



Highlights of [GAO-10-430T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, Government Information, Federal Services and International Security, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

In March 2008, GAO designated the 2010 Census a high-risk area in part because of information technology (IT) shortcomings and uncertainty over the ultimate cost of the census, now estimated at around \$15 billion. The U.S. Census Bureau (Bureau) has since made improvements to various IT systems and taken other steps to mitigate the risks of a successful census. However, last year, GAO noted that a number of challenges and uncertainties remained, and much work remained to be completed under very tight time frames.

As requested, this testimony provides an update on the Bureau's readiness for an effective headcount, covering (1) the status of key IT systems; (2) steps the Bureau has taken to revise its cost estimates; and (3) the extent to which critical enumeration activities, particularly those aimed at hard-to-count populations, are on track. The testimony is based on previously issued and ongoing GAO work.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is not making new recommendations in this testimony, but past reports recommended that the Bureau strengthen its testing of key IT systems, better document and update its cost estimates, and ensure the accuracy of the address list used to mail out questionnaires. The Bureau generally agreed with these recommendations and is in varying stages of implementing them.

View [GAO-10-430T](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Robert Goldenkoff at (202) 512-2757 or goldenkoff@gao.gov.

2010 CENSUS

Key Enumeration Activities Are Moving Forward, but Information Technology Systems Remain a Concern

What GAO Found

Overall, the Bureau's readiness for a successful headcount is mixed. On the one hand, ongoing performance issues are affecting key IT systems, especially a workflow management system essential for the Bureau's field operations and a payroll processing system that will be used to pay more than 1 million temporary workers. Indeed, an important performance test the Bureau held in December 2009 revealed significant performance issues with each system. Bureau officials stated that many of these issues were resolved in further testing; however, others remain unresolved, and new defects were identified. The Bureau is going to great lengths to address these issues. However, little time remains before the systems need to become fully operational.

In addition, the Bureau revised its cost estimate from \$2.7 billion to \$2.3 billion for nonresponse follow-up, the largest and most costly field operation where census workers follow up in person with nonresponding households. However, the Bureau's analyses of cost are not complete. According to the Bureau, it continues to reexamine the cost of two other nonresponse follow-up related operations.

On the other hand, the rollout of key enumeration activities is generally on track, and the Bureau has taken action to address some previously identified problems. For example, the Bureau has taken several steps to reduce the number of unreadable fingerprint cards of temporary workers, a problem that plagued an earlier field operation. Among other actions, the Bureau plans to digitally capture a third and fourth set of fingerprints if the first two sets cannot be read for background security checks. The Bureau has also developed new procedures for counting those living in group quarters, such as dormitories and prisons. For example, the Bureau is using a single address list containing both group quarters and housing units, rather than separate lists as in the 2000 Census, to reduce the chance of double counting. The Bureau's 2010 Census communications campaign is also more robust than the one used in the 2000 Census. Key differences from the 2000 campaign include increased partnership staffing, targeted paid advertising based on market and attitudinal research, and a contingency fund to address unexpected events. To increase participation rates, the Bureau plans to mail a second, replacement questionnaire to census tracts that had low or moderate response rates in the 2000 Census. To help ensure a complete count of areas along the Gulf Coast, the Bureau plans to hand deliver an estimated 1.2 million census forms in areas devastated by hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Ike. This effort will help ensure that households—even those that were not on the Bureau's address list but appear inhabitable—will be included in the census.

Moving forward, it will be important for the Bureau to quickly identify the problems affecting key IT systems and test solutions. Further, given the complexity of the census and the likelihood that other glitches might arise, it will be important for the Bureau to stay on schedule, monitor operations, and have plans and personnel in place to quickly address operational issues.