

Inter-University Program for Latino Research

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The Inter-University Program for Latino Research (IUPLR) opposes the sudden, unexpected, arbitrary, and misguided decision by the Secretary of Commerce, Wilbur Ross, directing the U.S. Census Bureau to include a question on citizenship in its questionnaire for its constitutionally mandated decennial population count. The Inter-University Program for Latino Research further calls on the U.S. Department of Commerce, and its Secretary, Wilbur Ross, to rescind the order to include the citizenship question in the U.S. Census Bureau 2020 decennial census questionnaire. On January 15, 2019, Judge Jesse Furman vacated Secretary Ross' decision because it violated the Administrative Procedure Act. Further, he prohibited the use of the citizenship question until its defects are "cured". Finally, the Inter-University Program for Latino Research calls on the U.S. Department of Commerce to protect and respect the U.S. Census Bureau's ministerial autonomy in the scientific, professional, non-partisan, and non-ideological execution of the Bureau's duties as it discharges its mission to "serve as the nation's leading provider of quality data about its people and economy."

The IUPLR is a consortium of 24 university-based centers from across the country researching Latino issues. Central to any type of scientific study, such as that engaged by the scholars affiliated with the IUPLR's constituent research centers (<https://www.iuplr.org/members>), is the availability of valid and reliable data. The U.S. Census Bureau has provided as valid and reliable data as may be obtained given methodological and financial constraints. One way by which the Census Bureau has been able to achieve the collection of high-quality data is by subjecting its collection procedures to scientifically stringent methodological scrutiny and regularly scheduled testing and verification. Furthermore, the Census Bureau achieves this by engaging in an open, consultative process, involving not simply the Bureau's staff, but outside scholars and, more broadly, the users of its data and products.

As scholars who engage in research on Latinos, we are well aware of the paucity of data involving this population. Through the Census Advisory Committees and the Census Information Centers, among others, we are keyed-in to the workings of the Census Bureau and closely engaged with the Bureau as it seeks to improve the reliability and validity of the data it collects on the Hispanic population in the United States. Hispanics in the United States are a population for whom it is difficult to obtain data. Among the reasons are lower participation rates in data collection efforts due to an overrepresentation of the population living below the federal poverty level, an overrepresentation residing in urban areas, an overrepresentation of the population that is not fluent in English, and an underrepresentation of the population that are native-born citizens of the United States, and often English-dominant. To be sure, the overwhelming majority of Latinos in the United States—two-thirds—are native-born citizens. This fact notwithstanding, we at the IUPLR are extremely concerned that introducing a question of citizenship will have the negative effect of reducing the response rate to the 2020 decennial census questionnaire, due to the greater percentage of people of Hispanic origin or descent who are not citizens, whether authorized to reside in the country or not. This concern of ours is not based on idle speculation, but on actual findings from the U.S. Census Bureau itself, which has researched the subject at hand in great detail.¹

In the abstract, introducing the citizenship question in the decennial census questionnaire might seem innocuous. However, the decision to introduce the citizenship question for the 2020 decennial census is not taking place in the abstract or in a vacuum. Rather, introducing the citizenship question for the 2020 decennial census is taking place in a climate of increasing hostility against immigrants. The virulence of the xenophobia being experienced by Latinos in the United States is felt not just by those who may be residing in the country without authorization, but extends to those who are resident aliens, naturalized U.S. citizens, and native-born citizens. It is in this specific historical context that introducing the question on citizenship in the 2020 decennial census could have the negative effect of reducing further the number of people who will complete the questionnaire and refuse to answer any questions when census enumerators appear in person to collect the requisite information.

The reduced response rate that will occur as a result of introducing the citizenship question in the 2020 Census questionnaire will impact the collection of data on *all people* in the United States, as is called for in Article I, Section 2, Subsection 3 of the Constitution of the United States. It will result in the reduced collection of data on Latinos. This reduced collection of accurate data will directly affect redistricting, apportionment, the distribution of federal funds and other resources to states, counties and municipalities across the country.

Consequently, we, the Directors of Latino-focused research centers and institutes in the United States, and linked collectively through the Inter-University Program for Latino Research, **express strong opposition to the inclusion of a specific question regarding citizenship in the 2020 Census.** The Census Bureau did not conduct any pretests of the inclusion of this question to determine if it would have the effect of lowering the likelihood of participation by Latino immigrants and other immigrant populations. Although the Census Bureau now states that it will conduct such tests, there must be nonpartisan, scientific oversight of any such pretest.

¹ Brown, J. David, Misty L. Heggeness, Suzanne M. Dorinski, Lawrence Warren, and Moises Yi. 2018. "Understanding the Quality of Alternative Citizenship Data Sources for the 2020 Census." CES 18-38. Working Paper Series, Center for Economic Statistics, U.S. Census Bureau. Washington DC.