

2020 Census FAQ

General Census Information

1) What is the Decennial Census?

- a) The U.S. Constitution mandates that every 10 years every person in every state and territory is counted. The 2020 Census timeline: <https://www.censusoutreach.org/census-timeline>.
- b) The Decennial Census and the American Community Survey (ACS) are part of the Decennial Census Program of the U.S. Census Bureau. Since 2005, in order to provide communities, businesses and the public with detailed information more frequently, data that were historically collected only once every 10 years by the decennial census long form have been collected monthly (and released annually) through the ACS (<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/about/census-acs.html>).

2) Does the Census only count U.S. Citizens?

- a) Both Republican and Democratic administrations, through the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), have confirmed unequivocally that the Constitution requires a count of all persons living in the United States on Census Day, regardless of citizenship status. Moreover, in adopting the 14th Amendment, Congress rejected proposals to allocate seats in the House of Representatives based on voter-eligible population alone, rather than total population.

3) What is Census data used for?

- a) The decennial count determines how the 435 members of the House of Representatives are allocated among the states, and its numbers determine how district lines are drawn for state legislatures, counties, city councils, school boards and other local governments. The data provide evidence of disparate impact of governmental and private sector policies and practices, and assist civil and business leaders in devising solutions that promote equality of opportunity and address the needs of a diverse population.
- b) Census data also determine how the federal government distributes more than \$600 billion in federal funds every year to state and local governments for:
 - i) Title I Grants to Local Educational Agencies
 - ii) Medical Assistance Program
 - iii) Economic Adjustment Assistance
 - iv) State Children's Insurance Program
 - v) Vocational Rehabilitation Grants to States
 - vi) Emergency Food Assistance Program
 - vii) Highways
 - viii) Housing
 - ix) Emergency disaster relief
 - x) Several other programs supporting lower-income families such as: Head Start, Medicare, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Pell grants for college and reduced-price school lunch programs
- c) To reduce costs for the 2020 Census while maintaining quality, the Census Bureau is investigating the strategic reuse of administrative records and private data sources. Administrative data refers to any information collected by federal or state agencies for the

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purpose of administering programs or providing services. Private, or commercial, data refer to information collected by third parties, which were acquired by the Census Bureau. The [Census Advisory Committee](#) has a working group to explore privacy, confidentiality, and consent issues, as well as provide feedback on research and plans to explore public attitudes on Administrative Records and Third Party Data (ARTPD) uses.

4) Is there a penalty for not responding to the census questionnaire?

- a) Your participation in the decennial census is required by law. There are penalties for not answering census questions (\$100 fine) and for providing false responses (\$500 fine). The Census Act also prohibits any action that is intended to cause an inaccurate enumeration (\$1,000 fine and/or up to one-year imprisonment). The Census Bureau encourages full participation in the census and does not refer cases of nonresponse to the Department of Justice for prosecution.

Hard-To-Count

1) Who is considered the hard-to-count population in California?

- a) Hard-to-Count populations (HTCs) are groups that have historically been less likely to respond to the census. HTCs are both rural and urban and include:
 - i) Young children
 - ii) Racial and ethnic minorities
 - iii) Individuals with low English language proficiency
 - iv) Lower-income families
 - v) The homeless
 - vi) Undocumented immigrants
 - vii) Mobile individuals such as college students
 - viii) LGBTQ persons
 - ix) Individuals who are angry at or distrustful of the government

2) Why is it important to get an accurate count for Children?

- a) When young children are undercounted, their communities are denied a full voice in policy decision-making. Children are included in the population totals used for congressional reapportionment and the drawing of legislative district boundaries. In the 2010 Census, the net undercount rate for young children was 4.6 percent, and more than 2.2 million in this age group were not included in the census results. Currently an estimate 4.5 million children under age five live in hard-to-count neighborhoods.
- b) There are many reasons why children are undercounted. Since there is no single cause for the undercount of young children, there is no single solution to the problem. However, the Census Bureau is pursuing multiple strategies, specifically to ensure that the count of young children is as complete as possible:
 - i) Wording changed on the census questionnaire to help those responding on behalf of their household to include children and babies. The term “grandchild” added and tested prompts to list unrelated children. This new wording was tested in the 2018 End-to-End Census Test.

