

2020 Census:

Security and Privacy Explained

United States
Census
2020

In 2020, for the first time ever, the US Census will allow households to respond to the census online. The majority of households will receive a letter from the Census Bureau containing a code to access the online form. The online option is a milestone for the census, one that requires careful thought about security and privacy.

SECURITY

As the Census Bureau prepares to go digital in 2020, **cybersecurity** becomes ever more important. The Census Bureau commits to protecting your privacy in the 2020 Census and beyond, and is working hard to ensure that your responses are kept secure during and after you complete the census form.

Regardless of whether you give your responses online or to a census enumerator, your responses will be encrypted so that **only** the Census Bureau can read them. The Bureau is working with experts to secure the online response form by using top-of-the-line cybersecurity techniques. In fact, the Census Bureau has made sure that the form can handle over 600,000 visitors at once without a reduction in performance or security.

PRIVACY

The Census Bureau is **legally bound** to keep all personally identifiable information (such as full name or address) confidential for 72 years after collection. Records for the 2020 census will be released in 2092. Starting with the 2020 Census, the Census Bureau will incorporate **differential privacy**, a new method of privacy protection based on the idea that an attacker should not be able to learn anything about you from any information you provide. This is done by carefully arranging data so that statistics such as counts and averages stay accurate, but individuals cannot be identified. Differential privacy is **future-proof**, meaning no matter how many data breaches occur, your data still cannot be reconstructed.

LEGAL PROTECTIONS

In addition to technological protections, the Census Bureau is also subject to **Title 13** of the United States Code. Title 13 lays out the Census Bureau's [legal obligation](#) to protect the confidentiality of your data. Any employee of the Census Bureau is sworn for life to keep your data confidential. Anyone who violates Title 13 protections at any point, even after leaving the Census Bureau, will face severe penalties, including up to **5 years in prison** and/or a **fine of up to \$250,000**.

