

QUESTIONABLE?

WHY AN UNTESTED CITIZENSHIP  
QUESTION THREATENS THE 2020 CENSUS

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WHAT'S THE HARM IN ASKING?



**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

ADDING THE CITIZENSHIP QUESTION WILL INCREASE  
RESPONDENT BURDEN BECAUSE IT IS SENSITIVE

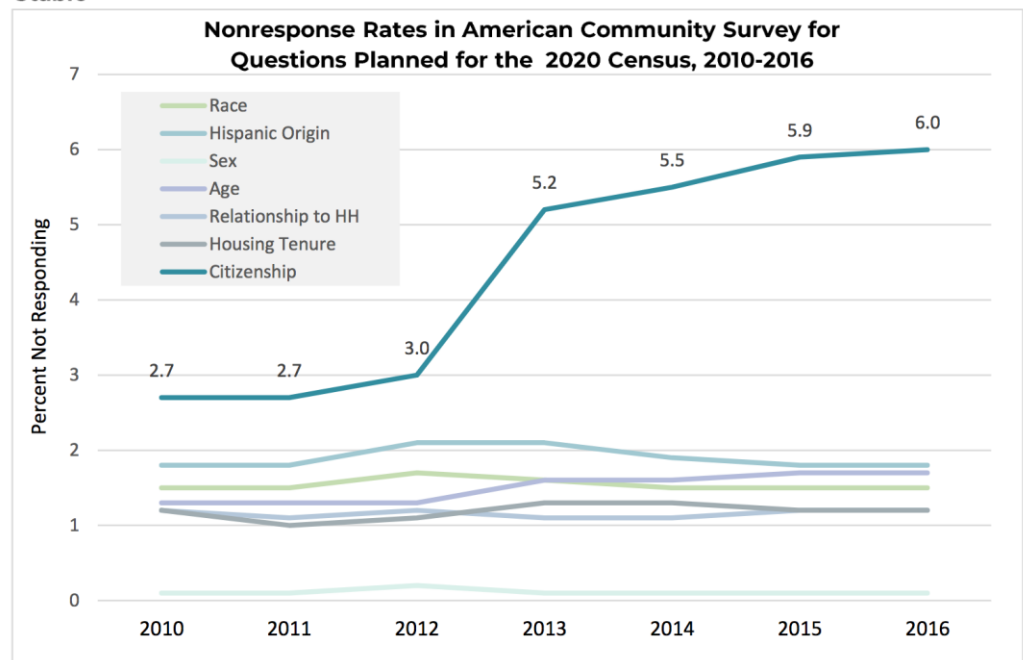
## CENSUS BUREAU HAS OPPOSED INCLUDING THE QUESTION ON THE DECENNIAL CENSUS IN THE PAST

- “Obtaining the cooperation of a suspicious and fearful population would be impossible if the group being counted perceived any possibility of the information being used against them. Questions as to citizenship are particularly sensitive in minority communities and would inevitably trigger hostility, resentment and refusal to cooperate.”
- --Census Bureau argument in *Federation for American Immigration Reform v. Klutznick*, 486 F. Supp. 564 (D.D.C. 1980):

## HIGH ITEM- NONRESPONSE

# More people skip the citizenship question than any other decennial census question

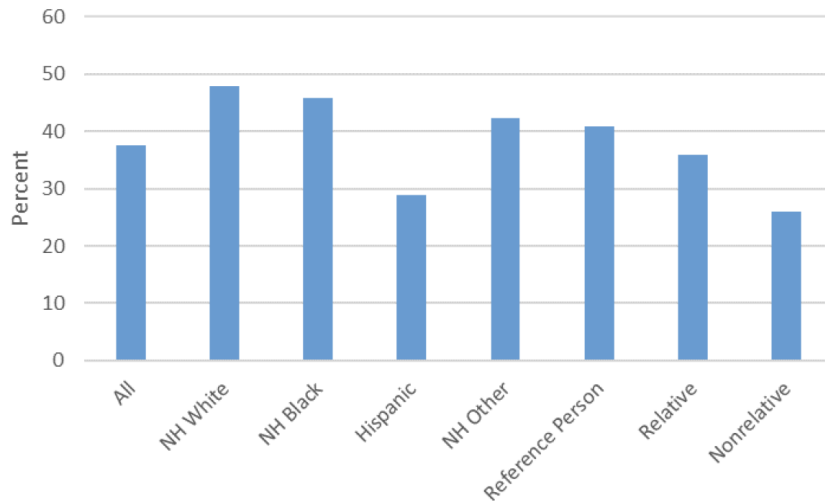
**Figure 1. Nonresponse Rates for the Citizenship Question Have Increased Since 2010 while the Nonresponse Rates for Other Questions Have Remained Relatively Stable**



