

Census: Fear, distrust, from some residents

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By **DAVID OLSON**
The Press-Enterprise

Census Tract 58 in San Bernardino is a gritty area dotted with grassy vacant lots, apartment buildings and boarded-up homes. Half the residents live below the pov level. Many speak little or no English. Some are illegal immigrants.

It is in neighborhoods like this, where fear, distrust and cynicism about the federal government is common, that the U.S. **Census Bureau** will face some of its biggest challenges in its count of the nation's population.

Tract 58 has the highest "hard-to-count" score of any of the 587 tracts in Riverside San Bernardino counties: 119 out of a possible 132. Some well-off areas of Redla Riverside, Corona and Woodcrest have scores of zero.

Most Americans, including residents of Tract 58, will receive their census forms th week. The survey includes only 10 questions. Answers are confidential.

Federal funding is based in part on census tallies, and San Bernardino County es that each uncounted person will mean \$20,000 less over the next 10 years for the schools, highways, parks and other services.

Yet many people in Tract 58 and the neighborhoods surrounding it wonder what g will do to participate.

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From left, **Mike Davis**, Kia Smith and Dubray Fortee, who are homeless in San Bernardino, talk about the

2010 census outside Gene's Market in San Bernardino. Smith, 32, said she'd probably fill out the census -- if census workers can find her. "Maybe it will make some changes," Smith said.

Valerie Abarca didn't fill out the census in 2000 and plans to toss this year's form trash as well.

"They say it gets all this stuff done, but I sure ... haven't seen it," she said.

As Abarca, 35, played with her 10-month-old daughter while waiting for her clothes at Fiesta Lavandería Laundromat at Waterman Avenue and Ninth Street, she recalled how she heard the same promises of community improvements before the 2000 census.

"It's the same," she said. "It's getting worse, as a matter of fact."

"Look at the park over there," said Abarca, referring to nearby Seccombe Lake Recreation Area. "You can't even use those restrooms. They just don't get cleaned."

"Unsanitary," said her husband, John Araiza, 32, who also plans to skip the census.

Hard to Count

Eleven of the 17 Inland tracts with hard-to-count scores of 100 and above are in tracts of San Bernardino or an adjoining unincorporated area. Most, including Tract 58, are in areas around downtown.

Points are added for factors such as poverty, lack of a high school diploma, limited English ability, **unemployment**, living in a rental unit and a recent address change.

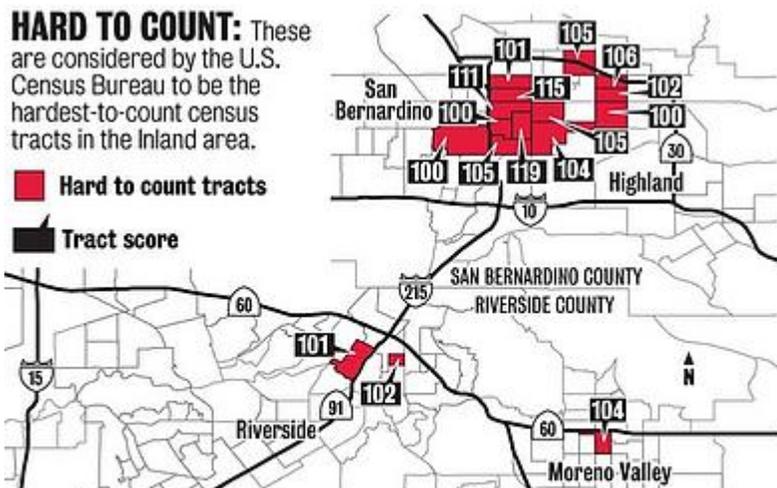
In a country comprised overwhelmingly of immigrants and their descendants, where more than 12 percent of the current population is foreign-born, language has always been a barrier for the census. For the first time, the Census Bureau is sending bilingual forms to households in areas with large numbers of Spanish speakers, and it has language-assistance guides in 58 other languages.

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HARD TO COUNT: These are considered by the U.S. Census Bureau to be the hardest-to-count census tracts in the Inland area.

 Hard to count tracts

 Tract score



Map does not include a census tract in Barstow that is the fourth hardest-to-count census tract in Riverside and San Bernardino counties.
 SOURCES: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU; CALIF. DEPT. OF FINANCE

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Yet even native English speakers -- especially those with low educational attainment -- may be confused by the census, said David Swanson, a demographer at UC Riverside and a longtime adviser to the Census Bureau.

"The form may be intimidating to them, even though they are designed to reach them with relatively low literacy levels," he said.

