

CENSUS 2020 FAQs

NAPA COMPLETE COUNT COMMITTEE

TIMELINE

When does the 2020 census start?

The census does not start on Census Day (April 1). It officially kicked off on Jan. 21 in remote Alaska¹. The bureau says most homes can respond as early as March 12.² Households are supposed to include everyone living in the home as of April 1, which is a reference date, on the form.

NONTRADITIONAL HOUSING

How will the homeless population be counted?

Two ways: Service way enumeration (SBE) and enumeration at transitory locations (ETL)³. These include shelters with sleeping facilities, shelters for children, soup kitchens or regularly scheduled mobile food vans, and targeted outdoor locations where people sleep unsheltered. This enumeration is set to take place March 30 to April 1 2020.

How will these transitory locations be identified?

The Census Bureau will identify service-based and outdoor locations through internet research, outreach to advocacy organizations, and outreach to elected officials of state, local, and tribal governments⁴.

¹ <https://www.npr.org/2019/01/21/686963414/why-the-u-s-census-starts-in-alaskas-most-remote-rural-villages>

² <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/visualizations/2019/how-census-invites-everyone.pdf>

³ <https://2020census.gov/en/conducting-the-count/tl/etl.html>

⁴ <http://www.georgetownpoverty.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/GCPI-ESOI-Counting-People-Experiencing-Homelessness-20180904.pdf>

ACCESSIBILITY

Who is counted by the census?

The census does not only count U.S. citizens. It counts every person living in the country on Census Day, including undocumented immigrants and green card holders, where they usually live and sleep. The Census Bureau has a more detailed breakdown of who is and isn't counted.⁵

Is the census voluntary?

The census is not voluntary, but every person is not required to fill out a census form. Although the federal government has rarely enforced penalties, federal law⁶ requires U.S. residents ages 18 and older to answer census questions. But one person can answer questions on behalf of others in the same household. When the Census Bureau releases census response rates, those are percentages of households, not people.

CYBERSECURITY

Is my information private?

The Census Bureau does not keep your individually identifiable data confidential forever. Census records identifying individuals are ultimately transferred from the Census Bureau to the National Archives and Records Administration, which releases the information to the public 72 years after it's collected. Federal law⁷ restricts access to data identifying individuals until then. Still, the Census Bureau can release information about specific demographic groups at a level as detailed as a neighborhood.

Is this the first online census?

The 2020 census is not the first online U.S. census. There was an online option for the 2000 census⁸, although it was only available for the short version of that year's form and only in English. The 2020 census is set to be the first *primarily* online count, allowing all U.S. households to reply through the Internet⁹. The bureau is also collecting responses on paper, over the phone and in person.

⁵ https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2020/program-management/memo-series/2020-memo-2018_04-appendix.pdf

⁶ <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/13/221>

⁷ https://www.census.gov/history/www/genealogy/decennial_census_records/the_72_year_rule_1.html

⁸ <https://www.census.gov/pred/www/rpts/A.2.b.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.npr.org/2020/03/02/807913222/despite-cybersecurity-risks-and-last-minute-changes-the-2020-census-goes-online>

GENERAL

What questions do the 2020 Census ask?

The 2020 Census asks how many people are living or staying at each address. For each person, we ask about name, sex, age, date of birth, relationship, Hispanic origin, and race. We also will ask whether the housing unit, such as the house, apartment, or mobile home, is owned or rented, and for contact information in case additional information is needed. The 2020 Census is not asking citizenship status, your full social security number, money or donations, anything on behalf of a political party or your bank or credit card numbers.

Is there a US citizenship question on the census?

The 2020 census form does not include a citizenship question. Federal courts have permanently blocked Trump administration plans¹⁰ to add this controversial question to the 2020 census forms: "Is this person a citizen of the United States?" The administration is instead gathering existing government records¹¹ for data about the U.S. citizenship status of every person living in the country.

Is Hispanic or Latino a considered a race on the census?

The census does not consider "Hispanic or Latino" a race. Federal standards¹² set by the White House Office of Management and Budget require the census and other federal surveys to categorize "Hispanic or Latino" as an ethnicity to allow Latinx people to identify with any race. OMB has not made public¹³ whether it has approved a proposal to change¹⁴ how the census collects data on Latinx identity.

Does the census ask about my religion, political party or income?

The census does not ask about your religion, political affiliation or income.

¹⁰ <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/6200561-July-16-2019-Order-by-U-S-District-Judge-Jesse.html>

¹¹ <https://www.npr.org/2020/01/04/793325772/to-produce-citizenship-data-homeland-security-to-share-records-with-census>

¹² <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Revisions-to-the-Standards-for-the-Classification-of-Federal-Data-on-Race-and-Ethnicity-October30-1997.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.npr.org/2018/01/26/580865378/census-request-suggests-no-race-ethnicity-data-changes-in-2020-experts-say>

¹⁴ <https://www.npr.org/2017/11/22/564426420/how-the-u-s-defines-race-and-ethnicity-may-change-under-trump>

Federal law¹⁵ prohibits the Census Bureau from requiring all households to answer questions about religious affiliation. The questions the 2020 census does ask are listed here¹⁶.

How much money is allocated because of the census?

The exact amount of federal funding guided by census data is not known. The Census Bureau often cites more than \$675 billion a year¹⁷ as the estimated amount of federal government spending that is distributed to states and local communities based in part on census data. But Andrew Reamer, a longtime researcher on census-guided funding based at the George Washington University's Institute of Public Policy, has used more recent data to produce a more comprehensive estimate, currently at more than \$1.5 trillion a year¹⁸.

Is the census the same as the American Community Survey?

The census is not the American Community Survey. Both are conducted by the Census Bureau. The census goes out to every household once a decade. The American Community Survey¹⁹ goes out to about one in 38 households every year.

How do I know whether someone works for the U.S. Census Bureau?

All Census Bureau workers carry official government badges that display a photograph, a Department of Commerce watermark, and an expiration date. You can also call your local regional office for verification. Find regional offices' phone numbers on the [Regional Census Center page](#).

¹⁵ https://ask.census.gov/prweb/PRServletCustom/YACFBFye-rFlz_FoGtyvDRUGg1Uzu5Mn*/!STANDARD?pyActivity=pyMobileSnapStart&ArticleID=KCP-5050

¹⁶ <https://2020census.gov/en/about-questions.html>

¹⁷ <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2020/program-management/working-papers/Uses-of-Census-Bureau-Data-in-Federal-Funds-Distribution.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://gwipp.gwu.edu/counting-dollars-2020-role-decennial-census-geographic-distribution-federal-funds>

¹⁹ <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs>