

AGENCY OVERVIEW

U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

SUMMARY OF KEY CRITICAL SUPPORT AREAS AND LEADERSHIP

Leadership

Census Director Robert Santos resigned from the position in February 2025. Deputy Director Ron Jarmin served as acting director until September when George Cook, a political appointee at the Department of Commerce, was named acting director.

Budget

(see figure below, Table 2.2 in body of report, and our [online resource](#)):

- The Census Bureau's FY25 budget was kept at its FY24 level of \$1.385 billion. Of that amount, \$1.054 billion is for periodic censuses and programs, and \$329 million is for current surveys. These funding levels amount to an estimated 2.4% loss of purchasing power from FY24 for the top line and each component. The current survey account has lost an estimated 3% of purchasing power since FY09.
- The FY26 President's Budget Request for the Census Bureau is \$1.677 billion, including \$1.388 billion for periodic censuses and programs, which represents an estimated 29% gain in purchasing power over its FY25 level, and \$289 million for current surveys, which represents an estimated 14% loss in purchasing power from its FY25 level.
 - The FY26 request also proposes to "reorganize the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Bureau of Economic Analysis, and the Census Bureau at the Department of Commerce," with the details still to be shared.

Staffing

(see Table 2.1 in body of report):

- The Census Bureau has lost an estimated 15% in staffing since FY24.
- The FY26 President's Budget Request is for a staffing level of 7,657, a decline of 9% from the FY24 level. The FY26 staffing request for periodic censuses and programs is 1,761, a 27% decline from the FY24 staffing level. The FY26 staffing request for current surveys is 5,896, a 2% decline from the FY24 level.

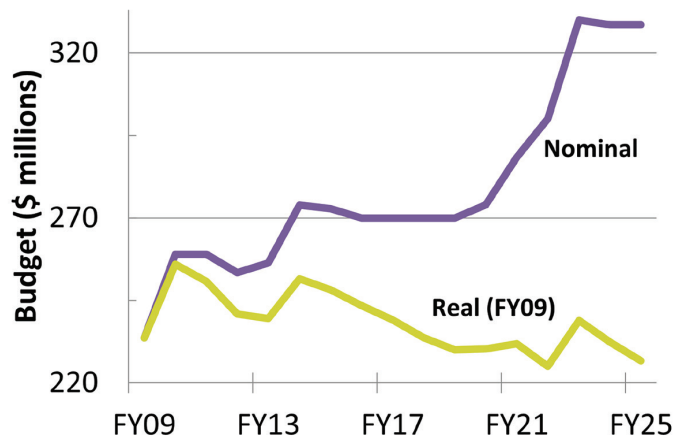
Parent Agency

Because statistical agencies are hesitant or not allowed to communicate with outside entities, and the parent agencies are communicating little information specific to statistical agencies, we have no agency-specific updates in this category. The fact that the staffing cuts occurred indicates lack of support for the statistical agency, support that is required by the Evidence Act

Statistical Integrity Safeguards

Because statistical agencies are hesitant or not allowed to communicate with outside entities and the parent agencies are communicating little information specific to statistical agencies, we have no agency-specific updates in this category. A degree of open communication with outside stakeholders is an important component of statistical integrity safeguards and government transparency.

Census: Current Surveys and Programs



Appropriations for the Census Bureau's Current Surveys Account in Nominal and Inflation-Adjusted ("Real") Dollars, Fiscal Years 2009–2025

NOTE: The GDP deflator is used to adjust nominal appropriations for inflation.

SOURCE: [ASA online resources](#)

IMPACTS

The Census Bureau has faced significant disruption in 2025 through leadership instability, operational constraints from hiring freezes and contract approval backlogs, canceled services, and an unprecedented presidential order to fundamentally alter the constitutional basis of the decennial census.

In August, President Trump directed the Commerce Department to begin work immediately on a new census that would for the first time in the nation's history exclude "people who are in our country illegally" from the count, directing the Census Bureau to "immediately adopt modern technology tools" to reflect only legal residents. In September, George Cook, a political appointee who has served as acting Under Secretary of Commerce for Economic Affairs since September 1, was named acting director of the Census Bureau.

