



Decennial Census

What are the origins of our decennial census, and how is data historically used? Dive into the history, definitions, and progression of this topic.

Conversation Questions

1. How did the decennial census start?
2. What data is collected in the decennial census?
3. How is data used?

Key Definitions *(from Merriam-Webster Dictionary)*

- *Census* – a usually complete enumeration of a population. Specifically, a periodic governmental enumeration of population.
- *Data* – factual information (such as measurements or statistics) used as a basis for reasoning, discussion, or calculation

Read

“The U.S. Census Tradition” by Population Reference Bureau

<https://bit.ly/2Yyn1hl>

The Population Reference Bureau summarizes the history and context of the decennial census, dating back to its constitutional origins. The article also outlines changes in questionnaires over time.

“A Short History of Census Taking” by John Steele Gordon, *The Wall Street Journal*

<https://on.wsj.com/2P0BJL4>

Gordon provides a short, but informative high-level summary of how census data reveals U.S. historical trends, such as slavery, city population and technology trends.

“History: Decennial Census” U.S. Census Bureau

<https://bit.ly/340ia9R>

The U.S. Census Bureau outlines agency history, innovations, and census data and information through the decades.





“Data for the Public Good” by Abdullah Shhipar, *The New York Times*

<https://nyti.ms/38lsehg>

In this opinion piece, Shhipar discusses the value of data and outlines how it is leveraged in our society, including the census.

“Tracking The Census: The People, Power, And Money Behind The Data” by Hansi Lo Wang, NPR

<https://n.pr/2qD9n04>

Lo Wang reports a special NPR series on how the 2020 Census will count every person living in the United States, including what questions will be asked and detailed reporting on current issues.

Listen

Count On Your Census from Asian Americans Advancing Justice

<https://bit.ly/2sYuxGK>

Podcast to promote a robust response to our nation's Decennial Census with answers to questions such as: why do I need to fill out the form? Is my personal information safe if I complete the form? How can historically undercounted groups be fairly represented?

Civics 101 from New Hampshire Public Radio

<https://n.pr/2LCnNER>

In their November 19 episode, Hansi Lo Wang and Sharon Tosi Lacey discuss the people, money, and power at the heart of the census. Lo Wang is a reporter at NPR and Tosi Lacey is the Chief Historian of the U.S. Census Bureau.