Source: American Community Survey Item Allocation Rates. Available at <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/methodology/sample-size-and-data-quality/item-allocation-rates>.

O'Hare, William P. 2018. Citizenship Question Nonresponse: Demographic Profile of People Who Do Not Respond to the American Community Survey Citizenship Question. Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality.

# More than 1 in 3 non-citizens are incorrectly reported as citizens



INACCURATE  
REPORTING

Panel B. Percentage of Administrative Record Noncitizens who respond as 2016 ACS Citizens

Notes: Administrative record noncitizens make up 6.7 percent of the overall 2016 ACS sample, 1.9 percent for non-Hispanic white, 5.1 percent of non-Hispanic black, 16.2 percent of Hispanic, 22.0 percent of non-Hispanic other race, 6.9 percent of reference persons, 6.5 percent of relatives, and 7.1 percent of nonrelatives. See Appendix Table A10.

Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year file and Census Numident, 2016.

Brown, J. D., Heggeness, M. L., Dorinski, S. M., Warren, L., & Yi, M. (2018). *Understanding the Quality of Alternative Citizenship Data Sources for the 2020 Census* (No. 18-38).

# 'Reign of Terror': ICE Chief Says Immigrants Living Over Their Heads

SENSITIVITY HAS INCREASED

He also said "no population of persons" in the U.S. illegally is safe from deportation


