

GAO

Testimony

Before the Subcommittee on Information  
Policy, Census, and National Archives,  
Committee on Oversight and Government  
Reform, House of Representatives

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For Release on Delivery Expected  
at 1:00 p.m. PDT  
Friday, April 30, 2010

2010 CENSUS

Cooperation with Enumerators  
Is Critical to a Successful  
Headcount

Statement of Robert Goldenkoff  
Director  
Strategic Issues



GAO

Accountability \* Integrity \* Reliability

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Highlights of [GAO-10-665T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Information Policy, Census, and National Archives, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

On May 1, 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau (Bureau) will launch its massive follow-up effort with the roughly 48 million households that did not mail back their census forms (130 million forms were delivered). As part of this nonresponse follow-up effort, over 600,000 enumerators will fan out across the country, personally contacting nonresponding housing units as many as six times in an effort to ensure everyone is counted. As requested, GAO's testimony in Los Angeles (L.A.) focuses on the importance of census participation, paying particular attention to (1) the Bureau's preparedness for nonresponse follow-up in terms of workload and staffing levels, (2) why it will be critical for Angelenos and others across the country to cooperate with enumerators during nonresponse follow-up, and (3) key steps the Bureau needs to take moving forward to ensure nonresponse follow-up is timely and accurate. 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 could build on lessons learned from 2000 to improve its 2010 nonresponse follow-up operation. The Bureau concurred with these recommendations and has taken steps to implement them.

[View GAO-10-665T or key components.](#)  
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## 2010 CENSUS

### Cooperation with Enumerators Is Critical to a Successful Headcount

#### What GAO Found

Nationally, based on workload and staffing levels, the Bureau appears to be well positioned to implement nonresponse follow-up. On both counts, the Bureau's performance is meeting its expected goals. With respect to the mail-back response rate, the Bureau expected a level of between 59 percent and 65 percent. The actual mail-back response rate when the Bureau determined the universe of houses to visit for nonresponse follow-up on April 19, was 63.2 percent, well within its estimates. The mail-back response rate for L.A. City was 61.4 percent, and L.A. County was 64.7 percent. In terms of staffing, the Bureau met its goals both nationally as well as for L.A. Still, the Bureau could encounter pockets of challenges at the local level where mail-back response rates are less than expected. Further, the reliability of a computer system needed to administer nonresponse follow-up is an open question.

Participation in the census has decade-long implications for individuals, communities, and states. For example, census data are used to apportion House seats, redraw the boundaries of congressional and local election districts, and help ensure compliance with civil rights and other laws protecting our citizens. A complete count also helps ensure that L.A. and other areas obtain their fair share of federal assistance. Indeed, a number of formula grants allocate money based at least in part on census and related population data. GAO's recent analysis found that the 10 largest federal assistance programs obligated an estimated \$478 billion in fiscal year 2009 based, to some extent, on census and related population data. The grants included Medicaid, Highway Planning and Construction, Head Start, and the Children's Health Insurance Program. Local governments as well as businesses use census data for planning and investment decisions, and to better tailor the services they provide.

Nationally, following up on nonresponding households is a daunting task, and L.A. presents its own challenges and opportunities. For example, data from a planning database the Bureau developed placed L.A. County first on a list of the top 50 U.S. counties with the highest number of people living in hard-to-count areas, based on data from the 2000 Census. Factors contributing to the area's hard-to-count challenges include poverty, unemployment, and language barriers. Moving forward, among other activities, it will be important for the Bureau to track various production, quality, and other indicators as planned to help ensure nonresponse follow-up stays on track.

In summary, participation in the census is a quick, easy, and confidential civic act that has a lasting impact on states, cities, neighborhoods, and even individuals. But the benefits that can accrue from a complete and accurate population tally can only occur if Angelenos cooperate with enumerators when they knock on nonrespondents' doors in the weeks ahead.

