



July 2, 2020

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**CHIEF EXECUTIVE
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Mr. Arturo Vargas

† deceased

Sheleen Dumas
Department PRA Clearance Officer
Office of the Chief Information Officer
Commerce Department
14th and Constitution Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20230

Submitted via www.reginfo.gov

Dear Ms. Dumas:

On behalf of NALEO Educational Fund, I write to comment upon the Census Bureau's notice of information collection published at 85 FR 34177 on June 3, 2020, concerning the Current Population Survey (CPS) Voting and Registration Supplement (the "Supplement"). This Supplement provides unique and critically important information about Americans' voting behavior. We previously submitted the following comments urging the Bureau to enhance the Supplement's usefulness to election administrators, academic researchers, and non-profit organizations that encourage voter participation by increasing the survey's sample size or by conducting targeted oversampling of small populations; by administering the survey in multiple languages; and by adding reference to the COVID-19 pandemic to multiple-choice answers on the 2020 questionnaire. In addition, we encouraged the Census Bureau to develop contingency plans that enable it to successfully field this survey in 2020 even if public health considerations prevent the conduct of in-person interviews. We write now to reiterate the continuing importance of incorporating these adaptations into this survey instrument and into plans to collect data for the Supplement this fall.

NALEO Educational Fund is the nation's leading nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that promotes the full participation of Latinos in the American political process, from citizenship to public service. Our Board members and constituency encompass the nation's more than 6,800 Latino elected and appointed officials and include Republicans, Democrats, and Independents. NALEO Educational Fund has been a national leader for several decades in both Census outreach and policy development, and voter engagement research and program activities. Since the 1990 Census, our organization has conducted outreach campaigns to promote the full and accurate count of the Latino community. We also have extensive experience working closely with our Latino elected official constituency, other government officials, and partner organizations to promote public policies that facilitate high quality, comprehensive data collection. The insights we have gained from publications including Supplement tables have driven our dynamic and successful campaigns to increase Latino voter engagement. For well over a decade, we have provided information and assistance to hundreds of thousands of voters

through our year-round, bilingual hotline, 888-VE-Y-VOTA, and through nationwide dissemination of bilingual voting rights public service announcements, palm cards, and other materials. In addition, we frequently use Supplement data to provide the public with accurate and relevant information about Latino political participation and impact.

The Voting and Registration Supplement Should Supply More High Quality Information About Small Populations by Increasing Sample Size or Incorporating Targeted Oversampling

NALEO Educational Fund and numerous public sector and nonprofit partners with which we work to increase civic engagement rely on the unique information the Supplement supplies about the behavior and attitudes of discrete groups of voters; however, the usefulness of these data is limited by the high margins of error associated with some statistics, and unavailability of others due to insufficient sampling. For example, Latino and Asian American populations in southeastern states such as Alabama have increased rapidly in recent years. According to American Community Survey (ACS) data, the number of Latino voting-age citizens more than doubled between 2008 and 2018 in the states of Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina. During this same decade, the Asian American citizen voting-age population increased by 59 percent in Alabama, 84 percent in Georgia, 101 percent in North Carolina, and 86 percent in South Carolina.

The rapid growth of these populations of voters who have historically encountered discrimination and language barriers to participation in elections creates heightened interest among stakeholders in understanding experiences at the polls, and enhancing efforts to mobilize voters from underrepresented communities. But unfortunately, the modest sample sizes for the CPS and the Supplement prevent the Census Bureau from obtaining a sufficient number of responses to provide statistically valid observations about population subgroups that are important, but relatively smaller in absolute numbers.

For example, the 2018 Supplement tables do not include any data on the number or percentage of eligible Asian American Alabamians or South Carolinians who registered and voted, nor of eligible Latino residents of Mississippi who were registered. Margins of error associated with other similarly important data points are extremely large: for example, more than 26 percentage points for percentages of Latino Alabamians who were registered and voted, and more than 15 percentage points for statistics about Latino and Asian Georgians and North Carolinians. The margin of error associated with the percentage of eligible Latino South Carolinians who voted in 2018 exceeded the total percentage of those projected to have cast a ballot, which creates significant concerns about the extent to which the reported figures accurately represent the voting behavior of the population.

The frequent occurrence of missing or unreliable data in Supplement publications is a significant hindrance to the efforts of organizations like NALEO Educational Fund, which do not have access to any other statistically valid and trustworthy source of data about self-reported race and ethnicity cross-tabulated with self-reported voting and registration behavior. We urge the Census Bureau to ensure its ability to provide comprehensive

reports that disaggregate information about voting activity, and impediments to registration and voting, by Americans' demographic characteristics.

