



ANA Members Oppose Addition of Citizenship Question for 2020 Census

Inaccurate data would lead to misallocated marketing resources

JUNE 12, 2018

ANA members widely oppose the addition of a “citizenship” question to the 2020 census. That question asks, “Is this person a citizen of the United States?”

Background

The United States Constitution requires that every resident of the United States be counted in a decennial census (i.e., every 10 years), whether or not they are citizens. Census data is relied on for a number of important government decisions, including the number of representatives each state gets in Congress, the number of votes each state gets in the Electoral College, and allocation of federal funds to local governments for programs like Medicaid, Head Start, and the National School Lunch Program. Measurement companies that service the marketing industry also rely on census data to provide an accurate representation of consumers.

The Trump administration is advocating for the addition of a “citizenship” question to the 2020 census. Its rationale is that it would permit more effective enforcement of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, a landmark piece of federal legislation that prohibits racial discrimination in voting.

On behalf of the administration, the Department of Justice made the request for this to the United States Department of Commerce, which has oversight of the census, under United States Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross. In late March 2018, [Secretary Ross approved the DOJ’s request](#) to add the citizenship question.

This would be the first time since 1950 that the U.S. Census Bureau is planning to ask everyone living in the United States whether they are citizens. A citizenship question was asked in each decennial

census from 1890 to 1950. Since then, the citizenship question has been asked of only a sample of households, either on the census long form or the American Community Survey, which replaced it in 2010.

The image shows a screenshot of a form titled "Is this person a citizen of the United States?". It contains five radio button options: "Yes, born in the United States", "Yes, born in Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, or Northern Marianas", "Yes, born abroad of U.S. citizen parent or parents", "Yes, U.S. citizen by naturalization – Print year of naturalization" (with a dropdown arrow and a four-digit input box), and "No, not a U.S. citizen".

Opponents of the citizenship question believe it will create an environment of fear and distrust in immigrant communities and depress response to the census from noncitizens and even legal immigrants. That runs the risk of non-respondent bias by significantly undercounting immigrant, minority, and low-income populations. Census costs could rise, as increased non-response would lead to increased in-person followup. Most importantly, if immigrants and others (e.g., their families, even if citizens) avoid the national head-count, the census results will be flawed.

As a result, the number of congressional seats and the amount of federal funding in states with large numbers of foreign-born residents could be reduced.

This also raises significant issues in the world of marketing, as flawed results would distort the representation of U.S. population estimates and the research benchmarked to it. Certain populations will likely be undercounted. It could have particularly negative impact on media that cater to those communities, the companies which research them, and the agencies which help advertise to them. The value marketers see in those consumer segments will be understated and investments will be reduced.

The new question's inclusion has been challenged in court on the grounds that it could cause many immigrants to skip the 2020 census out of fear that their information could be used against them. At least 12 states are suing, led by the New York Attorney General.

ANA Member Perspective

The ANA surveyed members of three committees whom we felt would be most knowledgeable and interested in this issue: Data & Measurement Committee, Legal Affairs Committee, and Multicultural Marketing & Diversity Committee. In total, 144 members responded. Key findings are detailed below.

Awareness of this issue is mixed.

- 63 percent of total respondents are aware that the United States Department of Commerce has approved a proposal to add a citizenship question to the 2020 U.S. Census. Awareness is highest for the Legal Affairs Committee (70 percent) and Data & Measurement Committee (67 percent), followed by the Multicultural Marketing & Diversity Committee (55 percent).

Members widely oppose the citizenship question.

- Among those aware that the United States Department of Commerce has approved the proposal to add a citizenship question to the 2020 U.S. Census, 60 percent oppose it and 13 percent support it, while 27 percent don't know enough to have an opinion. Responses are fairly similar across the three committees. Looked at another way, among the total respondents with the knowledge to have an opinion, 83 percent oppose the citizenship question.

The key concern among ANA members is that the addition of a citizenship question would depress response among both non-citizens and their families (even if family members are indeed citizens). Inaccurate census data would lead to misallocated marketing resources.

