



CONSORTIUM of SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATIONS

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COSSA Statement on the Impact of a Citizenship Question in the 2020 Decennial Census

The Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA) is disappointed in the decision by the Department of Commerce to add a question on respondents' citizenship to the 2020 Decennial Census. This decision circumvents the Census Bureau's routine research and testing processes to ensure potential questions do not affect the quality of responses and could compromise one of the most valuable data resources the government produces.

It is simply too late in the cycle to contemplate adding a question to the census. In the decade leading up to a decennial census, the Census Bureau conducts years of rigorous research and testing to ensure that even the smallest changes to design and wording will not impact the accuracy of the responses received. This research and testing phase culminates in the "dry run" of the census, the 2018 End-to-End Census Test, which is being conducted now—without a question on citizenship. Even Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross concluded that his department "is not able to determine definitively how the inclusion of a citizenship question on the decennial census will impact responsiveness."

Census data is too important to risk an untested question that has not been fielded since 1950. The decennial census is an irreplaceable source of data for researchers across the social sciences who use it to generate valuable findings about the U.S. population that can be used to inform evidence-based policies. In addition, information from the decennial census undergirds numerous other surveys and data sets at the Census Bureau and beyond, so a problem at the source would have far-reaching implications across the statistical system. We have no way of knowing what future insights will be lost if this data is compromised. Obviously, the value of reliable Census data extends beyond its use for research. It is used to allocate more than \$800 billion in taxpayer dollars to programs across the country, by businesses in the private sector to guide investment decisions, and by state and local governments to make better policies.

COSSA hopes that Congress will exercise its oversight authority to safeguard the integrity of Census data and enact legislation to prevent untested, unresearched questions from being added to the decennial census. We look forward to working with our partners in Congress and across the stakeholder community to ensure a fair and accurate 2020 Decennial Census.

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The Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA) is a nonprofit advocacy organization working to promote sustainable federal funding for social and behavioral science research and federal policies that positively impact the conduct of research. COSSA serves as a united voice for a broad, diverse network of organizations, institutions, communities, and stakeholders who care about a successful and vibrant social science research enterprise. The COSSA membership includes professional and disciplinary associations, scientific societies, research centers and institutes, and U.S. colleges and universities.

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