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Most Adults Aware of 2020 Census and Ready to Respond, but Don't Know Key Details

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How we did this

As the 2020 census gets underway, we conducted this study to better understand what Americans know about the census, their attitudes about it and whether they plan to participate. We also looked at the findings from a survey taken in January 2010 to see how attitudes have changed since the last census.

For this report, we surveyed 3,535 U.S. adults in January 2020. The adults who were surveyed are members of Ipsos Public Affairs' KnowledgePanel, an online survey panel that is recruited through national, random sampling of residential addresses and landline and cellphone numbers. KnowledgePanel provides internet access for those who do not have it and, if needed, a device to access the internet when they join the panel. To ensure that the results of this survey reflect a balanced cross section of the nation, the data are weighted to match the U.S. adult population by gender, age, education, race and ethnicity and other categories. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish.

For more information on how we conducted this study, see its [methodology](#) section.

Terminology

References to whites and blacks include only those who are non-Hispanic and identify as only one race. Hispanics are of any race.

All references to party affiliation include those who lean toward that party: Republicans include those who identify as Republicans and independents who say they lean toward the Republican Party, and Democrats include those who identify as Democrats and independents who say they lean toward the Democratic Party.

References to college graduates or people with a college degree comprise those with a bachelor's degree or more. "Some college" includes those with an associate degree and those who attended college but did not obtain a degree.

Foreign born refers to people born outside of the United States, Puerto Rico or other U.S. territories to parents neither of whom was a U.S. citizen, regardless of legal status.

U.S. born refers to individuals who are U.S. citizens at birth, including people born in the United States, Puerto Rico or other U.S. territories, as well as those born elsewhere to parents who were U.S. citizens.

Most Adults Aware of 2020 Census and Ready to Respond, but Don't Know Key Details

As the 2020 census gets underway, most U.S. adults are aware of it and are ready to respond, but many do not know what it asks or how to participate. A majority incorrectly believes a citizenship question is on the questionnaire, and only about one-in-five know they will have the option of answering online, according to a new Pew Research Center survey.

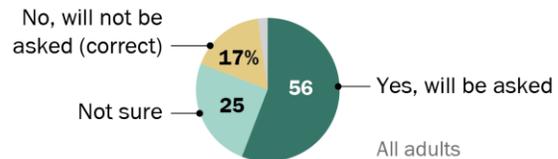
Intention to participate is high overall, but there is somewhat less enthusiasm among some groups the Census Bureau has found difficult to count in the past. These include black adults, Hispanic adults, younger people, and those with less education. There also are partisan differences in who intends to respond.

The Pew Research Center survey of 3,535 U.S. adults was conducted online Jan. 3-13, in English and Spanish, shortly before the government's count of everybody living in the U.S. got [underway Jan. 21 in Alaska](#). Most U.S. households will receive 2020 [census mailings in March](#) asking them to respond online, by mail or by phone.

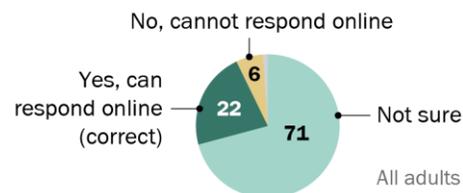
The survey finds that nearly all adults (95%) have heard of the census, and half say they have heard something about it recently. Most hold it in high regard: Two-thirds of adults say the census is very important to the country. About eight-in-ten (78%) say they definitely or

Many are hazy on basic facts, but say they will participate in the 2020 census

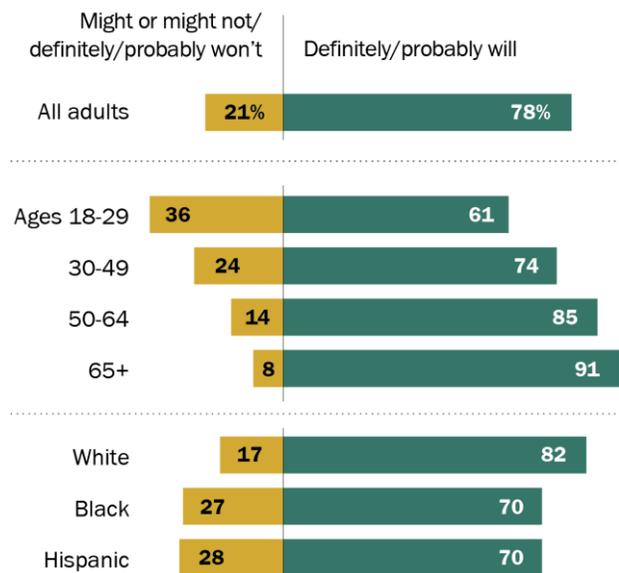
Majority thinks the census will ask about citizenship



Only about one-in-five know they can take the census online



Some groups are readier to respond than others



Note: Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer shown but not labeled for the pie charts. White and black adults include those who report being only one race and are non-Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 3-13, 2020.

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probably will fill out and submit a census form. (That share rises to 81% when including people who say someone else in their household probably or definitely will participate.)

Most unaware that citizenship and religion aren't asked on the 2020 census form

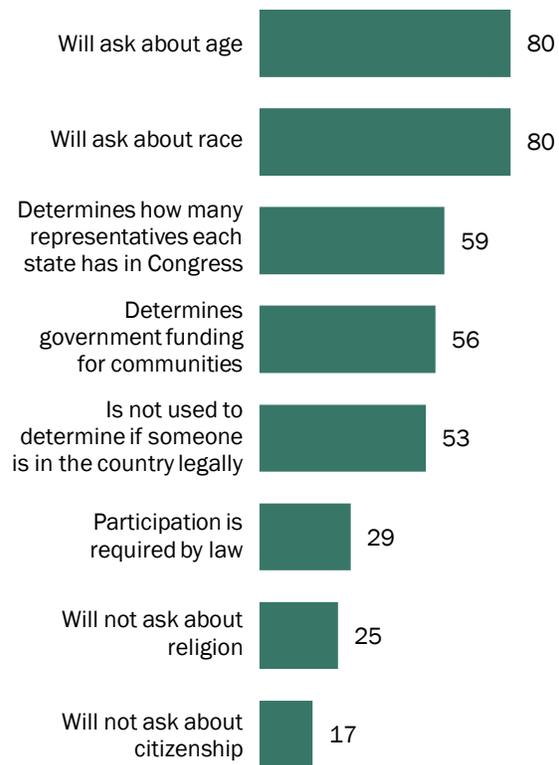
The survey also shows that many are unaware of some important aspects of the 2020 census. Most do not know that the census does not ask about citizenship or religion. As in 2010, only a minority knows that the [law requires them to respond](#).¹

In the survey, only 17% of adults answer correctly that a citizenship question is not on the 2020 census. A majority (56%) thinks citizenship is asked and 25% are unsure. The Trump administration sought to ask everyone living in the country whether they are a U.S. citizen, but it [dropped the question](#) from the 2020 census form last July after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against it.

The mistaken belief that citizenship is on the census is held by about half of men and middle-aged adults, as well as by a majority of women and young and older adults. A majority of white and black adults think citizenship is asked, as do 49% of Latinos. If “not sure” responses are included, three-quarters or more of each of these demographic groups do not know that there is no citizenship question on the 2020 census.²

What the public knows (or doesn't know) about the 2020 census

% correctly saying the census ...



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 3-13, 2020. “Most Adults Aware of 2020 Census and Ready to Respond, but Don't Know Key Details”

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¹ The Center's 2010 surveys were conducted via telephone (landline and cellphone), and due to the [difference in modes](#), results may not be directly comparable to those of the 2019 survey conducted online.

