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# Census predicts fall in response rate

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Enlarge By Stephanie Diani for USA TODAY

Actor Lucas Lee plays a doctor mailing in his form in a new Census Bureau commercial shot in Los Angeles last week.

By Haya El Nasser, USA TODAY

Turbulent political and economic times roiling the nation are expected to diminish initial participation by households in next year's Census despite a \$326 million marketing blitz that far outpends previous Census campaigns.

Mounting mistrust of government, rising identity theft and record numbers of foreclosures could discourage people from mailing back Census forms next year, according to the Census Bureau.

A Census analysis shows that about 64% of households are likely to mail in their forms without additional prodding from Census workers — down from 67% in 2000. That could mean 4 million more doors to knock on.

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Getting people to fill out and mail the forms is crucial to keeping costs down. Sending Census workers door-to-door — sometimes more than once — is expensive: \$80 million to \$90 million for every additional 1% of households.

If 36% of forms are not returned, workers may have to visit 47 million homes. Cost: \$3 billion.

The turnout estimate measures factors that historically influence the ability and willingness to participate — from education to homeownership and poverty.

One challenge: There are about 25 million more people and 15 million more addresses in the USA than in 2000. Other obstacles:

- This is the first Census since [the 9/11 terrorist attacks](#), which led to increased government surveillance powers through the USA Patriot Act and set off debates about privacy concerns.
- The spread of identity theft makes many Americans skittish about sharing personal data.
- The crackdown on illegal immigrants at the border and in the workplace may deter the estimated 12 million illegal immigrants from participating. Although most Hispanic rights groups support participation in the Census, the National Coalition of Latino Clergy and Christian Leaders is urging a boycott to pressure lawmakers to change laws and create ways for illegal immigrants to gain legal status.
- Unprecedented foreclosure rates and relocations after Hurricane Katrina have disrupted living patterns, forcing large numbers of people into temporary living quarters. As a result, millions of Census forms may end up reaching vacant homes.

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"If you're sitting around worrying about losing your house, a little speech on civic duty is not exactly what you want to hear," says Roderick Harrison, a fellow at the [Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies](#), a think tank on minority issues. "This is one of the most daunting climates the decennial (Census) has ever faced."

A \$140 million advertising campaign will target specific demographic segments. The slogan "It's in Our Hands" will emphasize that the Census count helps dole out \$400 billion a year in federal funds and redraw local, state and congressional districts.

"When Census is viewed more as a tool and instrument of the people rather than of the government, it's more positively viewed," says Jeff Tarakajian, of Drafftcb, the lead ad agency.

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Our founders intended that all persons be counted regardless of their status. In Federalist Paper 54, Alexander Hamilton and/or James Madison wrote: "It is agreed on all sides, that numbers are the best scale of wealth and taxation, as they are the only proper scale of representation."


Also, in the same paper, it is written: "representation...is regulated by a census of persons."

So, regardless of a person's status, it was the intention of our nation's founders that all persons be counted.

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Hm, hm, hm, I've got a very warm welcome for mr. census.

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What the heck -- the only thing a census is good for is a head count. There are so many illegals lying about there presence here that all the worker data is soft.


Count no one that cannot speak English and prove citizenship.

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Sen. David Vitter (R-LA) has been advising an amendment to the Commerce, Justice, and Science

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