



Highlights of [GAO-03-228](#), a report to Congressional Requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

To help boost response rates of both the general and Hispanic populations, the U.S. Census Bureau (Bureau) redesigned the 2000 questionnaire, in part by deleting a list of examples of Hispanic subgroups from the question on Hispanic origin. While more Hispanics were counted in 2000 compared to 1990, the counts for Dominicans and other Hispanic subgroups were lower than expected. Concerned that this was caused by the deletion of Hispanic subgroup examples, congressional requesters asked us to investigate the research and management activities behind the changes.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Bureau

- implement its plans to conduct further research on the Hispanic question, taking steps to properly test the impact of any changes on the quality of data on Hispanic subgroups and Hispanics overall, and
- develop agencywide protocols that provide guidelines for Bureau decisions on the level of quality needed to release data to the public, how to characterize any limitations in the data, and when it is acceptable to delay or suppress the data.

The Bureau agreed with our recommendations, but took exception to our findings concerning the adequacy of its data quality guidelines.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/gettrpt?GAO-03-228.

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Patricia A. Dalton at (202) 512-6806.

DECENNIAL CENSUS

Methods for Collecting and Reporting Hispanic Subgroup Data Need Refinement

What GAO Found

In both the 1990 and 2000 censuses, Hispanics could identify themselves as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or other Hispanic. Respondents checking off this latter category could write in a specific subgroup such as “Salvadoran.” The “other” category in the 1990 Census included examples of subgroups to clarify the question. For the 2000 Census, the Bureau removed the subgroup examples as part of a broader effort to simplify the questionnaire and help improve response rates. The Bureau removed unnecessary words and added blank space to shorten the questionnaire and make it more readable.

Although the Bureau conducted a number of tests on the sequencing and wording of the race and ethnicity questions, and sought input from several expert panels, no Bureau tests were designed specifically to measure the impact of the questionnaire changes on the quality of Hispanic subgroup data. According to Bureau officials, because federal laws and guidelines require data on Hispanics but not Hispanic subgroups, the Bureau targeted its resources on research aimed at improving the overall count of Hispanics. Bureau evaluations conducted after the census indicated that deleting the subgroup examples might have confused some respondents and produced less-than-accurate subgroup data. A key factor behind the Bureau’s release of the questionable subgroup data was its lack of adequate guidelines governing the quality needed before making data publicly available. As part of its planning for the 2010 Census, the Bureau intends to conduct further research on the Hispanic origin question, including a field test in parts of New York City. However, until research on a new version of the question is finalized, Bureau officials said that other census surveys will continue to use the 2000 Census format of the Hispanic origin question.

Enumerator Administers Census Questionnaire



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.