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- ii) Developing materials that explain why young children are undercounted and how organizations and individuals can educate households likely to exclude young children on their questionnaire.
 - iii) Including messaging on the importance of including young children in communications and partnership support materials.
 - iv) Planning to purchase advertising and have an online presence aimed toward households with young children. Also partner with advocacy groups focused on children and local community groups who can help get the word out about the importance of counting all children in the household.
 - v) Working on a local level. Organizations that focus on children are connecting bureau with communities through pediatrician groups and advocacy organizations focused on local children. Getting the word out about counting all children by communicating with a local network.
 - vi) Working with local schools through the Statistics in Schools program to educate parents about the importance of the census by way of older siblings of undercounted children.
 - vii) Improving census taker training materials to emphasize the importance of including children during interviews with nonresponding households.
- 3) How will the homeless population be counted?**
- a) The County of Marin is planning to organize an effort to count its homeless population for the 2020 Census.
- 4) Other questions about HTC populations:**
- a) There were several questions about hard to count population in Novato and rural West Marin as well as the formula used to determine a hard to count populations. More research is needed to answer these questions.

Citizenship Question

- 1) When was the addition of the citizenship question?**
- a) On March 26, 2018 Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross announced plans to include a question about citizenship status on the 2020 census — a question that has been in some bureau surveys in recent years but not in the primary decennial census since 1950.
- 2) What will be the impact of adding a citizenship question to the Census questionnaire?**
- a) The addition of a citizenship question to the census questionnaire creates a situation in which civic engagement action, to be counted, becomes risky. The Census Bureau's own research found that asking questions about citizenship caused an "unprecedented groundswell in confidentiality and data-sharing concerns among immigrants or those who live with immigrants." In test settings from February through September 2017, survey respondents provided incomplete or incorrect information and were visibly nervous about immigration and citizenship questions. One Census Bureau interviewer reported that one respondent got up and left her alone in his apartment when the interviewer asked citizenship related questions. Even though census data was protected under law from such disclosure, many people were

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concerned that their responses would be shared or disclosed even before the citizenship question was added.

3) Can the Census Bureau get information about citizenship in another questionnaire?

- a) The Census Bureau collects quality data on citizenship through the [American Community Survey](#).

4) When was the citizenship question last asked?

- a) The last time a citizenship question has been on a census survey sent to 100% of households was in the 1950 census. The Census Bureau decided to remove the citizenship questions in 1960 in part because innovations in survey methods revealed a more accurate and less burdensome way of counting the country's non-citizen population. When the Census Bureau was sued in 1980, the government argued at the time that "any effort to ascertain citizenship will inevitably jeopardize the overall accuracy of the population count" – an argument the bureau has consistently upheld over the years.

5) If there is missing information on the census questionnaire will it still count?

- a) Incomplete questionnaires for the 2020 census, including those that leave the controversial citizenship question unanswered, will still be included in the upcoming U.S. head count. The bureau's acting director, Ron Jarmin, testified on Capitol Hill during a House Appropriations Commerce, Justice, Science Subcommittee hearing on the 2020 census that they "process many surveys with incomplete responses".

6) Has anyone been persecuted for not completing the census questionnaire?

- a) Bureau spokesman Brian Lavin stated that no one has been prosecuted for failing to respond to a survey since the 1970 census. The bureau is "really not in the business of prosecuting people who don't comply".

7) Are there any efforts opposing the citizenship question?

