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Question about the census, congressional representation, and undocumented immigrants

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It is known that the census determines the number of seats a state has in the house. However, I would like to know whether this number is based upon the citizens in a state or overall population in a state. I live in the state of California, and it is known that there is a number of undocumented immigrants. However, because they have no obligation to answer the census (I don't even know if they are required to answer the census) would that not mean that there may be a number of people who are not counted by the census? Also, as a result of this, how accurately does the census actually determine the population of a state?

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[Albert Y. Kim](#) Signature Track · 2 days ago 🗨

I would argue that even more pressing than the issue of undocumented immigrants is the issue of several pockets of US citizens not being counted. Studies have shown that previous censuses have missed record numbers of people that are traditionally hard to count, mainly urban members of ethnic and racial minorities.

So [prior to the 2000 Census the Clinton Administration](#) proposed switching the census to a model where it would only attempt to count approximately 90 percent of the United States population and rely on statistical sampling methods to determine the number remaining. These statistical sampling methods are analogous to political polls where pollsters don't attempt to question every single member of the electorate, but rather take a random sample. The Clinton Administration's plan was hoped to achieve two ends: reducing costs and more importantly improving accuracy.

However, the [Supreme Court ruled in 1999 by a 5-4 decision](#) that sampling could not "under any circumstances" be used to reapportion House of Representative seats, since Article I Section 2 of the Constitution calls for an "actual Enumeration." That being said, sampling could still be used for other purposes, such as state redistricting and the distribution of federal funds to the states.

One cannot ignore the political angle of this debate, as the groups that traditionally go undercounted in the census tend to lean Democrat, so both sides of the aisle have a vested interest in how the census is conducted.

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