

GAO
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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-06-465T](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Federalism and the Census, Committee on Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Rigorous planning is key to a successful census as it helps ensure greater effectiveness and efficiency. The U.S. Census Bureau (Bureau) estimates the 2010 Census will cost around \$11.3 billion, which would make it the most expensive census in our country's history, even after adjusting for inflation. GAO was asked to testify on (1) the Bureau's progress in preparing for the 2010 Census, (2) the challenges that Hurricanes Katrina and Rita might pose for the Bureau's future activities, and, (3) more broadly, the importance of planning for a range of events that could severely disrupt the census.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is not making new recommendations at this time, but past reports have contained GAO's views on steps the Bureau needs to take to improve its planning processes, MCDs, enumerator training, human capital planning, and other aspects of the census. The Bureau generally concurred with these prior recommendations and has taken action to implement some of them.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-465T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov.

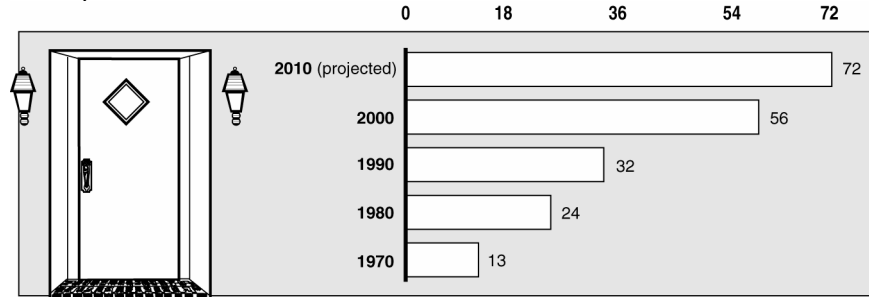
2010 CENSUS

Planning and Testing Activities Are Making Progress

What GAO Found

The Bureau's preparations for the 2010 Census are making progress along several fronts. Of particular note is (1) the re-engineered design of the census, which holds promise for controlling costs and maintaining accuracy; (2) the Bureau's early planning process which was more rigorous than for the 2000 Census; and (3) the Bureau's greater willingness to outsource key census-taking operations that would be difficult for it to carry out on its own.

Census Costs Are Increasing (Average Cost per Housing Unit in Constant Fiscal 2000 Dollars).



Source: GAO analysis of Census Bureau figures.

At the same time, it will be important for the Bureau to resolve issues that pose a risk to a successful census. For example, the Bureau plans to use hand-held mobile computing devices (MCD) to develop the census address list and collect data from millions of households that do not respond to the initial census questionnaire. The MCDs are an important step forward because they are designed to replace many of the paper questionnaires and maps that were used in past censuses, and are a key element of the Bureau's Field Data Collection Automation program. The Bureau has never before used the devices in a decennial. In tests held in 2004 and 2006 to date, census workers found the MCDs easy to use, but sometimes unreliable, which reduced efficiency. Some workers also deviated from prescribed procedures which points to the need for better training. The Bureau has taken steps to address these issues and future tests will help determine the effectiveness of the Bureau's actions. The Bureau also faces a possible brain drain, as 45 percent of its workforce will be eligible to retire by 2010. Although the Bureau has taken preventative measures, it could improve those efforts by, among other actions, strengthening the monitoring of its mission-critical workforce. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita highlight the importance of contingency planning and examining whether the Bureau's existing operations are adequate for capturing the demographic and physical changes that have occurred along the Gulf Coast.

Overall, as the Bureau's preparations for 2010 continue, it will be important for Congress to monitor the Bureau's progress in (1) identifying and diagnosing problems, (2) devising solutions, and (3) integrating refinements in time to be evaluated during the Census Dress Rehearsal scheduled for 2008.