- a) The New York State attorney general, Eric T. Schneiderman, said he was leading a multistate lawsuit to stop the move, and officials in Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Washington said they would join the effort. The State of California filed a separate lawsuit on March 26, 2018. Critics of Mr. Ross's decision made available a letter sent to Mr. Ross in January from six former directors of the Census Bureau who served under both Republican and Democratic administrations. The letter stated that they were "deeply concerned" that adding the citizenship question would "considerably increase the risks to the 2020 enumeration".
- b) The outcome of the various lawsuits opposing the citizenship question on the 2020 Census is still unknown.
- c) On March 20, 2018 U.S. Senators Bob Menendez, Cory Booker and Maizie Hirono introduced the Every Person Counts Act of 2018 that would prohibit the Census Bureau from asking a question on citizenship or immigration status. The bill is also co-sponsored by Senators Michael Bennet (D-Colo.), Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), Chris Coons (D-Del.), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-Nev.), Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.), Dick Durbin (D-Ill.), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.), Kamala Harris (D-Calif.), Ed Markey (D-Mass.), Patty Murray (D-Wash.) d Tina Smith (D-Minn.). The Every Person Counts Act of 2018 bill would:
 - i) Amend title 13, United States Code, to make clear that each decennial census shall tabulate the total number of persons in each State.

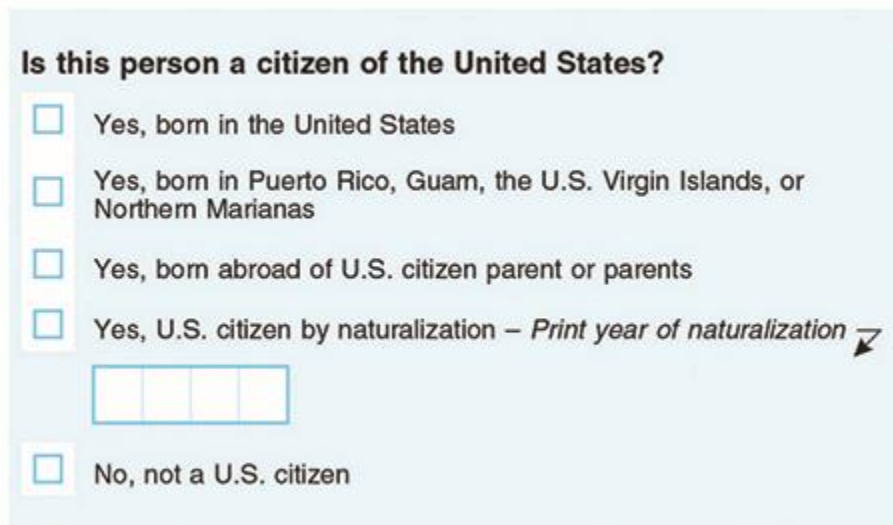
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- ii) Prohibit the Secretary of Commerce from including any census question regarding United States citizenship or immigration status.
- iii) Forbid an interpretation that would permit or require the census exclusion of populations based on age, personnel in the Armed Forces serving abroad, federal employees and their dependents stationed abroad or other persons outside the United States who are traceable to the state of their usual place of residence.
- iv) The bill is supported by: The National Association of Latino Elected Officials (NALEO), Service Employees International Union (SEIU), National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund, Jewish Council for Public Affairs, Common Cause, NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, Inc., and the National Council of Jewish Women.

There are currently no updates on this bill. (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/2580>)

8) What will the citizenship question ask?

- a) The proposed question doesn't ask about immigration status, just whether or not someone is a citizen. A sample of the question text is below:



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

9) What does the voting rights act have to do with including the citizenship question?

- a) The addition of the citizenship question has been attributed to the Justice Department's enforcement of the Voting Rights Act. The administration has claimed that better data on the citizenship of voting-age adults was needed to enforce the Voting Rights Act. Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 prohibits voting practices or procedures that discriminate on the basis of race, color, or membership in one of the language minority groups identified in Section 4(f)(2) of the Act.

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Technology

1) What technological changes will there be with the 2020 Census?

- a) The Bureau plans to reduce paper mailings of the questionnaire by promoting the internet as the primary response mode. Respondents will be able to enter their information using a unique ID code mailed to their homes or by providing identifying information that matches administrative records. The bureau's goal is that 55% of the U.S. population will respond online using computers, mobile phones or other devices.

2) How might offering an online questionnaire lead to an accurate count?

