

## Update on the U.S. Census Bureau's Race and Ethnic Research for the 2020 Census

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The Census Bureau's mid-decade research on race and ethnicity builds upon previous research which explored how Americans identify their race and ethnicity as our society continues to grow more diverse and more complex. Our research acknowledges that a growing number of people find the current race and ethnic categories confusing, or wish to see their own specific group reflected on the census. We remain committed to improving the accuracy and reliability of census results by researching approaches that more accurately measure and reflect how people self-identify.

The 2010 Census Race and Hispanic Origin Alternative Questionnaire Experiment (AQE) was fielded as the most comprehensive research effort on race and Hispanic origin ever undertaken by the Census Bureau. The research designed and tested different strategies to increase reporting in the major U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) race and ethnic categories, to elicit reporting of detailed race and ethnic groups, to lower item non-response, and to increase the accuracy and reliability of the results. The results of the AQE supported all of these objectives and provided promising strategies to address the challenges and complexities of race and ethnic measurement and reporting. (For details on the 2010 AQE research, see <[www.census.gov/2010census/news/press-kits/aeq/aeq.html](http://www.census.gov/2010census/news/press-kits/aeq/aeq.html)>.)

The 2010 AQE research marked the beginning of our race and ethnicity research this decade, and the research yielded critical findings from which additional experimental question refinements and research topics emerged. These research topics evolved over the past several years with ongoing qualitative and quantitative research, through internal discussions among Census Bureau experts, as well as through external dialogues with OMB, federal statistical and policy agencies, advisors, race and ethnic scholars, and myriad community leaders and stakeholders.

### Mid-Decade Research on Race and Ethnicity

The design of the Census Bureau's 2020 Census research on race and ethnicity builds upon the successful strategies of the 2010 AQE. The 2015 National Content Test (NCT) will be our primary mid-decade opportunity to compare different design options for race and ethnicity prior to making final decisions about the content for the 2020 Census. This research will examine key dimensions for the questions on race and ethnicity, including question format, response categories, wording of the instructions and question terminology, and evaluating performance of the questions with new web-based data collection methods.

**Question Format.** The first dimension is question format, wherein the 2015 NCT will continue to evaluate the use of two alternative question format approaches for collecting data on race and ethnicity. One approach uses two separate questions: the first about Hispanic origin and the second about race. The other approach combines the two items into one question. The 2015 NCT research will test both approaches with new data collection methods, including Internet, telephone, and in-person response.

### Separate Questions Approach

### Combined Question Approach

**8. What is Person 1's race or origin?**  
Mark  one or more boxes **AND** print origins.

**White** – Print, for example, German, Irish, English, Italian, Lebanese, Egyptian, etc.

**Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin** – Print, for example, Mexican or Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Salvadoran, Dominican, Colombian, etc.

**Black or African Am.** – Print, for example, African American, Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, Ethiopian, Somali, etc.

**Asian** – Print, for example, Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, etc.

**American Indian or Alaska Native** – Print name of enrolled or principal tribe(s), for example, Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe, Mayan, Aztec, Native Village of Barrow Inupiat Traditional Government, Nome Eskimo Community, etc.

**Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander** – Print, for example, Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Chamorro, Tongan, Fijian, Marshallese, etc.

**Some other race or origin** – Print race or origin.

[Click Image to Enlarge](#)

→ **NOTE: Please answer BOTH Question 8 about Hispanic origin and Question 9 about race. For this census, Hispanic origins are not races.**

**8. Is Person 1 of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?**  
 Mark  one or more boxes **AND** print origins.

No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin

Yes, Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano

Yes, Puerto Rican

Yes, Cuban

Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin – *Print, for example, Salvadoran, Dominican, Colombian, Guatemalan, Spaniard, Ecuadorian, etc. ↴*

**9. What is Person 1's race?**  
 Mark  one or more boxes **AND** print origins.

White – *Print, for example, German, Irish, English, Italian, Lebanese, Egyptian, etc. ↴*

Black or African Am. – *Print, for example, African American, Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, Ethiopian, Somali, etc. ↴*

American Indian or Alaska Native – *Print name of enrolled or principal tribe(s), for example, Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe, Mayan, Aztec, Native Village of Barrow Inupiat Traditional Government, Nome Eskimo Community, etc. ↴*

Chinese     Vietnamese     Native Hawaiian

Filipino     Korean     Samoan

Asian Indian     Japanese     Chamorro

Other Asian – *Print, for example, Pakistani, Cambodian, Hmong, etc. ↴*       Other Pacific Islander – *Print, for example, Tongan, Fijian, Marshallese, etc. ↴*

Some other race – *Print race or origin. ↴*

[Click Image to Enlarge](#)

**Response Categories.** The second research dimension examines response categories, exploring how to collect and tabulate data for Middle Eastern or North African (MENA) respondents. The 2015 NCT will evaluate the addition of a separate MENA checkbox category and relevant examples, compared to approaches without a separate MENA checkbox category where MENA is part of the “White” category.

MENA Included as Part of “White” Category

**White** – *Print, for example, German, Irish, English, Italian, Lebanese, Egyptian, etc. ↴*

Separate “MENA” Category

**Middle Eastern or North African** – *Print, for example, Lebanese, Iranian, Egyptian, Syrian, Moroccan, Algerian, etc. ↴*

**Instructions and Terminology.** The third dimension pertains to the wording of instructions and question terminology, examining ways to optimize detailed reporting and to improve respondent understanding of the options to report multiple race and ethnic groups. The 2015 NCT will evaluate the use of different approaches for wording the instructions used to collect data on race and ethnicity in an attempt to improve the clarity of the question and make it more apparent that more than one group may be selected. The following graphics illustrate some of the instruction options that will be tested in the 2015 NCT.