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here today at the Center for Healthy Communities in Los Angeles (L.A.), to discuss the importance of participating in the 2010 Census. As you know, the U.S. Census Bureau (Bureau) goes to great lengths to secure a complete and accurate enumeration of the more than 300 million people that live in our country. In fact, the decennial census is an enterprise that few, if any, peacetime endeavors can match in terms of its size, scope, complexity, and fixed deadlines.

For the 2010 Census, the Bureau needed to successfully print 360 million questionnaires, hire a million temporary employees, partner with over 200,000 public and private sector entities across the country, and align thousands of disparate activities. The Bureau needs to do all of this and more, do it right, and do it under an extremely tight schedule. Perhaps most importantly, however, the Bureau cannot do it alone. To the contrary, participation in the census, just like voting and jury duty, is a civic responsibility that helps sustain a democratic society. What does this mean, exactly? After all, the census is fundamentally a head count. Does the participation of any one person really make a difference?

For Angelenos, as with people across the country, a complete count has implications for political representation and getting their fair share of federal assistance. This is because data from the census—a constitutionally mandated effort—are used to apportion seats in Congress, redraw congressional districts, help allocate more than \$400 billion in federal aid to state and local governments each year, and remake local political boundaries. Census data are also used for planning purposes by the public and private sectors. The bottom line is that everything from House seats, to housing assistance, to investment decisions by L.A. businesses are determined, in whole or in part, by census data.

This afternoon's hearing is particularly timely as tomorrow the Bureau will launch its massive follow-up effort with the roughly 48 million households that did not mail back their census forms. As you know, the Bureau mailed out census questionnaires to around 120 million households in mid-March and hand delivered an additional 12 million questionnaires, mainly in rural areas, as well as in areas along the Gulf Coast affected by recent hurricanes. Both types of forms were to be returned by mail. On May 1, the Bureau's nonresponse follow-up operation begins. As part of the operation, over 600,000 enumerators will fan out across the country, personally contacting each nonresponding housing unit as many as six times in an effort to ensure everyone is counted.

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Cooperation with census enumerators during this next phase of data collection will be especially important. The city of L.A.'s mail-back response rate as of April 19, 2010, when the Bureau determined the nonresponse follow-up workload, was 61.4 percent<sup>1</sup> (nationally, the mail-back response rate was just over 63 percent). During the 2000 Census, the city's mail-back response rate when it determined its nonresponse follow-up workload was 62.8 percent (the national mail-back response rate for the short form, at that time, was 66.4 percent).<sup>2</sup> For those who did not mail back their census forms, nonresponse follow-up will be the last opportunity to be directly counted in the census.

As requested, my remarks today will focus on the importance of census participation, paying particular attention to (1) the Bureau's preparedness for nonresponse follow-up in terms of workload and staffing levels, (2) why it will be critical for Angelenos and others across the country to cooperate with enumerators during nonresponse follow-up, and (3) key steps the Bureau needs to take moving forward to ensure nonresponse follow-up is timely and accurate.

My testimony today is based on our ongoing and completed reviews of key census-taking operations (see "Related GAO Products" at the end of this statement). In these reviews we analyzed key documents—including plans, procedures, and guidance for the selected activities—and interviewed cognizant Bureau officials at headquarters and local census offices. In addition, we made on-site observations of certain census activities across the country. These observations included the Bureau's nonresponse follow-up efforts during the 2000 Census in various locations across the country, among them three sections of L.A.: Hollywood/Mid-Wilshire, L.A. Downtown, and Santa Monica. For the 2010 Census, we observed key census-taking activities in L.A., as well as in Fresno and San Bernardino, California; plus Atlanta, Georgia; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Washington, D.C., among other locations. We selected these cities because of their geographic and demographic diversity, among other factors. Further, to gain greater insight into the local census operations, we surveyed the Bureau's 494 local census office managers using a series of online questionnaires about their experience in managing local census office activities.

