

The Risk of Becoming Data-Blind in the Name of Becoming Colorblind

What America could lose if the 2030 Census stops directly measuring race and ethnicity - and why the consequences would not be limited to minority populations.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What happens to our ability to understand inequality, representation, opportunity, health, economic change, and demographic change if we stop collecting the information needed to see those differences?

Preference Analytics

Human understanding in an increasingly intelligent world.

September 2026

Executive Summary

The Trump administration has proposed prohibiting questions about race and ethnicity on the short-form 2030 decennial Census questionnaire and other questionnaires used for population enumeration. As of September 9, 2026, the proposal is not final. It has been released for public inspection and is scheduled for Federal Register publication, followed by public comment.^[1]

The most important fact is also the easiest to miss: the proposal does not eliminate all federal race and ethnicity data. As written, it preserves the Census Bureau's ability to ask those questions on the American Community Survey (ACS) and other non-enumeration surveys, and it allows demographic information to come from administrative records and other sources.^[1]

That distinction matters. The immediate issue is not whether America suddenly becomes unable to measure race or ethnicity. The immediate issue is whether the country should give up the direct, self-identified, complete-count race and Hispanic-origin benchmark produced by the decennial Census - especially at census-block geography - and replace part of that infrastructure with samples, linked records, and statistical models.^[5,7,8,13]

THE AHAA

You cannot determine whether differences are disappearing if you stop measuring the differences. And you cannot address problems you can no longer see.

This is not only a minority-population issue. Race data can reveal when White Americans are disadvantaged, when they are doing better, and when a problem that looks racial is really driven more by geography, age, income, education, disability, or some other factor. Without the race variable, we lose part of our ability to separate those explanations.

Key conclusions

The proposed rule is narrower than many headlines imply. It targets the decennial enumeration questionnaire, not the ACS or every federal race/ethnicity dataset.

The largest immediate loss would be geographic precision and continuity. The ACS is a sample survey and does not publish estimates for individual census blocks; the decennial Census is the anchor for block-level race/Hispanic-origin tabulations.

The consequences would affect White Americans too. Civil-rights protections apply to White people as well as other groups, and public-health, education, labor, and market analysis can reveal problems that disproportionately affect particular White populations.

Administrative records are not a perfect substitute for self-identification. Coverage, classification, timing, linkage, and conceptual differences can vary across groups.

The real policy choice is not simply colorblindness versus racial classification. It is whether America can pursue equal treatment while still retaining the ability to measure whether equal treatment and equal opportunity actually exist.

For researchers and businesses, the manageable case is a decennial-only change. The high-impact tail risk is a broader retreat from race/ethnicity measurement across the ACS or other federal statistical systems.

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1. What the Proposal Actually Changes

The proposed regulation would prohibit questions about race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation on the short-form decennial Census questionnaire and on any questionnaire used for population enumeration. It would still permit questions about biological sex, date of birth, household relationships, and residence criteria. It would also preserve demographic questions on the ACS and other non-enumeration surveys, and it would allow the Census Bureau to receive demographic information from other sources.^[1]

This means a statement such as "the government is ending race data" is too broad. A more accurate description is: the proposal would stop asking people to directly identify their race and ethnicity as part of the ten-year enumeration, while leaving other federal collection channels open.

What changes, and what does not

Element	What would change	What would remain
2030 decennial enumeration	Direct race and ethnicity questions would be removed from enumeration instruments.	The constitutional population count remains; total population still determines apportionment.
American Community Survey	No direct change under the proposed rule.	Race/ethnicity questions remain permitted, along with income, education, language, housing, and other variables.
Other federal surveys	Not automatically affected by this rule.	Programs outside decennial enumeration may continue collecting demographic information.
Administrative records	Likely become more important as a substitute or supplement.	The Bureau may receive race/ethnicity information from other sources.
Redistricting data	The familiar direct decennial source would change.	States would still need population data, and Voting Rights Act obligations would remain.
Broader federal policy	Not decided by this rule alone.	A future decision could either confine the change to the Census or expand the philosophy elsewhere.

Congress has delegated broad authority over census form and content to the Secretary of Commerce under 13 U.S.C. Section 141. But census decisions remain subject to statutory requirements and administrative-law review. The Supreme Court's 2019 decision in *Department of Commerce v. New York* illustrates both sides of that equation: broad census discretion exists, but the agency still must provide an explanation supported by the administrative record.^[2,10]

2. Why Race and Ethnicity Are Measured

Race has appeared in some form in every U.S. decennial Census since 1790, although the categories, purposes, and methods have changed dramatically. Hispanic-origin measurement developed much later. In modern federal statistics, race and ethnicity are treated as social and self-identified statistical concepts, not as biological definitions.^[3,4,12]

Today, the Census Bureau says race and Hispanic-origin data are used for civil-rights enforcement, redistricting and voting-rights analysis, demographic research, program planning, and understanding the populations that governments, businesses, and communities serve.^[3,4,5,6]

The system was already being redesigned

In 2024, the federal government revised Statistical Policy Directive No. 15, the standards used across agencies for race and ethnicity statistics. The revisions moved toward a combined race/ethnicity question, created a new Middle Eastern or North African category, and encouraged more detailed identity reporting. Census research had found that a combined question could better match how many people understand their own identity and reduce some long-standing measurement problems.^[11,12]

That creates an important policy contrast. The statistical system had been moving toward better measurement of increasingly complex identities. The new proposal asks whether the decennial Census should instead stop directly measuring race and ethnicity at all.

3. Colorblindness and Data-Blindness Are Not the Same Thing

There is a fundamental difference between using someone's race to decide how that person should be treated and measuring race to determine whether people are actually being treated differently. Those are not the same thing.