- a) This approach may lead to lower participation given that many may have limited access to the online questionnaire. Access to the Internet solely via mobile devices is common. One poll finds that 87% of California households report having broadband Internet connectivity at home. However, for a growing segment of residents (18%) their only means of connecting to high speed Internet at home is through a smartphone. While a questionnaire interface for mobile devices is being developed, it is unclear how user-friendly it will be. In addition, least likely to report having broadband Internet connectivity:
 - i) Residents living in households with annual incomes of less than \$20,000
 - ii) Non-high school graduates
 - iii) Spanish-speaking Latinos
 - iv) First-generation immigrants
 - v) Adults with a disability
 - vi) Seniors, especially those age 75 or older.

Low-income households are more likely to use mobile phones to get online, which presents another potential hurdle for the 2020 Census. Mobile devices have longer load times, and respondents are more likely to not complete surveys than those using desktop computers. This adds a layer of obstacles for people who may be poor and do not have computers at home, or who may not be proficient in English. Even though the surveys are translated into different languages, people still need English to navigate the technology required to even get to the surveys. Estimates from the Census Bureau show that every 1 percent decrease in the self-response rate will increase the cost of conducting the census by \$55 million.

3) How will the Census decide who will take the online vs. written Census questionnaire?

- a) The Census Bureau will encourage everyone who can to respond using the internet, but paper questionnaires will continue to be available. Households with indicators of low internet access or use will simultaneously receive the paper questionnaire and information about responding online. People will be able to report their answers by telephone as well.

4) How will the Census bureau contact the households?

- a) In contacting most households, the bureau will not include paper forms. Instead, its letter will include a unique security code and will urge people to use it to respond online. (The bureau is still studying whether to contact people by text message through mobile phones.) People without computers at home could go to community centers that partner with the bureau, where they could access the internet and get assistance.

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5) What if the household loses their security codes? Can they still participate in the Census?

- a) To make the form as easy to fill out as possible, the Census Bureau allows respondents to submit an online form either by entering a bureau issued ID code included in their household's mailings or by selecting a "non-ID" option, in which respondents can use their household address as identifying information. They will also have the option of assistance from a telephone agent. A program will use administrative records and third-party data to match each non-ID response with the bureau's Master Address File in real time. This functionality removes an extra step (finding or securing a bureau-issued ID) for many households and has performed well in tests.

6) What might be some challenges to using a mobile device?

- a) Census Bureau experts found that responding to the 2015 [National Content Test](#) (NCT) and the American Community Survey (ACS) online via mobile devices was more burdensome and likely produced less accurate data than using a desktop or laptop computer. Mobile device users faced the challenges of longer load time for the ACS web application, small font sizes, using a finger to select the proper option, and more scrolling. Mobile device respondents experienced breakoff rates—starting but not completing a survey. Responding by mobile phone browser also took on average about eight minutes longer than responding via computer. These challenges are important for hard-to-count communities, since mobile device web respondents are significantly more likely to be people of color, renters, and younger, less educated, and lower income respondents.

7) What languages will the online Census be offered?

- a) In 2020, the web option will allow for the survey to be instantly available in several languages besides English, including Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Russian, Arabic, and Tagalog.

8) How is the Census Bureau dealing with cyber security?

- a) To comply with provisions of the Federal Cybersecurity Enhancement Act of 2015, the Census Bureau is mandated to utilize Department of Homeland Security (DHS) cybersecurity systems. This move is particularly sensitive because it could allow federal personnel who are not sworn under the confidentiality provisions of the Census Act to see personally identifiable information if the DHS system detects possible, or actual, cyberattack. Accordingly, the Census Bureau decided to revise its longstanding confidentiality pledge, which had previously promised that only sworn Census Bureau employees would have access to raw census and survey data.
- b) The revised pledge states, "Per the Federal Cybersecurity Enhancement Act of 2015, your data are protected from cybersecurity risks through screening of the systems that transmit your data" and provides no promise that people involved in those systems must be sworn to confidentiality.

Confidentiality

1) Why are undocumented immigrants fearful of the Census confidentiality?