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<sup>1</sup> The boundaries of the census tracts used to generate these estimates are not identical to the actual political boundaries of the city so the actual value for the city may differ slightly.

<sup>2</sup> In the 2000 Census, the Bureau mailed out both long- and short-form questionnaires. The short-form questionnaire had a higher response rate because it had fewer questions. For the 2010 Census, the Bureau used only a short-form questionnaire. For this testimony we use the 2000 Census short-form mail response rate when comparing 2000 and 2010 mail-back response rates.

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On April 19, 2010, we provided the Bureau with a statement of facts for our audit work, and on April 22, 2010, the Bureau provided technical comments, which we included as appropriate. We conducted our work in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audits to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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## Background

The Bureau takes extraordinary measures to produce a complete and accurate census. To date, for example, the Bureau has sent questionnaires to 120 million housing units for occupants to complete and mail back. The Bureau also hand-delivered around 12 million questionnaires—mostly in rural areas as well as in areas along the Gulf Coast affected by recent hurricanes—for residents to fill out and return via mail. In March and April, the Bureau simultaneously launched operations aimed at counting people in migrant worker housing, boats, tent cities, homeless shelters, nursing homes, dormitories, prisons, and other diverse dwellings, all in an effort to secure a complete count.

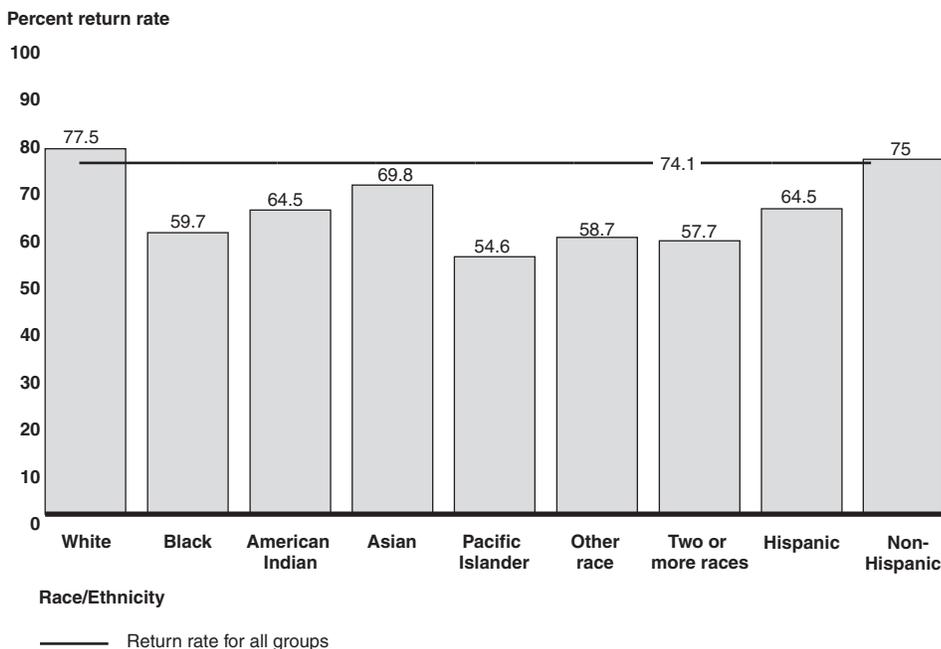
For those individuals who do not mail back their census forms, the Bureau attempts to include them through its nonresponse follow-up operation, which is scheduled to run from May 1 through July 10. During this operation, over 600,000 enumerators are to go door-to-door collecting census information from each address from which a questionnaire was not received. Nonresponse follow-up is the most costly and labor-intensive of all census-taking operations. The Bureau expects nonresponse follow-up will cost around \$2.3 billion, or around 16 percent of the decennial's total estimated lifecycle cost of around \$14.7 billion. By comparison, according to Bureau data on the 2000 nonresponse follow-up operation, labor, mileage, and certain administrative costs alone amounted to around \$1.76 billion (in 2010 dollars), or about 22 percent of the total \$8.15 billion (in 2010 dollars) lifecycle cost of the 2000 Census.

