



Census Participation Focus Group Research

July 2019





Methodology

The Benenson Strategy Group conducted 4 focus groups among rural Missourians in the Poplar Bluff and Joplin area from June 11-12, 2019. The focus groups included a total of 31 participants – 16 in Poplar Bluff and 15 in Joplin.

To ensure a representative cross section of rural Missouri residents we set demographic quotas for:

- ✓ Gender
- ✓ Ethnicity
- ✓ Age
- ✓ Number of children
- ✓ County

What we explored :

- ✓ Life in rural Missouri and trust in the government – both locally and federally
- ✓ Baseline awareness, past participation, and sentiment towards the census
- ✓ Motivators and barriers to participating in the 2020 census, including:
 - ✓ impact of different messages on likelihood to participate
 - ✓ new dynamics such as an online version and citizenship question



The quotes in this deck were pulled directly from the focus groups with only minor edits where needed for clarity. The demographics used in quote attributions were based on participants' screener responses.



10 key insights about rural Missourians and the census

Awareness

1. Rural Missourians are generally aware of the census...
2. ...though not without certain misconceptions about what it asks (e.g., income and political party) or how frequently it is conducted.
3. Past participation is no guarantee of understanding: even those with specific recollections of previous censuses are murky on many details.

Barriers

4. Government distrust runs high and colors how much all things it touches are trusted – including the census and the programs its count are dependent upon.
5. For many, participating makes them feel too vulnerable: privacy concerns are heightened by a perception that local crime is on the up-tick, making the prospect of opening their doors to strangers unappealing (particularly problematic for in-person collection efforts).
6. But one of the greatest obstacles to participation is knowledge – for many, their understanding of the census stops at knowing it counts people. Many rural Missourians say they won't decide whether or not to participate until they know what questions they will have to answer and how their answers will be used.
7. When the actual census questions are shared with them, the question that causes the most widespread concern is for their phone number (they don't know why this information is relevant and some worry it will be sold to telemarketers). The race question also raises concerns not only among People of Color, but also among some Whites.

Motivators

8. With so many folks struggling to get by, the best case for census participation is for resources and funding.

2020 Census

9. The online census collection pegs security against convenience, splitting opinion down the middle.
10. The citizenship question is a matter of principle and partisanship: it's an important question to ask (even though most believe it won't be answered truthfully by non-citizens); and it supports the President's agenda on immigration.



Key imperatives for quantitative research

Quantifying attitudes and beliefs about the census, past experience with it and participation intent

- **Benchmark views on the census** – not just awareness, past participation, and likelihood to partake in the 2020 census, but also beliefs on how and who it is used by. It will be important to understand on a macro scale what misconceptions hang-over the census in order to correct the record and drive participation.

Communicating the importance of participation

- **How to overcome immense government distrust** – unpacking how to motivate rural communities to respond to a government for whom they have great disdain for will be essential. Do we leave the government out of the conversation and lean into the sense of deep community spirit and responsibility we heard so much about? Or try to rebuild a sense that the government (with the census as its guide) is instrumental to helping improve the lives of rural Missouri in ways they might not realize?
- **Assuaging privacy and security concerns: how to give rural communities confidence that participating in the census does not put them at risk**– considering the different sides of how folks perceive the census to be invasive or intrusive in their lives will be important (how the census is collected, what the census asks, who the data is used by). This avenue of research will be particularly pertinent among the small population of Latinx people living in rural communities in Missouri.
- **Measuring and addressing concerns about individual questions** – to what extent do concerns about individual questions on the form pose a challenge to a full count and how do we talk to rural Missourians about those questions to encourage participation?
- **Test hypotheses about effective messages to drive census participation and what are the best ways to frame these messages as well as what is the best language to use** – these focus groups show a lot of promise from messages about funding, political representation, and confidentiality, but what specifically should MFH and partners say to convince rural Missourians to participate in the census? (E.g. Is it a negative story of what is at stake to lose? Or a positive story about gains? What specific words and phrases resonate most?)

Identifying effective advocates for census participation and the best role for Missouri Foundation for Health

- Given the severe distrust of the federal government, huge reliance on local organizations, and particular pain-points for better healthcare access and services, how can MFH position itself most effectively to be a trusted advocate and ambassador for the census?
- How should MFH focus its efforts on engaging community members? What are the platforms that will work to best connect (we heard a lot about Facebook being a place where folks have come across the 2020 census)? And who, if anyone, might MFH consider working with to get its message across– churches, food pantries, community centers?

