

US Census

I followed the debate about adding a citizenship question to the census with great interest. Contrary to some Facebook posts, Obama did not cancel the citizenship question from the census. In fact, the last time it was asked was in 1950 or eleven years before Obama was born. The taking of the census every ten years is in the US Constitution in Article 1, Section 2 which states “Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included within this Union, according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons.” It is interesting that the founders only included free persons and bonded servants in the count, excluding Indians and counting slaves as three fifths. It does not say a count of citizens. In 1854, Congress made some changes to the census including the requirement that the Census Bureau notify Congress of general census subjects to be addressed 3 years before the decennial census and the actual questions to be asked 2 years before the census. In 1870 the Supreme Court ruled that Congress had unquestionable power to conduct the census. In 1901, a District Court ruled that the census is “not limited to a headcount and does not prohibit the gathering of other statistics. In 2000, the District Court ruled that taking the census does not violate the Fourth Amendment, which deals with unreasonable searches. It also has been ruled the right of free speech is not violated by the census.

You may be wondering what use are census data. In the Constitution, the census is used to determine how many Representatives each state is awarded. Since there are only 435 Representative in the US House, following each census some states may gain and some may lose their number of Representatives. Each state has at least one, such as North Dakota. Minnesota has eight. Minnesota lost one Representative following the 1960 census. The last ninth district representative was Odin Langen who defeated Coya Knutson with the infamous “Coya come home’ campaign.

Your census data are protected by law. According to census.gov “By law, the Census Bureau cannot share your answers with the IRS, FBI, Welfare, Immigration-or any other government agency. No court of law, not even the President of the United States, can find out your answers. And the same law that keeps your answers out of the hands of these agencies, prevents the Census Bureau from selling or giving away your address to people who want to send you mail.” Summary data are used for many other reports by the Census Bureau. One example is a chart showing the 10 fastest growing cities in the US – Buckeye, AZ, New Braunfels, TX, Apex, NC, Frisco, TX, Meridian, ID, McKinney, TX, Georgetown, TX, Rowlett, TX, St Cloud, FL and Ankeny, IA.