CONSIDERATIONS IN DETERMINING THE CONTENT OF THE 1970 CENSUS

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RESUMEN

Este artículo describe algunos de los factores que se están considerando en el planeamiento del contenido para el Censo de 1970. El factor principal, es la conclusión de los más destacados oficiales de la Oficina, de que las mayores necesidades de datos para 1970 pueden ser satisfechas por un formulario cuyo contenido es similar al del usado en 1960. Aunque habrá algunos desacuerdos con esta conclusión, ella se basa en un amplio muestreo de opinión, en el que todos los elementos interesados fueron invitados, en realidad urgidos, a presentar sus puntos de vista.

Este diseño impone serias limitaciones a la oportunidad de introducir innovaciones en el contenido del formulario. Desde que no parece haber una buena razón, técnica o de otra índole, para eliminar tópicos que fueron incluidos en 1960, no parece posible que se pueda reemplazar anteriores ítems por otros nuevos. Tampoco parece haber ninguna buen perspectiva de que sea posible financiar nuevos ítems mediante ahorros en los procedimientos de campo tales como el envío y la devolución por correo. De acuerdo a las mejores estimaciones actuales, este procedimiento puede producir mejor cobertura y una sustancial ganancia en cuanto a un registro de direcciones; pero no parece que pueda producir un mayor ahorro en el costo.

La mayor innovación en los resultados que produzca el Censo de 1970 será, probablemente, la mayor disponibilidad de datos para áreas más pequeñas, extendiéndose hasta los bloques. En el momento actual, no parece que habrá cambios significativos en lo referente a contenido.

SUMMARY

This paper describes some of the factors that are being considered in planning the content of the 1970 Census. The key factor, is the conclusion by the top Bureau officials that the major needs for data in 1970 can be met by a schedule whose content is similar to that used in 1960. Although there will be some disagreement with this conclusion, it is based on a widespread sampling of opinion in which all interested parties were invited—indeed urged—to present their views.

This framework places serious limitations on the opportunity to introduce innovations in schedule content. Since there appears to be no good reason—technical or otherwise—to drop items that were included in 1960, it is not likely that new items will be traded off for old ones. There also does not appear to be any good prospect that it will be possible for new items to be financed by savings in field procedures such as the mail-out mail-back approach. According to the best current estimates, this procedure may produce better coverage and a substantial capital improvement in the form of an address register; but it is not likely to result in any major savings in cost.

The major innovation in the results produced by the 1970 Census will probably be in the greater availability of data for more small areas. It does not seem likely at present that there will be significant changes in content.

Broadly speaking, the content of the next census will be determined by the amount of funds made available by the Congress, historical precedent established in previous censuses, the existing technology for collecting and processing data, the taste of Census Bureau officials for risk under conditions of uncertainty, the imagination of the Census Bureau staff, the needs of the economy, the tenacity and ingenuity of those who plead for special causes, and by the experience gained in the New Haven pretest.

In September, 1966, the Bureau of the Census issued a policy directive which established the guidelines for the inclusion of completely new questions in the complete count and the sample sections of the 1970 Census. It might be useful to begin this discussion with an examination of this policy statement. The directive notes the following facts. (1) There is far more interest in having more complete presentation of the kinds of data previously collected than in having new questions added to the census schedule, (2) there is a great need for more statistics for

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small areas such as census tracts and blocks, and (3) there is a great need for more detailed cross-tabulations of data that are collected than was the case in 1960. These facts have led the Bureau to conclude that the content of the 1970 Census will be very similar to that of 1960. New questions will be added in the 1970 Census only if they meet the following criteria.

1. They must be of broad public interest, and proof of the need for their inclusion must be born by the proponents.
2. They must provide information that is needed for small areas such as counties and municipalities.
3. They must relate to subjects to which respondents can provide unambiguous and reliable answers.
4. They must be generally accepted by the public as relevant to the census.
5. The questionnaire as a whole must not involve an undue burden on respondents.
6. The entire census must be one which can be taken within the resources that are made available for the purpose.

At first glance, this policy directive seems straightforward enough. Upon close examination, however, several clarifications appear to be required. For one thing, this directive, if taken literally, precludes the possibility of collecting information needed for small subgroups in the population, but not necessarily for small areas. There are some, for example, who question the need for an inquiry on children ever born in the twenty-five-percent sample in order to provide statistics for census tracts or similar areas. Most experts in the field, however, would argue that whether or not this information is needed for small areas, it is essential for the analysis of geographic differentials in fertility for women classified by age, color, residence, socioeconomic status, and by other variables. A five-percent sample might be adequate; but the possibilities for analysis would be greatly increased if this information was available for a twenty-five-percent sample. A similar case can be made for other subjects as well.

The policy statement deals only with those items to be collected on a one-hundred-percent and twenty-five-percent basis; it says nothing at all about the possibility of collecting information for a two and one-half-percent sample, which has been strongly recommended by the Census Advisory Committee on Population Statistics. There are many items which are not needed for small areas or for very detailed cross-classifications, but which do require, nonetheless, much larger samples than can be provided by the Current Population Survey or similar surveys. A few examples include the beginning and ending dates of each marriage and the nature of the termination, the birthdates of all children rather than just those for children living in the household at the time of the census, the major reason for migration, dual jobholding, longest job held the preceding year, and college degrees received and major areas of specialization in obtaining the degrees. The list can be expanded and the Bureau has, in fact, prepared several packages that could be combined in various ways in the twenty-five-percent and two and one-half-percent samples.

There are several reasons for the omission of any reference to the two and one-half-percent sample in the policy statement. First, there is some uncertainty as to whether the two and one-half-percent sample should be regarded as a basic part of the census or as a new and separately identifiable element for which a special appropriation should be sought. There is some justification for the latter view since there was no corresponding sample for the population items in the 1960 Census.

Second, there is some hesitancy to make a commitment for a two and one-half-percent sample enumeration because of operational difficulties. The twenty-five-percent sample schedule is already an imposing document for use in selfenumeration. To introduce a third schedule which is considerably longer than the basic sample schedule into every tenth sample household would create serious