Old Instructions

Mark  one or more boxes **AND** print origins.

New Instructions

Mark all boxes that apply **AND** print ethnicities in the spaces below.  
 Note, you may report more than one group.

The 2015 NCT will also evaluate the use of different conceptual terms (e.g., origin, ethnicity, or no terms) in the wording of questions. Recent Census Bureau qualitative research found that the terms “race,” “ethnicity,” and “origin” are confusing or misleading to many respondents, and they mean different things to different people. The 2010 AQE tested the removal of the term “race” from the question and showed no evidence that removal of the term had any effect on either unit or item response rates. Recent cognitive research tested an open-ended instruction (“Which categories describe you?”) and found that respondents did not have issues with understanding what the question was asking. Therefore, an alternative option being explored tests the removal of the terms “race,” “origin,” and “ethnicity” from the question stem and instructions. Instead, a general approach asks, “Which categories describe Person 1?”

## 8. Which categories describe Person 1?

Mark all boxes that apply **AND** print details in the spaces below.  
 Note, you may report more than one group.

**Web-Based Technology.** The 2015 NCT also presents a critical opportunity to compare the success of different question designs with the advantage of new technology to collect data via web-based designs. The fourth dimension of our research explores the use of Web-based technology to enhance question designs and optimize reporting of detailed racial and ethnic groups, while enabling people to respond via computer, smartphone, and telephone questionnaire assistance.

The web-based approaches provide a series of screens to collect data for major groups (such as White, Hispanic, Black, and Asian) as well as data for detailed groups (such as Samoan, Iranian, Filipino, Jamaican, Puerto Rican, Irish, etc.).

On the initial screen, we collect data on the major OMB categories via a checkbox and examples, which are shown for the six largest detailed groups representing the geographic diversity of the OMB race/ethnic group’s definition.

So here, the red arrows show an example where the respondent marks Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish and also marks Asian.

After that, they will move to the next screen.

For any selected category, a subsequent screen presents either several detailed checkbox groups and/or a dedicated write-in area to collect additional detailed responses, depending on the design treatment.

In our example, where the respondent marked they are Hispanic and Asian, the first followup screen will collect detailed Hispanic groups, such as Mexican or Mexican American and Dominican.

Additionally, respondents can enter multiple additional responses, such as Guatemalan and Peruvian.

After that, the respondent would go to the NEXT screen.

such as Filipino and Vietnamese.

Additionally, respondents can enter multiple additional responses, such as Bangladeshi and Hmong.

Similar screens would collect detailed data for all communities, such as German, Jamaican, Lebanese, Samoan, etc.

### Stakeholder Engagement on Race and Ethnic Research

Since the release of the 2010 AQE research findings in the Summer of 2012, the Census Bureau has been very active in reaching out to stakeholders to make them aware of the research, to discuss the findings with them, and to obtain their feedback. Our Census Bureau Race and Ethnic Research Team has been involved in ongoing dialogues, outreach discussions, and engagement with myriad racial and ethnic communities and other key stakeholders.

The Census Bureau has a lot to consider regarding decisions for the 2020 Census, and in order to make the best decisions possible, this mid-decade research is being undertaken along with engagement in ongoing discussions

about race and ethnicity with OMB, federal statistical agencies, and myriad stakeholder groups. Together, these discussions and research will enable the Census Bureau to provide the most accurate, reliable, and relevant data possible about our changing and diversifying nation. These discussions have been especially helpful for us as we design new and innovative ways to collect data for both major OMB categories (e.g., White, Hispanic, Black, Asian, etc.) and data for detailed groups (e.g., Irish, Puerto Rican, Jamaican, Filipino, etc.).

We are excited about our prospective research this year, and believe this work will vastly improve the prospects for collecting and providing detailed data for all groups. We will continue our efforts to address questions and concerns through outreach and engagement. All in all, the 2010 AQE research started an important conversation that has yielded notable insights to the complexities of race and ethnicity, and we have been meeting with and advising stakeholders about the findings, as well as our plans for future research for the 2020 Census. The results from the 2015 NCT will lead to recommendations for the content of the 2020 Census and the 2019 American Community Survey.

If you are interested in learning more about this research, please visit our website for a link to the March 2015 presentations that we gave as part of the Spring 2015 meeting of the Census Bureau's National Advisory Committee on Racial, Ethnic, and Other Populations: [www.census.gov/about/cac/nac/meetings/2015-03-meeting.html](http://www.census.gov/about/cac/nac/meetings/2015-03-meeting.html).

An archived webcast video of the meeting is also available from the Census Bureau's online video library: [www.census.gov/library/video/2015-nac.html](http://www.census.gov/library/video/2015-nac.html).

#### **Future Outreach on Race and Ethnic Research and Plans for the 2020 Census**

We have learned so much from the 2010 AQE, but it was not the end, just the beginning. Our 2010 AQE research provided a strong foundation upon which we are building our research strategies to improve racial and ethnic data for the future. We continue to meet with stakeholders about the research findings, as well as our plans to explore ways to optimize race and ethnic reporting in our mid-decade research. We expect these discussions to continue, and we embrace them as a major part of our preparations for the 2015 National Content Test and future discussions of results and next steps. We welcome the opportunity to continue these discussions as we move forward with our work, and we welcome your feedback. Ultimately, we recognize that these discussions have been, and will continue to be, paramount to the success of improving data on race and ethnicity for the future.