



MEMO

April 1, 2019

To: Civic Engagement Narrative Change project partners
From: Joshua Clark / Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society

Re: Overview of findings, Nevada and Florida statewide survey items on the 2020 U.S. Census

Introduction

In October and November 2018, the Civic Engagement Narrative Change project worked with the polling firm Latino Decisions to design and field two statewide surveys in Nevada and Florida. Civic Engagement Narrative Change is a national project coordinated and anchored by the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society at UC Berkeley. It is a multi-sectoral collaboration comprised of partners from community organizing, labor, research, arts and culture, faith institutions, philanthropy, and strategic communications. The project aims to address pressing obstacles to inclusive democratic participation, both within and beyond elections, and with voters and non-voters alike. In particular, it focuses on two key problems impacting civic life: *disaffection* among groups that have long been under-represented, and *division and othering* across lines of difference.

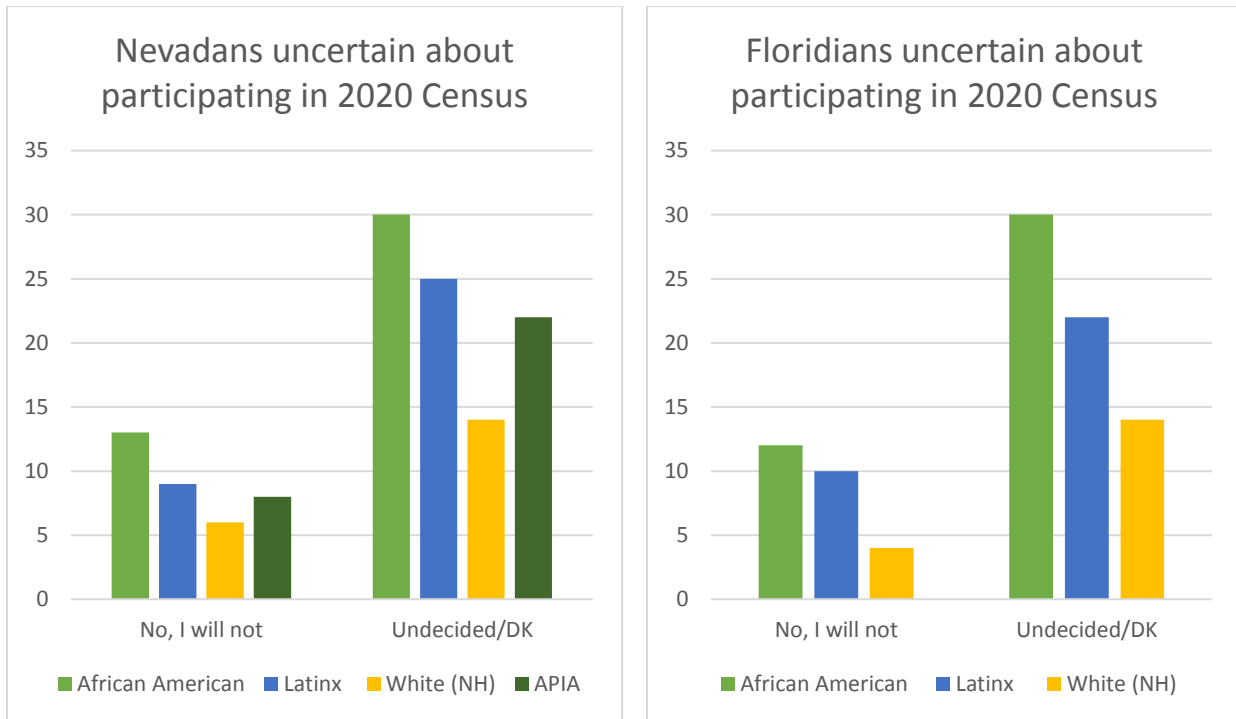
The Nevada and Florida surveys investigated attitudes about identity, inter-group relations, the role of government, the efficacy of voting, and much more. The samples included not only voters, but also unregistered citizens and non-citizens. Further details about the samples and methodology can be found in this document's Appendix (pp. 6-7). **The purpose of this memo is to report the main findings on a series of questions on attitudes and beliefs about the 2020 U.S. Census.**

Attitudes about the Census

The surveys fielded in Nevada and Florida included a block of eight items concerning the U.S. Census. The items as they appeared in both surveys can be found in the Appendix.

A first significant finding from both surveys is that large shares of respondents said they *do not trust the Census Bureau to keep information about them confidential*. This mistrust was widespread. Across age, ethno-racial, partisan, and ideological groups, only between 50 and 60% of respondents in both states say they believe the Census Bureau can be trusted to maintain confidentiality.

