

American Community Survey (ACS) – In 2005, the ACS replaced the “long form” U.S. Decennial Census questionnaire. The ACS is conducted every month and unlike the Decennial Census, the ACS only collects information from a random **sample of the population** and not everyone will receive it.⁷ Households that do receive the ACS are required, like the Decennial Census, to complete and return the questionnaire.⁸ The ACS produces 1-year and 5-year **estimates** of population counts⁹ and the social, economic, housing, and demographic characteristics.¹⁰ Information gathered by the ACS could include but is not limited to income brackets, languages spoken, educational achievement, job types, number of vehicles owned per household, and length of residence.¹¹ The data from the ACS helps determine federal funding formulas, public policy decisions, local planning, emergency services, and more.¹²

The Population Estimates Program (PEP) – The PEP is a yearly population **estimate** for the United States calculated by using Decennial Census data and reported births, deaths, and migrations each year.¹³ The accuracy of the Decennial Census data impacts results for every PEP conducted for the next decade. The PEP can map population changes¹⁴ and is often used for yearly housing and population estimates for cities, counties, and states.¹⁵ The U.S. Census Bureau encourages use of these population estimates for population totals and not the ACS

population estimates. ACS, since it is a survey sample only, is recommended to be used for population characteristics that use percents, rates, means, and medians.¹⁶

Current Population Survey (CPS) – The CPS is conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Department of Labor Statistics.¹⁷ The data produces **estimates** for statistics about the labor force.¹⁸ The CPS is a voluntary survey conducted each month and sent to approximately 60,000 households.¹⁹ The survey questions focus on a variety of topics that could include child support, health insurance, school enrollment, or volunteering.²⁰ Like the ACS and PEP, the CPS only produces estimates for the population or specific areas of the population and does not produce a complete count for the U.S. population like the Decennial Census.

The Decennial Census, the American Community Survey, the Population Estimates Program, and the Current Population Survey are only some of the key surveys conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau.²¹ The Decennial Census is the only one that counts every single individual living within the United States and this data on population totals impacts analyses and data results of other surveys conducted through the decade.

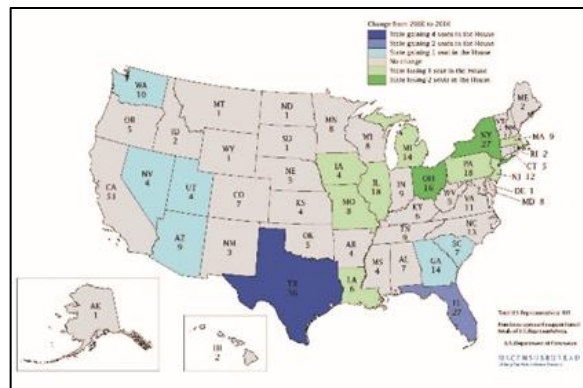
Decennial Census Data – Key Uses

Decennial Census data has significant impact on the United States population and geographical areas. Below are examples of key data uses for Decennial Census data.

Congressional Apportionment – Congressional apportionment is the process of calculating how many Representatives each state receives in the U.S. House of Representatives for the next ten years. Every state receives at least one U.S. Representative out of a total 435 U.S. Representatives.²² The remaining 385 Representatives are distributed to the states based on population sizes, and each Representative should roughly represent a similar amount of the population.²³ The use of Decennial Census data for congressional apportionment is why the Census is required by the U.S. Constitution.

Redistricting – Redistricting occurs when officials redraw the boundaries for legislative districts.²⁴ Redistricting occurs in response to population increases or decreases in different areas, and measurements for population changes come directly from Decennial Census data.²⁵ Redistricting impacts local, state, and federal representation due to potential changes to voting districts. Voting rights advocates watch the redistricting process closely.

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



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "2010 Apportionment Results." 2010 Apportionment Results - People and Households - U.S. Census Bureau, May 21, 2012. https://www.census.gov/population/apportionment/data/2010_apportionment_results.html.

