

## **2020 Census Barriers, Attitudes, and Motivators Study (CBAMS) Survey and Focus Groups Reports Fact Sheet**

### **What was the primary motivation for conducting the research?**

The goal of this, and all 2020 Census communications research, is to inform the development and execution of the communications campaign designed to drive self-response to the 2020 Census. These reports explore survey respondents' and focus group participants' knowledge of and attitudes toward the census; potential barriers that may inhibit participation and potential motivators that may facilitate census self-response. Results are critical for developing a research-driven creative campaign that efficiently delivers compelling messaging to a diverse population.

### **How big was the sample size, and who was included?**

The study employed a mixed-methods approach bringing together data from a large-scale survey and qualitative focus groups. The nationally representative CBAMS Survey was mailed to 50,000 households across all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Approximately 17,500 people responded for a weighted response rate of 39.4 percent. The survey used self-administered mail and Internet data collection in both English and Spanish.

There were 42 focus groups in 14 cities with 308 total participants. Focus groups asked questions to 11 audiences including racial and ethnic minorities, those with low Internet proficiency, young people who recently moved, rural residents, and audiences at risk of low self-response. Sixteen focus groups were conducted in a language other than English, including Chinese (both Cantonese and Mandarin), Vietnamese, and Spanish (both for Spanish speakers living on the mainland and in Puerto Rico). All focus group participants were required to meet certain "low response" criteria (i.e., characteristics found to lower self-response rates).

### **How does this compare to research conducted for the 2010 Census?**

The U.S. Census Bureau first conducted the CBAMS survey (CBAMS I) in 2008 to inform the 2010 Census communications campaign. The survey resulted in 4,064 interviews completed using dual-frame telephone (i.e., landline and cellphone) and in-person data collection modes. In 2011, the Census Bureau conducted the second CBAMS survey (CBAMS II). This survey sought to explore barriers, attitudes, and motivators of census participation after the 2010 census. The 4,071 respondents participated by landline, cellphone, or face-to-face interview.

CBAMS surveys were not created to be a time series, and comparisons are not advised due to changes in mode, questionnaire, sampling design, and the final sample itself.

The addition of qualitative research is an innovation from CBAMS I and II, allowing us to reach people not included in the survey (e.g., Puerto Rico), groups that would not be sufficiently represented (e.g., American Indian and Alaskan Natives), or groups otherwise difficult to reach by survey (e.g., non-English speakers).

The 2020 CBAMS Survey also had a much larger sample size and responding population than previous CBAMS surveys, allowing the Census Bureau to make inferences to smaller subpopulations.

## What are potential barriers to participation in the 2020 Census?

High-level findings from the 2020 CBAMS Survey on knowledge gaps, attitudes, and barriers include:

- **Some people were unfamiliar with the census, and there were misconceptions about its purpose and process.** Thirty-three percent of respondents were “extremely familiar” or “very familiar” with the census. Younger, less educated, and non-Hispanic (NH) Asians tended to be less familiar with the census than other groups.
- **Knowledge about the uses of the census was uneven.** Most people knew the census is used to determine changes in the U.S. population and that it determines a state’s number of representatives in Congress, but there were misconceptions about other uses. For instance, 10 percent of people **incorrectly believed the census is used to locate people living in the country without documentation**, and another 37 percent said they “do not know” if it is used this way.
- **Knowledge about the census was uneven across demographic characteristics.** Levels of knowledge about the census were lowest among those with less than a high school diploma, nonproficient Internet users, and NH Black African Americans.
- **Concerns about data privacy and confidentiality.** Roughly, a quarter of respondents were concerned about the confidentiality of answers to the 2020 Census, but racial and ethnic minorities were significantly more concerned about confidentiality than NH Whites.
- **Fear of repercussions.** Roughly a one-quarter of respondents were concerned their answers to the 2020 Census would be used against them. NH Asians, householders not proficient in English, and those born outside of the United States were the most concerned.
- **Distrust in all levels of government.** Distrust in government was high for everyone, with the highest levels of distrust among NH small-sample races, NH Whites, NH Blacks, people born in the United States, and people who are proficient in English.
- **A lack of efficacy.** Many did not feel it matters whether they are personally counted in the 2020 Census. Young people were the least likely to believe it matters if they are counted.
- **Belief that completing the census may not benefit them personally.** Across almost all demographic characteristics, more people predicted that answering the census could bring benefits to their community than to them personally.

The focus group discussions revealed five barriers to census participation: a lack of knowledge about the census, apathy and lack of efficacy (i.e., lack of confidence that individuals have the ability to influence government), confidentiality and privacy concerns, fear of repercussions, and general distrust of government. Focus group participants who knew little about the census lacked evidence to counter any fears and reasons not to respond.

## What would potentially motivate people to complete the census?

According to the survey, funding for public services was a top motivator across groups, yet less than half of respondents knew that the census is used to determine community funding. Householders thought funding for public services was the single most important reason to fill out the census, and hospitals and healthcare, fire departments, police departments, and roads and highways were identified as the most important services across all groups. When community-oriented uses of census information were combined into a single measure, community-oriented motivators were most popular with those who

were younger, non-White, not English proficient, and less educated compared to those who were older, White, and English proficient.

Across all focus group audiences, community funding was the primary motivator of self-response. Focus group participants were most interested in the role of the census in providing widely enjoyed public services, such as schools and hospitals. The findings suggest that community funding is a more compelling motivator when it is connected to three things: information about the impact of the census, tangible and local evidence of community benefits, and the concept of a better future for the community.

### **Who intends to respond to the census and by what mode?**

Two-thirds of survey respondents reported they were “extremely likely” or “very likely” to fill out a census form. Younger, less educated, and NH Asian and NH small-sample races (i.e., American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and people who are of multiple or other races) were least likely to report a high intention to respond to the 2020 Census.

Older and less educated householders preferred to fill out a paper 2020 Census form compared to younger and more educated householders.

### **How might concerns around lack of trust, privacy and confidentiality or fear of repercussions be mitigated?**

Data from both the survey and focus groups suggest the campaign may face barriers revolving around lack of trust, privacy and confidentiality concerns, and fear of repercussions from filling out the census. According to focus groups, providing potential decennial census participants with the Census Bureau’s data protection policies alone will not mitigate concerns around privacy and confidentiality. However, encouragement from trusted community voices, such as community leaders, could successfully increase participation among people with the greatest trust-based fears and government disaffection.

### **What does CBAMS tell us about the inclusion of a citizenship question being added to the 2020 Census?**

The 2020 CBAMS Survey was already developed and in the field when the announcement of adding a citizenship question occurred; therefore, the survey includes no direct questions about the inclusion of a citizenship question on the census form, and we were not able to observe attitudes on this addition. However, we did add questions and probes pertaining to the addition of the question to the moderator’s guide for focus groups occurring after the announcement.

Focus groups show that the addition of a citizenship question may impede participation among audiences with recent immigration history. The significance of this barrier will likely vary with individuals’ belief about the question’s purpose, their trust in the government to keep their information confidential, and beliefs about whether their ethnic group is the subject of politically motivated targeting. The barrier was highest among individuals who believed the purpose of the question is to find undocumented immigrants, that their information will be shared across agencies—potentially leading to deportation—and that their ethnic group is facing an inhospitable political environment.