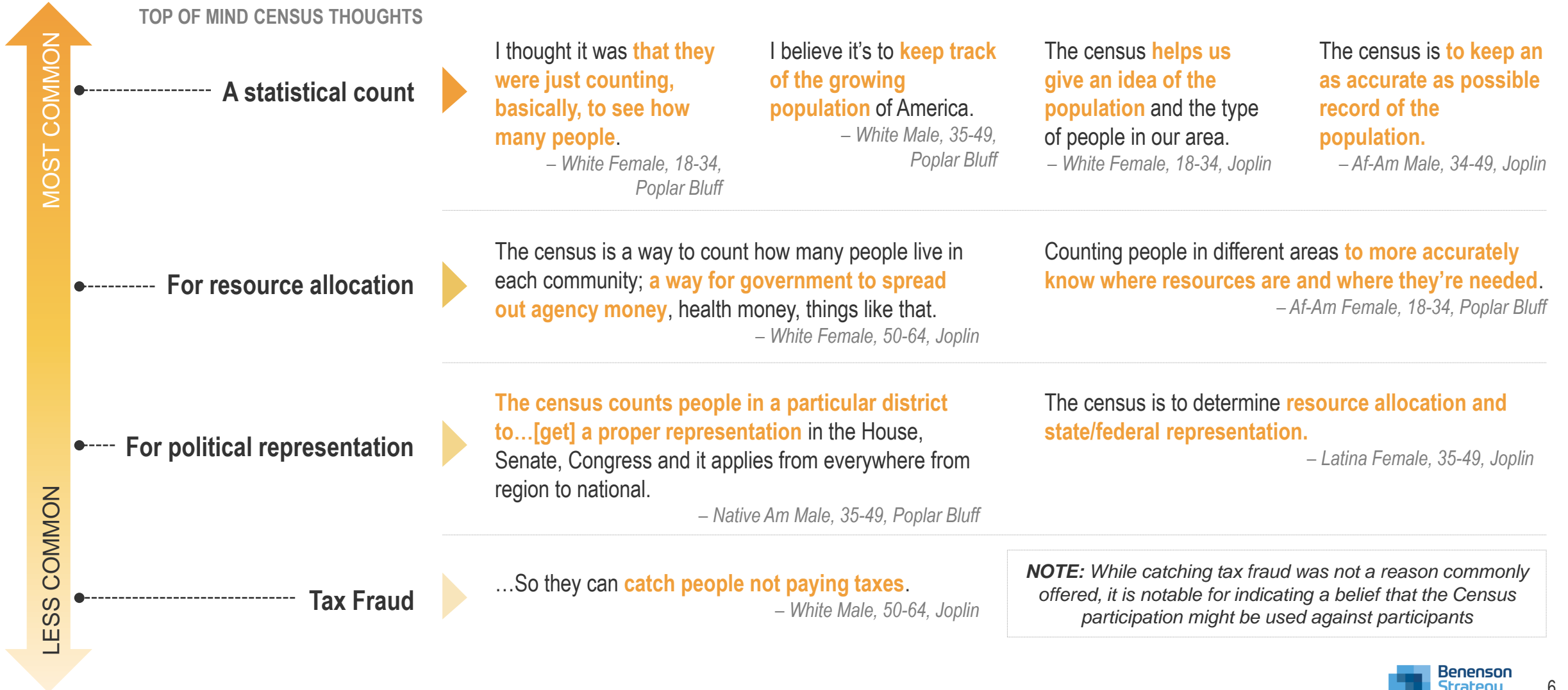


Census Overview: Baseline Awareness and Attitudes



Census awareness is broad but basic: nearly all participants described the census as a population “count,” but its other uses were much less familiar or top of mind

TOP OF MIND CENSUS THOUGHTS





Notably, many in Joplin saw the Census as a tool for businesses

For many, the census has distinct value as a tool businesses can rely on to understand where they should grow or where there's a population they can serve. Upcoming research will test the extent to which this sentiment is widely felt, and if so, whether the concept of the census helping to bring private sector investment into their communities can be used to encourage participation.

I think for small businesses, **I think that if the census helps to get more small businesses in the communities**, wonderful, great. If that's going to do it, I'm all for it.

– White Female, 50-64, Joplin

I would think **big business [also uses the Census]**.

– White Female, 35-49, Joplin



“The census counts the population in each area. It could be **used by governments and businesses for targeting services.**”

– Native Am Male, 18-34, Joplin

I know it's **definitely used to determine pricing on advertising for a lot of different markets** just because your radius of a, say, radio station has this many listeners.

– White Male, 18-34, Joplin

I was a telemarketer for a lot of years. You telling me how many TVs you've got in your house helps me a lot, but **I see some of that information not being used for good, but more for like marketing reasons.**

– White Female, 18-34, Joplin

I was in radio and **[it] lives and dies by demographics**. Radio does with their commercials, so I think it's a good thing.

– White Female, 50-64, Joplin



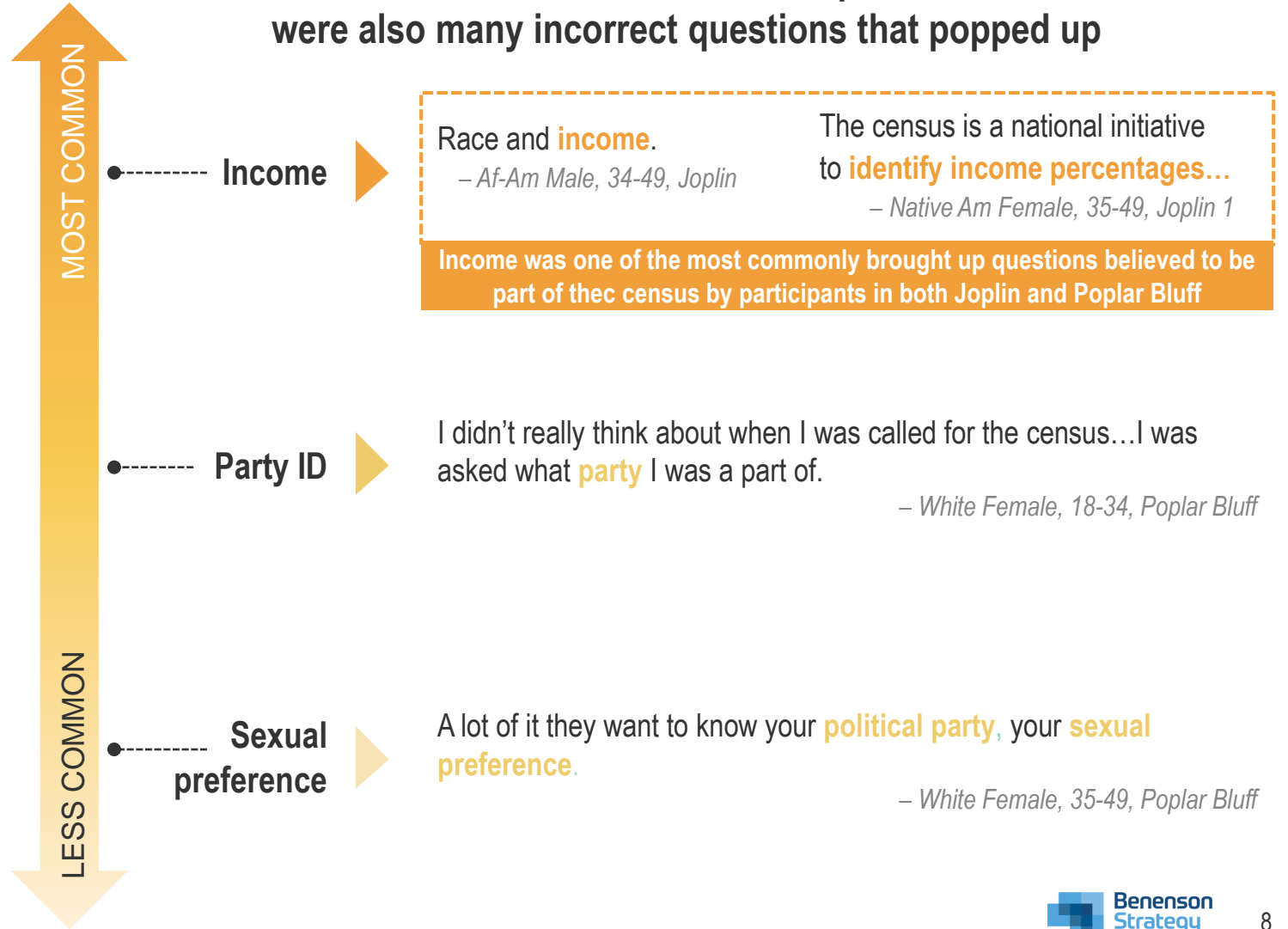
There's a fairly good sense of the kinds of "generic" questions asked by the census, though misconceptions were raised

Most participants had a vague idea of what questions were asked, but some conflated the census with other surveys – both government-sponsored and private ones. This could pose a challenge in 2020 if rural Missourians believe they have completed the census when they actually participated in a different survey.

