

Can we still count everyone *once, only once, and in the right place?*

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Maybe not...



What is the decennial census?

Constitutionally-required count of all persons in the U.S. every 10 years (years ending in 0) to reapportion Congress.

Also used for...

- Redistricting
- Funding allocations (federal, state, local)
- Tracking trends (health, safety, workforce, housing, etc.)
- Benchmark estimates, forecasts, and nearly every population-based survey in the U.S.

**Doesn't the
government
already know
how many
people there
are?**



There is no central database of every person in the U.S., so we need a census.

Largest peacetime civilian operation in the U.S.

Takes 10+ years of planning and hundreds of thousands of staff.



**It's important.
It's complicated.
And it's facing some
serious threats.**



The Census Bureau: January 2025-October 2026

Capacity

Loss of institutional capacity (staff and leadership)

Transparency

Termination of advisory committees (CSAC, NAC, Decennial Census)

A year without staff attending conferences

Termination of data user groups

Privacy

Prohibition against using modern privacy methods (DAO 216-26)

Integrity

Major revisions to Scientific Integrity policy (DAO 216-23) weaken oversight and accountability and no longer prohibit political interference

Quality

Proposed decennial census rules for residence criteria and demographic questions

Disclosure Avoidance for Statistical Products (DAO 216-26)

Notable excerpts (cont'd):

from SECTION 5. POLICY.

.02 The Census Bureau and the Bureau of Economic Analysis **shall adhere to the following order of priority** when considering and applying Disclosure Avoidance:

- a. **Coarsening** shall be the preferred category of Disclosure Avoidance methods for all statistical products.
- b. **Suppression** shall be permitted as a last resort, only to be used when coarsening is prohibited by law or would substantially defeat the accuracy or usability of a statistical product.
- c. **Noise infusion shall not be used for any statistical product.**

<https://www.commerce.gov/opog/disclosure-avoidance-statistical-products>

What's left? About half the tools, and nothing modern.

	Used by Census Bureau Before June 2026	Still Allowed
Using IDs instead of sensitive characteristics (such as name, DOB, address, SSN)	Yes	Yes
Coarsening (aggregating, grouping, rounding)	Yes	Yes
Suppression	Yes	Yes
Synthetic data for “testing code”	Yes	Yes
Synthetic data for privacy protection	Yes	No
Imputation for filling in missing data	Yes	Yes
Imputation for privacy protection	Yes	No
Swapping	Yes	No
Multiplicative Noise Infusion	Yes	No
Differential Privacy	Yes	No

Impacts Are Not Being Felt Equally Nor Fairly

Getting a Pass
Research projects
Some modeled estimates

Stay of Execution
Linked employer-household
data (LEHD, PSEO)
Products that were cleared
before June 2026 (CPS)

Major Impacts Already
American Community Survey
County Business Patterns
???

*More than 4 months later, many
details are still unknown...*

Scientific Integrity Policy Changed

New policy removes language that

- Prohibited political interference
- Promoted equity

Structural changes in oversight process = weaker protections

Trump officials cut political interference ban after unusual Census Bureau report

AUGUST 31, 2026 · 6:24 PM ET



Hansi Lo Wang



Proposed Rule(s)

What's proposed?

tinyurl.com/decennial-census-FRN

- Changes to residence criteria
- Bans some demographic questions

These would be changes to *federal law*, not just Census Bureau policy

SUMMARY:

The Census Bureau is proposing to add two new parts to the Code of Federal Regulations governing the decennial census of population and housing. First, the Census Bureau is proposing to add a part outlining the residence criteria used for identifying each person's "usual residence," as needed to determine whether and where to count them in the census of the population throughout the United States. Second, the Census Bureau is proposing to add a part establishing standards and restrictions for the inclusion of certain demographic questions on the decennial census short-form questionnaire and any other questionnaire used for the enumeration of the population. The Census Bureau is considering these two additions to better prioritize and fulfill its Constitutional mandate to count for apportionment the "whole number of persons in each State" based on the concept of "usual residence"—a process that factors in an element of allegiance but otherwise should be colorblind and should not be distorted in any way by questions about immaterial personal characteristics, such as race. Although these two parts are somewhat related and complementary, each is being proposed independently based on its own merits. These proposals are intended to ensure fidelity to the Constitution, improve and protect the core decennial census data, and promote efficiency.

