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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 the much larger Periodic Censuses and Programs account.

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 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 decrease reflects the completion of most 2020 census activities in FY2020, when census expenses were greatest. 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

House

On July 14, 2020, the House Committee on Appropriations reported its FY2021 CJS appropriations bill, H.R. 7667. It became part of minibuss legislation, H.R. 7617, which the House passed on July 31. H.R. 7617 would provide \$1,681.1 million for the Census Bureau, including \$288.4 million for Current Surveys and Programs, and \$1,392.7 million for Periodic Censuses and Programs. The total amount for the bureau would be \$5,877.2 million (77.8%) less than the FY2020-enacted amount; for Current Surveys and Programs, \$14.4 million (5.3%) more; and for PCP, \$5,891.6 million (80.9%) less.

Senate

On November 10, 2020, Senator Richard Shelby, chair of the Senate Committee on Appropriations, released drafts of all 12 FY2021 regular appropriations bills, with draft explanatory statements. The purpose of the release was to further negotiations on appropriations between the House and Senate. As drafted, the CJS bill would provide the Census Bureau with \$1,799.7 million, \$5,758.6 (76.2%) less than in FY2020. Current Surveys and Programs would receive \$285.0 million, an increase of \$11.0 million (4.0%), and PCP would receive \$1,514.7 million, \$5,769.6 million (79.2%) below the FY2020-enacted level. The Senate bill, like H.R. 7617, would provide for a transfer of about \$3.6 million from PCP to the DOC OIG for ongoing bureau oversight.

Current Status

P.L. 116-159, Division A, the Continuing Appropriations Act, 2021, funds the Census Bureau until December 11, 2020, at \$1,788.7 million, \$5,769.6 million (76.3%) below the \$7,558.3 million enacted for FY2020. According to Section 101(2) of the law, the bureau’s funding continues at the rate specified in the FY2020 Consolidated Appropriations Act, P.L. 116-93, except that the \$2.5 billion in emergency funding provided for Periodic Censuses and Programs by P.L. 116-93 is no longer considered an emergency appropriation under Section 251(b)(2)(G) of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985. Section 124 of P.L. 116-159 states that the amount for PCP “may be apportioned up to the rate for operations necessary to conduct the 2020 Decennial Census Program.” Current Surveys and Programs is funded at the FY2020 level of \$274.0 million. PCP is receiving \$1,514.7 million, \$5,769.6 million (79.2%) below the \$7,284.3 million FY2020-enacted amount.

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