What’s Race Got to do With It? Census 2020

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The Issue
Community leaders, including philanthropy, rely on accurate U.S. census data to make good decisions about schools, seniors, veterans and other community needs. The data collected by the decennial census determines the number of seats each state has in the U.S. House of Representatives and is used to distribute billions of federal funds to local communities. Businesses also make numerous critical decisions using census data. However, the Census Bureau is facing a daunting set of challenges as it prepares for the 2020 census. Since the bureau is facing budget constraints like never before, it is planning to collect the majority of census information online, scale back door-to-door outreach and roll back canvassing.

Historically, the census has missed disproportionate numbers of people of color, immigrants, young children (especially Latino and Black children); and low-income, low educational attainment, and rural households, leading to a decade of inequity in political power, government funding, and private sector investment for these communities.

Throughout the 2020 Census “lifecycle” (FY 2012 through FY 2021) so far, Congress failed each year to allocate the amount of money the Census Bureau requested—by ~$210 million cumulatively through FY2017. The Census Bureau must have a significant funding ramp-up and receive the money on time for the next two years, to ensure a fair and accurate census—one that counts all communities equally well.