The following verbatim comments are representative of the perspective of survey respondents:

- “Marketing decisions/investments are often made based on population counts. If the question leads to non-citizens not answering, millions of people — primarily minorities — might not be counted. Inaccurate population counts would lead to misallocated resources.”
- “It would affect the data we rely on to quantify the marketplace, and thereby undersize the business opportunity.”
- “Marketing is based on consumers in markets, not citizens in markets. As a business user of the data, we need the census to accurately reflect all segments of our society. Non-citizen residents contribute a great deal to many economies. Marketers need to understand who truly lives and works in the U.S.”
- “Minorities would most likely be miscounted and therefore misrepresented. The data would be bad. That would make locating and targeting multicultural groups harder.”
- “It would vastly affect our view of the size of the multicultural market, and ultimately is likely to pull dollars away from multicultural marketing and marketing overall.”
- “I believe that undocumented people and their families (even if citizens) will not report their presence and the census will be underreported, skewing data, messing up budgets, and providing inaccurate reporting.”

Conclusions and Next Steps

The ANA, in support of our members, opposes the addition of the citizenship question to the 2020 U.S. Census and has [voiced our perspective to the United States Department of Commerce and Secretary Ross](#). We encourage ANA members to do the same.

The [Advertising Research Foundation \(ARF\)](#) and the [4A's](#), sister marketing trade associations, have both told us that they support the ANA's position, as does the [Alliance for Inclusive and Multicultural Marketing \(AIMM\)](#). [Media Rating Council \(MRC\)](#) has told us that it shares our concerns about the methodological research implications of this question.

As a key next step, the Office of Management and Budget (part of the White House) will release the Census 2020 questions for public review and comment and will do so via a Federal Register notice likely sometime this month. There will be a 60-day comment period. During that period the ANA will express our views and again encourage ANA members to do so.

About the ANA

The ANA (Association of National Advertisers) makes a difference for individuals, brands, and the industry by driving growth, advancing the interests of marketers, and promoting and protecting the well-being of the marketing community. Founded in 1910, the ANA provides leadership that advances marketing excellence and shapes the future of the industry. The ANA's membership includes more than 1,000 companies with 15,000 brands that collectively spend or support more than \$400 billion in marketing and advertising annually. The membership is comprised of more than 750 client-side marketers and 300 marketing service providers, which include leading agencies, law firms, suppliers, consultants, and vendors. Further enriching the ecosystem is the work of the nonprofit ANA Educational Foundation (AEF), which has the mission of enhancing the understanding of advertising and marketing within the academic and marketing communities.

Appendix: Survey Details

Are you aware that the United States Department of Commerce, which has oversight of the census, has approved a proposal to add a citizenship question to the 2020 U.S. Census (i.e., *Is this person a citizen of the United States?*)?

Sixty-three percent of total respondents were aware that the United States Department of Commerce has approved a proposal to add a citizenship question to the 2020 U.S. Census. Awareness was highest for the Legal Affairs Committee (70 percent) and Data & Measurement Committee (67 percent), followed by the Multicultural Marketing & Diversity Committee (55 percent).

ANA Committee	Aware	Not Aware	#
Data & Measurement	67% (41)	33% (20)	61
Legal Affairs	70% (19)	30% (8)	27
Multicultural Marketing & Diversity	55% (31)	45% (25)	56
TOTALS	63% (91)	37% (53)	144

If yes, what is your perspective on the citizenship question?

Among those aware that the United States Department of Commerce has approved of the proposal to add a citizenship question to the 2020 U.S. Census, 60 percent oppose it while 27 percent don't know enough to have an opinion. Responses are fairly similar across the three committees.

Looked at another way, among the total respondents with the knowledge to have an opinion, 83 percent oppose the citizenship question.

ANA Committee	Support	Opposed	Don't Know Enough to Have Opinion	#
Data & Measurement	15% (6)	56% (23)	29% (12)	41
Legal Affairs	6% (1)	59% (10)	35% (6)	17
Multicultural Marketing & Diversity	13% (4)	67% (20)	20% (6)	30
TOTALS	13% (11)	60% (53)	27% (24)	88