by Jake Johnson, staff writer  
*Trump's Travel Ban Is Upheld by Supreme Court*

**DACA Officially Rescinded**  
**Family Separation**


*President Wants to Use Executive Order to End Birthright Citizenship*

CENTER FOR  
SURVEY  
MEASUREMENT  
2017 STUDY

Respondents had  
received advice not to  
open the door without  
warrant

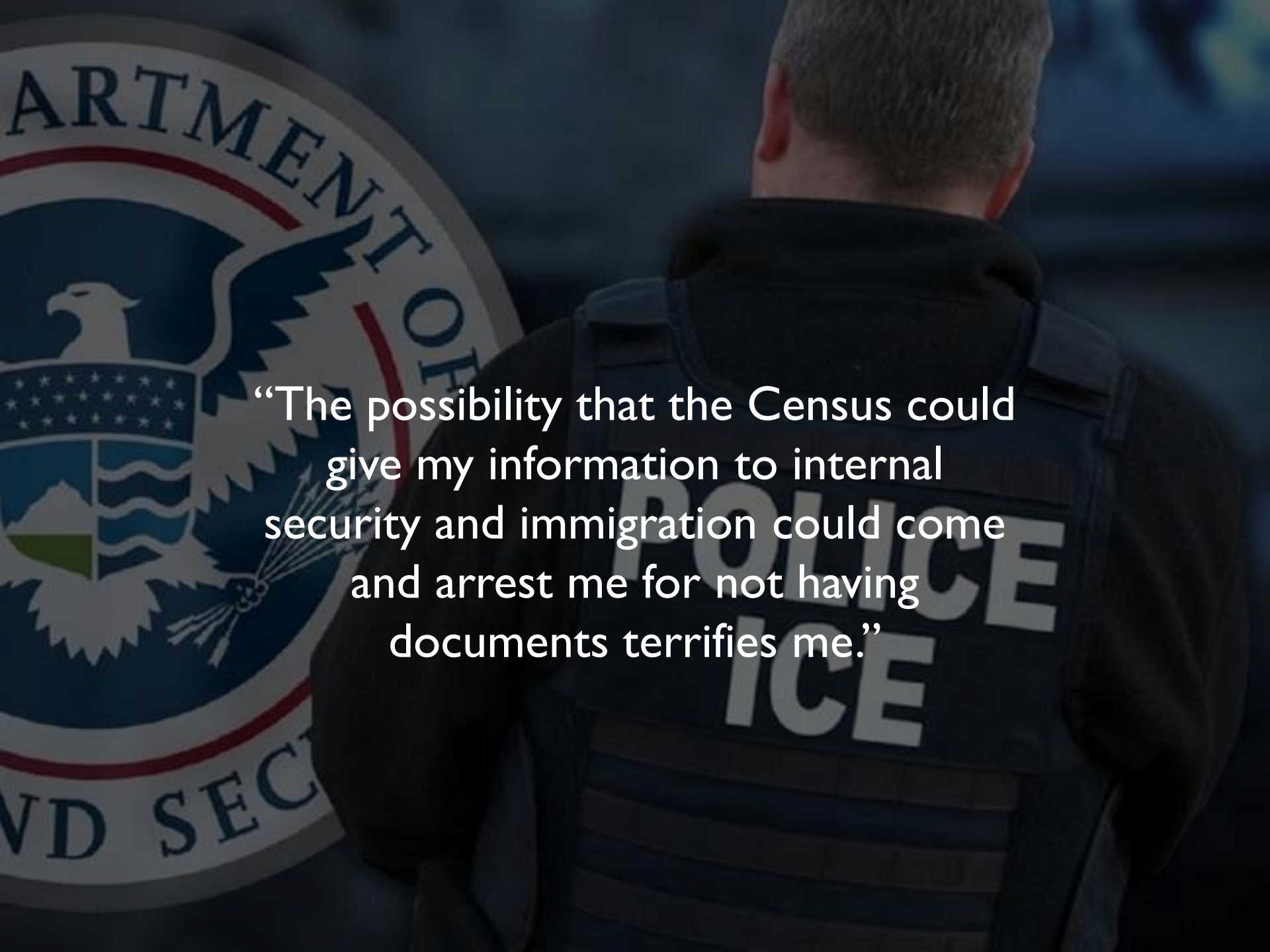


Respondents deliberately  
omitted people from  
household roster or gave  
false names due to  
“political climate”