² Citizenship was last included in 1950 as a decennial census question, though it was asked only of foreign-born residents. It is now asked on the American Community Survey, a detailed Census Bureau survey of about 2 million households a year. In lieu of collecting citizenship information on the 2020 census, President Donald Trump [ordered the Census Bureau](#) to compile the citizenship status of each U.S. resident from other government records, including immigration records from the Department of Homeland Security. Those records are confidential under federal law.

Only 25% of adults know that their religious affiliation will not be asked on the census questionnaire. Another 26% say religion is on the form and 47% say they're not sure.

Other basic facts about the census are more widely known: A large majority of the public knows that the census asks about their race and age. Majorities correctly say the census is used to decide how many representatives each state has in Congress (59%) and that the census is used to decide how much money communities will get from the government (56%). Just over half of adults (53%) correctly say the census is not used to determine whether someone is in the country legally; 14% think it is used for that purpose and 31% are not sure.

Most want to answer online but don't know they can this year

A major innovation of the 2020 census is that most households will be able to respond online. The Census Bureau hopes that most of them do, because internet responses are quicker and less expensive than the traditional method of mailing paper questionnaires.

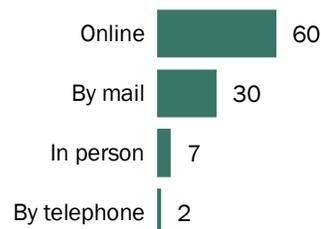
Only about one-in-five adults (22%) know they will have the option to answer online. Most people (71%) are unsure whether internet response is an option in 2020, and a few (6%) say it will not be. Still, most adults (60%) say they would prefer to answer over the internet if they have the option, rather than by mail (30%), on the phone (2%) or with an in-person interviewer (7%).

Older adults are an important exception. Adults ages 65 and older are split between preferring to respond online (44%) or by mail (45%).

Those who hesitate about completing the census form online cite both data security and personal preference as reasons. Seven-in-ten say a major or minor reason is that online data may not be secure, and a similar share (68%) say a major or minor reason is they "just prefer a different way." Smaller shares say they don't want to respond online because it's less convenient (41%) or because they do not have reliable internet access (22%).

Most people prefer to answer the census online if they could

% saying they prefer to respond...



Note: Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 3-13, 2020.

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Whether or not they prefer to participate online, most people say they would be very concerned (37%) or somewhat concerned (29%) if there was a data breach and their census responses were released.

Still, people are more likely to trust the Census Bureau to keep their information safe than they are to trust social media companies or retailers they do business with to do the same. Two-thirds say they are somewhat or very confident the Census Bureau will safeguard their data, about the same level of trust the public has in credit card companies.

Some groups less likely to say they will participate

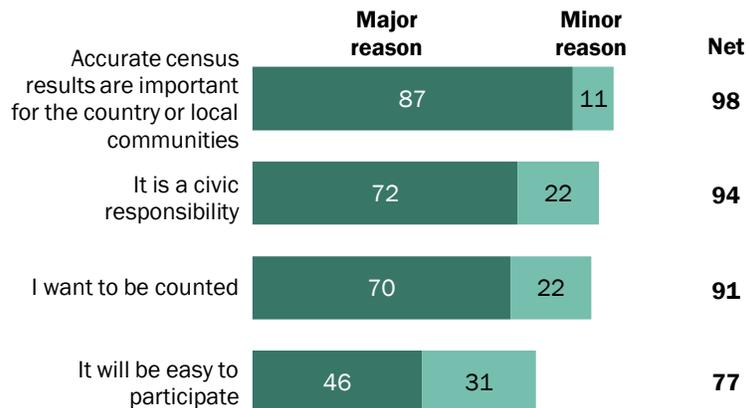
The differences among groups in intention to participate in the census follow a familiar pattern, reflecting [similar gaps in 2010](#) and the Census Bureau's [long-term challenge](#) in reaching those who are hard to count. Although about eight-in-ten U.S. adults (81%) expect they or someone in their household will definitely or probably respond to the census, that share declines to about three-quarters for adults who are black, Hispanic, or without a four-year college degree, and to seven-in-ten for those ages 18 to 29.

There also is a partisan difference in intention to participate: 85% of Republicans, but 80% of Democrats (including those who lean to one of the two parties), say they or someone in their household probably or definitely will submit a census form. That difference holds even when accounting for differences in demographic characteristics of Democratic and Republican partisans.

Policy-oriented and personal reasons are cited by those inclined to participate: Large majorities who say they probably or definitely will fill out their forms point to the importance of

Accurate results, civic duty and a wish to be counted among the reasons cited for census participation

Among those who probably or definitely will participate, % saying each is a ___ why they are likely to participate in the census



Note: Figures may not add to subtotals due to rounding.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 3-13, 2020.

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accurate results, the census being a civic responsibility and their personal desire to be counted as major or minor reasons why they will participate.

Among those who at best might or might not participate, negative attitudes about government may be linked to their census plans. Roughly a third (34%) say a major reason they might not or will not participate is that the census asks for too much personal information, and a similar share say a major reason is that they don't trust the government to use the information properly.

For adults younger than 30, 40% say a major reason they do not lean toward participating in the census is that they don't know much

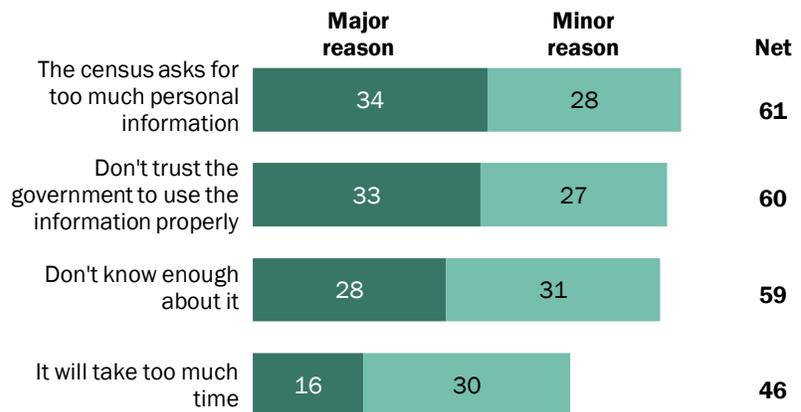
about it – not surprising given that for many it would be the first time they answer on their own.

It's important to note that, according to [Census Bureau research](#), people who say they intend to participate in the census do not necessarily follow through. The actual national census response rate in past censuses has been lower than the share of adults who say they intend to participate (in 2010, 76% mailed back their forms even though a 2008 survey showed 86% said they definitely or probably would). The lower the self-response rate, the more the Census Bureau spends on sending employees to knock on the doors of nonresponding households, raising the cost of the census and possibly producing less accurate responses.

In addition, census awareness among the public rises as the census approaches. In 2010, as the census got closer, the [share saying they would participate](#) increased in a Pew Research Center survey.

Distrust of government and lack of knowledge are among reasons some may not answer the census

Among those who might or might not, probably will not or definitely will not respond to the census, % saying each is a ____ why they may not participate in the census



Note: Figures may not add to subtotals due to rounding.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 3-13, 2020.

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Does what people know about census questions and uses affect their likelihood of participating?

We do not know for sure. In general, knowledge about and familiarity with the census (what is asked, how census statistics are used and whether participation is required) are strongly associated with intention to participate. The more knowledge people have, the more likely they are to say they will participate; the less knowledge they have, the less likely they are to say this. (See [Chapter 2](#) for more analysis of these knowledge questions.)

