

Tribes and the Census

Bureau Announces Proposed Questions For the 2020 Census and the ACS

The Census Bureau sent the text of the questions it proposes to ask on the 2020 decennial census questionnaire to Congress late last week. The submission, two years before the next Census is conducted, is required by law. The Bureau also included the questions being proposed for the American Community Survey (ACS) in future years.

The full details can be found in the Bureau publication "Questions Planned for the 2020 Census and American Community Survey" available on the agency's Web site at: <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2018/dec/planned-questions-2020-ac.html>.

The race question on both the decennial and the ACS forms is the foundation stone of all the data the Census Bureau publishes on the American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) population. The responses to the question are entirely a matter of how the person completing the form, generally the householder, wishes to identify each person in that household. To identify as American Indian or Alaska Native does not require any verification. The Census Bureau takes whatever is on the form as that person's race, and the data are tabulated accordingly.

The proposed version of the question is shown on the following page.

There are several changes from the version used in the 2010 Census.

The 2010 questionnaire had a single write-in line below the question on whether the person was American Indian or Alaska Native. The respondent was to use the line to write in the name of the person's "enrolled or principal tribe." In an effort to encourage use of the write-in line the Bureau is now providing examples, two for American Indian tribes, two for Central, Mexican or South American Indian tribal groupings and two for Alaska Native Tribes.

The question will also be on the on-line version of the 2020 questionnaire in a form suitable for use on a computer, tablet or smartphone.

As the illustration shows, there are check boxes in the question for "Native Hawaiian," "Samoan," "Chamorro" and one for "Other Pacific Islander" with examples of groups that may be entered on the write-in line provided for that purpose.

What is this person's race?

Mark one or more boxes **AND** print origins.

- White – *Print, for example, German, Irish, English, Italian, Lebanese, Egyptian, etc.* ↴

- Black or African Am. – *Print, for example, African American, Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, Ethiopian, Somali, etc.* ↴

- American Indian or Alaska Native – *Print name of enrolled or principal tribe(s), for example, Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe, Mayan, Aztec, Native Village of Barrow Inupiat Traditional Government, Nome Eskimo Community, etc.* ↴

- | | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese | <input type="checkbox"/> Vietnamese | <input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Filipino | <input type="checkbox"/> Korean | <input type="checkbox"/> Samoan |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian Indian | <input type="checkbox"/> Japanese | <input type="checkbox"/> Chamorro |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other Asian –
<i>Print, for example, Pakistani, Cambodian, Hmong, etc.</i> ↴ | | <input type="checkbox"/> Other Pacific Islander –
<i>Print, for example, Tongan, Fijian, Marshallese, etc.</i> ↴ |

- Some other race – *Print race or origin.* ↴

Citizenship Question Proposed for 2020

A major controversy is now swirling around the questions proposed for the 2020 Census. The Secretary of Commerce, head of the Department that houses the Census Bureau, decided to add a question on the citizenship status of everyone enumerated on the 2020 questionnaire. The addition of such a question was urged by the Justice Department.

The question would look like this:

Is this person a citizen of the United States?

- Yes, born in the United States
- Yes, born in Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, or Northern Marianas
- Yes, born abroad of U.S. citizen parent or parents
- Yes, U.S. citizen by naturalization – *Print year of naturalization* ↘
- No, not a U.S. citizen

Unless the Secretary's decision is reversed, the question is widely expected to create major problems in immigrant communities, including ones housing significant numbers of Hispanics, Middle Easterners and Asians. When such a question was raised during focus group interviews conducted some months ago by Census Bureau staff, the reaction was explosive.

A Memo by Census Bureau managers noted that Bureau staff interviewers and their supervisors indicated that they were facing a “new phenomenon” in the field. The respondents in the focus groups, particularly immigrant respondents, expressed fears that increased markedly over those in previous sessions. Respondents reported being told by community leaders not to open the door without a warrant signed by a judge. The Census Bureau interviewers observed respondents falsifying names, dates of birth, and other information on their household rosters.

The Commerce Secretary dismissed these reports as failing to provide documentation that the response rates to a questionnaire containing a citizenship question "would in fact decline materially."

The effect of a citizenship question on the response rates to the 2020 Census on the part of the AI/AN population is unknown and perhaps unknowable at this point. All American Indians and Alaska Natives born within the territorial limits of the United States were made US citizens by an act of Congress in 1924.

However, indigenous people from Central and South America are classified as AI/AN for Census purposes as a result of a directive that the Office of Management and Budget issued in 1997. There were slightly over 170,000 persons counted as in living in the US in 2010 who identified as AI/AN only and with a Central American, Mexican American, South American or Spanish American tribal grouping. Just over 70% of these identified with a Mexican-American tribal grouping. About 100,000 others identified with a Central American, Mexican American, South American or Spanish American tribal grouping along with another race.

If a portion of this segment of the AI/AN population avoids being counted in 2020 because of the citizenship question, it will depress the total AI/AN count nationally and in a number of mostly urban areas.

The Commerce Secretary's decision to include a citizenship question on the 2020 form has been roundly denounced by the civil rights organizations that represent the immigrant communities certain to be affected. It has been heavily criticized in the editorial columns of several national newspapers and by their editorial cartoonists.

The decision has also evoked strong objections on scientific grounds from the American Statistical Association. In a letter to the Secretary of Commerce while the matter was still pending, the president of the Association contended that adding such a question at this stage of the preparations for 2020 and without time for the extensive testing used in vetting all the questions "is very likely to undermine the census."

Although the law requires that the questions proposed for the next decennial be submitted to Congress, it provides no process for overriding the Commerce Secretary's decision on what to include and how to include it on the Census questionnaire short of passing a new law.

The questions just submitted to Congress include the questions to be asked on the ACS. A future issue of this newsletter will look at some of these.

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