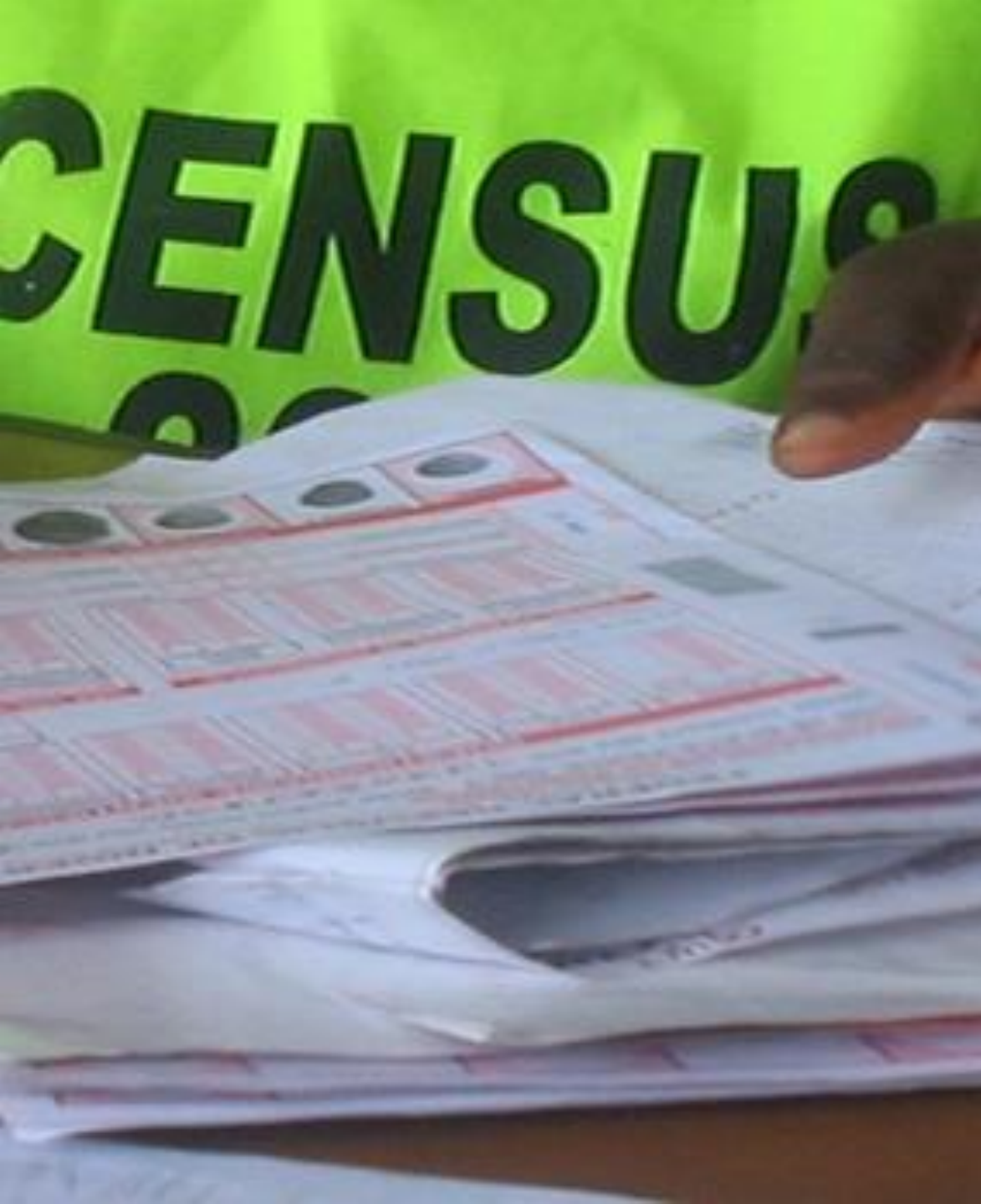


One man walked out  
when the immigration  
questions came up



The background image shows the back of a person wearing a dark tactical vest with 'POLICE ICE' printed in large, light-colored letters. To the left, a large, semi-circular seal of the Department of Homeland Security is visible, featuring an eagle with a shield and the words 'DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY'.

“The possibility that the Census could give my information to internal security and immigration could come and arrest me for not having documents terrifies me.”



“Three years ago I didn’t have problems with the immigration questions.”

-ACS interviewer

## The citizenship question may be a major barrier



1. **Its purpose is to find undocumented immigrants**
2. **The political discourse is targeting their ethnic group – residents and citizens may also feel endangered**

“ [The purpose is] to make people panic...  
Some **people will panic because they are afraid that they might be deported.**”  
— Vietnamese

“ ICE is working with different groups on **deportation sweeps, and it would make me feel like I'm aiding in that.** They're doing a lot of illegal stuff, and so I wouldn't fill out any of the questions.”  
— MENA