It's a **wide range of things**. Every question you can think of is in the booklet last time I saw it.
– Native Am Male, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

It used to be, when you took the census back years ago, just a couple of questions. Now it's like taking a test. **I did it online [four months ago]** and it's page after page. They're asking everything.
– White Male, 50-64, Poplar Bluff

While most knew the real census questions, there were also many incorrect questions that popped up





Past non-participation appears to mostly reflect individuals having fallen through the cracks or being too young, not an active decision to not participate

Unaware

I just **don't remember [participating]...**

– White Female, 18-34, Poplar Bluff

No, I **don't even remember it.**

– Af-Am Male, 18-34, Poplar Bluff



Never Contacted

I haven't actually been approached or anything on doing the census, but I don't know. Do you, like you said, you just get something in the mail?

– White Male, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

I'd never filled out information for the census or been sought out to fill out information for it... but I certainly [was aware it was going on].

– Native Am Female, 35-49, Joplin

I've **never had anybody knock on my door** too, to do a census...**I never got anything in the mail.**

– White Female, 50-64, Joplin



There's some confusion on whether or not participation is legally required, leading to some concerns about that threat

Conversation in Joplin:

Is [participating in] it the law?

Grey law. Yes, it is. Nobody enforces it.

Because I almost remember them saying these things like, "Well, if you don't, you may not be..." and it was almost threatening in a way

– Af-Am Male, 35-49, Joplin

– White Male, 50-64, Joplin



News or information on the 2020 census hasn't penetrated widely; but if it's on rural Missourians radar, it's most likely because they've been targeted on Facebook by ads looking to recruit census workers

The effectiveness of Facebook ads in capturing attention on the census in rural communities raises the role that Facebook engagement may play in the success of related campaigns designed to increase participation, this question will be further examined in upcoming quantitative research.

It's on **Facebook**...I think right now, it's like, "Are you needing a job? Do you want to work for the US Census coming in 2020?" That's all over **Facebook**.

– White Female, 50-64, Joplin

I think **I've read a couple of articles** about it coming up but it hasn't been anything that was incredibly interesting to me.

– Native Am Female, 35-49, Joplin



I did see the thing for people to work for it on **Facebook** or somewhere.

– White Female, 35-49, Joplin

They have **little flyers at the schools**.

– Af-Am Male, 18-34, Poplar Bluff

[I saw an ad] on the side of **Facebook**, there's always something on there, like, "Yes, look at that."

– PoC Female, 35-49, Poplar Bluff



Rural Experience and Implications for Census



Life in rural Missouri has many hardships, and we should explore how messaging on the census can address some of these concerns

Determining how to best position census funding as a remedy for rural pain-points will be an important focus of upcoming research.

Lack of economic opportunity

Even [though] I have a bachelor's degree and I'm working on my master's degree, **it's hard to find a decent job that is actually worth doing for what I'm paying for my degree program.** – *White Female, 18-34, Poplar Bluff*

It's hard to find a job.
– *White Female, 50-64, Joplin*

They're all considered decent money for this area, but they're either entry-level or you can't move beyond. You're going to hit your cap there and you will not be able to surpass that.
– *Latino Male, 18-34, Joplin*

Inadequate access to medical care

I respect all the doctors here, but they brush you off too much. **You have to end up going at least 90 miles away to get good medical care.**
– *White Female, 35-49, Poplar Bluff*

Sunday, on Mother's Day 2007, I was really sick. I threw up. I said, "That's it. Okay, something's got to happen." Unfortunately, we still went back to the same hospital, but [saw] two different doctors. They finally diagnosed me that I had had a heart attack, and they airlifted me to Cape. **So, I feel like I almost lost my life, because, like you said, in fact, they just sort of brush you off.** – *White Male, 35-49, Poplar Bluff*

Rising Crime

Crime raised so much in our area that ... They're out here robbing more. They are stealing on women and taking them. This is what we're doing down here ... We found ladies getting kidnapped, people where there are dead bodies on the field. There's a lot of stuff going on here now that has not been going on in a long time.
– *PoC Female, 35-49, Poplar Bluff*

Isolation

I chose to live out [of] the county, but it's 15 miles near a prescription store, probably ... I chose to live out there, but sometimes, it gets tough if you're going to Poplar Bluff – that's 25 miles one way. Everything is bad in Poplar Bluff.
– *White Male, 50-64, Poplar Bluff*

Poverty

I work at a high school here. I coach basketball. **They don't see that I spend a lot of my own money feeding kids.**
– *Af-Am Male, 18-34, Poplar Bluff*

There are a lot of hungry people in this area.
– *White Female, 50-64, Poplar Bluff*



To get by, rural residents depend on local non-government resources, and because help comes from close to home, there's a sense among those living rurally, that they must take care of themselves

Rural Missourians see local resources as the only providers of the leg-up or life-line so relied upon in their communities – but the reasons why are mixed

For some, it's the idea that specific organizations are looking out for them...

There's an organization I think called **One Joplin** ... They come from different sources in the community like healthcare, low income, different kinds of agencies. And they've identified places where Joplin is lacking services and places where we're overlapping those services, and they're working with the government of Joplin to try to get them active in pursuing the things that we need.

– Native Am Female, 35-49, Joplin

If there's one thing that I'm still holding onto, I'm like, "**Thank God for the Boys & Girls Club** that is still holding on." You also have summer programs [so] that if your child can't find something to eat, they can go to the park and get a meal.

– PoC Female, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

Crossline (community center) ... a lot of the homeless things we have now, since the tornado, have had a lot of impact. You see a lot more resources in that area.

– White Female, 18-34, Joplin

Catholic Charities helps with utilities and economic security.

– Af-Am Male, 35-49, Joplin

Community Action ... they help with utilities.

– Af-Am Male, 18-34, Poplar Bluff

Ozarks Area Community Action Corporation.