- a) Many Latinos fear the information given to the Census Bureau may be used to harm their families and communities, and their distrust could significantly reduce their willingness to participate in the Census. California has more undocumented residents than any other state. The Pew Research Center found that by 2014, 12.3% of California children in grades K-12 had at

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least one undocumented parent. There is fear of what the government will do with this data. Think about DACA; people voluntarily disclosed information, and now it is being used to potentially deport them.

- 2) What legal protections exist to safeguard my privacy and the confidentiality of my responses?**
 - a) The confidentiality provision of the Census Act (also known as Title 13) – 13 U.S.C. §9 – prohibits any officer or employee of the Department of Commerce or Census Bureau, or local government census liaison, from using information collected under the Census Act for any purpose other than producing statistical datasets. The bureau may not publish information that would identify an individual, business, or organization. Only Census Bureau employees or liaisons sworn to observe the strict confidentiality of personal data collected in censuses or surveys may examine individual reports or census/survey forms. More importantly, the bureau and its employees may not share personal census responses with any other government agency or official (federal, state, or local), outside entity (such as a business), or court of law for any reason. And for all census data, the [“72-Year Rule”](#) applies: the government is not allowed to release data on individuals for 72 years. Census data on individuals from the 1940 census only became available in April of 2012.
- 3) What are the consequences for sharing personal census information?**
 - a) Violators are subject to stiff criminal sanctions, including fines up to \$250,000 and up to five years in prison (13 U.S.C. §214, as amended).
- 4) Census data was used to incarcerate Japanese Americans during WWII. Shouldn't that concern me?**
 - a) The most notable case of disclosure of unpublished information to assist another federal agency was the provision of tabulations of Japanese Americans, by county, county subdivision, and – in some cases – by census block, to the Department of War during World War II, as well as limited sharing of personally identifiable information with a federal agency. The Census Bureau's actions did not fully come to light until the early 2000s. As deplorable as the agency's actions were, it is important to know that it was not done in violation of the law as written at the time. No law currently on the books, or any agency or government official, can override the Census Act confidentiality protections – not the Patriot Act, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), Homeland Security, Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE), or even the president. Furthermore, no private company, landlord, or employer can get any household's census information, even with a court order.
- 5) What role do civil rights advocates have in protecting me from others using my information against me?**
 - a) Civil rights advocates will organize teams of experienced lawyers who will be prepared to respond quickly and over the long term to any unauthorized access to and misuse of census data by government agencies and officials.

Hiring Process/ Funding

- 1) Are there any requirements for working in the Census Bureau?**

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- a) The current administration has decided to hire U.S. citizens to serve as Census workers for Census 2020. The Bureau will not employ legal permanent residents or other work-authorized non-citizens in outreach or enumerator positions. Unfortunately, these individuals who have the skills needed to gain the trust of community members are not going to be hired from within the community to help reduce the anxiety of speaking to government officials.
- 2) How many local offices will the Census Bureau open?**
- a) The Bureau is opening far fewer local offices than it did in Census 2010, when there were 53 offices in California, one in every Congressional district. As of today, it intends to open only 30 local offices in California for Census 2020 (https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/2020-census/planning-management/memo-series/2020-memo-2017_21.html)
- 3) How much does in-person follow-up costs tax payers?**
- a) Visiting homes in-person comes at a much higher cost for taxpayers and is one reason why the Government Accountability Office [reported](#) the 2010 Census cost approximately \$98 per housing unit.
- 4) What consequences has the lack of funding had so far in the census?**
- a) The U.S. Census Bureau has faced a \$200 million shortfall since 2012. Thousands of Census employees have to been cut, including outreach workers and those who may have the language and cultural skills to reach many hard to count communities.
- 5) How was the Master Address File changed with technology?**
- a) The Census Bureau enhanced the integrated address and spatial data system (known as MAF/TIGER) with imagery and sophisticated geospatial technology. Using this imagery and technology allows them to verify 70 percent of addresses from their office instead of verifying all of them in the field as done in the past. In the past, census-takers have walked all 11 million blocks in the country to compile the mailing list. For 2020, the agency will walk 25% of blocks and do the rest from the office, using digital imagery and other sources.
- 6) What happens when the enumerator can't find the household? Do they not take part in the Census?**
- a) If the enumerator can't reach a household after various attempts, they try to get information from neighbors about who was living in the house — and if that does not work, they resort to a “nearest-neighbor imputation,” or basically assuming that the household looks identical to that of the most similar household nearby.