There are a few possible explanations for this: Familiarity with the census is associated with perceptions that the census is important, and it may also lead to comfort with the idea of participating. In addition, those who are knowledgeable about the census tend to have demographic characteristics associated with participating in surveys in general, while those who are less knowledgeable tend to be from groups that are less likely to participate in surveys, including groups that the Census Bureau has found it hard to count in the past.

Among other important links to people's intention to participate in the census is what people think about its importance to the country, as well as its potential benefits or harms to individuals or communities. People who say the census is very important to the country are far more likely than those who see the census as somewhat important to say they definitely will participate (75% to 20%). Similarly, those who see a community benefit from taking the census are more likely than those who see neither harm nor benefit to say they definitely will participate (72% to 32%). Knowledge about the census and how it is used is strongly related to perceptions of the census's importance and its potential benefits to individuals and communities.

Unfortunately, surveys like this one cannot definitively determine whether mistaken beliefs that citizenship is asked on the census or that the census is used to determine whether someone is in the country legally will affect participation. All the knowledge questions in this survey – including those unrelated to immigration status – are associated with intention to participate, and it is impossible to disentangle whether a specific perception or misperception directly affects intention to participate or is simply serving as an indicator of overall familiarity with the census.

To study whether the now-deleted citizenship question would lower response rates if it had been included, the Census Bureau conducted a [test census](#) last year of 480,000 households, which began before the question was dropped. Overall response rates were about the same for people who received a census form with the citizenship question and those who got a form without it. However, response rates from people whose census forms included the citizenship question were slightly lower in some neighborhoods, including areas with high shares of Hispanic residents and noncitizens and those with medium shares of Asian

1. Intention to participate in the census

A large majority of U.S. adults – 78% – say they definitely or probably will participate in the 2020 census. An additional 21% say they might or might not, probably will not or definitely will not participate, with most of this group (14%) saying they might or might not.

Among those who express at least some uncertainty, a small share says someone else in their household definitely or probably will participate. Including those who say others who live with them are likely to participate, 81% of U.S. adults say that they or someone else in their household definitely or probably will participate in the census.

Most plan to participate in the census, but some are doubtful

% saying they ___ submit a census form

	Definitely/ probably will	Might or might not	Definitely/ probably won't
All adults	78	14	7
Men	78	13	8
Women	77	14	7
Ages 18-29	61	21	15
30-49	74	16	8
50-64	85	10	4
65+	91	7	2
White	82	13	4
Black	70	14	13
Hispanic	70	15	12
<i>Among Hispanics</i>			
U.S. born	71	16	12
Foreign born	69	14	14
Some college or less	73	16	9
Bachelor's+	88	9	3
Registered to vote	88	9	3
Not registered to vote	55	25	16
Rep/Lean Rep	83	11	5
Dem/Lean Dem	75	15	9

Note: Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer not shown. White and black adults include those who report being only one race and are non-Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. "Some college" includes those with an associate degree and those who attended college but did not obtain a degree.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 3-13, 2020.

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Some hard-to-count groups less enthusiastic

Certain groups are more likely than others to be on board. The more hesitant include black and Hispanic adults, compared with whites, as well as young adults, especially those ages 18 to 29, compared with older ones. The Census Bureau is targeting black and Hispanic populations, as well as some groups of young adults, for additional outreach because they have been [hard to count](#) in the past.

Age is linked to intention to participate: Adults ages 65 and older are about twice as likely as those ages 18 to 29 (76% vs. 35%) to say they definitely will participate. However, 9% of the youngest adults say they expect that someone else in their household probably or definitely will participate in the census, which reduces the participation gap with older adults somewhat but does not close it. These differences remain even after controlling for race, education, gender, party and voter registration.

Adults with four-year college degrees are more likely to lean toward participating than those without them. About two-thirds of college graduates (68%) say they definitely will fill out their census form, compared with half of those without a four-year degree.

Republicans (including those who lean toward the GOP) are more likely than their Democratic and Democratic-leaning counterparts to say they definitely or probably will participate in the census – 83% to 75%. These differences appear even when controlling for age, race, education, gender and voter registration status.

Participation linked to favorable attitudes about the census

People's attitudes about the census – its importance to the country, its potential benefits or harms to individuals and communities, and the security of census data – are strongly related to whether they say they plan to participate. Among those who think the census is very or somewhat important to the country, most (84%) say they will probably or definitely participate. Among those who think the census is not too important or not at all important, only 13% say they probably or definitely will participate.

Similarly, public perceptions of the potential benefit or harm that the census could bring to their community or to them personally are also related to the likelihood of participation. Most people (61%) say that participating in the census will benefit their community. Among those who hold this view, 72% say they will definitely complete their census, and another 22% say they probably will do so. In contrast, among the roughly one-third (35%) who think participating will neither

benefit nor harm the community, just 32% say they will definitely participate, with another 23% saying they probably will.

Only about one-quarter of the public (24%) believes that participating in the census will benefit them personally, but these individuals say they are highly likely to participate: 79% say they definitely will participate and another 16% say they probably will. Among the 72% who say the census will neither benefit nor harm them personally, just half say they definitely will participate, with another one-quarter saying they probably will do so.

Large majority cites importance of accurate results as reason to take census

Among those who say they definitely or probably will participate, most cite at least one of three reasons offered: the importance of accurate results (87% say this is a major reason they will participate), filling out the census is a civic responsibility (72%) and “I want to be counted” (70%).

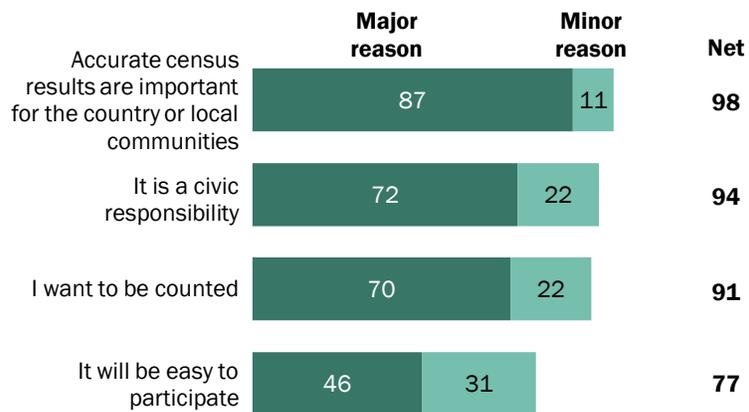
A similar share of older and younger adults who plan to participate cite each of these as major or minor reasons they plan to do so. Older adults are more likely than younger adults to cite each of these as *major* reasons. For example,

94% of adults 65 and older say the importance of accurate results is a major reason they plan to fill out their census forms; among those ages 18 to 29, 78% say so. Younger adults are more likely than older ones to say any of these are *minor* reasons for participating.

On the question of whether a major reason for participation is that the census is a civic responsibility, there are no differences among racial and ethnic groups, but foreign-born Hispanics stand out for their strong support of this reason: 80% say it is a major reason to

Accurate results, civic duty and a wish to be counted among the reasons cited for census participation

Among those who probably or definitely will participate, % saying each is a ___ why they are likely to participate in the census



Note: Figures may not add to subtotals due to rounding.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 3-13, 2020.

