

# News Article



## Lawmakers Debate Path to Census Accuracy, Citizenship Question

- Republicans worry about impact on states' representation
- Democrats: constitutionally-mandated enumeration 'under threat'

By Avery Ellfeldt | June 11, 2018 5:43PM ET

The upcoming 2020 U.S. population census risks putting some states at an electoral disadvantage or ignoring the U.S. Constitution, depending on how it treats undocumented immigrants, according to lawmakers.

"The ability to meet the mandate of an actual enumeration of the whole number of persons in each state is under threat from this administration," said Rep. Steve Cohen (D-Tenn) at a recent hearing of the House Judiciary Committee's subcommittee on the constitution and civil justice.

But the inclusion of undocumented residents in the census threatens the equal representation of states with fewer immigrants, Republicans said.

"Congressional districts with many illegal aliens will have fewer citizens casting votes for their representatives, thereby granting citizen voters in districts with many illegal aliens more influence in selecting representatives," said subcommittee chairman Steve King (R-Iowa) said at the June 8 hearing.

The debate has taken greater significance as preparations for the decennial census begin to ramp up. The Trump administration has proposed asking about citizenship, a move that has drawn fire from civil liberties groups and others. With the count's role in apportioning congressional representation as well as its use in various federal funding formulas that affect states, the dispute has broad implications.

For example, in May, the state of Alabama filed a federal lawsuit challenging Alabama's predicted loss of seats in the House and votes in the Electoral College as a result of the 2020 U.S. Census. The suit claimed these losses would result from undocumented immigrants being counted in the Census, with those seats and votes going to states like California, Arizona and Texas.

### More Accurate Data?

"The bottom line is that political influence as well as funds is distributed based on the results of the census. If you have people who are not supposed to be in the country, but are residing in the state, the state has every incentive [for] them being counted," said Steve Camarota, director of research at the Center for Immigration Studies. "It means more money for the state, it means more political influence in congress."

Cohen said excluding the undocumented population from the count would "literally and figuratively" negate their presence in the U.S. With the census determining legislative districts and federal funding distribution, this would decrease access to resources for already vulnerable immigrant communities, he said.

Dr. Steve Murdock, a former director of the U.S. Census Bureau, said a citizenship question would discourage immigrant communities from participating in the census. He said all other census questions go through extensive testing procedures and the citizenship question should be no different.

"We really haven't had the time, or taken the time, I won't fight over that, to evaluate these questions the way we evaluate every question," Murdock said. "What the Census has been suggesting is that if we want the same accuracy with those kind of questions that we have with others, we need allow the testing and other procedures to be performed with the Census."

To contact the reporter on this story: Avery Ellfeldt in Washington at [aellfeldt@bgov.com](mailto:aellfeldt@bgov.com)

To contact the editors responsible for this story: Paul Hendrie at [phendrie@bgov.com](mailto:phendrie@bgov.com); Jonathan Nicholson at [jnicholson@bgov.com](mailto:jnicholson@bgov.com); John R. Kirkland at [jkirkland@bgov.com](mailto:jkirkland@bgov.com)