



## **Talking Points for PAA Members: Proposal to Add Citizenship Question to 2020 Census**

As population scientists we rely on federal statistical data to conduct our research and research training activities. To that end, we support efforts by federal statistical agencies to collect, store, and disseminate population data. However, we believe these efforts must be both scientifically sound and cognizant of repercussions for public policy and programs.

It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of the decennial census. Congressional apportionment is based on the decennial census, as well as the allocation of substantial federal funds ([\\$800 billion per annum](#)).

The Population Association of America (PAA) opposes the inclusion of the proposed citizenship question to the 2020 Census for two primary reasons:

- 1) It has not been properly tested. Therefore, the consequences of this addition on response rates and the accuracy of responses are not known.**
- 2) It will increase costs. The presence of this question will likely lead to lower initial response rates; additional follow-up efforts to address this challenge will be expensive.**

These reasons were addressed in an [amicus brief](#) that the PAA signed along with the American Statistical Association and American Sociological Association.

Below are talking points that reiterate and reinforce PAA's reasons for opposing the addition to the 2020 Census of a citizenship question.

- The Census Bureau conducts careful research and testing over many years to develop census questions and forms. Adding any question that circumvents the Bureau's thorough vetting process compromises the government's constitutional responsibility to conduct a fair and accurate count of every person living in the United States.
- The Census Bureau has continually asked a question about citizenship through its surveys but not on a decennial form since 1950. Since then, a citizenship or naturalization question has been asked on the long form, or more recently since 2005, the American Community Survey (ACS).
- Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross claims the U.S. Department of Justice asked his department to add the citizenship question to the decennial census, which goes to all U.S. households as opposed to the ACS, which goes to approximately 3.5 million households annually, to improve enforcement of the Voting Rights Act. Citizenship data from a sample survey (previously the long form, currently the ACS) has always been used to successfully ensure compliance with the Voting Rights Act as the last time a citizenship question was asked on a decennial census was prior to the enactment of the Voting Rights Act in 1965.



- Nonpartisan Census Bureau [experts](#) have warned that adding an untested, last-minute citizenship question to the 2020 Census will depress response, increase costs, and lead to a less accurate count and lower quality data.
- The 2020 Census faces growing challenges that could affect success in all communities, including cyber-attacks, natural disasters, access to broadband internet that could impact rural communities and the growing distrust of government that could depress response rates. An untested citizenship question will unnecessarily add to these challenges, depressing self-response rates and driving up census costs.