Accordingly, relatively large shares of respondents are either undecided about whether they will fill out a census form, or say that they *will not* fill one out. Here however we see some noteworthy differences across groups, as shown in the following graphs.



As the above graphs show, *Black/African American respondents are the most likely* in both states to say that they don't know whether they will fill out a 2020 U.S. Census form, *and* the most likely to say affirmatively that they *will not fill out a form*. This is a significant finding given that much of the conversation in the media, and among civic engagement organizations and donors, has so far focused on ethno-racial groups most closely associated with immigration—namely Latinxs/Hispanics and Asian and Pacific Islander Americans. Survey respondents from these latter groups are also noticeably less likely to say that they plan to fill out 2020 Census forms than are non-Hispanic whites, but not at the rates of African Americans.

Similar—though less dramatic—disparities exist in both surveys between homeowners and renters. There is an even larger gulf between the rates at which 18-29 year olds versus 50+ year olds say they will fill out a census form. Further research is needed to assess whether, and for which communities, these young people may be heads of household responsible for filling out the form, or potentially influential over the heads of household.

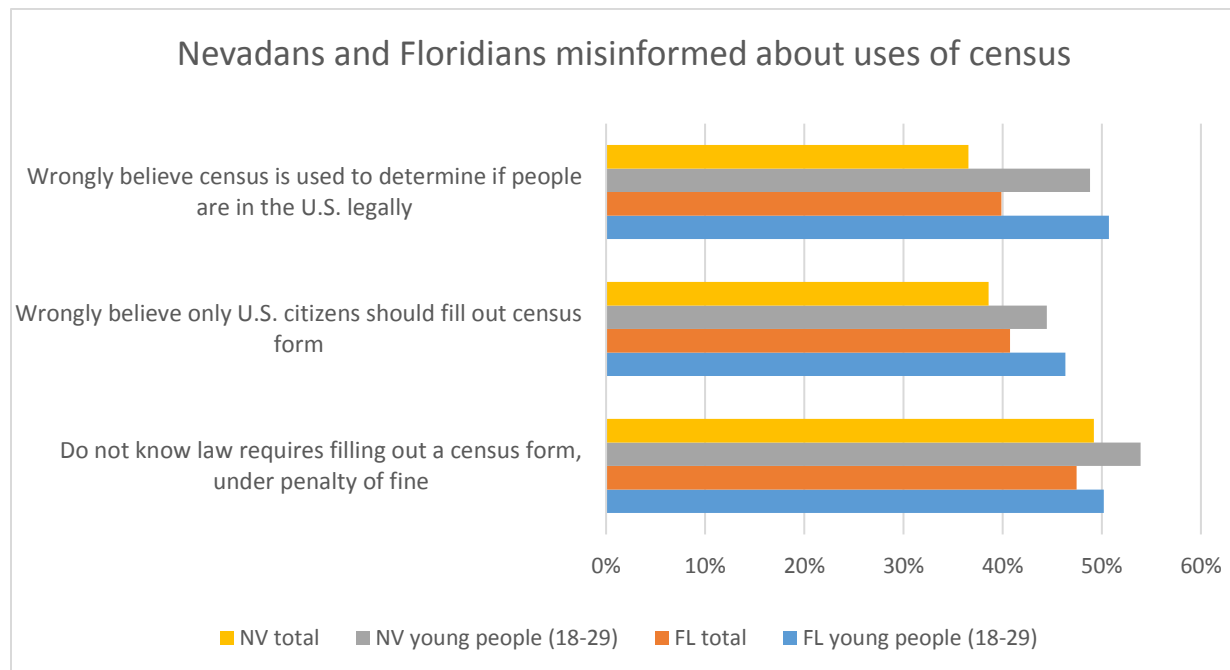
Misinformation about the Census

The prevalence of misinformation about the uses of the U.S. Census among both Nevadans and Floridians is remarkably high. It is unclear as yet whether this is due to an *absence* of knowledge, or if it is instead caused by the spread of *inaccurate* knowledge or narratives. Either poses a threat to a complete count, but each may require different strategies to be countered.

A series of four True-False statements about the census were posed to Nevada and Florida survey respondents. For three of these, 40-50% of respondents answered incorrectly. The one exception was the statement: “The Census is used to determine how federal funds are allocated to states, counties, and communities across the country.” In Nevada, 79% correctly responded that this is true, along with 83% of Floridians.

In contrast, 39% of Nevadans and 41% of Floridians incorrectly believe that only U.S. citizens should fill out a census form. Similarly, 37% of Nevadans and 40% of Floridians believe the census is used to determine whether someone is in the United States legally.