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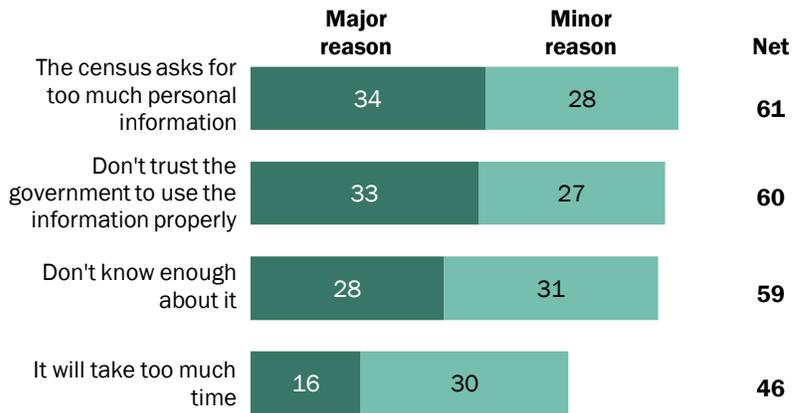
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participate, compared with 66% of U.S.-born Hispanics who say so. College graduates, compared with those who do not hold a four-year degree, are more likely to cite civic responsibility as a major reason to fill out their census forms.

Among those who say they probably or definitely will participate in the census, black and Hispanic adults are more likely than whites to say that a major reason for this is because they “want to be counted.” About three-quarters of black (78%) and Hispanic (77%) adults give this as a major reason, compared with two-thirds of whites (67%). Among Hispanics, those who are foreign born are more likely than those born in the U.S. to give this as a major reason.

Distrust of government and lack of knowledge are among reasons some may not answer the census

Among those who might or might not, probably will not or definitely will not respond to the census, % saying each is a why they may not participate in the census



Note: Figures may not add to totals due to rounding.
 Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 3-13, 2020.
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The ease of participating in the census is a relatively less important reason for participation – 46% of those who say they probably or definitely will participate say the census being easy to complete is a major reason why.

Women are more likely than men to cite ease of participation as a major reason, as are black or Hispanic adults compared with white adults. Adults 65 and older are more likely than younger ones to agree that ease of participation is a major reason they plan to participate.

Personal information and lack of trust cited by those who may not respond to the census

Among those who are at least doubtful about participating in the census, 61% say a major or minor reason is that the census asks for too much personal information, and a similar share (60%) say a major or minor reason is they do not trust the government to use the information properly. About the same share (59%) say a major or minor reason is that they don't know enough about the census. A smaller share (46%) says a major or minor reason is that it will take too much time, and about half (51%) say that is not a reason.

On the question of whether the census asks for too much personal information, white adults (66%) are more likely to give this as a major or minor reason than black adults (45%). Older adults, ages 50 and older, are more likely than younger ones (71% vs. 58%) to say that the census asking for too much personal information is a major or minor reason they may not participate.

When it comes to not knowing enough about the census, young adults (many of whom may be responding to the census on their own behalf for the first time) stand out from their older counterparts. Fully 73% of those ages 18 to 29 say this is a major or minor reason that they may not participate in the census, compared with 56% of those ages 30 to 49 and 43% of those 50 and older.

Near universal awareness of the census

Nearly all U.S. adults – 95% – say they have heard of the census (including a very small share who say they heard of it only after it was described to them). That includes at least nine-in-ten adults across most gender, racial, ethnic and age groups.

Half of adults say they have heard something about the census recently, within the past month or so. Men are more likely than women to have heard something recently (53% vs. 48%), as are older adults compared with younger ones (62% of those 65 and older vs. 42% of those 18 to 29).

In Pew Research Center surveys conducted [before the 2010 census](#), 92% of Americans said they were aware of the census in early January that year, and 94% were aware of it in mid-March. As census-related advertising and news coverage grew, the share who reported hearing something recently rose from 44% in January to 79% in March.

By March 2010, roughly nine-in-ten Americans (87%) said they definitely or probably would fill out their forms (or already had), a 6 percentage point increase from that January. However, the

Center's 2010 surveys were conducted via telephone (landline and cellphone), and due to the [difference in modes](#), results may not be directly comparable to those of the 2020 survey conducted online.

2. What Americans know about the census

While awareness of the U.S. census is nearly universal, much of the public is hazy about important details such as whether participation is required by law and what specifically will be asked on the census form. This lack of familiarity is not new; the public in early 2010 had a similar level of knowledge of many of these facts.

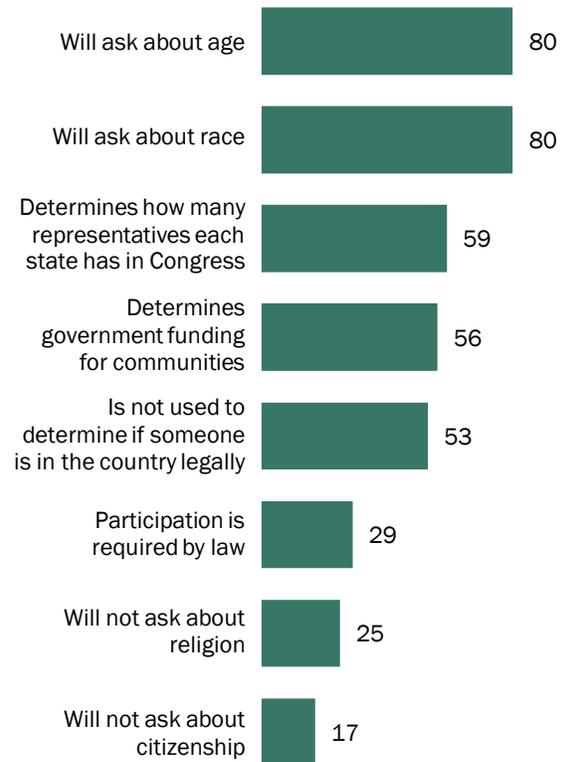
In the current survey, just 29% know that participation in the census is required by law. A larger number (37%) erroneously believe that it is not required, while a third are unsure. Ten years ago, a similar small minority knew that participation is required.

The survey shows that much of the public knows basic facts about how census data will or will not be used. A majority (59%) correctly say that the census is used to decide how many representatives each state will have in Congress, and nearly as many (56%) say that the census is used to decide how much money communities will get from the government. Just over half (53%) are aware that the census is not used to determine whether someone is in this country illegally; 14% erroneously believe that it is used for this purpose. Knowledge of how census data is used is roughly similar to what it was in [January 2010](#), when Pew Research Center asked these questions of the public in a telephone survey.³

Large majorities of the public in the current survey know that the census will collect information about age and race (80% each). But most people are unaware that citizenship and religious affiliation will not be asked about. A majority (56%) believe – incorrectly – that citizenship will be

What the public knows (or doesn't know) about the 2020 census

% correctly saying the census ...



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 3-13, 2020. "Most Adults Aware of 2020 Census and Ready to Respond, but Don't Know Key Details"

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³ The change in the survey mode (from telephone in 2010 to online in 2020) can affect the comparisons, so an exact trend to 2010 is not possible. But the general contours of knowledge in 2020 are quite similar to what they were in the 2010 survey.

asked about, and just 17% are aware it will not be on the form. Only a quarter could correctly state that questions about religion are not asked.

The survey also asked about a new feature of the census – the fact that people will be able to fill out their census form online. Just 22% of respondents correctly say that there will be an option to complete the census online. While only 6% incorrectly believe there will be no online option, 71% say they are unsure.

Older and more educated adults know more about the census

The survey included eight questions in total that measured knowledge of various aspects of the census.⁴ Respondents were divided into three groups based on their answers to those eight questions. About one-quarter (24%) correctly answered two or fewer questions (low knowledge group). About half of respondents (52%) answered between three and five of the questions correctly (medium knowledge group). And one-fourth (25%) correctly answered six or more of the eight items (high knowledge group).

