The U.S. census, mandated by Article I, Section 2 of the Constitution, is conducted every 10 years to count each resident of the United States. A complete and accurate census is vital. The census determines each state’s representation in the House of Representatives and dictates how billions of federal dollars are spent on critical services in local communities.

This year, census takers began going door-to-door on July 1, working to ensure that every household completed the census in an effort that was expected to take until October 31. Yet on August 3 the U.S. Census Bureau Director Steven Dillingham announced that the agency would “end field data collection by September 30, 2020.” As of that announcement, only 63% of households had completed the census.

With September 30 fast approaching, there remains significant danger of an inaccurate census if the deadline is not extended. The pandemic has slowed progress, making it difficult for census workers to reach certain populations. And those most likely to be excluded are people who are already vulnerable and marginalized—people of color, undocumented people, people experiencing homelessness—and who will be most harmed if the census is inaccurate.

In a new poll of likely voters, we found overwhelming support for extending the census to ensure a more accurate count of the United States population. Seventy percent of all poll respondents supported extending the deadline because the census is used for critical functions, like drawing congressional districts and allocating federal funding to education, transit, and health care, among other vital community needs. This support runs across party lines, with 78% support among Democrats, 65% support among Republicans, and 59% support among third party voters.
A majority of voters (66%) also support the federal government allocating additional resources for census outreach to ensure that vulnerable and marginalized populations are not under counted.

Polling Methodology

From 9/18/2020 to 9/19/2020 Data for Progress conducted a survey of 1,104 likely voters nationally using web panel respondents. The sample was weighted to be representative of likely
voters by age, gender, education, race, and voting history. The survey was conducted in English. The margin of error is +/- 2.9 percentage points.