

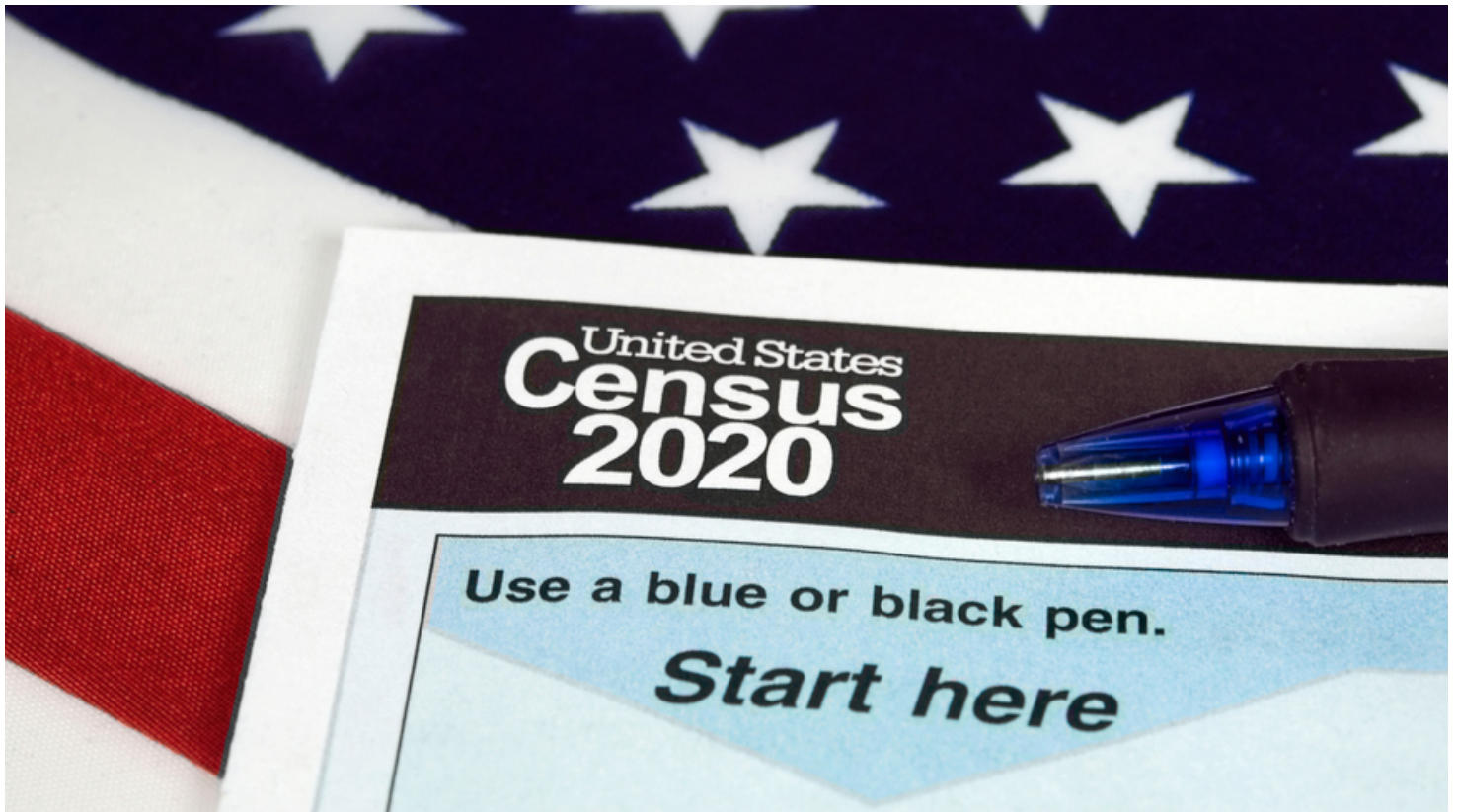
# PRO/CON: Should our next census ask about citizenship status?



By Merrill Matthews and Wayne Madsen, Tribune News Service, adapted by Newsela staff on 04.18.18

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Ahead of the 2020 census, a debate has emerged about the inclusion of a question about citizenship status. Photo by: Getty Images

## **PRO: The question allows the government to properly disburse needed funds and services**

The U.S. government does a census every 10 years. The census is a series of questions used to determine the population of each state. It's important for deciding how many representatives each state gets in Congress, among other uses.

The government plans to add a question to the 2020 census. The question asks whether the respondent is a U.S. citizen.