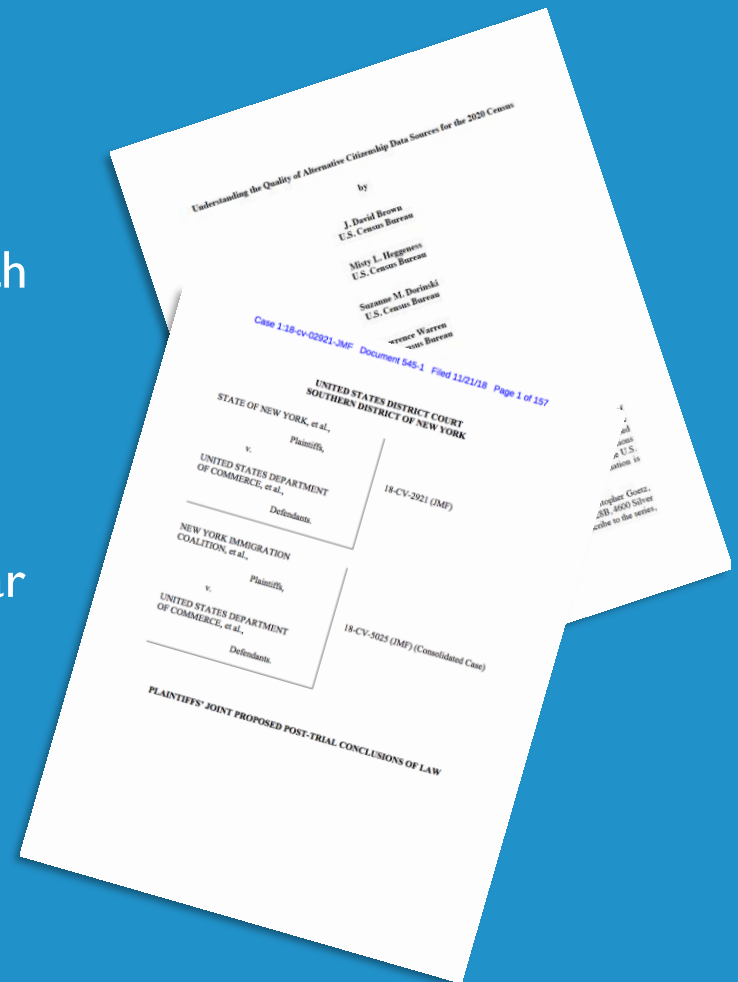
“ For this census, a lot of people are afraid. **It doesn't matter if they ask you whether or not you're a citizen.** The first question they ask you, are you Hispanic or Latino? And that's enough. That's all they need. And people are scared.”  
— Spanish (U.S. Mainland)

“ [Latinos will not participate] out of fear...[there] is **practically a hunt** [for us] ...**Latinos are going to be afraid to be counted because of the retaliation that could happen** - it's like giving the government information, saying, 'Oh, there are more here.'”  
— Spanish (U.S. Mainland)

## 2020 CENSUS BARRIERS, ATTITUDES AND MOTIVATORS STUDY (OCT 2018)

# ADDING THE CITIZENSHIP QUESTION WILL REDUCE RESPONSE RATES TO THE DECENNIAL CENSUS

- No random control trial done. But Census attempted to estimate the effect
  - Compared nonresponse on 2010 ACS with 2010 Census
  - Concluded self-response will decrease by 5.8% for non-citizen households
  - Did not account for current climate of fear
- Filings in recent court cases suggest it could decrease as much as 11.9%



## LOW RESPONSE RATES CANNOT BE EASILY FIXED

Census has large nonresponse follow-up operation.

