

American Statistical Association releases 2020 Census Quality Indicators, urges prompt action

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The American Statistical Association Board of Directors has endorsed the recommendations of the 2020 Census Quality Indicators report, written by a task force of census experts to shed light on the quality, accuracy, and coverage of the 2020 Census counts. The task force, co-chaired by former US Chief Statistician Nancy Potok and ASA President-elect Robert Santos, was formed in early September in response to concerns about 2020 Census data quality, including the lack

of transparency and measures of quality traditionally provided by the US Census Bureau.

"The decennial [census](#) is an enormously complicated process facing unprecedented challenges and obstacles," Santos says. "Because its data are foundational to our democracy, commerce, and everyday lives, the nation deserves publicly available indicators to assess the credibility of the final counts."

"These indicators are an important first step in a discussion on data quality," Potok says. "More critical is the administration's expeditious application of them to the 2020 decennial data, along with transparent reporting of each quality indicator to lawmakers and the public."

In its statement of endorsement, the ASA Board strongly urges detailed indicators such as those provided in the report be applied to decennial census data as soon as possible after data collection has concluded; furthermore, the board encourages these indicators be used and preserved throughout all remaining phases of census data analysis and the results released to the public immediately thereafter.

The indicators are a collection of various measures of quality, accuracy, and coverage that span all processes—from data collection to post-data collection operations. The report emphasizes the importance of each process, comparing each to a link in a chain. "The strength or quality of the final census data depends on all links being strong," the report says.

The report also makes recommendations for the application of the indicators. One recommendation is that qualified external researchers be granted access to the data so they can conduct analyses of the data quality. Another is for the US Census Bureau to develop and perform additional assessments when more data becomes available.

Santos transmitted the report to US Department of Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross and US Census Bureau Director Steven Dillingham, urging the leaders to "have these indicators applied to the 2020 decennial census data as soon as possible—commencing in the post-data collection phase when the census apportionment and redistricting files are being produced—and the results made public."

In his letter, Santos noted "such transparency and measures of quality are, of course, the traditional hallmarks of the US Census Bureau" and elaborated as follows: "Our indicators are an extension of this tradition in multiple ways, including the public release of the quality measures at the census-tract level, the addition of indicators to make use of data available this decade because of the continued automation of the decennial census, and the public sharing of indicators starting in the post-data collection phase."

In addition to the co-chairs, the task force comprises—among other experts—a former Census Bureau chief scientist, a former Census Bureau chief demographer, a former Census Bureau senior mathematical statistician, former members of Census Advisory Committees, three former Census Bureau directors, and a former president of the ASA.

A group of four former bureau directors serving under administrations of both parties first suggested census quality indicators in an August public statement, urging Congress to "[t]ask a suitable independent institution—any apolitical and trusted institution of its choosing—to produce predetermined quality metrics that can assess if the final 2020 numbers match other historical and reasonable estimates of the population the Census Bureau produces." Potok and fellow former US Chief Statistician Katherine Wallman endorsed and further justified the idea in a September op-ed, writing, "Transparency and objectivity are essential if census results are to be trusted and used... As chief statisticians, we developed—and the Office of Management and Budget

issued—extensive standards to ensure information quality complied with the law. Federal agencies must consider and document quality at each step: collection; processing; and dissemination."

More information: 2020 Census Quality Indicators: A Report from the American Statistical Association: www.amstat.org/asa/files/pdfs/...ualityIndicators.pdf

Provided by American Statistical Association

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