Federal Funding – A U.S. Census Bureau working paper found that at least 132 federal programs used Census Bureau data to distribute funds, including but not limited to Decennial Census data.²⁶ Federal funding formulas often use and may even be required to use data from the U.S. Census Bureau to determine where, what kind, and how much funding goes to different states, counties, tribal nations, and communities.²⁷

Data used for the funding formulas may include total population numbers, sex, age, race, or other factors,²⁸ yet not all federal agencies share what pieces of data are used for each formula. Minimum population counts or demographic information of areas can be the determining factors of eligibility for different federal funds²⁹ and can impact the amount of funding for states, counties, cities, or even tribal nations.

Table 1 provides examples of federal programs that use Census data in their funding formulas.³⁰ ³¹ To view the list identified by the U.S. Census Bureau of 132 federal programs that use Census data for funding formulas, visit: <http://bit.ly/3bbdWkl>.

Table 1: Examples of Federal Programs that use Census Bureau Data in Funding Formulas	
Federal Pell Grant Programs	Head Start
National School Breakfast and Lunch Programs	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
Community Development Block Grants	Section 8 Housing Assistance
Indian Housing Block Grants	Formula Grants for Rural Programs
Crime Victim Assistance	Violence Against Women Formula Grants
Native American Employment and Training	Urban Indian Health Services
Family Violence Prevention and Services/Grants for Battered Women's Shelters	Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant
Grants to States and Indian Tribes (FVPSA)	
Medicaid	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs (SNAP)

Table 2 shows examples of federal agencies and departments that use Census data in funding formulas by choice or mandate.³²

Table 2: Examples of Federal Agencies and Departments that use Census Bureau Data in Funding Formulas	
Indian Health Services (IHS)	U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)	Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
Department of Homeland Security (DHS)	Education Department
Department of Labor	Department of Justice (DOJ)
Department of the Interior (DOI)	Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

The website USAspending.gov allows individuals to search through federal funding recipients to identify the top federal funding sources for each recipient and trends in federal funding over time. Tribal nations can search by nation or DUNS and see the top federal programs and awarding agencies from which they receive funding and trends in federal funding distributed to them over time. Tribal nations can review USAspending.gov to have a better idea of their specific Census data needs based on the sources of their funding primarily and other website analytics. To search the USAspending.gov recipient profiles, visit: <https://www.usaspending.gov/#/recipient>.

Tribal Governance – Accurate Decennial Census data can help tribal nations govern, plan for public safety, manage emergency preparedness, write grant applications, build infrastructure and roads, and make policy and planning decisions. Tribal decisions may rely on Census data to determine and respond to educational needs, healthcare needs, housing needs, long term planning, and other services.³³ Tribal nations need access to accurate data for local tribal governance.

Research – Research studies and data analyses use Census data in a multitude of ways and many researchers use AI/AN census data in their analyses. Results from the Decennial Census counts may impact the geographies or areas where researchers want to focus research. Census datasets are often combined with other datasets to create a greater understanding of what is occurring in the population. Analyses on AI/AN youth in juvenile justice system use Census data to measure overrepresentation and underrepresentation of AI/AN youth in juvenile justice systems.³⁴ Data on Violence Against Women, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, voter registration, and educational attainment can cross tabulate with Decennial Census data to find and identify gaps in policy needs and to further understand trends over time.³⁵ Decennial census population data is often used in calculating rates of diseases and mortality rates.

The importance of a full and accurate count in the 2020 Census. As described in this update, 2020 Census data will play an important role in determining representation at the federal, state, and local levels of government through apportionment and redistricting and will impact funding and grants, governance and policy decisions, and research that benefits AI/ANs for the next 10 years and beyond. “Get Out the Count” efforts in AI/AN communities for the 2020 Census are critically important to ensure that the 2020 Decennial Census population counts include every AI/AN living in the United States. The future of Indian Country depends on an accurate and complete count of the AI/AN population in the Decennial Census.

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Questions: NCAI Policy Research Center – email: research@ncai.org; website: <http://www.ncai.org/prc>

Endnotes

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