



From voter suppression to census suppression

a citizenship

question to the

standard census

form will mean a lower

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Last fall, I asked some members of the

California Endowment team, who had just completed their excellent work on voter registration and previously had done outreach for Covered California, what their next big project would be. They told me: "The census."

The census? Frankly, I thought the census was like eating your vegetables—something good, but not one of the most significant issues of our time. I was wrong.

Census data determines the number of U.S. House representatives each state receives. Census data controls the size of state and local election districts. And census data is used to allocate about \$675 billion a year—about \$20,000 per person—in federal funds for housing, transportation, schools and more, over the decade that follows the census. This is a ton of money.

If all people were counted, as they should be, this would be a great system. But not all populations are counted equally.

estimates that the 2010 census had overcounted non-Hispanic whites by 0.08 percent, while undercounting African-Americans by 2.1 percent and Hispanics by 1.5 percent. And these problems occurred before President Donald Trump and the fear he has instilled in the immigrant community with his rhetoric.

Now the same people who brought you voter suppression and a tax bill that penalized Democratic-voting states including California are working on census suppression.

By adding a citizenship question to the standard census form, we will see a lower count in minority and immigrant communities, which will decrease political representation and federal revenue for areas that have a high percentage of these populations—California, for example.

In a bizarre legal defense, the Trump administration said it needed to add the

citizenship question to better enforce the Voting Rights Act. In January, a federal judge in New York ruled against U.S. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, saying he "failed to consider several important aspects of the problem; alternately ignored, cherry-picked, or badly misconstrued the evidence in the record before him; acted irrationally both in light of that evidence and his own stated decisional criteria; and failed to justify significant departures from past policies and practices—a veritable smorgas-bord of classic, clear-cut ... violations."

You'd think this strongly worded decision would be the last word. But no, the Trump administration is appealing the case to the conservative majority on the U.S. Supreme Court, which is expected to make

its ruling by the end of June.

Much is at stake. One

government estimate is that 6.5 million residents may not participate in the census if the citizenship question is included.

What would happen, I wonder, if the commerce secretary wanted to add a question on gun ownership? That question might suppress the census count

among those individuals who did not want the federal government to know that they had guns. And gun-toting states such as Wyoming, Alaska and Montana would risk losing large amounts of federal funding. The citizenship question makes as much sense as the gun question. Neither should be on the census.

The census should be not be manipulated for political gain. We have enough of that already.

The census fight is a political fight. It is a revenue fight. And it is a fight for the soul of America.

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