Knowledge about the census tends to be strongly associated with age and education. Older or more highly educated respondents are considerably more knowledgeable than younger or less educated ones. For example, 36% of respondents ages 65 and older are in the high knowledge group, compared with just 16% among those under 30. A similar knowledge gap is seen between college graduates (35% in the high knowledge group) and those without a college degree (20% in the high knowledge group).

Older adults and college graduates are more knowledgeable about the census

% of each demographic group in each census knowledge category

	High knowledge (6-8 correct)	Medium knowledge (3-5 correct)	Low knowledge (0-2 correct)
All adults	25	52	24
Men	30	49	22
Women	20	55	25
Ages 18-29	16	50	35
30-49	21	49	30
50-64	28	56	17
65+	36	53	11
White	29	52	19
Black	15	49	36
Hispanic	18	54	28
<i>Among Hispanics</i>			
U.S. born	19	56	26
Foreign born	18	52	29
Some college or less	20	52	28
Bachelor's+	35	52	13
Registered voter	31	54	15
Not registered	12	48	40
Rep/Lean Rep	26	55	19
Dem/Lean Dem	25	50	25

Note: White and black adults include those who report being only one race and are non-Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. "Some college" includes those with an associate degree and those who attended college but did not obtain a degree. Knowledge groups based on answers to eight questions about the census. The low knowledge group had two or fewer correct answers, the medium knowledge group had three to five correct answers, and the high knowledge group had six to eight correct answers.

Source: Survey of adults conducted Jan. 3-13, 2020.

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⁴ The questions were about what is asked on the census, the uses of census data and whether participation is mandatory. www.pewresearch.org

The differences were even more stark on certain questions: For example, 76% of college graduates but only 52% of those without a four-year college degree correctly state that the census is used to determine the size of each state's congressional delegation. And 76% of those 65 and older know this, compared with just half among those under 30. This is not surprising, since older people have experienced more rounds of the decennial census, and more formal education likely exposes individuals to information about the census and how it is used.

But even the oldest or most highly educated respondents struggled with certain questions. Only 26% of college graduates are aware that there will be no citizenship question on the census form, a higher share than among those without a four-year degree (13%) but far from a majority. Only 21% of those 65 and older could state that there would not be a citizenship question on the census; 16% of those under 30 know this. Similarly, just a third of college graduates (33%) could correctly state that answering the census is required by law, only slightly higher than the 28% of those without a college degree who say this. But older respondents are considerably more likely than younger ones to be aware of the legal requirement to answer the census. Among those 65 and older, 46% correctly answered this question, while just 21% of those under 30 and just 22% of those ages 30 to 49 could do so.

One question for which age and education made little difference was awareness of the option to complete the census online. Fewer than 30% of respondents across all major demographic groups were aware of the online response option.

Greater knowledge of the census is linked to more positive views of its potential impact

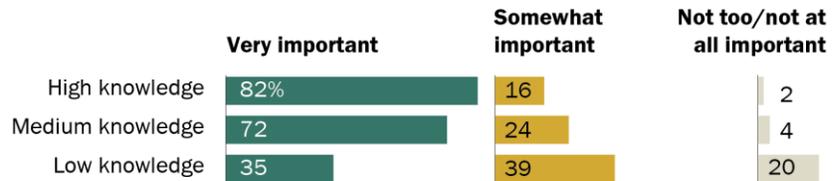
People who know more about the census have more favorable attitudes about it.

Knowledgeable individuals are more likely to believe that participating in the census is very important and that participation will benefit their community. Knowledge is also related to perceptions that taking part in the census will benefit the individual who participates, but not as strongly as believing that it will benefit the community. These attitudes, in turn, are strongly related to one's intention to participate in the census.

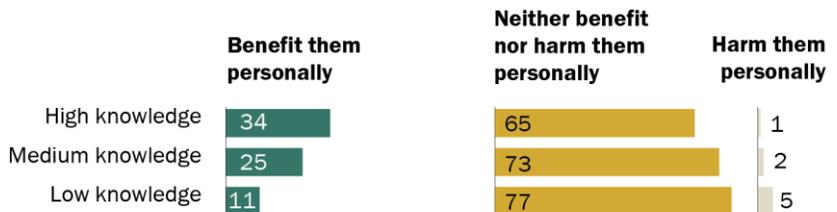
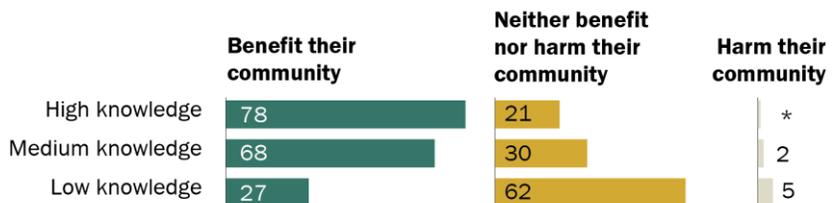
The biggest differences in attitudes tend to occur between the low and medium knowledge respondents. Among those with low knowledge about the census, just 35% say the census is very important for the United States. Among those with medium knowledge, 72% say the census is very important, while 82% of those in the highest knowledge group say this. Similarly, just 27% of those in the low knowledge group believe that participating in the census would benefit their community, while 68% of the medium knowledge group and 78% of the high knowledge group believe this.

People who know more about the census are more likely to say it is important and will benefit their community

% saying the census is _____ for the U.S.



% saying the census will _____



Note: The percentages less than 0.5% are replaced by an asterisk (*). Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer not shown. Knowledge groups based on answers to eight questions about the census. The low knowledge group had two or fewer correct answers, the medium knowledge group had three to five correct answers, and the high knowledge group had six to eight correct answers.

Source: Survey of adults conducted Jan. 3-13, 2020.

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More knowledgeable individuals are more likely than others to say that participating in the census will benefit them personally, but even among those in the highest knowledge group, just 34% say this. In the lowest knowledge group, just 11% see a personal benefit in census participation.

Given the link between opinions about the census and knowledge of what is on it and how its data is used, it is not surprising that knowledge about the census is associated with willingness to participate. People who are more familiar with the census and what will be asked on it are significantly more likely to say they definitely will participate. Among those in the lowest knowledge group, just 21% say they will definitely participate in the decennial count and another 22% say they probably will do so. The likelihood of participation jumps substantially among the medium knowledge group, with 58% saying they definitely will participate and 28% saying they probably will. Fully 82% of those in the high knowledge group say they definitely will complete their census form, and another 12% will probably do so.

The strong association between knowledge and intention to participate is not simply a function of demographic differences between low and high knowledge individuals. Even taking the demographic differences into account, knowledge has a strong and independent association with likelihood of participating.

3. Responding to the census online

The 2020 census will be the first in which nearly all households will be offered the [option to respond online](#) and encouraged to do so when they receive mailings in March. Most U.S. adults across all demographic groups do not know that they will be able to fill out their 2020 census forms online, and most say they would prefer to do so, according to a Pew Research Center survey.

Only 22% of adults answer yes when asked whether people will be able to fill out their census form online in 2020. About seven-in-ten (71%) say they are not sure, and very few (6%) say online response is not an option.

There are few differences by gender, age, race, ethnicity or other characteristics in answers to this question: The shares of men and women – as well as of black, white and Hispanic adults – who know an online option will be available range from 21% to 24%. Even among people who say they would prefer to respond online, only 25% say it will be an option in 2020.

Offered a choice of how to respond, 60% say they would prefer to answer online, followed by 30% who want to mail in their questionnaires, which has been the main method used in recent decades. The rest of those who give an answer say they prefer to respond in person (7%) or by phone (2%).