Respondents in Nevada and Florida were misinformed about the uses of the census at similar rates across ethno-racial groups. Even though misinformation is high across the board, it is most prevalent among young people, as shown in the graph below.



Campaigns to Participate in the 2020 Census

The Nevada and Florida surveys asked respondents to say whether they had heard anything from community or civic organizations, media, or social media either encouraging or discouraging participation in the 2020 Census. The results suggest that, as yet, the *census is still largely off the radar* of residents of these two states.

Just 15% of Nevadans and 14% of Floridians say they have seen or heard something *encouraging* them to participate in the census; 12% and 11% respectively have seen or heard something *discouraging* participation. In Florida, African Americans and Latinxs are twice as likely as whites to have encountered encouraging (1 in 5) *and* discouraging (1 in 6) messages.

In both states, young people ages 18-29 and members of union households were the groups most likely to have heard both pro- and anti-participation messages about the census. Nearly one third of union household members have encountered *both* types of messages. We might suspect that the pro-census participation messages have come from the unions themselves, but given the high prevalence of anti-participation messages, further research is needed to understand the dynamics at play.

Initial Thoughts on Implications and Next Steps

The widespread mistrust toward the Census Bureau reflects a broader deterioration of faith in government and public institutions currently being experienced in the U.S. and around the globe. But the fact that this widespread mistrust translates into uncertainty about participating in the census *at different rates across ethno-racial groups* is an ominous sign for those worried about a differential undercount. The high number of Black Nevadans and Floridians who said they *will not* fill out a 2020 Census form is particularly noteworthy given that much of the attention to ensuring a complete count so far is being directed elsewhere.

The Haas Institute's Civic Engagement Narrative Change project is continuing its work in partnership with year-round state and local civic engagement organizations rooted in under-represented and under-counted communities. The project has built deep relationships not only in Nevada and Florida, but also in Michigan, Illinois, and California. **We are in active conversations with partners in these states about carrying out deeper qualitative research with their members and constituencies to better understand dispositions toward the 2020 Census, and to create multimedia tools that support a complete count.**

One good sign from the surveys' findings is that large majorities are aware that the census is tied to federal funds for their cities and communities. Civic organizations must develop compelling ways to leverage this awareness to fight skepticism about participating in the count.

The survey results reveal specific research needs in a number of areas relevant to shaping pro-participation strategy:

- Sources of misinformation about the census, including:
 - the extent to which it is driven by lack of knowledge versus intentional disinformation aimed at suppressing the count.
 - the media or networks through which it is circulating and being consumed.
- The foreseeable impact of misinformation among young people in particular on prospects for a complete count and for a differential undercount.
- Other messaging and narrative—beyond disinformation—that may contribute to unwillingness to participate. We know that there are efforts to suppress the count from malicious actors. But there are likely also anti-participation messages moving from and through institutions and networks that are justifiably concerned about how census data could be misused (especially against communities of color) in the current socio-political climate. These too must be confronted if we are to achieve a complete count.

Appendix

Survey Samples and Methodological Information

For the Nevada statewide survey, 1,845 adults completed the questionnaire via internet and telephone, yielding a total margin of error of +/- 2.3%. In Florida, 1,729 adults answered the survey via internet only, yielding a total margin of error of +/- 2.3%. African American, Latino/Hispanic, and Asian and Pacific Islander American (Nevada only) respondents were oversampled to allow for precise subgroup analyses in each state. Young people ages 18-29 years were also oversampled. All results were weighted to be representative of each state's adult population.

Survey Items concerning the U.S. Census

Federal statistical agencies like the Census Bureau carry out many studies that collect information on people in the United States. Do you agree or disagree that people can trust the Census Bureau to keep information about them confidential?

Strongly agree	1
Somewhat agree.....	2
Somewhat disagree.....	3
Strongly disagree.....	4
Don't know	88

In 2020, the federal government will conduct a census. Do you plan to participate in the census by filling out the U.S. Census form?

Yes, I will fill out the form.....	1
No, I will not fill out the form	2
Undecided/Don't know.....	3

For each of the following four statements, please say whether you believe the statement is true or false.

- Only U.S. citizens should fill out the 2020 Census form.
- The Census is used to determine how federal funds are allocated to states, counties, and communities across the country.
- The Census is used to determine whether someone is in the country legally.
- The law requires everyone to respond when they receive a census form, under penalty of a fine.

True	1
False	2

Have you recently been contacted by community or civic organizations, or seen or heard anything in social media or media **encouraging** you to fill out the 2020 Census form?

Yes..... 1
No..... 2

Have you recently been contacted by community or civic organizations, or seen or heard anything in social media or media **discouraging** you from filling out the 2020 Census form?

Yes..... 1
No..... 2