

March 3, 2010

THE 2010 CENSUS: The Stakes of an Accurate Count

Every 10 years, as required by the U.S. Constitution, the federal government undertakes a massive nationwide effort to count the residents of the United States, who now number more than 300 million. The results form the basis for the apportionment of congressional districts and the distribution of hundreds of billions of dollars in federal funds, as well as serving to guide a wide range of community-planning decisions across the country.¹ The Census is, however, no stranger to controversy, such as the suggestion by some activists that immigrants sit out the Census this year to protest the federal government's failure to enact comprehensive immigration reform.² Yet, among demographic groups like immigrants and ethnic minorities who are typically under-counted in the Census, a boycott would be self-defeating. Moreover, anyone living in an area afflicted by a large under-count of any sort stands to lose out on political representation and federal funds.³ For instance, an undercount of Latino immigrants would impact anyone living in a state such as California, New York, or Illinois that has a large population of Latino immigrants—meaning that everyone in those states stands to lose political representation and access to economic and educational opportunities if their residents aren't fully counted in 2010.

Reapportioning seats in Congress:

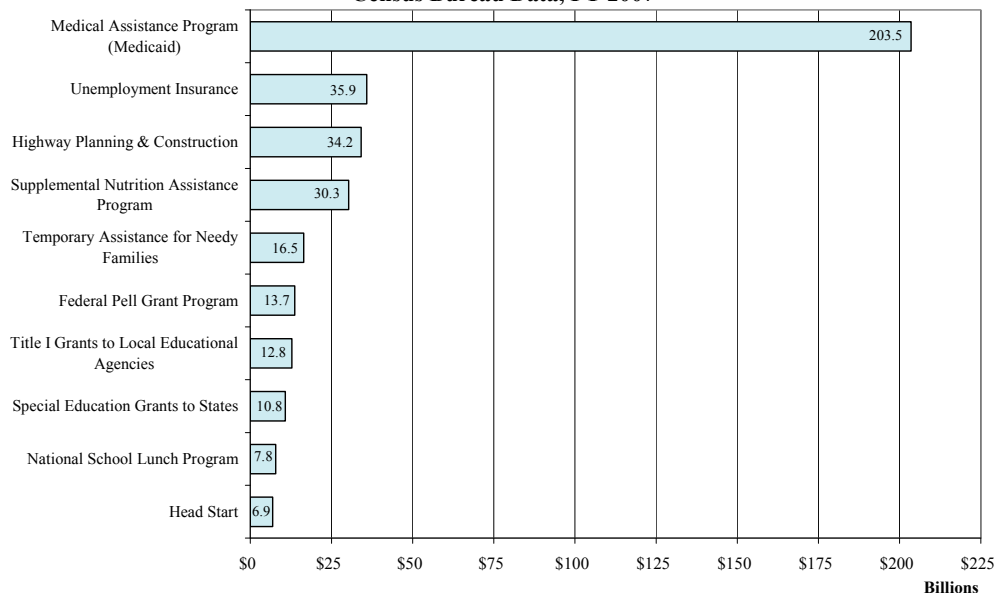
- According to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#), “by providing the count of the population used to apportion the number of seats in Congress among the states and providing our state and local governments with the population counts necessary to redraw their legislative districts, the census has become the foundation of our democracy, as well as the nation’s factfinder.”⁴

Allocating over \$400 billion in federal grant money each year:

- According to a 2009 [research report](#) from the Census Bureau, roughly \$435.7 billion in federal grant and direct assistance money “was allocated based on Census Bureau data”—including “annual population estimates, Decennial Census data, and other Census Bureau sources”—in Fiscal Year (FY) 2007.⁵
- The 10 federal programs accounting for 83.4 percent of all funding “allocated annually using population and/or income statistics,” as of FY 2007, were {Figure 1}:⁶
 - Medical Assistance Program {Medicaid} (\$203.5 billion)
 - Unemployment Insurance (\$35.9 billion)
 - Highway Planning and Construction (\$34.2 billion)
 - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (\$30.3 billion)
 - Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (\$16.5 billion)

- Federal Pell Grant Program (\$13.7 billion)
- Title I Grants to Local Educational Agencies (\$12.8 billion)
- Special Education Grants to States (\$10.8 billion)
- National School Lunch Program (\$7.8 billion)
- Head Start (\$6.9 billion)

Figure 1: Funding of Top 10 Federal Programs Distributed According to Census Bureau Data, FY 2007



Source: Lisa M. Blumberman & Philip M. Vidal, *Uses of Population and Income Statistics in Federal Funds Distribution*, 2009, p. 3.

Undercounting of minorities and the less affluent:

- The National Research Council notes in a [2009 study](#) that, “historically, a key issue has been, and remains, the differential net undercount of blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans, which has resulted in the repeated underrepresentation of areas in which those groups make up a large fraction of the residents. In particular, the differential net undercount of these groups has led to their receiving less than their share of federal funds and political representation.”⁷
 - In other words, because blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans tend to live in particular areas, everyone in those areas receive less political representation and federal funding if blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans are under-counted.⁸
- A [2009 report](#) from the Congressional Research Service (CRS) notes that any problems in the implementation of the 2010 Census could “exacerbate the recurrent likelihood of differential undercount—the greater tendency for minorities and less affluent members of society than for whites and wealthier persons to be undercounted.”⁹

Endnotes

¹ See U.S. Census Bureau, “[2010 Census: It’s In Our Hands](#),” March 2008.

² Audrey Singer, “[Census 2010 Can Count On Controversy](#)” (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, January 4, 2010).

³ Hope Yen, “[Poll: Nearly 1 in 5 may not fill out census form](#),” Associated Press, January 20, 2010.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, [Designing P.L. 94-171: Redistricting Data for the Year 2010 Census](#), September 2004, p. 5.

⁵ Lisa M. Blumberman and Phillip M. Vidal, [Uses of Population and Income Statistics in Federal Funds Distribution—With a Focus on Census Bureau Data](#), Governments Division Report Series, Research Report #2009-1 (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, May 2009), p. 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷ Robert M. Bell and Michael L. Cohen, eds., [Coverage Measurement in the 2010 Census](#) (Washington, DC: National Research Council, Panel on Correlation Bias and Coverage Measurement in the 2010 Decennial Census, 2009), p. 15.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁹ Jennifer D. Williams, [The 2010 Decennial Census: Background and Issues](#) (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, April 27, 2009), p. i.