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Fact Check

FACT CHECK: Has Citizenship Been A Standard Census Question?

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FORM P1 U. S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE BUREAU OF THE CENSUS 16-59925-1

1950 CENSUS OF POPULATION AND HOUSING

FOR PERSONS 14 Y

11	12	13	B	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
How old was he on his last birthday? <small>(If under one year of age, enter month of birth as April, May, Dec., etc.)</small>	Is he now married, widowed, divorced, separated, or never married? <small>(Mar, Wd, D, Sep, Nov)</small>	What State (or foreign country) was he born in? <small>If born outside Continental United States, enter name of Territory, possession, or foreign country</small> <small>Distinguish Canada-French from Canada-other</small>	LEAVE BLANK	If foreign born— Is he naturalized? <small>(Yes, No, or AP for born abroad of American parents)</small>	What was this person doing most of last week—working, keeping the house, or something else? <small>(Wk, H, Ot, or U for unable to work)</small>	If H or Ot in item 15— Did this person do any work at all last week, not counting work around the house? <small>(Include work for pay, in own business, profession, on farm, or unpaid family work)</small> (Yes or No)	If No in item 16— Was this person looking for work? <small>(See Special Cases below)</small> (Yes or No)	If No in item 17— Even though he didn't work last week, does he have a job or business? (Yes or No)	If Wk in item 15 or Yes in item 16— How many hours did he work last week? <small>(Include unpaid work on family farm or business)</small> (Number of hours)	1. If employed (Wk) 2. If looking for work 3. For all other persons What kind of doing? <small>For example: Nails heels on shoes. Obchemistry professor. Farmer..... Farm helper..... Armed forces..... Never worked.....</small> (Occupation)

The 1950 census form asked where respondents were born and whether they were naturalized.

Census.gov/Screenshot by NPR

Updated on March 28 at 12:30 p.m.

After a controversial decision by the Department of Commerce to add a question about U.S. citizenship to the 2020 census, White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders defended the move as nothing out of the ordinary.

The claim

"This is a question that's been included in every census since 1965," Sanders said Tuesday, "with the exception of 2010, when it was removed."

The short answer

This statement is inaccurate, incomplete and misleading. A quick history of the decennial survey makes that clear.



THE TWO-WAY

2020 Census Will Ask About Respondents' Citizenship Status



NATIONAL

Adding Citizenship Question Risks 'Bad Count' For 2020 Census, Experts Warn

The long answer

The census has been conducted every decade since 1790 to get a national head count used most critically to decide the distribution of congressional representation. At first it was conducted by U.S. marshals, but later surveys were sent to most American households, with census workers helping those who didn't promptly return their surveys.

The last time a citizenship question was among the census questions for all U.S. households was in 1950. That form asked where each person was born and in a follow-up question asked, "If foreign born — Is he naturalized?"

In 1960, there was no such question about citizenship, only about place of birth.

P2. Name of this person (Last name) (First name) (Middle initial) ← **QUESTIONS FOR**

P8. Where was this person born?
(If born in hospital, give residence of mother, not location of hospital)
 If born in the United States, write name of State.
 If born outside the United States, write name of country, U.S. possession, etc. Use international boundaries as now recognized by the U.S. Distinguish Northern Ireland from Ireland (Eire).

 (State, foreign country, U.S. possession, etc.)

P9. If this person was born outside the U.S. —
What language was spoken in his home before he came to the United States?

P14. What is the highest grade (or year) of regular school this person has ever attended? (Check one box)
 If now attending a regular school or college, check the grade (or year) he is in. If it is in junior high school, check the box that stands for that grade (or year).

Never attended school

Kindergarten

Elementary school (Grade) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

High school (Year) 1 2 3 4

College (Year) 1 2 3 4 5 6 or more

In 1960, the census asked respondents what country they were born in but not whether they were naturalized citizens.

Census.gov/Screenshot by NPR

Sanders mentioned the year 1965 on Tuesday, but the census only comes every 10 years, so it isn't clear what she was referring to, and the White House did not respond to a request for clarification.