Importantly, nonresponse follow-up is the last opportunity for people to be directly counted in the census. Those individuals who are missed by, or who do not respond to, census enumerators, are included through methods that are indirect and not as accurate. In cases of refusal, enumerators may be instructed to try to find a proxy respondent who might know something about the occupants of a household. If this is infeasible, data on the household are statistically imputed based on the demographic characteristics of surrounding housing units.

This is significant for Angelenos for two reasons. First, for 2010, the mail-back response rate, used for determining the nonresponse follow-up workload, of 61.4

percent for the city of L.A. is lagging the national rate of 63.2 percent. Second, in 2000, minority groups, which comprise a large share of L.A.'s population, tended to return their questionnaires at a lower rate compared to other groups, and were more likely to be missed by the census. For example, as shown in figure 1, nationally in 2000, whites had a higher mail return rate (77.5 percent) than the rate for all groups (74.1 percent), while nearly every other race/ethnic group had lower return rates than the total mail return rate.<sup>3</sup> The lowest mail return rates were those of Pacific Islander (54.6 percent) and multi-racial (57.7 percent) households. Participating in nonresponse follow-up represents an important opportunity to improve the quality of census data.

**Figure 1: Mail Return Rates by Race/Ethnic Groups during the 2000 Census**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

Despite these elaborate efforts to obtain a complete count, some amount of error is unavoidable. However, what makes these errors particularly problematic is

<sup>3</sup> The mail return rate differs from the mail response rate in that the mail response rate is calculated as a percentage of all the housing units in the mail-back universe, including those that are later discovered to be nonexistent or unoccupied. The Bureau uses this mail-back response percentage as an indicator of its nonresponse follow-up workload.

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their differential impact on various subgroups. Minorities, renters, and children, for example, are more likely to be missed by the census while more affluent groups, such as people with vacation homes, are more likely to be included more than once.

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### The Bureau Is Positioned to Conduct Nonresponse Follow-up but Could Encounter Local and Other Challenges

Nationally, in terms of workload (as measured by the mail-back response rate) and staffing levels, the Bureau appears to be well positioned to implement nonresponse follow-up. On both counts, the Bureau's performance is meeting its expected goals. Nevertheless, national-level data can mask challenges occurring at the local level, and there are areas throughout the country where either the mail-back response rate or staffing levels are lagging.

With respect to the mail-back response rate, the Bureau expected a level of between 59 percent and 65 percent. The actual mail-back response rate when the Bureau determined the universe of houses to visit for nonresponse follow-up on April 19, was just over 63 percent, well within its estimates.<sup>4</sup> This translates into a workload of around 48 million housing units. Achieving this mail-back response rate is an important accomplishment as the nation's population is growing steadily larger, more diverse, and according to the Bureau, increasingly difficult to find and reluctant to participate in the census.

High mail-back response rates are important because they save taxpayer dollars. According to the Bureau, for every one-percentage point increase in mail response in 2010, the Bureau saves \$85 million that would otherwise have been spent on nonresponse follow-up. According to the Bureau, it costs 42 cents to mail back each census form in a postage-paid envelope, compared with \$57 for census takers to visit each home. Moreover, mail returns tend to have better quality data.

Key factors aimed at improving the mail-back response rate included the mailing of a reminder postcard; sending a second or "replacement" questionnaire to

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<sup>4</sup> As discussed in the previous footnote, the mail-back response rate is calculated as a percentage of all forms in the mail-back universe from which the Bureau received a questionnaire. Although it includes households whose forms were returned by the U.S. Postal Service as "undeliverable" and thus might be vacant or nonexistent, the Bureau still sends enumerators to follow-up on them to ensure a complete count. We report the mail-back response rate because it is a measure of the nonresponse follow-up workload; the workload, in turn, has implications for the final cost of the census. On its Web site, the Bureau reports what it refers to as the "participation rate." This number differs from the mail-back response rate in that it excludes undeliverable questionnaires. The Bureau reports this figure because it is a better indicator of the public's cooperation with the census.

around 30 million households in census tracts that had the lowest response rates in the 2000 Census, and 12-million replacement questionnaires to nonresponding households in other census tracts that had low-to-moderate response rates in 2000; and an aggressive marketing and outreach program.