The government-wide hiring freeze has impacted Census operations. The freeze halted at least three local censuses for rapidly growing communities in March. While the bureau received temporary hiring waivers in May and October—allowing resumption of two special local censuses and hiring of approximately 1,500 temporary field workers for the 2026 Census Test—these exceptions only partially address operational needs. Commerce Department policy requiring the Secretary to approve contracts and grants over \$100,000 created a backlog of more than 3,000 requests as of early May, according to the *Washington Post*, potentially including contracts for 2030 decennial census work and myriad surveys.

Longer term, a Commerce inspector general evaluation found the Census Bureau lacks effective strategies to address staffing gaps and high vacancies in field representative positions.

The impacts of staffing loss and a hiring freeze on top of the longer-lived staffing and budget challenges must also be considered in light of the central role the Census Bureau plays for the federal statistical system. Specifically, it is the principal data collection entity for many of the other federal statistical agencies, as discussed in Section 2.2.1. Furthermore, as discussed in Section 2.3.3, its data are critical to other agencies' data programs. Therefore, staffing constraints at the Census Bureau and product disruptions can have major rippling impacts across the statistical agencies.

Multiple services and advisory functions have been terminated. The Census Bureau could not renew its contract with the Population Reference Bureau to maintain the American Community Survey Data Users Group Online Community, serving over 7,000 members since 2013, which ceased operations September 30. Four advisory committees—the Federal Economic Statistics Advisory Committee, Census Scientific Advisory Committee, National Advisory Committee, and 2030 Census Advisory Committee—were terminated in March.

SUMMARY

While we are not updating our ratings for parent agency support and statistical integrity safeguards—primarily for lack of information—we rate Census Bureau resources as CHALLENGING due to concerns about budget and staffing. According to our 2024 report rubric, this rating means, “The agency’s efforts to meet its Evidence Act responsibilities are challenged.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the all-agency recommendations in the body of the report, we reiterate the recommendation from last year, namely that:

- We urge strong parent agency support of the U.S. Census Bureau, along with respect for its statistical integrity.

US CENSUS BUREAU: 2024 HEALTH ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

For full text, see <https://bit.ly/NationsDataAtRiskCensus>.

The July 2024 assessment of the U.S. Census Bureau reveals the federal government's largest statistical agency maintaining a strong innovation culture and broad stakeholder engagement yet also being vulnerable to political interference due to weak statutory autonomy protections and facing persistent funding challenges that constrain its ability to conduct constitutionally mandated and statutorily required data collections.

KEY SUCCESSSES AND STRENGTHS

The Census Bureau demonstrates exceptional innovation, launching the Small Business Pulse Survey and Household Pulse Survey within weeks of the pandemic's onset—both subsequently institutionalized due to their value. The agency released new products measuring technology adoption (machine learning, robotics, AI) and their employment impacts, experimental data linkages showing earnings outcomes for Army veterans, and the Index of Economic Activity (IDEA) aggregating 15 primary economic data series into a daily-updated monthly index. The bureau's website has over 100 million annual views, and the agency is responsible for 13 Principal Federal Economic Indicators. Census data inform distribution of approximately \$1.5 trillion in federal funding annually. The agency receives strong parent agency support through meaningful inclusion in DOC leadership meetings, regular consultation with the director serving as DOC Statistical Official (alternating with the BEA director), and departmental promotion of the 2020 Census. The Census Bureau conducts over 125 surveys (75 economic, 50 demographic), engages extensively with data user communities through advisory committees and conferences, and makes extensive use of administrative datasets to reduce respondent burden while improving timeliness.

CRITICAL CHALLENGES AND VULNERABILITIES

The Census Bureau's most significant vulnerability is weak statutory autonomy protection, with most critical decisions statutorily assigned to the Commerce Secretary rather than the Census director, leaving the agency susceptible to political meddling like that occurring during the 2020 Census. Funding challenges persist, particularly for decennial census build-up and Current Surveys programs. The 2017 Economic Census was delayed for months by the January 2019 government shutdown, and inadequate funding forced cancellation of two 2020 Census field test sites. Declining survey response rates require prioritizing research and investment for effective transition to multimodal data sources. Title 13 confidentiality protections, while important, limit data-sharing with other statistical agencies and restrict geographic detail available to users.

2024 SUPPORT RATINGS SUMMARY

The assessment assigned:

- Autonomy: **Weak**, reflecting minimal statutory protections despite the director's five-year term;
- Parent agency support: **Good**, acknowledging current strong DOC backing while noting historical periods of attempted interference; and
- Budget/staffing: **Mixed**, recognizing challenges maintaining programs, launching new products, and conducting adequate decennial census R&D and testing.