Citizens get certain rights from the government, like the right to vote. Some people are not citizens but have permission to live in the country. Others are in the country without permission. The government isn't entirely sure how many people are in each group. That's because the census has not asked who is a citizen for a long time.

The census asked if people were citizens through 1950. It stopped in 1960. The hope was that more people would respond.

## Who Has Health Insurance?

Adding the question again could be very helpful for those who make laws. For example, it can help count people who don't have health insurance. People use health insurance to pay for going to the doctor.

Up to about 25 percent of people without health care may be living in the U.S. without permission. That means they are unlikely to be covered by any new government health care plans. It's hard to write good laws when we don't know how many people would benefit.

We don't know for sure how many people without health insurance are here without permission. It has mostly been a guessing game.

The issue is not limited to health care, though. The government has a number of programs that support people without permission to be here. This money should be used for programs that support citizens and people who came to the U.S. with the proper permission.

## Helpful Information For The Government

Asking if people are citizens could stop some people from answering. They might be afraid to say they don't have permission to be here. The government has ways to fill in the gaps, though. They can make estimates based on math.

Asking if people are citizens goes back hundreds of years. Asking it on the census once again would be helpful. It would make things easier for the people in government who make decisions.

*Merrill Matthews is a resident scholar with the Institute for Policy Innovation. He holds a Ph.D. in the humanities from the University of Texas.*

## CON: Such questions don't belong in a free country's census

The 2020 census will include a question about whether a respondent is a citizen. It's the first time since the 1950 census.

President Donald Trump's team explained some worrying plans for the 2020 census. They want census data to be "re-used" by other government departments and private businesses.

Asking if people are citizens is worrying. Using census data for other purposes is concerning, too. For example, the data could be used to locate groups of non-citizens and target them.

Census data has been used in bad ways in the past.

## The Abuse Of Census Data

In 2004, the government used 2000 census data to track Arab-Americans. Using the census data, the government was able to tell where most Arab-Americans lived.

During World War II, the U.S. government rounded up 120,000 Japanese-American citizens. They were forced to leave their homes and taken to internment camps. The government used information from the 1940 census to figure out where Japanese-Americans lived.

Trump and other high-ranking officials often say hateful things about people from other countries. Because of this, it's safe to say that the new question has a harmful purpose.

## Historical Lesson From Abroad

The name Jacques Fauvet is not known to many Americans. However, in France, Fauvet was known for warning about improper use of census data.

Fauvet oversaw French data protection from 1984 to 1999.

German Nazis took over France in 1940. Fauvet pointed out that one of their first acts was to seize as many detailed census records as possible.

From these records, the Nazis made their lists of who would be sent to the concentration camps. Enough said!

*A graduate of the University of Mississippi, Wayne Madsen is a progressive commentator whose articles have appeared in a wide range of American and European newspapers.*

## Quiz

1 What do the authors of the PRO and CON articles AGREE about?

- (A) whether the census would help people who answer it
- (B) whether the census should ask if people are citizens
- (C) whether the government uses the census to make decisions
- (D) whether the government uses the census in bad ways

2 Read the paragraph from the section "Helpful Information For The Government."

*Asking if people are citizens goes back hundreds of years. Asking it on the census once again would be helpful. It would make things easier for the people in government who make decisions.*

How would the author of the CON article MOST LIKELY respond to this statement?

- (A) He would agree but say that this has been proven to be a bad thing.
- (B) He would agree and say that people should try to make things easier for leaders.
- (C) He would disagree but say that something should be done to track citizens.
- (D) He would disagree and say the census has not been around that long.

3 How does the section "Who Has Health Insurance?" support the PRO author's argument?

- (A) by describing the reasons why many people without health insurance are here without permission
- (B) by describing how government programs affect whether people in different areas answer the census
- (C) by explaining that asking who is a citizen could help the government know what programs need money
- (D) by explaining that the government wants to make sure that people without health insurance get it

4 Read the paragraph from the section "The Abuse Of Census Data."

*During World War II, the U.S. government rounded up 120,000 Japanese-American citizens. They were forced to leave their homes and taken to internment camps. The government used information from the 1940 census to figure out where Japanese-Americans lived.*

How does this paragraph support the CON author's argument?

- (A) It shows that the U.S. government used the census for bad reasons in the past.
- (B) It explains that many Japanese-Americans answered the 1940 census.
- (C) It describes the effects of not asking about citizenship on the U.S. census.
- (D) It highlights the idea that many people do not know about bad things in history.