The Bureau also appears to be in good shape nationally from the perspective of enumerator staffing. In terms of recruiting, the Bureau’s goal was to recruit 3.7 million applicants to fill over 600,000 enumerator and other positions by April 25. As of April 11, the Bureau had recruited 3,717,757 applicants, or 101 percent of its target.

While the Bureau appears to be well-positioned from a national perspective to carry out nonresponse follow-up, the decennial is essentially a local endeavor, where the operational environment and challenges the Bureau faces vary markedly from one locale to another. In this regard, several locations stand out. For example, the mail-back response rates in some large cities trail the 2010 national response rate of 63.2 percent, and/or the response rate they achieved during the 2000 Census. They include Detroit, New Orleans, San Antonio, and San Diego (see table 1).

**Table 1: Selected Cities with Mail-Back Response Rates for 2010 That Are Lower Than 2000**

City	City Mail-Back Response Rates (percent)		
	2000 Census	2010 Census (as of April 19, 2010)	Difference
Detroit	61.4	45.9	15.5
New Orleans	50.1	42.5	7.6
San Antonio	66.9	61.0	5.9
San Diego	71.5	64.5	7

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data.

Likewise, there are three local census offices that have less than two qualified applicants per field position--the Bureau’s recruitment target. These offices continue their recruiting efforts, and the Bureau has plans to staff operations with recruits from neighboring local census offices, if necessary.

With respect to L.A., as shown in table 2, L.A. City is trailing the state and national mail-back response rates as of April 19, 2010, as well as comparable benchmarks from the 2000 Census.

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**Table 2: 2010 Census Mail-Back Response Rates Compared to 2000**

Level of Geography	Census Mail-Back Response Rates (percent)	
	2000 Census	2010 Census (as of April 19, 2010)
National	66.4	63.2
California	68.9	64.6
L.A. County	68.3	64.7
L.A. City	62.8	61.4

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data.

In terms of recruiting, the L.A. region has met its recruiting goals. For example, the Bureau's recruiting goal for the L.A. region was 266,370, and as of April 18, 2010, the Bureau had recruited 350,187 or 131 percent of its goal. Starting pay for enumerators, which is based on local labor markets, is \$17 per hour in the L.A. area.

Aside from workload and staffing, the reliability of the Bureau's automated systems, and in particular an information technology (IT) system used for managing the Bureau's field operations, is an open question. In earlier tests and prior activities, the operational control system did not function reliably, and the Bureau had to restrict the number of users in local census offices because of capacity limitations. The Bureau has taken steps to mitigate the risks posed by the unreliable IT systems, including upgrading hardware and software, but time will tell whether they will be able to perform as needed under full operational loads.

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## Cooperation with Enumerators Will Help California Count in the 2010 Census

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### Census Data Are Critical for Representative Democracy

The Constitution requires a census every 10 years in order to apportion seats in the House of Representatives. Moreover, while not required by the Constitution, states use census data to redraw the boundaries of congressional districts. Although a few missed households might not seem particularly problematic, especially in a nation of more than 300 million people, a complete count is necessary because, in some cases, small differences in population totals could potentially impact apportionment or redistricting decisions, or both. Indeed,

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during the 2000 Census, the last House seat could have gone to Utah rather than North Carolina if Utah's population had around 850 more people.