What are residence criteria?

Rules that determine where people are counted during a census based on the concept of “usual residence.”

Examples of why we need criteria:

- People traveling for work or vacation on Census Day (April 1)
- People with more than one home
- Transient populations (e.g., seasonal workers, adventurers, unhoused persons)
- Deployed military personnel
- College students
- Incarcerated persons

How would residence criteria change?

Proposed Change	Illustrative Question/Concern
New metric: “lawfully present” for at least one hour	Does that mean your place of work counts? Your gym? Your church?
Counts only citizens and lawful permanent residents	What about people from American Samoa? Palau? Students and workers with visas? Others?
Sets “enumeration period” January 3 - April 1	Legal mandate is a count on Census Day (April 1), so what happens if someone moved in March?
Residence “should be consistent with, and evidenced by, their tax records (e.g., tax returns, W-2 forms)”	What about people who have a post office box, use a business address, or don’t file taxes?
Loss of specificity for less common living situations (e.g., children in foster care, boarding schools, people at emergency shelters, etc...)	Will people be counted in the wrong place? Missed entirely?

For more information, refer to: <https://mdi.georgetown.edu/decennial-census/>

Why and why not? (Excerpts on residence)

Purpose of residence criteria

“Proponents of this legal argument therefore understand the term “persons,” as used in Article I, Section 2, and in the Fourteenth Amendment, to denote *who* counts for purposes of apportionment (*i.e.*, “inhabitants,” members of the body politic), and understand the phrase “in each State,” as used in the Fourteenth Amendment, to denote *where* to count such individuals.”

Anticipated impact of residence criteria

"The accuracy of ACS total-population estimates may decline because the ACS **will not have an updated full count of the U.S. population.**

Between censuses, the Census Bureau creates intercensal population estimates and revises them when new decennial census data become available. The ACS relies on those intercensal estimates to generate its sampling weights.

Without new decennial census data to recalibrate those estimates, the ACS sampling weights, and therefore its population estimates, will become less reliable."

Preliminary Regulatory Impact Analysis:

<https://www.regulations.gov/document/USBC-2026-0628-0002>

What questions would be banned?

- Race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation questions would be banned.
- Race has been asked in every U.S. census since the 1st in 1790.
- Proposal does not provide rigorous evidence for removing the questions and would have sweeping implications
 - Less insight into community well-being
 - Loss of data for civil rights enforcement
 - Loss of data needed for business decisions
 - And the impact goes far beyond the census...

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Preliminary Regulatory Impact Analysis

"The ACS, and other surveys that use intercensal estimates as population controls, would have the same limitations relative to the decennial census noted above. In addition, **the quality of the estimates for the ACS and other federal surveys may deteriorate after the release of the 2030 decennial census data.** Numerous key dependencies have been structured around the reliable annual release of intercensal estimates for **race and ethnicity**, such as population controls for major federal surveys; denominators for crucial social and economic indicators (e.g., fertility/mortality rates, cancer rates, poverty rates, unemployment rates, labor force participation, etc.); required information for state and federal grants and other funding formulas; foundational data to support planning at the local level (infrastructure, real estate, and other investments); and essential inputs for countless research projects across academia, government, and the private sector. To produce and release these data, the decennial census counts of the population by race and ethnicity are relied upon, as **there are no other comparably accurate, comprehensive, and reliable sources of this information.** Omitting race and ethnicity from the 2030 Census questionnaire would require the development of estimates from a **base population derived from outdated and/or less accurate data and would deteriorate the accuracy of the estimation method itself.**"

Preliminary Regulatory Impact Analysis: <https://www.regulations.gov/document/USBC-2026-0628-0002>

Watch the recording

www.youtube.com/@apdu_info

The Census Is In Trouble: What You Need to Know About Proposed Changes

September 18, 2026

Resource

Compilation

handsoffourcens.us

Currently 16 collaborators representing a wide array of interests and perspectives

HANDS OFF OUR CENSUS

PUBLIC COMMENT CLOSES OCT 13, 2026

The Census Bureau has proposed unprecedented changes to how the 2030 Census counts the country. Everyone who is counted, and everyone who relies on the count, can weigh in until October 13.

WHO'S MISSING?