



The 2010 Census Questionnaire

Why We're So Nosy Over Here at the Census Bureau

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What I'm trying to do – what we're all trying to do at the Census Bureau – amounts to the largest domestic undertaking since the last decennial Census. It's the biggest survey taken of the United States, covering 130 million households. Over the coming decade, the data we collect will give planners the information to decide where best to build hospitals, schools and libraries. Businesses will use the information for marketing and for planning expansions. Census numbers will decide which states will gain or lose congressional seats. The data also helps guide the spending of more than \$400 billion in federal money each year.

As with any major undertaking, there are ticklish issues.

Some people are claiming (wrongly) that the Constitution doesn't give us authority to seek any information about households other than simply how many people live at your address. The truth is, when the Founding Fathers wrote the Constitution, they gave Congress the power to determine how the Census is conducted. The U.S. Supreme Court has again and again upheld how the Census Bureau conducts the Census.

And this year, the Census questions are few. It's the shortest questionnaire in modern history. Every household will be asked to answer only 10 relatively mundane questions.

The job of getting people to return their forms has become more difficult because distrust in the government seems to be growing. I believe the best way to answer misgivings about the Census is to show you the questions. Then, maybe people will see there's nothing complicated going on here.

1. How many people were living or staying in this house, apartment or mobile home on April 1, 2010?

We're tabulating the U.S. population. A number would help.

2. Were there any additional people staying here April 1, 2010, that you did not include in Question 1?

Just to make sure that we don't inadvertently leave anyone out.

2a. How is this person related to Person 1? (Posed if there is more than one person living in the household. Asked since 1880.)

Knowing whether you're married to someone, taking care of Grandpa, what have you—are key predictors in determining the need for more schools, whether children will need subsidized school lunches, if there's a need for nursing homes, etc.

3. Is this house, apartment or mobile home owned, rented or occupied without payment or rent? (Asked since 1890.)

This helps identify neighborhoods that might be aging, in need of home-rehab loans or aid for low-income individuals or families.

4. What is your telephone number?

Penmanship varies from person to person. Did you indicate that two parrots – or two parents – are living with you? Perhaps a clarifying phone call is in order. We won't give your number to telemarketers or sell it.

5. What is person 1's name? (Asked since 1800.)

This helps the Census Bureau ensure that people are counted only once. This way, we can count names and numbers, to make sure they match up.

6. What is person 1's sex? (Asked since 1790.)

Knowing your gender helps planners build enough schools, homes, apartments and hospitals to keep up with demand. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission checks this Census data to identify unfair hiring practices. State and county governments also use this information to determine how to allocate money for school lunches and hospitals.

7. What is your age and date of birth? (Asked since 1790.)

Combine the previous question with this one and now planners know whether to build grade schools or nursing homes. State governments use these numbers to establish boundaries for legislative districts.

8. Is Person 1 of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin? (Asked since 1970.)

Are there enough bilingual voting forms at your polling place? This is why. These numbers also help to verify whether election laws are being followed.

9. What is Person 1's race? (Asked since 1790.)

The federal government uses racial statistics, in part, to decide how to fund schools (both k-12 and higher education) and where to enforce anti-discrimination laws. The information is also used in redistricting.

10. Does Person 1 sometimes live or stay somewhere else?

Here we go again, making sure you're not just passing through to your villa in the south of France.

That wasn't so bad, was it? Please fill out your form and mail it back when you get it in mid to late March. If we don't hear back from you, a Census worker will come knocking on your door for the information. And that's where our work gets expensive – it costs taxpayers about \$60 for every household that doesn't mail back its questionnaire.

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