More broadly, census data are used to help protect our democratic system of government. For example, block-by-block census data were used in reapportioning state legislatures in the 1960s, as discussed in the Supreme Court's "one person, one vote" landmark case of *Reynolds v. Sims*.<sup>5</sup> Further, census data are used to help ensure compliance with federal civil rights and other laws protecting our citizens.

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## Census Data Are Used to Allocate Federal Aid to States and Localities

Many federal assistance programs are funded by formula grants that have historically relied, at least in part, on census and related population data to allocate funds. In our recent analysis, we found that the 10 largest federal assistance programs obligated an estimated \$478 billion in fiscal year 2009 based, to some extent, on census and related population data.<sup>6</sup> This amount represents about 84 percent of total federal assistance. The grants included Medicaid, Highway Planning and Construction, Head Start, and the Children's Health Insurance Program.

A recent study by the Brookings Institution calculated that in fiscal year 2008, federal assistance programs distributed a total of \$19.8 billion in total program expenditures, or \$1,988 for each person in L.A. County.<sup>7</sup> Medicaid, a joint federal-state program that finances health care for certain low-income individuals, was by far the single largest program, accounting for \$14.7 billion, or around 75 percent of total expenditures. Other assistance went to programs that included transportation, education, training, employment, social services, and income security.

Beyond these specific numbers, this much is clear: While population is one of several factors that can affect the distribution of federal assistance, boosting the participation rate, especially for hard-to-count groups, helps ensure that Angelenos obtain their fair share of federal assistance. This is a particularly important goal given the fiscal challenges that L.A. and the state of California are facing.

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<sup>5</sup> 377 U.S. 533 (1964).

<sup>6</sup> GAO, *Formula Grants: Funding for the Largest Federal Assistance Programs Is Based on Census-Related Data and Other Factors*, [GAO-10-263](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 15, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Reamer, *Counting for Dollars: The Role of the Decennial Census in the Distribution of Federal Funds*, Brookings (Washington, D.C.: March 2010).

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## Local Governments Use Census Data to Plan for and Provide Services

The decennial census yields data that states use not only to determine boundaries for congressional districts, but also to establish boundaries for smaller jurisdictions such as local election and school districts. The census is also a rich source of data to help county and city governments plan for and provide a variety of services. For Angelenos, this could mean help in answering such questions as:

- Will the population of preschoolers in various neighborhoods warrant building additional elementary schools?
- Are the mass transit systems reaching the people likely to use public transport?
- Where and when should the next senior citizen facility be built?

Without federal census data, state and local governments would have to undertake their own headcounts, a costly alternative given the Census Bureau's experience and economies of scale. Further, a less-than-complete count could result in the inefficient allocation of taxpayer dollars.

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## Census Data Help Businesses Make Investment and Planning Decisions

Businesses use the aggregated census data to plan for and provide their services and goods. Census data about population trends help businesses succeed—and provide jobs in the process—by alerting them of opportunities to provide new services and products and to tailor existing ones to reflect demographic changes. Census data also help businesses efficiently target their advertising dollars and better meet the needs of their clients and customers. For example, a free issue of a magazine focused on the interests of Hispanic readers can be distributed based on information at the census block level. Likewise, retail chains can use census data to inform decisions on what mix of multicultural products—from cosmetics to music—they should carry. Companies also use population data to locate where to place new stores, as well as where to place production facilities where they can expect to find a suitable labor force.

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## Census Participation Is Safe

While the Bureau does a lot with the information people report, there are a number of things the Bureau will not do with it. For example, the answers that are provided cannot be shared with anyone, including law enforcement or tax collection agencies. The answers cannot be used in court, and they cannot be obtained with a Freedom of Information Act request. Federal law protects respondents' privacy and keeps the information confidential.

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Further, in March 2010, the U.S. Justice Department confirmed that provisions of the Patriot Act<sup>8</sup> that pertain to the gathering and sharing of information do not override legal provisions that protect the confidentiality of census data. In short, everyone who lives in the country should feel safe about participating in the census, regardless of their immigration status.

