



## Everyone Counts!

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It is unlikely many of us have escaped the signs that we are in full-steam election-season mode, but this year's census—and its significance— may be less apparent. What is the census and why does it matter?

The U.S. Constitution (Article 1, Section 2) mandates a count of the country's population every 10 years. The 2020 Census will be the 24th time the country has engaged in a count of the population. The count includes all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and five U.S. territories: Puerto Rico, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The census is conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, a nonpartisan government agency bound by law to keep collected information confidential.

Unfortunately, attempts by the current Administration to include a question about citizenship status have raised concerns about participation in the census. Although the question's use has been blocked in court, fears that information about citizenship status could be used to target persons for deportation may result in decreased participation in the census. At stake in an accurate census count is congressional representation and over \$800 billion in federal government funding. Data collected in the census also impacts how congressional districts are drawn; district mapping has played an influential role in election outcomes over the last several election cycles.

Census data shapes funding decisions that impact the day-to-day lives of people in every community, including transportation infrastructure, education and Head Start programs, school lunches, health services, housing for older adults, and emergency response services. Census data is used by business owners and municipal planners to shape community life, to determine where businesses and services are located, the routes of buses and subways, the number of teachers and schools that serve a community.

People of faith can play an important role in making sure everyone is counted. Our faith reminds us that every person carries within the image of God and every person counts in the well-being of the whole community. Communities of faith are critical in making sure that historically undercounted communities are

counted, such as people living in poverty, children under the age of five, immigrant communities, American Indians and Alaska Natives, Latinos, African Americans, and Asian American/Pacific Islanders. The 2020 Census is our chance to shift the historical narrative that has excluded so many from being counted for so long, and move to a more vibrant, inclusive picture of “we the people.”

Here are some important dates to keep in mind:

Households will begin receiving Census Bureau mail in mid-March with instructions on how to respond to the Census. It is possible to respond online, by phone, or by mail. April 1st is Census Day, and Census Bureau representatives will begin visiting college campuses, senior centers and transitional housing facilities, and community-based programs servicing low-income people. During the months of May through July, Census Bureau representatives will visit homes that have not yet responded. The census count will wrap up in August 2020.

It is a pivotal election year and a census year, and your voice—your action—matter! Participate in the 2020 Census and encourage others in your community to participate. Distribute flyers and bulletin inserts to raise awareness about the importance of the 2020 Census. Remind people to register to vote, and make sure you are registered to vote. Attend community forums and talk about the issues that are important to your community. Ask questions of the candidates. Vote. “Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet!” (Isaiah 58:1)

For additional resources on the 2020 Census, visit Census Counts 2020: [www.CensusCounts.org](http://www.CensusCounts.org).

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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