

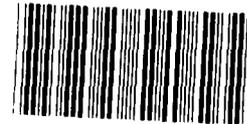
GAO

Fact Sheet for Congressional Requesters

May 1987

DECENNIAL CENSUS

A Comparison of the 1980 and 1990 Census Questionnaire Contents



133060

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RELEASED



General Government Division

B-222824

May 11, 1987

The Honorable Mervyn M. Dymally
Chairman, Subcommittee on Census
and Population
Committee on Post Office and Civil Service

The Honorable Constance A. Morella
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Census and Population
Committee on Post Office and Civil Service
House of Representatives

Your March 25, 1987, letter requested that we assist the subcommittee in its evaluation of the content of the 1990 census questionnaire. Subcommittee representatives asked us to compare the Census Bureau's submission to Congress on the 1990 questionnaire content dated March 27, 1987, with its 1980 questionnaire content submission dated April 4, 1977. The results of our comparison and a summary of the differences between the proposed 1990 questionnaire content and the 1980 census questionnaires are presented in appendix I.

Overall, the proposed 1990 content for both 100-percent and sample data is similar to that included in the 1980 census questionnaires,¹ except for the following major changes:

--Two topics have been added. Congregate housing² has been included in the 100-percent data and housing quality in the sample data. The latter was proposed for the 1980 questionnaire but was omitted from the final version due to concerns that the questions were not demonstrated to be reliable indicators of substandard housing and might hinder public cooperation.

--Nine topics have been dropped, two 100-percent items and seven sample items. Most of these topics related to the

¹In 1980, a short questionnaire included 100-percent questions asked of all households to meet data needs at small area levels. Additional questions were included on a longer questionnaire sent to a sample of about 19 percent of households to satisfy other data needs.

²Congregate housing includes separate housing units where meals are included as part of the rent. For example, in facilities for the elderly, units often have kitchens but the residents may eat one or more meals in a common dining room.

identification of housing units and indicators of housing quality.

--One topic, presence of a telephone, was moved from the sample data to the 100-percent data. The Bureau also plans to request telephone numbers with the 100-percent data for possible questionnaire follow-up.

In addition, Bureau officials said that they plan to revise other questions prior to submitting the actual 1990 census questions to Congress, as required, by April 1988.

Census data serves three main purposes: 1) to count the population every 10 years for the apportionment of the House of Representatives, as required by the Constitution; 2) to provide data needed to implement governmental programs; and 3) to meet demonstrated public needs. During planning of the 1990 census content, the Bureau received many requests from various data users to add items to the census questionnaire. At the same time, the Bureau is concerned about lower than expected response rates in the 1985 and 1986 test censuses which seem to indicate increasing reluctance on the part of the public to respond to census inquiries.

In developing the 1990 questionnaire content, the Bureau consulted with various data users, including many government agencies as well as academic, advisory, and local community groups. The Bureau also conducted tests using alternative questions and questionnaire formats to measure the accuracy and consistency of responses. Finally, the Bureau conducted studies to observe the participants' reactions to these various questions and formats and obtained suggestions on the need to improve the questionnaire's "user friendliness." A summary of the Bureau's process used to develop the 1990 questionnaire is included in appendix II.

While we did not evaluate whether the proposed topics should be included in the 1990 census, we did address the content of the 100 percent questionnaire in our prior report, Decennial Census: Issues Related to Questionnaire Development (GAO/GGD-86-74BR, May 5, 1986). We also recently reported on the use of 100 percent decennial housing data by local governments in our report, Decennial Census: Local Government Uses of Housing Data (GAO/GGD-87-56BR, April 8, 1987).

As arranged with your office, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this document until 30 days from the date of its issuance. At that time, we will send copies to the Senate Subcommittee on Federal Services, Post Office and Civil Service; other appropriate congressional committees; the Secretary of Commerce; and the Director, Office of

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Management and Budget. Copies will also be made available to other interested parties upon request. If there are any questions about the information presented, please call me on 275-8387.



Gene L. Dodaro
Associate Director

COMPARISON OF 1980 & 1990 CENSUS QUESTIONNAIRE
CONTENT SUBMISSIONS TO CONGRESS

100 Percent Population

<u>1980 Proposed Content</u>	<u>1980 Final Questions³</u>	<u>1990 Proposed Content</u>
Name	Name (1)	Name
Household relationship	Household relationship (2)	Household relationship
Sex	Sex (3)	Sex
Race	Race (4)	Race
Age	Age (5)	Age
Marital status	Marital status (6)	Marital status
Ethnic origin	Hispanic origin (7)	Hispanic origin
Total income in 1979	(Dropped)	

100 Percent Housing

<u>1980 Proposed Content</u>	<u>1980 Final Questions</u>	<u>1990 Proposed Content</u>
Access to unit	Access to unit (H5)	(Dropped)
Number of units in structure	(Moved to sample form)	Number of units in structure
Number of rooms in unit	Number of units at address (H4)	(Dropped)
Plumbing facilities	Number of rooms in unit (H7)	Number of rooms in unit
Tenure-owned or rented; cooperative/condominium	Plumbing facilities (H6)	Plumbing
Value of home or monthly rent	Tenure-owned or rented (H8); condominium (H9)	Tenure-owned or rented; condominium
Vacancy status	Value of home (H11), or monthly rent (H12)	Value of home or monthly rent
	Vacancy status (C1,C2,C3,D)	Vacancy status
		Telephone
		Congregate Housing

³The numbers in parentheses indicate the question numbers on the 1980 census questionnaires. The 1980 questionnaires also included several questions called "screeners," which were used by the Bureau to identify specific data universes to improve population and housing coverage.