Many people don't understand what the census is for and that it is linked to funding their communities, Swanson said. Some erroneously believe their answers can be used against them and may fear that participating in the census may lead to the cancellation of government assistance, Swanson said.

In 2000, 59 percent of Tract 58 residents mailed in their census forms, compared to 42 percent countywide. If the Census Bureau doesn't receive a questionnaire from an address, a worker is sent out to conduct an in-person interview -- at an average cost to the government of \$56 per household, compared with the 42-cent cost of a mailed survey.

Yet not everyone answers the door or mails in a form left on a doorknob. Abarca and Araiza said they don't recall getting a visit from a census worker in 2000.

'NOT STABLE'

Many people in San Bernardino are homeless and don't want anyone from the government to find them, said Lupita Ortiz, who is working with the community-organizing group Inland Congregations United for Change to increase census turnout in the city.

"They're not stable and in one place," she said.

Kia Smith sleeps in a tent behind one of the many auto-parts, auto-repair and truck supply shops in and around Tract 58 -- but she didn't want the location revealed for fear the city would kick her out. Until a few weeks ago, Smith slept in Seccombe recre:

area but shifted spots because she worried about being ejected.

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Terry Pierson / The Press-Enterprise
Valerie Abarca, 35, of San Bernardino, holding her daughter April, didn't fill out the census in 2000 and doesn't plan to fill out this year's form. "They say it gets all this stuff done, but I sure ... haven't seen it," she said.

Smith, 32, said she'd probably fill out the census -- if census workers can find her. "Maybe it will make some changes," Smith said, as she stood outside the door of Market at Ninth Street and Sierra Way, asking for money.

The Census Bureau works with shelters and other non-profit groups to find homeless people, said Bee Pindel, manager of the San Bernardino census office. The home effort is part of a broader Census Bureau outreach that includes questionnaire-assistance centers in grocery stores, churches, nonprofit-group offices and other locations, and reliance on trusted community members -- such as clergy and neighborhood activists -- to encourage participation.

The federal government is spending \$14.5 billion on the 2010 census, much of it in hard-to-count areas. California has allocated \$2 million -- including more than \$1 million to Riverside and San Bernardino counties -- to reach hard-to-count areas, but that's a fraction of the \$25 million it spent in 2000, before the state budget crisis hit. Private foundations, including the California Endowment, which is helping to pay for outreach efforts in San Bernardino, are spending about \$8 million statewide.

Getting out Word

The Census Bureau is using billboards, television commercials, newspaper ads, and text messages from church pulpits and other methods to spread the word. Census posters at Hiep Thanh Supermarket in Tract 58 are in Vietnamese and Thai.

But some people still don't know about the census.

"The what?" asked Tract 58 resident Pat Jones, 32. "I never heard of it. Do I get p
Lovie Plascencia at first said she wouldn't fill out the form.

"I'm not interested in government stuff," Plascencia, 24, said as she held the hand
4-year-old daughter, Mia, while walking home to her Tract 58 apartment.

When told the census helps determine funding for schools and other services,
Plascencia said she might participate after all.

But Plascencia predicted many of her neighbors wouldn't care.

"If it doesn't have to do with drugs, they're not interested in it," Plascencia said.

FEAR FACTOR

Javier López has seen the Spanish-language TV ads that assure viewers that the
will not share information with anyone. But many undocumented immigrants are s
wary, López said as he smoked a cigarette with two friends on the grass outside a
two-story, stucco apartment building populated largely by immigrants.

"I think a lot of people are going to be afraid," López, 22, said in Spanish. "On TV
say, no, this will not affect immigration or anything, but who knows what might hap
the future? Many people are not going to take the risk."

The census form does not even ask about immigration status. Yet rumors abound
census forms will be used to conduct immigration raids.

"I don't believe it will be confidential," Teresa Gutiérrez, 47, said in Spanish as sh
next to her steel security door in her Tract 58 apartment. "I heard on the news the
share this with immigration."

Gutiérrez said someone from the **Obama** administration sounded the warning on
news -- but it is likely Gutiérrez misunderstood, because the Obama administrati
promoting the census and the Census Bureau is a federal agency. Federal law pr
census employees from sharing information with immigration authorities or anyon
and they face up to five years in prison if they do so.

Gilberto Menchor, who lives near Gutiérrez, said he is eager to participate. Mench
said in Spanish that he knows undocumented immigrants have nothing to fear fro
census.

"The one thing has nothing to do with the other," he said. "The (census) count is c
the good of the community."

Staff writer Jim Miller contributed to this report.

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THE QUESTIONS

To view the questions on the 2010 census, along with the government's reasons

asking the questions, go to 2010.census.gov, click "How it works" and then "The Questions on the Form."
