

July 27, 2018

ABOUT

A Fair and Accurate Count: Why the Census Citizenship Question Is A Bad Idea

Every 10 years, the Census Bureau conducts the Decennial Census to obtain a headcount of every individual living in the United States. This provides highly valuable information that is critical to keeping our governments and local communities functioning. Counts from the Decennial Census determine the number of representatives in Congress and the amount of aid that states get from the federal government, along with providing other public and private entities information for decision-making.

However, the usefulness of the upcoming 2020 Census Survey is currently jeopardized by plans to include a divisive question about participants' citizenship. This will be costly for Virginia and communities across the nation.

The Census Bureau hasn't asked every decennial respondent a citizenship question since 1950, and adding it for 2020 will likely have serious consequences for participation, especially in Virginia. Immigrants represent 12 percent of Virginia's population and they hold a wide range of immigrant statuses, including naturalized citizens, temporary visa holders, and unauthorized immigrants. And many immigrants live in mixed-status households, where their spouse or child may have a status that is different than theirs. With our current political landscape rife with fraught discussions about undocumented immigrants and deportation, imposing this question on the 2020 Census will likely make many immigrant families wary of participation and result in significant undercounts that undermine our governments and communities.

Accurate counts are necessary to determine appropriate funding levels for states and localities, so that they can provide high quality public services at a reasonable cost to taxpayers. Virginia received over \$5 billion in federal aid during fiscal year 2015 alone for 11 federal-state partnerships. Annually, Virginia receives almost \$1.2 billion in federal transportation funding so that the state can maintain and update roads and highways. Funding for Virginia's infrastructure and other priorities would be negatively impacted by undercounts of certain populations in the state.

Moreover, asking a citizenship question will incur additional costs. The Census Bureau's own Chief Scientist John Abowd advised against the citizenship question, noting that, in addition to compromising the quality of the census, asking the question would increase Census costs by \$27.5 million due to a need for more follow-up work to compensate for unresponsiveness.



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It is crucial that all Virginians get counted in the upcoming Census survey, including the over 1 million foreign-born individuals living in Virginia. There's still a chance to save the accuracy and fairness of the Census, by **submitting a public comment to the U.S. Department of Commerce before midnight on Tuesday, August 7**. You can find more information about submitting a public comment from the [Fair Immigration Reform Movement](#).

— Faith Burns, Research Intern, and Laura Goren, Research Director

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