– White Female, 35-49, Joplin

Community Action came up in 3 out of 4 groups

...for others, it's a deep sense of community spirit and individual responsibility

There's a lot of **personal initiative**, I think, among the population and that's where people come together.

– Native Am Male, 18-34, Joplin



[After the tornado] I think the community led that process. **I think people looking around and seeing half their town gone makes you want to stand up and say, "This is my community.**

These are my people who are struggling and some of these people lost their homes." All the outside forces that came to help us helped, but **I really think it was the community who did that and not anybody else.**

– White Female, 18-34, Joplin



Churches in particular are a trusted community resource and would likely make strong partners to advocate for participation, particularly when discussing its importance for resource allocation

In rural communities, where access to resources is often hard to come by, churches provide essential support. The reliance on churches for services was greater among those living around Poplar Bluff than in Joplin, suggesting that churches' roles grow as communities get smaller and access to resources becomes sparser. Understanding if (and if so, how) churches can be brought into efforts to drive census participation will be an important area of exploration.

The **churches here are a big, big part of the town ...** My child goes to a church that we don't attend because of the programs that they offer. That's what we lean on.

– Other Female, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

There's what they call the *Bread Shed*. **You go by the church on the second week of every month.**

– White Male, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

I know several churches that do a lot of things like that. **I know more than just this church and they're rebuilding the park over on Bacon Park.** There are several different things in the area that they do. I know there's the *Bread Shed*. That's just from a couple of churches in the community. I think there are various churches doing a lot of things.

– White Male, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

We have one called **the River Street Food Pantry – it's not a specific church, just people from all the churches in the area who come together and give food** on Wednesday nights. They give bread on Thursdays, and they give produce on Fridays.

– White Female, 18-34, Joplin

“Where we are, **the churches do everything...**”

– White Male, 65+, Poplar Bluff

Our government officials in this area just don't do enough. That's the problem. **The churches have to pick up the slack because you don't have a lot of people doing a lot in this community – as far as people that can actually get something done,** changed, or open for the community.

– Other Female, 35-49, Poplar Bluff





There's very little trust in government and it dovetails as a barrier to participation

A pervasive, generalized distrust of government in rural Missouri is made stronger by recent, high-profile scandals in the Missouri state government, making residents here particularly skeptical of government and questioning whether it really does anything to help everyday people.

Many voiced a generalized distrust of government...

Nobody really knows the government.

– White Male, 50-64, Poplar Bluff

I no longer trust my government.

– White Female, 50-64, Joplin

Our government officials in this area just don't do enough. That's the problem.

– PoC Female, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

If you don't see it with your own eyes, then you don't trust it. I feel the same about the federal government too.

– White Female, 35-49, Joplin

Not really [trusting of government]. Not that I've had any personal experience or anything, but I don't feel like I really - it's not more like trust. I just don't agree. I feel like that's what a lot of it is. I don't agree a lot with the government.

– Af-Am Female, 18-34, Joplin

...but specific examples of why the government can't be trusted were also top-of-mind (especially the scandals in Jefferson City)

My husband is in the military and **our data has been hacked so many times** so I do not trust the government security resources.

The state government, **we just impeached our governor...** he was using campaign funds to pay hookers or whatever. I don't feel I can trust any official.

– Latina Female, 35-49, Joplin

I got out of prison in February... Paid my debt to society and **they tell me there were all these services here that would help me get on my feet and it's a crock.**

– Native Am Male, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

I think that the government is so full of lies. Like you mentioned, they're always caught in something. Whether you're right-wing, left-wing, right in the middle, it doesn't matter. You pick an official, there's something wrong with them and you can see it from - **like you said, in our communities where there's embezzlement,** you can see it where there's allocated funds.

– Latino Male, 18-34, Joplin





The dynamics of the tornado recovery in Joplin created unique mixed feelings about government: while many praised the initial response, later misuse of funds fueled deep cynicism

Some acknowledged the governmental aid that came in...

After the tornado, this town came together, people came from everywhere. **The government stepped in, and they made sure people had water and food.**

– White Female, 50-64, Joplin

I think a lot of the **homeless things we have now since the tornado have had a lot of impact.** You see a lot more resources in that area.

– White Female, 18-34, Joplin

The government, whether it was the local government that hired the grant writers or whoever to get FEMA money, **did a really good job. There is still money being spent that is tornado recovery money that's going into parks, roads, sidewalks.**

– White Male, 18-34, Joplin

...but this sentiment was largely undercut by news of corruption

I know **after the tornado, there was a lot of embezzlement** and he was using the money that was for the tornado...

– White Female, 18-34, Joplin



I know that after the tornado...I think it was the city manager. He left...Because **he was involved in some of the money, disappearing.**

– White Female, 50-64, Joplin



As far as the Joplin government goes, **there was a fiasco following the tornado with Wallace Bajjali.** I wasn't here during that, but it was big in the local news...

– White Male, 18-34, Joplin



Participation: Attitudinal Barriers to Completing Census



Hostility towards or mistrust of the government is a leading hurdle to a full count...

REASONS NOT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE CENSUS

The communities in which I've come from, you don't always see the government as something out there to help you. **I think with the situation that I've had in my life, where the government has done negative things to impact my life, I just don't feel the need to give that information.** I don't think I should give as much respect to something I don't feel like I get respect back from.

– White Female, 18-34, Joplin

I don't trust the government. It's just as simple as that. **I don't want my information given to any other bureau.**

– White Female, 50-64, Poplar Bluff



I think a lot of people are leery of the government ... There are some people that say, "Hey, listen. I've got my right to bear arms, and this, this, and that. **I think this is another step for the government wanting to know what I've got,** you know what I mean, in my personal household, in my stockpile," or whatever it is.

– Af-Am Male, 35-49, Joplin

I'm sure there are **a lot of people that have no experience dealing with the government,** therefore they don't have... **We fear what we don't understand.**

– White Male, 18-38, Joplin



...made worse by a perception that resources – whose funding depends on census participation – are abused

REASONS NOT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE CENSUS

This widespread concern about abuse of benefits could pose a challenge to making arguments about the importance of the census for resource allocation

From what I've seen where I live, **the people that need [help] aren't getting it and the people that get it don't need it.** One guy who lives close to me, I asked him. I said, "What kind of job would you like to have?" He goes, "I don't want a job." He's on disability and if he works, he makes just a little bit more than what he gets in disability, so why work?



