



How & Why to Talk About Census & Voting Rights Amidst Uprisings for Justice

[OurCount](#), a project of [Color Of Change](#), is a movement to ensure that every Black person counts, every Black community counts, and every Black vote counts. Read on for more guidance on how to contextualize and discuss critical elements of democracy amidst ongoing uprisings for justice and retaliatory racist violence.

Democracy is about so much more than just voting. When we talk about democracy, we're talking about *all* of the ways people influence and share decision-making power in society, including being counted in the census, voting, organizing, engaging in protest, making demands of elected officials, and more. In order to ensure everyone -- regardless of race or any other facet of our identities -- has what we need to survive and thrive, we must be able to participate in democratic processes on an equal basis. That's how we choose (and/or become) leaders we trust to represent us, how we give our representatives the information they need to make decisions in our collective best interest, and hold them accountable when their actions harm us and the environment that sustains us.

When people are systematically excluded from democratic processes, as Black people in the United States have been for centuries, harm, injustice and violence in all forms is all but inevitable. We are seeing that very plainly not only in glaring examples like the disproportionate rates of Black people suffering harm and death due to COVID-19 and police violence, but also in the desperation that has driven people into the streets by the thousands during a pandemic, and in the hopelessness many people feel watching the Trump and his accomplices abuse power they gained after winning only a minority of the popular vote amidst widespread voter suppression.

In this moment, we must do more than tell people to vote -- particularly when many of the people at greatest risk of illness and violence in this year's elections have also been subjected to policy choices explicitly designed to make it harder to cast a ballot that counts. Instead, we must help people understand how barriers to democratic participation result in both harm to individuals and to society as a whole, and illuminate solutions that will help bring the accountability needed in this moment and enable us to build a more just society going forward.

Until justice is real,

The Color Of Change Democracy Team

Census:

- Police violence and other abuses of power we are protesting right now are a direct outcome of Black communities being undercounted and underrepresented at every level of government for generations.
 - Census data are used to decide how many representatives each state sends to the House of Representatives, how many votes each state gets in the Electoral College, and are also used by state legislators to decide representation at the state and local level.
 - When Black communities are undercounted, representation our communities deserve is given to other communities instead, weakening our political power and thus our ability to hold public officials accountable for their complicity with police violence and mass incarceration.
- If we want to make Black lives matter in public policy, we have to ensure Black people count on the census. Census data are used to make decisions about how [money and power](#) are shared in our society, so when Black communities are undercounted, the resources and representation our communities deserve are sent to more privileged communities instead.
- Every year, the federal government spends nearly \$1.5 trillion in federal dollars on health care, food and housing assistance, education, and more. We deserve our fair share of that funding, *and* the political representation needed to ensure our money is spent on resources and services that help us live, instead of deadly industries like mass incarceration.
- This year we have more options and more power than ever to ensure Black communities are fully counted. It's critical for us to use them.
 - Anyone with an internet connection or a phone can self-respond to the 2020 Census by visiting www.my2020census.gov or calling 844-330-2020. (*Note: For communities needing additional numbers for different languages, [find the relevant phone numbers here.](#)*)
 - Paper forms have also been mailed out to every household in the United States that gets regular mail service, and Census Bureau employees with personal protective equipment are beginning to resume hand-delivering paper forms to the ~5% of households that don't.

Voter Justice:

- In order to permanently change the conditions we're protesting, we need to shift who gets to make decisions in our society. That means we must reclaim our power as citizens, including as voters and as potential candidates for office.

- Overcoming generations of voter suppression policies targeting Black, brown, young, low-income and/or disabled voters will require us to combine our protests with determined efforts to help people overcome unnecessary barriers to voting so we can (re-)elect leaders willing to rewrite unjust laws and pass better ones that make it easier for all of us to vote and live freely.
- This year, it's urgent that we expand safe voting options to protect Black voters from both COVID-19 and intimidation by violent racists. Congress must step up and fund the accommodations we need to reduce the need to vote in person and to make in-person voting as safe as possible. And states must ensure that they offer the following accommodations in order to ensure free, fair, and safe voting conditions for Black voters and everyone else:
 - **Universal, no-excuse vote-by-mail.** To reduce the number of people crowding into polling places and standing in line on election day, all eligible voters must be able to receive and return a ballot by mail using a prepaid postal envelope. This reduces the risk of COVID-19 spreading while increasing access to the ballot.
 - **Secure and accessible ballot collection sites.** To ensure no one in our community is disenfranchised due to lack of mail service, a consistent mailing address, or transportation, states must ensure Black communities have secure, accessible ballot collection sites close to where we live, where voters can receive and return their ballots. These spaces must allow voters to properly observe physical distancing guidelines.
 - **Voter-verifiable ballot tracking.** After decades of disenfranchisement, it's understandable that Black people are concerned that our votes won't be counted. Officials must provide systems that allow voters to track the status of their individual ballot through the system and know it is counted.
 - **Expanded early voting.** For some voters, voting in-person is the only way to ensure they have the proper access, assistance, and/or privacy needed to cast a ballot, so we must take every step to ensure they can do so as safely as possible. Localities must offer multiple in-person early voting locations for 30 days leading up to election day, including weekends. This will reduce crowds at individual polling places and shorten lines on election day, which reduces the risk of COVID-19 spreading while increasing access to the ballot.
 - **Strong public health protocols at polling places.** Along with taking steps to reduce both the number of people that need to vote in-person overall and at any one time, there must also be proper disease prevention protocols in place to protect the remaining in-person voters and poll

workers. Measures such as physical distancing, frequent disinfection of shared surfaces, and mask-wearing must be thoroughly and fairly enforced.

○ **Protection from intimidation.**

- All polling places and their immediate surroundings *must* be gun-free zones.
- Officials must work to prevent efforts by political operatives and extremist groups to intimidate or mislead Black voters and suppress Black turnout, and prosecute people and organizations who engage in threatening election-related behavior.
- As white supremacists have been emboldened by Trump and his accomplices, local officials regardless of political affiliation must clearly declare their commitment to vigorously defending the civil rights of Black voters and anyone else targeted by hate groups in their jurisdictions.
- Social media companies like Facebook and Twitter must step up and protect users from organized disinformation and intimidation campaigns, which disproportionately target Black activists and voters.