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## Key Steps Could Help Ensure Timely and Accurate Follow-up Operations

Nationally, following up on nonresponding households is a daunting task, and L.A. presents its own challenges and opportunities. For example, data from a planning database the Bureau developed placed L.A. County first on a list of the top 50 U.S. counties with the highest number of people living in hard-to-count areas, based on data from the 2000 Census. Specifically, 4.4 million people of L.A. County's total population of more than 9 million people (46 percent) lived in hard-to-count census tracts in 2000. Factors contributing to the area's hard-to-count challenges include poverty, unemployment, and language barriers.

In our review of nonresponse follow-up during the 2000 Census, we noted that the Bureau has historically faced the combined challenge of (1) collecting quality data directly from household members, while (2) completing the operation on schedule, before error rates can increase as people move or have trouble remembering who was living at their homes on Census Day (April 1, 2010), as well as for keeping subsequent operations on track. For methodological reasons, the Bureau needs to complete its field data collection workload before a subsequent accuracy check can begin.<sup>9</sup>

During the 2000 Census, finding the optimal balance between these two objectives was sometimes a challenge for the Bureau. Indeed, to help ensure that local census offices completed nonresponse follow-up on schedule, the Bureau developed ambitious interim "stretch" goals that called on local census offices to complete 80 percent of their nonresponse follow-up workload within the first 4 weeks of the operation and be completely finished by the end of the 8th week of the 10-week long effort. We found that these production goals generated mixed results.

Specifically, 17 percent of the sample of local census office managers we surveyed during the 2000 Census believed that the pressure had a positive or

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<sup>8</sup> Pub. L. No. 107-56, 115 Stat. 272. The Patriot Act was enacted following the September 11, 2001, attacks in order to assist in the prevention of future terrorist incidents.

<sup>9</sup> GAO, *2000 Census: Best Practices and Lessons Learned for More Cost-Effective Nonresponse Follow-up*, [GAO-02-196](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 11, 2002).

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significantly positive impact; 41 percent believed that scheduling pressure had little or no impact on the quality of the operation; and 40 percent of the respondents believed that the pressure during nonresponse follow-up had a negative or significantly negative impact on the quality of the enumeration. Of those managers in the latter group, a common perception appeared to be that production was emphasized more than accuracy and that the schedule required local census offices to curtail procedures that could have improved data quality. Further, a small number of local census offices improperly collected less complete data and took other shortcuts (which the Bureau took steps to rectify).

Nationally, however, our analysis of Bureau data showed that those local census offices that completed their 2000 Census nonresponse follow-up workloads faster than the others did not collect larger quantities of less-than-complete data, such as partial interviews.

For the 2010 Census, the Bureau will conduct a quality assurance procedure it refers to as “outlier reinterviews,” where the Bureau is to revisit or “reinterview” those households where characteristics of an enumerator’s work differ from other enumerators collecting data in the same vicinity. In such cases, enumerators could be fabricating data. Outlier reinterviews are one of several types of reinterviews the Bureau plans to use for 2010.

Although the Bureau had procedures for various types of reinterviews, including a form of outlier reinterviews, for the 2000 Census, local census office managers often decided against conducting them. Indeed, 52 local census offices—about 10 percent of all local offices—did not conduct any reinterviews after a random check of enumerators’ initial work. For the 2010 Census, the outlier interview cases will be automatically selected as opposed to being controlled by clerks in the local census offices. This could help ensure that outlier cases are investigated per the Bureau’s reinterview procedures.

More generally, as the Bureau completes its nonresponse follow-up workload, it will be important for it to closely track various indicators of the pace, production levels, and quality of the operation as planned, and quickly investigate and appropriately address any peculiarities that could be indicative of falsification or other data quality issues. At the same time, it will be important for the Bureau to fully leverage its partnership program—an effort where specially trained Bureau employees engage key government and community organizations to support the census—to help pave the way for nonresponse follow-up and improve cooperation with enumerators. For example, based on our review of the 2000 Census, partnership staff could, among other activities, reach out to building managers and community leaders to gain access to secure apartment buildings and gated communities, and take other steps to deal with enumeration challenges.

