

Women may not be counted accurately during Census, professor says

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It's no secret the COVID-19 pandemic forced businesses and schools to close and people to shelter in place, forcing millions to file for unemployment and delivering a huge blow to the U.S. economy.

But Wake Forest sociology professor Catherine E. Harnois says there's another, less obvious consequence of the pandemic that could have a far-reaching impact: women's rate of participation in the U.S. Census.

"Everyday practices like going to the [grocery store](#) or putting your kids in daycare are now much more complicated and in some cases simply impossible," Harnois said. "On top of that, research on the social impact of the coronavirus suggests that it may be putting more of a burden on women's day-to-day lives than it is on men's. Women tend to do a disproportionate amount of domestic activities, including childcare and elder care... So the question is will women have enough time to complete the Census, or is it going to be pushed to the back burner since many are overwhelmed with the responsibilities of everyday life?"

Harnois teaches sociology courses on topics ranging from statistics to gender and sexuality at Wake Forest and was recently quoted in a [New York Times article](#), "The Census Needs to Count Women. The Pandemic Makes That Harder."

Taken every 10 years, the Census is used to help determine allocation of billions of dollars in funding for [public schools](#), hospitals, fire departments and in communities. It also determines the number of seats states are given in the House of Representatives.

In addition to studying gender, race, and socio-economic inequalities, Harnois' expertise includes research on how to design and administer effective surveys, ensuring that the methods followed do not duplicate inequalities in the research process.

"If that is true, then that's going to have a rippling effect on communities with great need," Harnois said. "It's really critical that we make sure that everybody has enough time and energy to complete the Census and that they feel safe doing so."

Although a citizenship question was discussed but ultimately not added to the Census, Harnois said that has made some people skeptical—and fearful—about completing the survey.

"The Census is one of the building blocks of our democracy," Harnois said." Dramatic shifts in the social landscape, such as the [COVID-19 pandemic](#), require a reconsideration of survey methodology, to ensure that the [study design](#), conceived under very different circumstances, is appropriate for the current situation."

Provided by Wake Forest University

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