Yet I know another fellow who works for NAPA [and] makes minimum wage and has terrible insurance. He got hurt – well, he actually had a kidney stone, but **he had to go to a hospital and winded up with like a \$20,000.00 bill. And he has to pay so much a month, but yet, everybody else gets it for free and he actually had nothing.**

– White Male, 65+, Poplar Bluff

They told me I'm \$5.00 a year over from being able to get [social security] – I was on a walker. I make \$5.00 too much per year for any food stamps, medical care, coverage, or any kind of services like that. I worked since I was 12 years old. I went to work in a restaurant washing dishes, and at 15, I became a waitress. **I busted my tail all those years, got sick, and I can't get any help.**

– White Female, 50-64, Poplar Bluff

It also depends on how good your politicians are with money, **because they seem to be getting really political with other people's money and not putting it where it belongs.**

– Native Am Male, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

The church is afraid to speak up and say, **"We offer this [resource] because so many people take advantage of it and then the people who do need it can't get it."**

– White Female, 35-49, Poplar Bluff



For others it's a breach of privacy, and where worries about local crime are mounting, so are fears about security

REASONS NOT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE CENSUS

Specifically, the idea of in-person interviews made some people particularly uncomfortable...

It feels very Jehovah Witness-y, like somebody **knocking on your door to sell you something** – you know, you don't want that.

A lot of people would be like, “No. **Get away from my door with that now. I don't have time for that.**”

– PoC Female, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

I don't want people coming to my house. That's just me.

– White Female, 35-49, Joplin

With as much crime and identity theft that's going on, I don't trust somebody coming to my door, taking all my information, and then going next door. They could get robbed by the time they get to the end of the street.

– White Female, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

You probably got a creep in some of these people that are going to have to go door-to-door, and he's going to make it bad for everybody – or she.

– White Female, 35-49, Joplin





But what appears to give rural residents greatest pause is simply not knowing enough about it

REASONS NOT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE CENSUS

To the extent that unawareness or lack of education are a leading barrier to participation, a priority of upcoming research will be to zero-in on how investments in education and informational resources might best improve participation, specifically what the kinds of information rural communities need to feel more comfortable and motivated to fill out the census.

I still think they **need to release more information about what this is used for** and stuff like that.

– Latino Male, 18-34, Joplin

I think if it was actually used for the resources like they're saying, it'd be a good thing, but **we have to know why they do it. I don't really know why they do it, the reason behind in doing it.**

– White Male, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

I'm going to read the questions first. I **won't give my information unless I know what's going on.**

A lot of people don't understand the actual need for it, so a lot of them will probably just throw them in the trash.

– White Female, 18-34, Poplar Bluff

The ones who are educated enough to understand what [the census is] about [will do it].

– White Female, 50-64, Poplar Bluff

A lot of people are very uneducated [about the census] ... It's just **they don't know who this is going to go to. They don't know who's going to read this.** They just don't know.

– PoC Female, 35-49, Poplar Bluff





Participation: Census Questions that Pose a Barrier



The phone number question drew the most widespread concern by far, with about half of participants crossing it out

The recent surge in robo calls and telemarketing was the primary reason for concern...

That's the only thing that I wouldn't want to put on – the phone number. Because **you can get a lot from somebody just from the phone number. That's a little personal.**

– White Male, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

How do I know that if I give you this phone number, government officials aren't going to call me to ask me for surveys? Or like with Medicare, we ask them for surveys after they call us anytime. I don't want to be bothered by that.

– White Female, 18-34, Joplin

I just get too many cold calls and too many phone calls that I don't want. I don't have a problem most of the time with the government, but who's to say that they won't sell that to someone so that they can cold call?

– White Female, 50-64, Joplin

I am not giving up my phone number to them. **I think they'll create robo calls.**

– Native Am Male, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

...and some thought it was simply pointless or unnecessary

I don't know why they even need our name. **If all they're really doing is counting, then why do they need names and phone numbers?**

– White Female, 35-49, Joplin



I'm registered with too many government entities for them not have my phone number...like, they probably have my telephone number anyways.

– White Female, 18-34, Poplar Bluff

My goodness. People that you've never heard of have your phone number, so **I think if [the government] really wants it, they can probably find it.**

– White Male, 35-49, Poplar Bluff



The race question strikes some – People of Color and otherwise – as inappropriate and may have similar participation consequences to the citizenship question for some

Some express concerns over how a race count would be used. A few specifically questioned why Hispanic identity would be a separate question and we should explore whether that question will create a barrier to participation similar to the citizenship question (and if yes, how to help people overcome those concerns).

If ever I feel like the question, at some point, would come up for everyone to select an origin, and if I was of any of those three and I checked “yes,” then **they have a database of all the names where, “This house. Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin...”**

– *White Male, 18-34, Joplin*



However, **there is just the fear of being ostracized or disenfranchised** depending on putting, “I’m a minority of some sort.” ... I mean **that’s a legitimate fear for a lot of people.**

– *Af-Am Male, 35-49, Joplin*

Your race, what does it matter what color you are? **If I need help, I’m next in line for a surgery, why does someone of a different color get to go ahead of me?**

– *Latino Male, 18-34, Joplin*

Where we’re at in the country, I think right now, just that question scares a lot of people – feeling like they’re maybe being targeted or maybe more questions. It’s more like I live in Carthage and, “Oh, you live where all the Mexicans live.” That’s something I hear all the time, and it’s like that generalized statement ... “We want to know. Are you minority? Are you here? Are you there?” **I think that question right now scares a lot of people in general...**

...The father of my child is Hispanic. My stepmother is black. I have a brother who’s black. **I feel like that’s a question that’s used to put someone down** and to know, “Are they a minority?” Stuff like that.

– *White Female, 18-34, Joplin*



Participation: Reasons to Complete Census



On a top of mind basis, securing resources and funding are by far the strongest motivation for census participation

REASONS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE CENSUS

You have the balance and **you can allocate certain resources to certain areas**, because, “We have this doctor who’s really good with sickle cell anemia,” which runs in African-American base. “This has a very predominately African-American population. Let’s send those here.”

– Af-Am Female, 18-34, Joplin



When you do get a chance to get money allotted to your area, so much of it goes to one space. It’s like the lottery deal. It’s supposed to go to education. **It goes to St. Louis and Kansas City, but none of it comes down here.**

– White Female, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

I also know that **the government uses it in allocating resources as far as deciding what areas need the most** .

– Native Am Male, 18-34, Joplin

If we could get money and services for the stuff that we actually need. Better healthcare. More hospitals. More doctor’s clinics. Services for disabled people to get back on their feet.