The online option is the first choice – and majority response – among men and women, white, black and Hispanic adults, and all age groups except those ages 65 and older. Among these older adults, 44% prefer to respond online and 45% by mail.

Responding online is a more popular option among college graduates than among those without a four-year degree (72% vs. 54%). As might be expected, those who use the internet every day are more likely to say they prefer to answer online than those who do not access the internet daily (63% to 31%).

Although the Census Bureau says people may respond online, by mail or by phone, the agency hopes the internet will be the [primary response mode](#). In March, when invitations to respond are mailed to most U.S. households, they will include a [unique code](#) and an internet address. In areas

Most people would prefer to submit their census information online

% saying they would prefer to answer the census...



Note: Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer not shown. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 3-13, 2020. "Most Adults Aware of 2020 Census and Ready to Respond, but Don't Know Key Details"

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where bureau research indicates people are likely to [prefer to respond by mail](#), a paper questionnaire also will be enclosed. The bureau plans to stagger the mailings so they will be delivered from March 12 to 20.

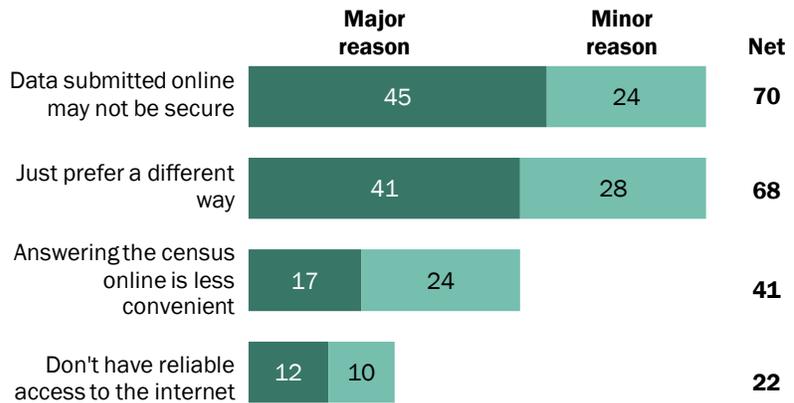
Some say online data may not be secure

Among those who prefer not to respond online, 70% say a major or minor reason is that data submitted online may not be secure. That includes 45% who say data security is a major reason they would prefer another response mode. (As might be expected, this group is also more likely to say that they have concerns in general about providing personal information online.)

There are no differences by gender or age group on the likelihood of citing data security as a major or minor reason not to respond over the internet, but white adults (74%) are more likely to give this reason than are Hispanic adults (60%).

Most people who do not want to take the census online say data may not be secure

Among those who prefer to answer the census by a mode other than online, % saying each is a ____ why responding online is not their preference



Note: Figures may not add to subtotals due to rounding.
 Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 3-13, 2020.
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Data security troubles some respondents, but a similar share – 68% – say they do not want to respond online because they “just prefer a different way.” Of these, 41% say this is a major reason they do not want to give census information over the internet. Among those who give this as a major reason, adults ages 65 and older are more likely to say so than younger ones.

About four-in-ten (41%) who do not prefer to respond online say it’s because it’s less convenient for them. Women are somewhat more likely to say this than men (45% vs. 38% say this is a major or minor reason). Similarly, adults ages 50 and older give this as a reason more often than adults ages 18 to 49 (44% vs. 37%).

Only about one-in-five of those who prefer not to respond online (22%) say it's because they don't have reliable access to the internet. That includes 12% who say it is a major reason. Among Hispanics who say they prefer not to answer online, about a third (36%) say it's because they don't have reliable internet access, higher than the white share (19%). This also is more often offered as a reason by those without a four-year college degree (25%) than by those with a bachelor's degree or more (13%).

4. The U.S. census and privacy concerns

Most U.S. adults say they are confident that the Census Bureau will keep their personal information secure – yet a majority also say that they would be concerned if the data the 2020 census form collects from them were to be made public. With most people being encouraged to respond to the census online for the first time in 2020, those who are confident that the bureau will keep their data safe are also among the most likely to say they would prefer to respond to the census online.

There is more confidence in the Census Bureau to protect personal information than in some other organizations

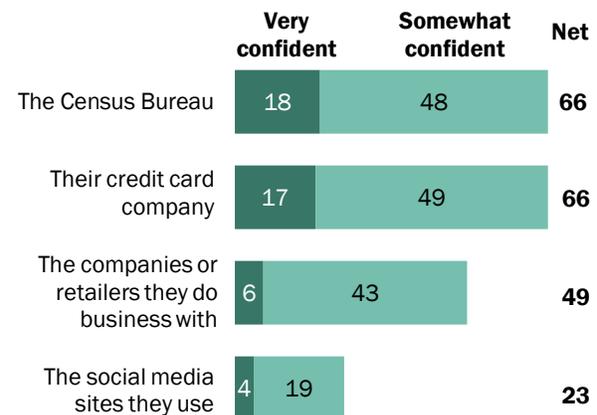
For the most part, U.S. adults are confident the Census Bureau will keep their personal information safe from hackers or unauthorized users. About two-thirds say this (66%), including 18% who say they are very confident and 48% who are somewhat confident.

People are equally confident in their credit card company – 66% say this, including 17% who are very confident their credit card company will protect their information. These responses exclude people who say they do not have a credit card.

When it comes to other entities, though, the public expresses less confidence. About half (49%) say they are confident that the companies or retailers they do business with will keep their personal information safe, and only 6% say they are very confident about this. Far fewer say the same about social media sites. Only about a quarter (23%) say they are very or somewhat confident that the social media sites they use will protect their information (among those who did not indicate that they don't use social media).

Most people feel confident that the Census Bureau will keep their personal information at least somewhat safe

% saying they are very/somewhat confident that each of the following will keep their personal information safe from hackers or unauthorized users



Note: Figures for “their credit card company” and “the social media sites they use” are based only on respondents who did *not* select “do not have a credit card” or “do not use social media.”

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 3-13, 2020.

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Older adults – those ages 50 and older – are more likely than 18- to 49-year-olds to say they are confident the Census Bureau will keep their information safe (70% vs. 63% say they are very or somewhat confident). White adults (70%) are also more likely to be confident in the Census Bureau than are black (60%) or Hispanic (62%) adults.

There are also differences by educational attainment. Adults with at least a bachelor's degree are more likely than those with less education to feel confident about the safety of their personal information collected by the Census Bureau (73% vs. 64%).

Despite high confidence in Census Bureau, most say they would be concerned if there were a privacy breach

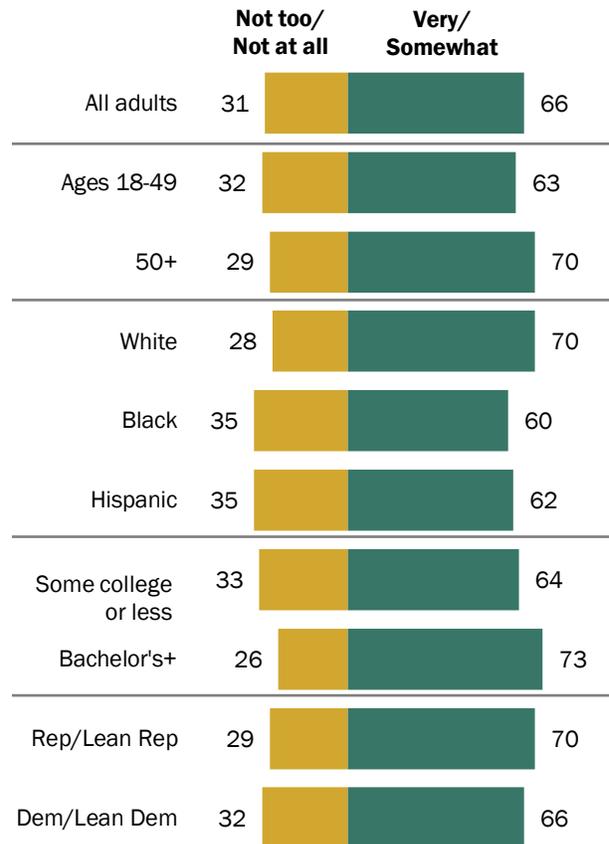
Although people generally believe the Census Bureau will do an adequate job of keeping their personal information safe from hackers or unauthorized users, if there *were* to be a breach, most would be concerned.

