



Written by [Steven Yates](#) on March 9, 2010

Census Should Stick To Constitutional Limits, Says Ron Paul

Every time a year ending in a zero swings around, the federal government conducts a census — typically in early spring, meaning that 2010 Census forms should be in our mailboxes in a matter of a few weeks or days. Advance letters for the 2010 Census have probably already landed in a lot of mailboxes around the country. The federal government's conducting a census is Constitutional, but in the words of Ron Paul — as is often the case, the single "No" vote against participation in the 2010 Census — the census “has grown far beyond what the framers of our Constitution intended.”



A capsule overview of the history of the census might be useful. The single reference to conducting a census in the Constitution occurs in Article I, Sec. 9: “No Capitation, or other direct, Tax shall be laid, unless in proportion to the Census or enumeration herein before directed to be taken.” And, from Article I, Sec. 2: “The actual Enumeration shall be made within three Years after the first Meeting of the Congress of the United States, and within every subsequent Term of ten Years, in such Manner as they shall by Law direct.”

The first census was taken in 1790. Its purpose was a headcount to determine how many persons lived in each Congressional District. This was to apportion Congressional seats among the various states. In 1810, however, the government began collecting information on additional questions such as housing conditions, schools, achievement of students and the economy, and so on. The amount of information on census forms continued to expand over ensuing decades.

Most constitutionalists now see many questions on the census as invasions of citizens' privacy. Many of the questions mirror the shift to collectivism and redistribution of the wealth we have seen over the past century. In a column explaining his No vote, Dr. Paul wrote, “The invasive nature of the current census raises serious questions about how and why government will use the collected information. It also demonstrates how the federal bureaucracy consistently encourages citizens to think of themselves in terms of groups, rather than as individual Americans. The not so subtle implication is that each group, whether ethnic, religious, social, or geographic, should speak up and demand its “fair share” of federal largesse.”

Moreover, many observers of how the federal government now conducts its business wonder what will be done with the information collected. This year, for the first time, the feds have recorded the GPS coordinates of every front door on every street in every city and town in America, so they can pinpoint our locations with greater accuracy. The U.S. Census Bureau assures us that our information is safe. It will be locked away for 72 years, and not made available to other agencies. But as Dr. Paul observes, information from a census was used during World War II to locate Japanese Americans; it was used during the Vietnam War era to find those who refused military conscription; it has been used by the IRS



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to detect tax evaders.

I was recently afforded an advanced glance at this year's ten-question form online. The 2010 Census stresses simplicity. The first question asks, "How many were living in this house, apartment, or mobile home on April 1, 2010?"

The form should have stopped there. The second question asks, "Were there any additional people staying here April 1, 2010 that you did not include in Question 1?" It almost sounds as though the author(s) of this year's census do not trust people to answer Question 1 truthfully! If the U.S. Census Bureau trusts us, then why put that kind of question on the 2010 Census? Many federal laws and regulations are, of course, built up under the assumption that we taxpaying citizens cannot be trusted.

To the other questions, Dr. Paul tells us, we are constitutionally justified in telling the U.S. Census Bureau, "None of your business." Not returning the form, however, or returning it incomplete, will exact the following consequence: a census bureaucrat will pay you a visit to get the answers in person. Continued refusal to cooperate can result in a fine of up to \$5,000. No law-abiding U.S. citizens would give compliance with the census a second thought, of course, were it limited to, "How many people reside at this address?"

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