– White Female, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

It’s important for us to be counted because we matter just as much as the East or the West Coast ... It’s important for us to all be counted because we all have opinions. We all have views about things that we want to see get done. **It’s important for everybody to be counted, not just people who agree with me, but everybody.** The way of life here is different than on the coasts, where all of the population is. We have a different way of life and it’s important that people know that.

– White Female, 35-49, Joplin

It’s a really good thing for schools, too. That’s a lot of how money is allocated for schools and things like that.

– Native Am Female, 35-49, Joplin



In particular, a sense of obligation to one's community and view that it's a collective effort builds an even stronger case for the "resource argument"

REASONS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE CENSUS

If it helps your representative help you **get stuff in the community, then it should be a good thing**. Positive, it helps.

– White Male, 50-64, Poplar Bluff

I'd still answer the questions to help the **community** if that's what it's for, but I wouldn't change my mind on releasing my phone number.

– White Male, 35-49, Poplar Bluff



The reason I would tell them that they needed to participate is because, when they do the census, **it's for community**. You're not included in that community at that point because you didn't take the census, and **then you're taking the resources away from other people that did participate**. If it is about money and resources to this place, the people that don't participate, then they say, "We have so many people here," but then 10,000 people didn't take it, then that community's going to be short of that money. That's not fair to the people that do take the census.

– White Female, 50-64, Joplin

If it was used for common-sense purposes like that, yes – that would be great. Because in our **community**, we're going to get to see a big change because of Hispanics, which is great. I love the diversity and I hope that it does well for us when the census comes around and they see, "This is a group of underserved people. We need to do something about that." Maybe that will be a positive outcome.

– White Female, 35-49, Joplin



Messaging



Messaging Scorecard

Confidentiality: “By law the Census Bureau has to keep the information you provide to them secret. It is against the law for the Census Bureau to disclose any survey information that identifies an individual and it is also illegal for the Census Bureau to share census information with other branches of government, such as the FBI or IRS.”

Funding: “Census data is used to ensure states receive their fair share of public funds. Every year Missouri gets over \$11 billion dollars in funds from the federal government that are directly calculated based on how many people the Census reports live in Missouri. If Missourians don’t participate in the census and there is an undercount, for every person who goes uncounted, Missouri forfeits \$1,200 in federal dollars. The majority of the dollars going toward programs such as Medicaid (called MO HealthNet in Missouri), the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP; sometimes called “food stamps”), and the Highway Planning and Construction Program.”

Representation: “Census data is used to ensure states are being fairly represented in Washington, DC. Every ten years following the census, congressional districts are adjusted for population changes picked up by the census count. In 2010, Missouri lost a seat in Congress. If Missourians don’t participate in the census and there is an undercount, there’s a risk that Missouri will lose the seats it should have in Congress.”

Rural Benefits: It’s important for Missourians, especially those in rural areas, to complete the Census, so the hard-earned tax dollars we send to D.C. comes back to Missouri. Census counts determine how critical funds designed to strengthen rural communities are distributed. For example, Missouri’s federal funds to build, maintain, and secure rural communities’ electric infrastructure depends on the census counts. Also, the USDA Business and Industry Loan Program provides loans to small and rural businesses based on census counts. These funds are going to rural communities – the question remains whether ones in Missouri get them, or other places like California.

Count of participants who found messages...								
+			●			-		
Poplar Bluff	Joplin	Total	Poplar Bluff	Joplin	Total	Poplar Bluff	Joplin	Total
14	9	23	2	6	8	0	0	0
14	10	24	2	2	4	0	3	3
14	8	22	2	5	7	0	2	2
16	10	26	0	5	5	0	0	0



Funding Message: Very popular and the scale and significance of what resources are at stake is news to most

Unsurprisingly, the idea of getting a fair share of resources was received with open arms, and giving specifics appears to help build the case...

I knew that that’s the reason for the census and that we can get funding, but **just to see it black and white, to me, makes a difference.**
– White Female, 50-64, Poplar Bluff

The funding helping everyone in Missouri and, yes, **the health insurance for sure – children’s health insurance.**
– White Female, 18-34, Poplar Bluff

It spells it out for you. In some way, for the folks that are a little bit shaky on doing it, and you all said a minute ago, it says “Children’s health.”
– White Male, 18-34, Joplin

The more people that fill that out, like I said, it’s \$1,200.00 per head and that stuff goes towards the elected children, health insurance and stuff like that. There are a lot of parents who can’t afford health insurance for their kids. The programs that offer assistance are funded that way. **It’s important that they get the money that they need so they can help as many kids.**
– Af-Am Male, 35-49, Joplin

It says that everyone that isn’t on the census and that goes uncouncted, that’s \$1,200.00 less than they get. **It pays for food stamps and there are so many people I’m sure in the State of Missouri that needs that to keep going. That’s why I put plus.**
– White Female, 50-64, Joplin

[When I saw] the words \$11 million... I was like, “Okay. I see you.”
– PoC Female, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

...and with some not knowing of the census’ role in getting these funds, building awareness is important.

I didn’t know these programs. That it had all of that to do with these programs. Medicaid and all that.
– White Male, 65+, Poplar Bluff



...people don’t necessarily realize that that’s what the census is for.
– White Female, 18-34, Poplar Bluff

I think [telling people about census funding] is the part that needs to be put out there for education.
– White Female, 50-64, Poplar Bluff



Funding Message: Concerns among some who already see government-funded programs rife with fraud and abuse, hold out against this argument

The thing is, a lot of them get food stamps. They aren't really feeding their kids. They're selling the food stamps... We need to help those kids as much as possible, but even though the parents aren't mature enough to feed their own children, they would rather sell it and buy something else... Then it's not the government's fault. They could improve it, but I know what happens because I know somebody that does it, which really makes me mad.

– White Female, 50-64, Joplin

[Fraud of these government programs] happens, it absolutely does.

– White Female, 50-64, Joplin





Rural Benefits Message: Effective for the same reasons as the funding message, but specifically focusing on how census funds benefit rural communities may work even better with some

At the end of the day, it's all about funding. Interestingly, funding messages that focused on rural- rather than state-wide resources were received equally well and the first-hand experience with many of these programs presents unique benefits to a rural funding angle.

Our infrastructure is terrible. If they're giving money to help with that, if you live where I live, you'd know what I was talking about.

– White Male, 65+, Poplar Bluff

It's about funding.

– Native Am Male, 18-34, Joplin

It just goes back to money getting put where it needs to be put.