The Bureau should increase the Supplement sample size, or conduct oversampling of smaller populations, so that tables that convey registration rates by state and by voters' race and ethnicity contain comparable margins of error for comparable subpopulations in different states. Registration and voting rates for Latinos in Alabama should be reported with margins of error similar to those associated with registration and voting rates for Latinos in states like California, Texas, Florida, and Arizona. We encourage the Bureau to design its methodology to ensure that margins of error of published Supplement data produce coefficients of variation (CV) that meet thresholds widely considered to demonstrate high reliability, such as Esri Demographics' ArcGIS's reference point of a CV no greater than 12.¹

The Voting and Registration Supplement Should Be Conducted in Languages Other Than English

American citizens who are not yet fully fluent in English are a numerous and important voting contingent. 2018 ACS 1-year data show that there are more than 11.4 million limited-English proficient adult U.S. citizens; these potential voters constitute nearly five percent of the electorate. It is indispensable that they be represented among the Americans who respond to the Supplement, and in fact, the Bureau contemplates that they will be by including "Difficulty with English" among multiple-choice responses to the question about the reason for one's non-registration. Therefore, we are dismayed that it does not appear that the Bureau has translated the Supplement Questionnaire or Advance Letter into any languages other than English, nor otherwise provided direction to enumerators around administering the questionnaire in languages other than English.

For the Bureau to accurately capture information from an adequate number of the millions of Americans who may struggle with English as they attempt to navigate the electoral process, it must request that information in a language in which those respondents can communicate. To the extent that it does not already do so, we very strongly encourage the Census Bureau to produce standard translations of the Supplement in Spanish and the other non-English languages most commonly spoken by adult U.S. citizens; and to equip CPS enumerators with language cards with which they can ascertain a respondent's favored language, and access to phone interpretation services through which they can conduct interviews.

¹ Esri Demographics, "American Community Survey (ACS), Esri Improves Confidence in Using ACS," <https://doc.arcgis.com/en/esri-demographics/data/acs.htm> (accessed May 8, 2020).

The Census Bureau Must Anticipate Unique Pandemic-Related Challenges to Fielding the 2020 Voting and Registration Supplement, and Ask Potential Voters About COVID-19's Effects

The 2020 Supplement survey will be an unprecedentedly challenging undertaking, given the high likelihood that Americans will face the ongoing, acute threat of severe COVID-19-related illness through and beyond November 2020. Following the President's declaration of a national emergency in March 2020, states widely adopted stay-at-home orders, and the Census Bureau suspended field operations that were critical components of the decennial census; approximately two months after issuance of the emergency declaration, these operations remain in suspense in significant part. The Bureau has changed its protocols to reduce contact between its employees and survey respondents, and has not yet committed to a plan to resume some of its major operations, like Mobile Questionnaire Assistance. In sum, the scale of disruption to this survey effort upon which our representative democracy relies portends similar, or greater, disruptions to all other data collection conducted by the Census Bureau during the present pandemic.

Unfortunately, there is a strong possibility that pandemic conditions will prevail while the Bureau fields the 2020 Supplement in November 2020. For example, in an April 2020 interview with the editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Dr. Nicholas Christakis of Yale University said, "In the fall, I think there is at least a 75% chance it will come back with a second wave," of COVID-19. A report by Stephen Kissler, Christine Tedijanto, Edward Foldstein, Yonatan Grad, and Marc Lipsitch in the April 2020 *Science* magazine opined that, "recurrent wintertime outbreaks of SARS-CoV-2 will probably occur after the initial, most severe pandemic wave...To avoid [exceeding critical care capacities], prolonged or intermittent social distancing may be necessary into 2022." If public health considerations do prevent the Census Bureau from timely sending enumerators to conduct in-person CPS interviews in the weeks following the 2020 general election, we hope that the agency can identify alternate means of securing a sufficient number of responses from households chosen in accordance with its protocols. To do this, the Bureau may need to ask CPS respondents to submit information through the internet, or on a paper form that it sends and receives by mail. We urge early contingency planning, as well as attention to the imperative of obtaining a sample that is representative of all American households, including those most likely to lack high-speed internet access and other modalities of communication.

In addition, we urge the Census Bureau to add response choices to question S4 about respondents' reasons for not voting that reference the COVID-19 pandemic. We hope that this will be relevant only for the 2020 version of the Supplement questionnaire. The Bureau can produce valuable information about the effect of this public health emergency on voting behavior by adding choices that follow "Illness or disability (own or family's)" in the responses to question S4, and state, "Fear of exposure to COVID-19" and "Lack of information about voting by mail." In the alternative, the Bureau might add similar phrases to the "Other" answer prompt, so that enumerators read that choice as, for example, "Other, such as fear of exposure to COVID-19." Finally, the Bureau should consider whether a similar addition to the response choices for question S3 about reasons for not being registered is feasible and would elicit useful data.

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Conclusion

NALEO Educational Fund appreciates the opportunity to comment on the methodology and operational plans for conduct of the 2020 Supplement. With appreciation for the value of the information it produces to our voter mobilization, research and election policy work, we would be pleased to discuss our recommendations further or to collaborate with the Census Bureau in any way to promote the success of CPS data collection in 2020 and into the future. Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Arturo Vargas', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Arturo Vargas
Chief Executive Officer

A large, light gray watermark logo of the NALEO Educational Fund is centered on the page. It features a large, stylized 'N' and 'E' forming a circle around the word 'NALEO' in a serif font, with 'Educational Fund' in a sans-serif font below it.

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