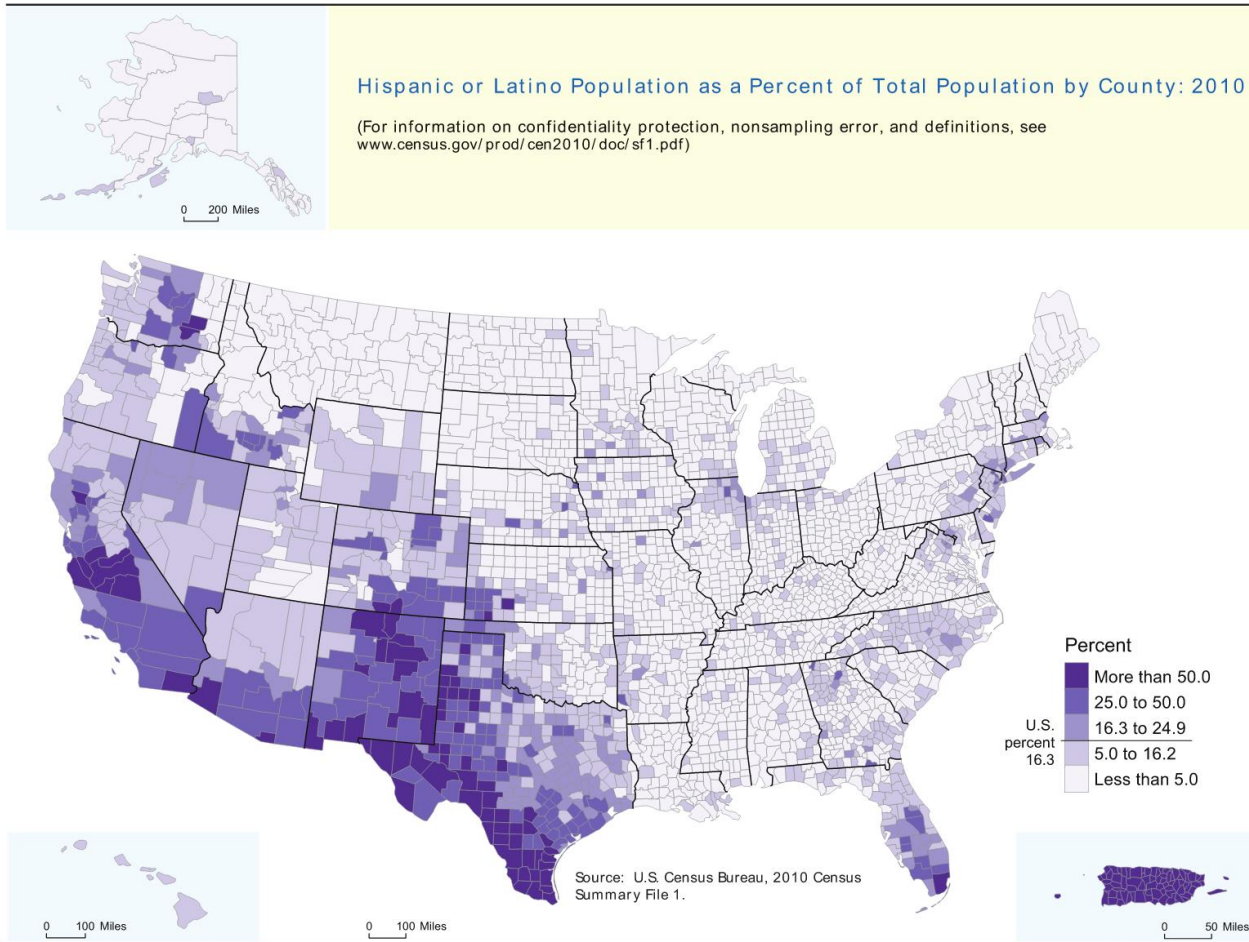
But it will not solve all problems

- Proxy and imputed responses not as accurate
- Groups with high nonresponse also have high omissions rates
- Differential coverage error persists for hard-to-count groups

IT IS UNNECESSARY TO COLLECT  
DATA ON CITIZENSHIP IN THE  
DECENNIAL CENSUS

- The American Community Survey (ACS) already measures the citizenship voting-age population
- ACS provides both the Justice Department and researchers with sufficiently detailed data to study noncitizen populations, particularly when paired with other data sources





# CONSEQUENCES FOR AMERICA

OVER THE NEXT  
DECADE...



Inaccurate data for  
apportionment and  
redistricting



Misallocation of \$700 billion  
in federal and state funds



Lower quality data on all  
surveys, jeopardizing  
informed decision-making



Reduced public trust in  
Census Bureau and its data



# TRUST MATTERS



Parents at Funston Elementary in Logan Square received a brief training before heading out into the streets to spread the word.

- Required for collecting high-quality data
  - Building relationships with communities
  - Strictly adhering to privacy and confidentiality laws
- Required for legitimacy as data provider
  - Transparent and open decision-making processes
  - Staying out of politics
- Why jeopardize this trust with a sensitive, untested, and unneeded question?