– Af-Am Female, 18-34, Joplin

I think it just comes back to the one on every person who goes unaccounted for, they forfeit the money.

– White Female, 18-34, Joplin

A few participants offered their personal reliance on rural benefits.

Well, my home loan's through the USDA. So, any kind of program that they can offer me, that will help me with repairs or anything, if they don't have the funding, they can't help.

– White Female, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

I have reviewed the USDA grant a few times and they are all about the census. If you don't have it, then the money really doesn't come back here. It really doesn't.

– Native Am Male, 18-34, Joplin

Focusing on federal funding for local communities may generate some backlash in communities like Joplin, where local officials are distrusted due to scandal.

The governor was caught allocating funds for all types of stuff, helicopter rides, vacations, whatever... Are you kidding me? This is the funds that Congress, that D.C. sent to Missouri, and this is what you chose to do with it? There are no real good afterschool programs ... Missouri has already showed that it's politicians can't be trusted... They can't be trusted with these funds at the top of – at the biggest level.

– Af-Am Male, 35-49, Joplin



Representation Message: Government disenchantment aside, it's important that *rural* Missouri gets a voice in D.C.

Rural communities feel overlooked and poorly represented in the Capitol. The census offers them a fair shot to have their communities' unique needs better served.

If you can get the good representatives in there, that are actually taking the Missourian voice back to Washington like they are supposed to, then we get what we need...

– White Female, 18-34, Poplar Bluff

It was a plus for me to think that, if we participated in the census, we could have more representation. The problem I find with that is, where would that representation come from? Because I'm pretty sure nobody from Monett is in the State House right now. Even though there might be more representation, it would really need to be from somebody who lives like we live.

– White Female, 35-49, Joplin

If it gives us more of a showing in Washington, that's positive. – White Female, 50-64, Joplin

That one representative is a difference of maybe our hospital getting shutdown to where – then we've got to travel 90 miles to a hospital.

– White Female, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

I mean, you don't want to lose a seat in Congress. That loses your voice in Congress. The more people we have in Congress, the better off I think we can be. Somebody else is going to get their seat. So, that means a different state. That's not going to help our state out.

– Af-Am Male, 18-34, Poplar Bluff

Everybody needs to be represented and the rural government needs to be there. The more people that participate, the more all of us get represented.

– White Female, 50-64, Joplin

The more people that we have in Congress, the more representation we're going to get. **More people could be from rural places that are like, "These people are getting left out. Let me speak about it,"** instead of just being people from Springfield or from Kansas City that don't know or really even care about those people.

– Af-Am Female, 18-34, Joplin

(It certainly doesn't hurt to recall how the state lost a seat following 2010 census)

We lost one on 2010. We don't want to lose anymore.

– White Male, 50-64, Poplar Bluff

We lost a seat in Congress because people didn't participate in it, because they didn't think we needed it. So, it does help... We cannot afford to lose seats in Congress.

– White Male, 50-64, Poplar Bluff



Representation Message: But for a few, more representation in Congress doesn't feel like it will necessarily do much to improve *their* lives

Either Washington won't listen at all...

In Washington, **all of that has fallen on deaf ears**. So, the fact that if it's counted or not counted ... I don't want to go back to my answer before, but I just don't think that it makes a difference. The specific reason is that they don't do very much in some of the communities that really need it, rural or otherwise.

– Af-Am Male, 35-49, Joplin



...or it will hear only someone else's interests

I'm positive that's **not our voice** [that's being represented in Congress].

– Af-Am Male, 18-34, Poplar Bluff



Confidentiality Message: It sounds good, but can the government really be trusted?

On face value, messaging on confidentially puts minds at ease...

I put a positive because it made me feel positive. Like I said, if they're going to use the information like they say they are, it'll be okay. Like she said, you don't want your information given out to anybody else.

– Af-Am Female, 65+, Poplar Bluff

For the most part, **it makes you aware it's at least stated that they're going to protect your information.**

– White Female, 18-34, Poplar Bluff

It's a law that they can't share information. That's interesting. I did not know that. – White Female, 35-49, Joplin

The idea of it is a plus. – White Female, 18-34, Joplin



...but government distrust runs deep, making this message a potentially hard sell. Many indicated that while in theory it sounded appealing, in practice it was not enough to convince them that it was anything more than the government paying lip-service.

I don't trust the government. It's just as simple as that. I don't want my information given to any other bureau. – White Female, 50-64, Poplar Bluff

That's what you said about the HIPAA. To me, I put a plus because it's positive. It makes people feel trust, but we still don't trust. **It's just at the back of your mind like, "You all say that about everything."** – PoC Female, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

The government likes to pretend that certain agencies don't interact. That's just ridiculous. Some of the best places in our country have been penetrated. The Pentagon, somebody stole like 10 laptops from the Pentagon with secrets. You know what I mean? I'm supposed to believe that this one government agency won't communicate with the other ones... They'll break the law and say that it was stolen or something. – Af-Am Male, 35-49, Joplin

I mean we've talked earlier about how many lies the government get caught in, and **how am I supposed to believe that?** – White Female, 18-34, Joplin



New 2020 Census Dynamics



Despite general concerns about data privacy, many said they would likely complete the Census online for the convenience factor

ONLINE ADDITION

Given the absence of awareness of the change (not one person knew of the new online option), there is a need for advocates of census participation to offer clarity on the online option; reiterating that data will be safely protected and that if they prefer, the mail-in approach remains.

Convenience

If it's used to help the community, I mean, **doing it online is more convenient for everybody**. That doesn't mean it's safe, it doesn't change that.

– White Male, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

I probably would [participate] either way, but yes, it **makes it more easier for people**.

– White Male, 50-64, Joplin

I can probably go online. **Get it done quicker.**

– White Female, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

I think it's **a more efficient way to finish the census**, and I would like to think it'll save money.

– Native Am Female, 35-49, Joplin

People in my age-group, they don't really check their mail. If they see anything other than a bill, they'll probably put it in the trash. They're not going to look at it. Honestly, if the government sent me some package in the mail, I'll be like, "Yes. No, thank you." If I see that online, it's just like, "Hey, we want to know – we want you to be a part of this," people are more likely, especially in the younger age group, to be like, **"Oh yes, it's convenient. I can just do it right here on my phone."**

– White Female, 18-34, Joplin





But others expressed concerns about security and said they would stick to the paper form; but no one said that the existence of an online option would lead them to not participate

ONLINE ADDITION

About half of all participants raised varying degrees of concern at the online option. In line with prevailing concerns about how our data is used (or abused) online, many worried sharing this information digitally made them vulnerable.