Sample Population (Content not included on 100-percent form)

<u>1980 Proposed Content</u>	<u>1980 Final Questions</u>	<u>1990 Proposed Content</u>
Social characteristics:		
Birthplace, year of immigration and citizenship	Birthplace (11), year of immigration and citizenship (12)	Birthplace, year of immigration and citizenship
Language spoken at home	Language spoken at home (13)	Language spoken at home
Education	Education (8,9,10)	Education
Migration status	Migration status (15)	Migration status
Disability	Disability (19)	Disability
Marriage and fertility	Marriage (21) and fertility (20)	(Dropped)
Veteran status	Veteran status (18)	Fertility
	Ancestry (14)	Veteran status
	Activity 5 years ago (17)	Ancestry
		(Dropped)
Economic characteristics:		
Employment and unemployment	Employment and unemployment (22,25,26,27)	Employment and unemployment
Occupation, industry, and class of worker	Occupation, industry, and class of worker (28,29,30)	Occupation, industry and class of worker
Commute to work	Commute to work (24)	Commute to work
Work experience and income in 1979	Place of work (23)	Place of work
	Work experience (31) and income in 1979 (32,33)	Work experience and income in 1989 ⁴

Sample Housing (Content not included on 100-percent form)

<u>1980 Proposed Content</u>	<u>1980 Final Questions</u>	<u>1990 Proposed Content</u>
Plumbing and equipment:		
Heating equipment and fuels	Heating equipment (H20) and fuels (H21)	Heating equipment and fuels ⁵
Source of water and sewage disposal	Source of water (H16) and sewage disposal (H17)	Source of water and sewage disposal
Air conditioning and telephone	Air conditioning (H27) and telephone (H26)	(Dropped)
Autos, light trucks, and vans	Autos, light trucks, and vans (H28,H29)	(Moved to 100 percent form)
		Autos, light trucks, and vans

⁴One item from the 1980 question on work experience will be deleted in 1990--weeks looking for work in previous year.

⁵One of the three 1980 questions on fuels will be deleted in 1990--type of cooking fuel.

Sample Housing (continued)

<u>1980 Proposed Content</u>	<u>1980 Final Questions</u>	<u>1990 Proposed Content</u>
Structural and other characteristics:		
Kitchen facilities	Kitchen facilities (H23)	Kitchen facilities
Year structure built	Year structure built (H18)	Year structure built
Stories in structure and elevator	Year moved into residence (H19)	Year moved into residence
Number of bedrooms and bathrooms	Stories in structure and elevator (H14)	(Dropped)
Farm residence	Number of bedrooms (H24) and bathrooms (H25)	(Dropped)
Housing quality	Farm residence (H15)	Number of bedrooms (Dropped)
Shelter costs including utilities	(Dropped)	Farm residence
Ownership of second homes	Shelter costs (H30,H31,H32) utilities costs (H22)	Housing Quality
	(Dropped)	Shelter costs including utilities
	Number of units in structure and type of building (H13)	(Moved to 100 percent form

Summary of changes—1980 content submission to final 1980 questionnaire:

<u>Topics dropped</u>	<u>Topics added</u>
Total income in 1979	Ancestry
Housing quality	Activity five years ago
Ownership of second homes	Place of work
	Year moved into residence
	Number of housing units at address

Summary of changes—1990 content submission from 1980 questionnaire:

<u>Topics dropped</u>	<u>Topics added</u>
Weeks looking for work in previous year	Congregate housing
Activity five years ago	Housing quality
Marital history	
Number of housing units at address	
Access to living quarters	
Stories in structure and presence of elevator	
Type of cooking fuel	
Presence of air conditioning	
Number of bathrooms	

SUMMARY OF 1990 QUESTIONNAIRE CONTENT DEVELOPMENTConsultations With Data UsersFederal Agency Data Users

- The Bureau established 10 interagency working groups (IWG) by decennial data topic areas comprised of representatives from federal agencies to identify federal data needs.
- The recommendations of the IWGs were reviewed by the Federal Agency Council which is comprised of high level federal officials under the chairmanship of the Office of Management and Budget.

Nonfederal Data Users

- The Bureau held specialized conferences on the housing and the race and ethnicity questions with participants from academic, research, and ethnic groups.
- The Bureau held a series of 65 local public meetings across the country with representatives from state and local governments, private industry, academia, and the general public.
- The Bureau also solicited suggestions on 1990 questionnaire content through its data user news bulletin.

Testing and Evaluation for Questionnaire ContentQuestionnaire Content Tests

- A special test was conducted in Chicago in 1985 to assist in designing the race and Spanish origin questions for the 1986 National Content Test.
- In 1986, the Bureau conducted the National Content Test, which is the major opportunity to test content on a national scale. The test included eight different questionnaires and tested alternative questions and questionnaire designs.
- The Bureau conducted re-interview surveys with a small sample of respondents in the Chicago special test, the National Content Test, and the 1986 test census in Los

Questionnaire Content Tests (continued)

Angeles to measure the accuracy and consistency of responses.

- In 1987, the Bureau plans to conduct a special purpose test of the race and Spanish origin questions nationwide.
- In 1988, the Bureau will conduct a dress rehearsal, which will be the final opportunity to test questions for the 1990 census.

Focus Group Studies

- A small number of participants in the 1985 test census in Tampa and the 1986 test census in Los Angeles and Mississippi were asked to comment on the questionnaires used in these tests.
- The Bureau plans to conduct additional focus group studies in 1987 to further evaluate the race and Spanish origin questions.

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