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Overview of FY2021 Appropriations for the Census Bureau

Introduction

This In Focus presents an overview of FY2021 discretionary budget authority for the Census Bureau, including the FY2021 budget request, related congressional actions, and comparisons with FY2020 funding. As a Department of Commerce (DOC) agency, the bureau is funded through the Departments of Commerce and Justice, Science, and Related Agencies (CJS) appropriations bills.

FY2021 Budget Request

The Administration's \$1,672.0 million FY2021 budget request for the Census Bureau is \$5,886.3 million (77.9%) below the \$7,558.3 million appropriated for FY2020. The FY2021 request is divided between the bureau's two major accounts, Current Surveys and Programs, and Periodic Censuses and Programs.

Current Surveys and Programs

The FY2021 request for Current Surveys and Programs is \$279.3 million, \$5.3 million (1.9%) above the \$274.0 million enacted for FY2020. Under this account are Current Economic Statistics and Current Demographic Statistics.

Current Economic Statistics

Current Economic Statistics include business, construction, manufacturing, general economic, foreign trade, and government statistics that, as the FY2021 budget justification for the Census Bureau states, "provide critical information" about the U.S. economy and underlie "key economic indicators" like the gross domestic product (GDP).

The request for Current Economic Statistics in FY2021 is \$196.0 million, \$11.3 million (6.1%) above the \$184.7 million enacted for FY2020.

Current Demographic Statistics

Current Demographic Statistics include those from household surveys like the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) and the Current Population Survey (CPS), which is undertaken jointly by the Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), is two-thirds funded by BLS, and provides monthly unemployment rates. Other Current Demographic Statistics are analyses of population and housing characteristics, as in the Current Population Reports, which are based on CPS and other data and are the official source of U.S. income and poverty statistics; the Housing Vacancy Survey; intercensal demographic and housing unit estimates for the total United States and subnational geographic levels; and population projections into the future.

The \$83.3 million FY2021 request for Current Demographic Statistics is \$6.0 million (6.8%) less than the \$89.3 million FY2020-enacted amount.

Periodic Censuses and Programs

In the FY2021 request, Periodic Censuses and Programs (PCP) would receive \$1,392.7 million, \$5,891.6 million (80.9%) below the FY2020-enacted \$7,284.3 million, and 83.3% of the Census Bureau's total FY2021 request. (In contrast, the FY2020 request of \$5,885.4 million for PCP was 95.7% of the bureau's \$6,149.4 million total, mainly to fund the 2020 decennial census in its peak year of operations and expenses. The request for the census typically declines steeply after the census year.) About \$3.6 million of the FY2021 amount for PCP is to be transferred to the DOC Office of Inspector General (OIG) for continuing bureau oversight. Four major programs under PCP are discussed below.

2020 Decennial Census

The decennial census is the bureau's largest, most costly undertaking. Article I, Section 2, clause 3 of the U.S. Constitution, as amended by Section 2 of the Fourteenth Amendment, requires a population count every 10 years, to apportion seats in the House of Representatives. The data also are used to redraw state congressional and legislative districts and, with census-related American Community Survey (ACS) data and intercensal estimates, in formulas to determine states' and localities' annual shares of federal funds, estimated by the Census Bureau as of FY2015 at \$689.3 billion and by an academic researcher as of FY2017 at \$1.5 trillion.

The FY2021 request for the 2020 census is \$812.4 million, \$5,883.6 million (87.9%) less than the \$6,696.0 million enacted for FY2020. The budget justification states that the FY2020-enacted amount includes \$669 million for "contingency needs that may arise" during the census, "such as major disasters or other unforeseen risks realized, and \$263 million in additional sensitivity risks" if initial response rates are lower than projected. "Combined with funding provided in prior year appropriations," the justification continues, the "bureau has \$7.9 billion available to support the 2020 decennial operation." An April 27, 2020, House Oversight and Reform Committee press release noted an April 24 committee briefing by senior bureau officials, including the bureau's chief financial officer. He reported the amount of contingency funding as \$2 billion and said, according to the release, that the bureau "currently anticipates using only \$1.5 billion" of the \$2 billion "in connection with the delay in operations and response to the coronavirus outbreak" (COVID-19; see CRS In Focus IF11486, *2020 Census Fieldwork Delayed by COVID-19*, by Jennifer D. Williams).

American Community Survey

The ACS, which the bureau implemented nationwide in 2005 and 2006, is the replacement for the decennial census long form that, from 1940 to 2000, collected detailed socioeconomic and housing data from a sample of U.S. residents as the census was administered. The ACS is sent monthly to small population samples. It covers more than 3.5 million households a year in every U.S. county and the District of Columbia. The monthly data are aggregated to produce new estimates every year for areas with at least 65,000 people and every five years for areas from the most populous to those with fewer than 20,000 people. According to the budget justification, the bureau releases more than 11 billion ACS estimates annually on more than 40 “social, demographic, housing, and economic” topics. The ACS “is the only source” of data on “many of these topics for rural areas and small populations.” Similarly, the Puerto Rico Community Survey is conducted across 78 county-equivalents there.

The FY2021 request for the ACS is \$226.4 million, \$8.4 million (3.8%) above the \$218.0 million enacted for FY2020.

Economic Census

The economic census originated when, the Census Bureau has written, “Congress responded to a rapid increase in industrial activity” by instructing 1810 census enumerators to take “an account of the several manufacturing establishments and manufactures” under their purview. The modern economic census occurs every five years. It is, the budget justification states, “the foundation” for measuring “U.S. businesses and their economic impact.” Economic census and related statistics provided to the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) are “key data” for estimating GDP and other principal economic indicators.

During FY2021, the release of 2017 Economic Census data is to continue; 2022 census planning and development also are to continue.

The \$136.0 million FY2021 economic census request is \$8.4 million (6.5%) more than the \$127.6 million FY2020-enacted amount.

Census of Governments

The census of governments, conducted since 1957, is the bureau’s other major quinquennial census. The budget justification calls this census “the primary source of facts about the structure and function of the public sector of the U.S. economy,” which accounts for about 12% of GDP and 15% of the civilian labor force.

In FY2021, the bureau plans to continue reengineering the 2022 Census of Governments to feature all-electronic responses and greater reliance on administrative records to reduce respondent burden.

The \$11.8 million FY2021 census of governments request is \$168,000 (1.4%) below the \$12.0 million enacted for FY2020.

Congressional Action

FY2021 CJS appropriations legislation has not been introduced yet in the House or Senate.

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