Master Address File (MAF)/ Local Update of Census Address (LUCA)

- 1) How can household already be missed by the Census Bureau?**
- a) The Master Address File (MAF) establishes the universe of living quarters (including group facilities, such as college dorms, prisons, and military barracks) for the census count. The accuracy of the MAF and related digital maps (the TIGER files, which put housing units in the correct location) is fundamental to an accurate census. The Census Bureau will not know that it

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has missed people who live in housing units that are not included on the MAF. In developing the address file and maps that guide census-taking, the Bureau can easily overlook commercial buildings that have been converted to residential units, people living in non-traditional housing (such as garages), illegally subdivided living quarters, and multiple households living in one structure ([Local Update of Census Address details](#)).

California

1) Hard-to-count and California?

- a) California has ten of the top 50 HTC counties in the nation, totaling an estimated 8.4 million people, the approximate population of New Jersey (the eleventh most populous state). As the most populous state in the nation, California is home to large numbers of youth, immigrants, highly mobile residents, and those with Limited-English proficiency. This diversity is an asset, helping make California the sixth-largest economy in the world, but it also means that the state population is hard to count.

2) What would be the impact in federal funding with an undercount in California?

- a) If there's a 2.7% undercount in 2020, Governor Brown's finance department estimates it would short California's total population by 1.1 million residents. For each person not counted, it would mean \$1,950 less each year in federal money. Over a decade, that's \$21 billion.

3) How many children in California are at risk of being missed?

- a) California's more than 2.5 million young children are especially at risk of being missed. Black and Hispanic children have the highest undercounts of any age group.

4) How much funding does California receive per citizen based on 2010 Census data?

- a) California receives over \$73 billion annually in federal funds for schools, crime prevention, health care, and transportation. This amounted to about \$1,800 for every individual.

5) How was California able to reach and maintain its 53 congressional seats?

- a) In 2000, California picked up one congressional seat because of the final 18 people who were counted. That increased our total to 53, where it still stands today. With the addition of two U.S. senators and it totals 55 electoral votes, by far the nation's largest block.

Marin County Data

- 251,848 people live in 104,400 households in the county, and 7,510 people live in group quarters. (Total population =259,358)
- In 2010 census self-response was 81.1% (county's households mailed back their 2010 questionnaire). The remaining 18.9% required in-person follow up that is costlier and more difficult to enumerate.
- Approximately 7% of Marin County's current population (or 19,310 people) lives in hard-to-count neighborhoods.
- In 2016, 8.9% of Marin County's households had either no internet subscriptions or dial up-only access, according to the latest American Community Survey estimates.

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- California's 2nd Congressional District is located in the northwestern portion of the state and includes the counties of Del Norte, Humboldt, Marin, Mendocino, and Trinity. It also includes a portion of Sonoma County. The current representative of the 2nd Congressional District is Jared Huffman (D). The California congressional district 2 HTC map and information - <https://www.censushardtocountmaps2020.us/>:
 - In the 2010 decennial census, 79.4% of this district's households that received a census questionnaire in the mail, mailed back their form. This required costlier and more difficult in-person follow up from the Census Bureau to count the remaining 20.6%.
 - Approximately 12% of the district's current population (or 89,356 people) live in hard-to-count neighborhoods.
 - Another 3,047 people (~0.4% of the district's current population) live in tracts that did not receive a census questionnaire by mail in 2010 because these areas did not have traditional addresses, had large numbers of seasonally vacant housing, or were otherwise rural or sparsely populated. In the 2010 Census, the net undercount in these tracts was nearly 8%, according to the Census Bureau.
 - In 2016, 14.0% of districts households had either no Internet subscriptions or dial up-only access, according to the latest American Community Survey estimates.