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However, the initial results of our 2010 survey on local census office managers suggest that there is room for improvement, in many cases, in the relationships between the local census offices and partnership staff. For example, of the 395 of 494 local census office managers who responded to our question about their satisfaction with the communication between the local census office and with partnership staff, 39 percent indicated they were generally or very satisfied, 46 percent were generally or very dissatisfied, and 14 percent were neither satisfied or dissatisfied.

Likewise, when asked about the partnership staff's assistance with local challenges, 39 percent of responding local census office managers were generally or very satisfied, 43 percent were generally or very dissatisfied, while 18 percent were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

The 26 local census office managers in the Bureau's L.A. region—an area extending from L.A. proper south to the Mexican border—held views similar to managers nationwide. Moving forward, it will be important for the Bureau to take appropriate steps to ensure that the efforts of the partnership staff are aligned with and fully supportive of the activities carried out by local census offices. For example, one partnership specialist we met with noted that having weekly, in-person meetings with local census office managers helped coordinate the work they were doing.

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## Concluding Observations

As measured by workload and staffing levels, the Bureau is generally well-positioned to launch nonresponse follow-up. The operation starts tomorrow and will have more than 600,000 enumerators fan out across the country, collecting census information from those households that did not mail back their forms.

That said, the success of the enumeration is determined as much by what happens at the local level, as by national trends. With that in mind, the level of cooperation that occurs in the coming weeks on doorsteps across the country—as well as right here in downtown and South L.A.; Echo Park and Westlake; Wilshire and East Hollywood; and in neighborhoods all across L.A. City and County—will determine, to a large degree, the ultimate cost and quality of the decennial census.

Mr. Chairman and members of this Subcommittee, this concludes my statement. I would be happy to respond to any questions that you might have at this time.

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## Contacts and Acknowledgments

If you have any questions on matters discussed in this statement, please contact Robert Goldenkoff at (202) 512-2757 or by e-mail at [goldenkoffr@gao.gov](mailto:goldenkoffr@gao.gov). Other key contributors to this testimony include David Bobruff, Sara Daleski, Dewi Djunaidy, Ronald Fecso, Richard Hung, Kirsten Lauber, Andrea Levine, Kathleen Padulchick, Lisa Pearson, and Timothy Wexler.

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# Related GAO Products

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*2010 Census: Data Collection Is Under Way, but Reliability of Key Information Technology Systems Remains a Risk.* [GAO-10-567T](#). Washington, D.C.: March 25, 2010.

*2010 Census: Operational Changes Made for 2010 Position the U.S. Census Bureau to More Accurately Classify and Identify Group Quarters.* [GAO-10-452T](#). Washington, D.C.: February 22, 2010.

*2010 Census: Census Bureau Has Made Progress on Schedule and Operational Control Tools, but Needs to Prioritize Remaining System Requirements.* [GAO-10-59](#). Washington, D.C.: November 13, 2009.

*2010 Census: Efforts to Build an Accurate Address List Are Making Progress, but Face Software and Other Challenges.* [GAO-10-140T](#). Washington, D.C.: October 21, 2009.

*2010 Census: Census Bureau Continues to Make Progress in Mitigating Risks to a Successful Enumeration, but Still Faces Various Challenges.* [GAO-10-132T](#). Washington, D.C.: October 7, 2009.

*2010 Census: Communications Campaign Has Potential to Boost Participation.* [GAO-09-525T](#). Washington, D.C.: March 23, 2009.

*2010 Census: Fundamental Building Blocks of a Successful Enumeration Face Challenges.* [GAO-09-430T](#). Washington, D.C.: March 5, 2009.

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