Two-thirds of U.S. adults say they would be very or somewhat concerned if all of their personal information included in the 2020 census form were made public, including 37% who say they would be *very* concerned.

For the most part, the groups who tend to have more confidence in the Census Bureau also tend to be less concerned about the consequences of this kind of data breach. For example, those with a bachelor's degree or more education are somewhat less likely than those with some college education or less to be very concerned (34% vs. 38%).

Older and more educated adults express more confidence in Census Bureau

% saying they are ___ confident that **the Census Bureau** will keep their personal information safe from hackers or unauthorized users



Note: White and black adults include those who report being only one race and are non-Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. "Some college" includes those with an associate degree and those who attended college but did not obtain a degree.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 3-13, 2020.

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Among other demographic groups, different patterns emerge. Although older adults are more likely than their younger counterparts to say they are confident the Census Bureau will protect their information, they are also more likely to be concerned about a breach of privacy. About four-in-ten adults ages 50 and older (42%) say they would be very concerned, compared with 33% of younger adults. Black adults are more concerned about what would happen if their personal information were made public (49% say they are very concerned) than are white (34%) or Hispanic (38%) adults.

Attitudes about data privacy affect whether people prefer to answer the census online or not

Those who express more confidence that the Census Bureau will protect their personal information are somewhat more likely to say they would prefer to respond to the census online (rather than in person, by mail or by telephone). Some 63% of those who are very or somewhat confident in the Census Bureau would prefer to answer online, compared with 57% of those who are not too or not at all confident.

As might be expected, those who are more comfortable sharing their personal information online are also more willing to answer the census online (67% of those who are slightly or not at all concerned about sharing their information online would prefer to answer online, vs. 55% of those who are at least somewhat concerned). These factors are associated with the preference to answer the census online, even after controlling for demographic characteristics such as age, education, voter registration, race or ethnicity, gender, and party affiliation or leaning.

Black adults more likely to be very concerned about the idea of a privacy breach

% saying they would be ___ if all of their personal information included in the 2020 census form were made public

	Very concerned	Somewhat concerned	Net
All adults	37	29	66
Ages 18-49	33	31	64
50+	42	27	69
White	34	31	64
Black	49	23	72
Hispanic	38	28	65
Some college or less	38	28	66
Bachelor's+	34	33	67
Rep/Lean Rep	35	29	64
Dem/Lean Dem	38	30	68

Note: Figures may not add to subtotals due to rounding. White and black adults include those who report being only one race and are non-Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. "Some college" includes those with an associate degree and those who attended college but did not obtain a degree.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 3-13, 2020.

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However, concern about a breach of privacy is not correlated with the desire to answer online – 60% of those who would be very or somewhat concerned if their data were made public would prefer to answer online, about the same as the 62% of those who are not too or not at all concerned who would prefer to answer online.

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Methodology

Most of the analysis in this report is based on a nationally representative online survey conducted by Pew Research Center Jan. 3-13, 2020, among a sample of 3,535 adults 18 years of age or older residing in the United States. This included an oversample of 175 U.S.-born Hispanics and 243 foreign-born Hispanics. The survey was conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs in English and Spanish using KnowledgePanel, its nationally representative online research panel.

KnowledgePanel members are recruited through probability sampling methods and include both those with internet access and those who did not have internet access at the time of their recruitment (KnowledgePanel provides internet access for those who do not have it and, if needed, a device to access the internet when they join the panel). A combination of random-digit dialing (RDD) and address-based sampling (ABS) methodologies have been used to recruit panel members (in 2009 KnowledgePanel switched its sampling methodology for recruiting panel members from RDD to ABS). The panel includes households with landlines and cellular phones, including those only with cell phones, and those without a phone. Both the RDD and ABS samples were provided by Marketing Systems Group.

KnowledgePanel continually recruits new panel members throughout the year to offset panel attrition as people leave the panel. All active adult members of the Ipsos panel were eligible for inclusion in this study. In all, 5,797 panelists were invited to take part in the survey, for a study completion rate of 61.2%. All sampled members received an initial email to notify them of the survey and provide a link to the survey questionnaire. Additional follow-up reminders were sent to those who had not yet responded as needed.

The cumulative response rate accounting for nonresponse to the recruitment surveys and attrition is 4.0%. The break-off rate among panelists who logged onto the survey and completed at least one item is 5.4%.

The data were weighted in a multistep process that begins with a base weight incorporating the respondents' original selection probability. The next step in the

Weighting dimensions

Variable	Benchmark source
Gender	2018 American Community Survey
Age	
Education	
Race/Hispanic origin	
Country of birth among Hispanics	
Home internet access	
Region x Metropolitan status	2019 CPS March Supplement
Volunteerism	2017 CPS Volunteering & Civic Life Supplement
Voter registration	2018 CPS Voting and Registration Supplement
Party affiliation	Average of the three most recent Pew Research Center telephone surveys.

Note: Estimates from the ACS are based on non-institutionalized adults. Voter registration is calculated using procedures from Hur, Achen (2013) and rescaled to include the total US adult population.

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weighting uses an iterative technique that aligns the sample to population benchmarks on the dimensions listed in the accompanying table.

Sampling errors and test of statistical significance take into account the effect of weighting. Interviews are conducted in both English and Spanish.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Survey conducted Jan. 3-13, 2020

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	3,535	2.0 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

Pew Research Center undertakes all polling activity, including calls to mobile telephone numbers, in compliance with the Telephone Consumer Protection Act and other applicable laws.

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Appendix: Additional charts

More than nine-in-ten people who plan to participate in the census say it is a civic duty

Among those who probably or definitely will participate, % who say a reason is that it is a civic responsibility

	Major reason	Minor reason	Net
All adults	72	22	94
Men	72	22	94
Women	73	22	94
Ages 18-29	63	31	94
30-49	68	26	94
50-64	72	21	93
65+	84	11	96
White	73	22	95
Black	71	22	94
Hispanic	72	19	92
<i>Among Hispanics</i>			
U.S. born	66	27	93
Foreign born	80	10	90
Some college or less	69	23	92
Bachelor's+	78	19	97
Registered to vote	77	18	95
Not registered to vote	51	39	90
Rep/Lean Rep	73	22	95
Dem/Lean Dem	73	21	94

Note: Figures may not add to subtotals due to rounding. White and black adults include those who report being only one race and are non-Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. "Some college" includes those with an associate degree and those who attended college but did not obtain a degree.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 3-13, 2020.