In 1970, the Census Bureau began sending around two questionnaires: a short-form questionnaire to gather basic population information and a long form that asked detailed questions about everything from household income to plumbing. The short form went to most households in America. The long form was sent to a much smaller sample of households, 1 in 6. Most people didn't get it.

Starting in 1970, questions about citizenship were included in the long-form questionnaire but not the short form. For instance, in 2000, those who received the long form were asked, "Is this person a CITIZEN of the United States?"

12 Where was this person born?

In the United States — *Print name of state.*

Outside the United States — *Print name of foreign country, or Puerto Rico, Guam, etc.*

13 Is this person a **CITIZEN** of the United States?

Yes, born in the United States → *Skip to 15a*

Yes, born in Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, or Northern Marianas

Yes, born abroad of American parent or parents

Yes, a U.S. citizen by naturalization

No, not a citizen of the United States

The 2000 long-form survey, sent to a subset of Americans, asked about citizenship. The more widely distributed census short form that year did not.

Census.gov/Screenshot by NPR

The short form kept it simple: name, relationship, age, sex, Hispanic origin, race, marital status and whether the home is owned or rented.

→ **NOTE: Please answer BOTH Questions 7 and 8.**

7. Is Person 1 Spanish/Hispanic/Latino? Mark the "No" box if **not** Spanish/Hispanic/Latino.

- No, not Spanish/Hispanic/Latino Yes, Puerto Rican
 Yes, Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano Yes, Cuban
 Yes, other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino — Print group.

8. What is Person 1's race? Mark one or more races to indicate what this person considers himself/herself to be.

- White
 Black, African Am., or Negro
 American Indian or Alaska Native — Print name of enrolled or principal tribe.

- Asian Indian Japanese Native Hawaiian
 Chinese Korean Guamanian or Chamorro
 Filipino Vietnamese Samoan
 Other Asian — Print race. Other Pacific Islander — Print race.

- Some other race — Print race.

The 2000 census short form asked about race but not citizenship, which the long form that year did ask about.

Census.gov/Screenshot by NPR

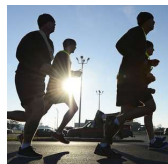
Later, the census added the American Community Survey, conducted every year and sent to 3.5 million households. It began being fully implemented in 2005. It asks many of the same questions as the census long-form surveys from 1970 to 2000, including the citizenship question.

Sanders said that in 2010 the citizenship question was removed. In fact, there was no long form that year — it had been replaced by the annual American Community Survey. The decennial census form asked just 10 questions.



NATIONAL

2020 Census Will Ask Black People About Their Exact Origins



NATIONAL

2020 Census To Count Deployed Troops At Home Bases, Prisoners At Facilities

The state of California has already sued to block the addition of a citizenship question to the 2020 census, and New York's state attorney general has announced plans for a multistate lawsuit. The concern expressed by states with large undocumented immigrant populations is that asking about citizenship will scare people off, forms won't get filled out and the count won't be accurate, affecting federal funding and the number of congressional seats. (The Census Bureau is legally required to keep answers confidential, even from the FBI and other government entities. That means it isn't allowed to release data identifying an individual. But federal agencies and researchers can request census information on specific population groups.)



NATIONAL

2020 Census To Keep Racial, Ethnic Categories Used In 2010

In a memo explaining his reasoning, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross dismissed concerns about incentive to participate.

"The Department of Commerce is not able to determine definitively how inclusion of a citizenship question on the decennial census will impact responsiveness. However, even if there is some impact on responses, the value of more complete and accurate data derived from surveying the entire population outweighs such concerns.

Completing and returning decennial census questionnaires is required by Federal law,

those responses are protected by law, and inclusion of a citizenship question on the 2020 decennial census will provide more complete information for those who respond," Ross wrote.

But if the 2020 census form does ultimately ask about citizenship status, it will be the first time **the U.S. census has directly asked for the citizenship status of every person living in every household.**

NPR's Hansi Lo Wang contributed to this report.

Clarification

March 28, 2018

An earlier version of this story stated that the American Community Survey began in the 1990s. In fact, the survey moved from the developmental stage to full implementation in 2005.

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