Security

I'm not a huge skeptical person; it may or may not be someone with the census. I'm sure at some point in 2020, while the census is going, **there's going to be a certain amount of fraud linked to it.**

– Af-Am Male, 34-49, Joplin

If it got sent to me in the mail with a federal stamp I would do it, but **getting an e-mail is tricky these days, pretty much because an e-mail is a lot easier to forge** than an actual government stamp.

– White Female, 18-34, Poplar Bluff

It would make people do it because of the convenience, but in my opinion, a smart person, knowing the ability that people have on the internet, knowing things about the dark side of the web or hackers, **I wouldn't trust putting my information on any platform on the internet in that way.**

– White Female, 18-34, Joplin

It's **a little more risky**, I think, in general.

– White Male, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

Technology Illiteracy

On that online thing, I'm still old-school and I **just don't trust online at all.**

– Native Am Male, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

I've got a computer, but **I just don't use it.**

– White Male, 65+, Poplar Bluff



I think the packet would be beneficial for it, like you said, this area, because it is rural. **You have a lot of people that do not know how to work on that online.**

– PoC Female, 35-49, Poplar Bluff



A few opposed citizenship question as exclusionary, but most either supported it or believed it would have no impact on participation, assuming undocumented immigrants would “lie”

CITIZENSHIP QUESTION

Census advocates have raised concerns that the citizenship question will result in total abstention of non-citizen communities, but there was evidence across groups that it's understood that your census will count, even if specific questions are left blank. The extent to which this thinking is echoed across communities particularly at risk of non-participation on account of the new citizen question is an important question for upcoming research.

Well, because I figured that they probably would have already asked that.

– White Female, 18-34, Poplar Bluff

I think it should be on there. If you can't be here legally, then you shouldn't be here.

– White Female, 50-64, Joplin

It really should be on there.

– White Male, 65+, Poplar Bluff

I don't think they'll get honest answers.

– White Male, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

Unless they're going to ask you right then for the proof, you could still lie about it.

– White Female, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

They are not going to answer ... I see a whole diverse neighborhood that won't bother with it.

– Native Am Male, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

If you're an illegal immigrant, why would you answer to that question?

– Af-Am Male, 18-34, Poplar Bluff





The citizenship question not only threatens a full count, it also has the potential to politicize the census which could create additional challenges for an accurate count

CITIZENSHIP QUESTION

There was a general sense of the (potential) new citizenship question, but neither familiarity with the question or debate surrounding it was necessary for participants to instantly characterize it as a partisan matter.

News. It's all over the news. **It's political.**

– *White Male, 50-64, Poplar Bluff*

I guess it **depends on what you politically believe in.**

– *White Female, 35-49, Poplar Bluff*



It's **probably going to be added because of Trump and the flow of immigrants...**

– *White Male, 50-64, Joplin*

Donald Trump said that he wanted to, by 2020, implement the database where you've got – they called it a long thing, but [it is basically] just a chip that kind of – because Europe passed that, with the news covering the outpour of immigrants going into Greece and Germany, and how they didn't just send them away but they said, "All right. Listen, we'll gather all your information. Here, we'll give you an ankle monitor." That's what Trump said, that that will be a great thing, that we can keep track of the citizens or not.

– *Af-Am Male, 35-49, Joplin*

Do they really want to know about your demographic or it's just trying to figure out who we need to target? Living in Carthage, I noticed that after Trump's inauguration, I'd seen ICE vehicles in my town that I've never seen before, that I had seen [having] people come into them, questioning them just for the way they look, asking them if they were legal.

– *White Female, 18-34, Joplin*



Considerations for Census Workers



More rural communities believe there's a need for census collection to consider how they are unique

This was particularly the case for those living around Poplar Bluff, who were very vocal about the need for the census to not be a one-size fits all; “outsiders” dropping in to get their data struck many undesirable.

In rural areas, you're more guarded. **You're not as open with people I guess anymore, because of so much going on.** Census takers come up, don't be surprised. **They answer the door with a gun.** You know what I mean?

– White Female, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

[Rural residents] grill whoever's coming to the door to death. They'll ask you 20 questions just to make sure their neighbors are protected and themselves.

– White Female, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

As long as you get mail... As long as they stay doing the packets... **Please don't go on some of these houses, the next neighbor is five miles away.** Please don't do that.

– PoC Female, 35-49, Poplar Bluff

In rural America, you really know your neighbors for the most part. You might be a mile away, but you know them better than the one in the city you live two feet away from... “Did Jerry Smith, my next-door neighbor, did he – what did he do?” You're really not able to tell them that, but it's interesting because they kind of wondered, “Well, if old Jerry let you in, well, maybe I'll let you in.” Kind of that thing and I got that sometimes.

– White Male, 35-49, former census worker, Poplar Bluff

You need to send rural understanding folks to talk to rural folks. You don't send the kids, especially if they're going to talk weird and they're going to seem all something's wrong with this.

– Native Am Male, 35-49, Poplar Bluff





Census workers spotlight: value folk's time, respect their privacy, and know that the rural mindset leans toward caution

In 3 of the 4 groups, we had at least one participant who'd worked for the census collecting data in the past. Their experiences collecting census data in rural communities reveals the importance of making folks feel at ease with answering questions.



I was one of the ones taking the census door-to-door and I learned a lot. **I learned that people are private. People don't like to be hassled.** Even though I was mostly in rural communities, people are friendly, but their time is valuable. Sometimes I got some "No"s, but **most of the time people were willing to give, I'd say, 80% of the information.**

– White Male, 35-49, former census worker, Poplar Bluff

I want people to participate, because I've had it explained to me what the duty of the Census Bureau is, and how they cannot share with law enforcement. But I know in this area, people are pretty stubborn, so if they decided not to, there's not much you can do.

– Latina Female, 35-49, Joplin

They might not do it now, but I was told to call first and see if I could talk to somebody ... to set up a time that worked for them. [So they'd say] "No, my husband won't be here," or, "No, my family won't – I'd rather they answered it for the household." So we try to set up something that way. Because a lot of us, we're not going to answer our phones...

...I worked for a company that I went door-to-door for to get the number of people that were in the home. For the most part, people wouldn't come to the door and then, if they weren't at home, say, working during the day or whatever, I had to leave something for them to mail in.

– White Female, 50-64, former census worker, Joplin



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