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Among people who plan to participate in the census, nearly all cite the need for accurate results

Among those who say they probably or definitely will participate, % who say a reason is that accurate census results are important to the country or local communities

	Major reason	Minor reason	Net
All adults	87	11	98
Men	86	12	98
Women	88	10	98
Ages 18-29	78	20	98
30-49	82	15	97
50-64	91	7	98
65+	94	5	99
White	87	10	98
Black	86	13	99
Hispanic	86	11	97
<i>Among Hispanics</i>			
U.S. born	80	17	97
Foreign born	94	4	98
Some college or less	86	11	98
Bachelor's+	88	10	98
Registered to vote	89	9	98
Not registered to vote	78	20	98
Rep/Lean Rep	85	12	98
Dem/Lean Dem	89	10	98

Note: Figures may not add to subtotals due to rounding. White and black adults include those who report being only one race and are non-Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. "Some college" includes those with an associate degree and those who attended college but did not obtain a degree.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 3-13, 2020.

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Many people who plan to respond to the census say it is because they want to be counted

Among those who probably or definitely will respond to the census, % who say a reason is they want to be counted

	Major reason	Minor reason	Net
All adults	70	22	91
Men	70	21	91
Women	70	22	92
Ages 18-29	63	30	93
30-49	63	26	90
50-64	70	20	90
65+	82	11	94
White	67	24	91
Black	78	16	94
Hispanic	77	15	92
<i>Among Hispanics</i>			
U.S. born	73	19	92
Foreign born	82	10	92
Some college or less	70	22	91
Bachelor's+	70	21	91
Registered to vote	73	20	92
Not registered to vote	54	32	87
Rep/Lean Rep	68	23	91
Dem/Lean Dem	72	20	92

Note: Figures may not add to subtotals due to rounding. White and black adults include those who report being only one race and are non-Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. "Some college" includes those with an associate degree and those who attended college but did not obtain a degree.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 3-13, 2020.

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Ease of participation in the census is a major reason for more than four-in-ten of those who plan to respond

Among those who probably or definitely will respond to the census, % who say a reason is that it will be easy to participate

	Major reason	Minor reason	Net
All adults	46	31	77
Men	42	33	75
Women	50	30	80
Ages 18-29	44	39	83
30-49	48	33	81
50-64	43	30	73
65+	50	25	75
White	43	33	76
Black	53	27	80
Hispanic	61	23	84
<i>Among Hispanics</i>			
U.S. born	58	26	84
Foreign born	69	16	84
Some college or less	48	30	77
Bachelor's+	43	34	77
Registered to vote	47	31	77
Not registered to vote	40	37	77
Rep/Lean Rep	44	32	75
Dem/Lean Dem	49	31	80

Note: Figures may not add to subtotals due to rounding. White and black adults include those who report being only one race and are non-Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. "Some college" includes those with an associate degree and those who attended college but did not obtain a degree.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 3-13, 2020.

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Some who may not respond to the census say they do not have enough information about it

Among those who say they might or might not, probably will not or definitely will not respond to the census, % who say a reason is they don't know enough about it

	Major reason	Minor reason	Net
All adults	28	31	59
Men	20	35	55
Women	34	28	63
Ages 18-29	40	32	73
30-49	23	33	56
50-64	20	26	45
65+	9	30	39
White	22	40	62
Black	36	15	51
Hispanic	31	25	56
<i>Among Hispanics</i>			
U.S. born	33	27	60
Foreign born	29	23	52
Some college or less	29	32	61
Bachelor's+	21	30	51
Registered to vote	30	32	62
Not registered to vote	26	34	60
Rep/Lean Rep	26	36	61
Dem/Lean Dem	30	30	60

Note: Figures may not add to subtotals due to rounding. White and black adults include those who report being only one race and are non-Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. "Some college" includes those with an associate degree and those who attended college but did not obtain a degree.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 3-13, 2020.

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The amount of time it takes to complete the census is a concern for some who say they may not respond

Among those who say they might or might not, probably will not or definitely will not respond to the census, % who say a reason is it will take too much time

	Major reason	Minor reason	Net
All adults	16	30	46
Men	18	32	50
Women	15	27	42
Ages 18-29	21	25	46
30-49	16	31	47
50-64	9	31	40
65+	10	43	53
White	15	33	47
Black	14	24	38
Hispanic	17	27	43
<i>Among Hispanics</i>			
U.S. born	21	21	41
Foreign born	13	33	46
Some college or less	16	28	44
Bachelor's+	18	36	54
Registered to vote	15	30	45
Not registered to vote	18	29	47
Rep/Lean Rep	17	34	51
Dem/Lean Dem	16	27	43

Note: Figures may not add to subtotals due to rounding. White and black adults include those who report being only one race and are non-Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. "Some college" includes those with an associate degree and those who attended college but did not obtain a degree.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 3-13, 2020.

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Some people who may not respond to the census say it is too intrusive

Among those who say they might or might not, probably will not or definitely will not respond to the census, % who say a reason is it asks for too much personal information

	Major reason	Minor reason	Net
All adults	34	28	61
Men	32	26	58
Women	36	29	64
Ages 18-29	26	29	55
30-49	35	26	61
50-64	44	29	72
65+	43	24	68
White	33	33	66
Black	25	19	45
Hispanic	40	21	62
<i>Among Hispanics</i>			
U.S. born	35	21	57
Foreign born	46	21	67
Some college or less	31	29	60
Bachelor's+	47	20	67
Registered to vote	38	31	69
Not registered to vote	28	26	54
Rep/Lean Rep	34	30	64
Dem/Lean Dem	33	26	60

Note: Figures may not add to subtotals due to rounding. White and black adults include those who report being only one race and are non-Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. "Some college" includes those with an associate degree and those who attended college but did not obtain a degree.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 3-13, 2020.

"Most Adults Aware of 2020 Census and Ready to Respond, but Don't Know Key Details"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Six-in-ten of those who may not respond to the census say they do not trust the government to use the information properly

Among those who say they might or might not, probably will not or definitely will not respond to the census, % who say a reason is they do not trust the government to use the information properly

	Major reason	Minor reason	Net
All adults	33	27	60
Men	32	28	60
Women	34	27	61
Ages 18-29	32	21	54
30-49	32	30	62
50-64	39	27	66
65+	28	47	69
White	31	34	65
Black	27	26	54
Hispanic	41	18	58
<i>Among Hispanics</i>			
U.S. born	39	21	60
Foreign born	42	14	56
Some college or less	32	28	60
Bachelor's+	40	24	64
Registered to vote	38	31	69
Not registered to vote	26	29	55
Rep/Lean Rep	30	31	61
Dem/Lean Dem	34	26	60

Note: Figures may not add to subtotals due to rounding. White and black adults include those who report being only one race and are non-Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. "Some college" includes those with an associate degree and those who attended college but did not obtain a degree.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 3-13, 2020.

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PEW RESEARCH CENTER

More than half of U.S. adults mistakenly believe the census includes a question about citizenship

% giving each answer for whether the census will ask them if they are a U.S. citizen

	No, will not be asked (correct)	Yes, will be asked	Not sure
All adults	17	56	25
Men	20	52	25
Women	14	60	25
Ages 18-29	16	56	26
30-49	15	53	30
50-64	16	59	24
65+	21	58	20
White	18	57	23
Black	9	61	27
Hispanic	18	49	31
<i>Among Hispanics</i>			
U.S. born	16	56	26
Foreign born	21	41	38
Some college or less	13	60	26
Bachelor's+	26	48	25
Registered to vote	20	56	24
Not registered to vote	9	61	26
Rep/Lean Rep	14	64	21
Dem/Lean Dem	20	52	28

Note: Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer not shown. White and black adults include those who report being only one race and are non-Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. "Some college" includes those with an associate degree and those who attended college but did not obtain a degree.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 3-13, 2020.

"Most Adults Aware of 2020 Census and Ready to Respond, but Don't Know Key Details"

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