Consider a company that adopts a simple rule: race will not be considered in hiring or promotion. That may be a legitimate colorblind policy. But now suppose the company also stops measuring outcomes by race. If one racial group applies for management positions at roughly the same rate as another but is promoted far less often, the company may never know the difference exists. The lack of data would not prove fairness. It would prove only that the company stopped looking.

A SIMPLE TEST

If a disparity disappears, good data can show that it disappeared. If a disparity remains, good data can show that too. Without measurement, both progress and problems become harder to prove.

This principle cuts in every direction. Race data can document disadvantage among Black or Hispanic Americans. It can also show that a particular White population is doing worse than other groups on a specific outcome. It can show that an apparent racial gap disappears after accounting for income or geography. Or it can show that a gap remains even after those factors are considered. Measurement is what lets us test the story instead of assuming the story.

4. What the Country Would Lose - and What Would Remain

The decennial Census and the ACS are not interchangeable

The decennial Census is designed as a complete enumeration every ten years. The ACS is a continuously fielded sample survey. Both are essential, but they answer different questions. The ACS provides rich information about income, education, language, employment, housing, and many other characteristics. The decennial Census provides the most comprehensive population count and extremely detailed geography.^[7,8,9]

The Census Bureau does not publish ACS estimates for individual census blocks. Block groups are the smallest standard ACS geography. By contrast, decennial redistricting products include race and Hispanic-origin data down to census blocks. That distinction matters whenever analysts need to build districts, examine a few neighborhoods, evaluate a proposed service area, or compare very small geographic units.^[5,8]

Feature	Decennial Census	ACS	Administrative / modeled data
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Feature	Decennial Census	ACS	Administrative / modeled data
Coverage	Complete-enumeration design every 10 years.	Sample survey conducted continuously.	Depends on source systems and successful record linkage.
Fine geography	Core population tabulations reach census blocks.	No published block estimates; block group is the smallest standard geography.	Potentially fine internally, but release depends on method and privacy rules.
Race/ethnicity construct	Historically direct self-identification, with assignment/imputation when missing.	Direct survey response plus sampling and estimation.	May inherit classifications from other records or statistical models.
Primary error concerns	Coverage, response, processing, privacy protection.	Sampling error plus survey error.	Coverage, linkage, classification, model, and source error.
Continuity	Provides a once-a-decade benchmark for change.	Strong continuous trend series, but not a complete count.	Continuity depends on changing source systems and models.

5. Why This Could Hurt White Americans Too

Race and ethnicity data are sometimes discussed as though their only purpose were to measure disadvantage among minority populations. That is too narrow. The same data can identify problems affecting White Americans, test whether White people are being discriminated against, and show when a broad national average hides a serious problem concentrated in a particular White population.

The examples below are analytical use cases. They do not claim that White Americans are uniformly worse off on these outcomes. The point is the opposite: good data let us see when outcomes differ, where they differ, and whether race still matters after age, geography, income, education, and other variables are taken into account.

1. Employment discrimination against White workers

Federal employment law prohibits discrimination because of race, and the Supreme Court has held that Title VII protects White employees from racial discrimination as well as employees of other races. If employers, regulators, or researchers stop measuring race, it becomes harder to detect or rebut claims that White applicants or employees are being treated differently.^[15,16]

Scope: Broader measurement principle; employer and EEOC data do not disappear under the Census proposal.

2. Suicide among White men or specific White age groups

Mortality systems such as CDC WONDER permit rates to be examined by race, ethnicity, age, sex, and geography. If a spike occurs among White middle-aged men, analysts can identify it, compare it with other groups, and target prevention. Without race data, that pattern could be diluted inside a total-population average.^[18]

Scope: Broader federal/statistical example; not directly eliminated by the proposed Census rule.

3. Drug-overdose crises in predominantly White rural communities

Suppose overdose deaths rise sharply in a cluster of Appalachian or Midwestern counties. Race data help test whether the increase is concentrated among White residents, shared across all residents, or changing differently by group. That distinction affects prevention strategy and resource allocation.^[18]

Scope: Race-specific public-health data come from mortality systems; decennial race data can still matter as denominator and small-area benchmark.

4. Aging and service needs in older White communities

Many counties with older populations are predominantly White. Combining race with age and geography helps planners distinguish a general aging problem from one concentrated in particular populations. That can matter for transportation, home health, caregiver support, housing, and local healthcare access.^[7]

Scope: Under the current proposal, the ACS would still allow this analysis; the risk rises if broader race measurement retreats.

5. Educational outcomes among low-income White students

Race data allow researchers to ask whether low-income White students experience the same outcomes as low-income students from other groups. Without race, a school system could see a poverty gap but miss a population-specific pattern - or wrongly attribute a class problem to race.

Scope: Most education data are collected outside the decennial Census; this illustrates why retaining race as an analytical variable can protect every group.

6. Economic distress in deindustrialized White communities

A county-level decline in labor-force participation, income, or population may affect a predominantly White community differently from nearby more diverse communities. Race data help determine whether the driver is racial composition, rurality, industry mix, age, education, or some combination.^[7]

Scope: ACS and economic datasets remain critical; the decennial Census provides a demographic benchmark.

7. Disaster recovery in predominantly White towns

After a wildfire, flood, tornado, or hurricane, analysts may need to know whether aid reached all groups fairly. In a heavily White rural area, race data can demonstrate that White residents - including low-income or older White households - were underserved rather than assuming that equity analysis is relevant only to minority communities.

Scope: Primarily a broader program-evaluation example; detailed population benchmarks strengthen local analysis.

8. Housing discrimination against White households

The Fair Housing Act prohibits housing discrimination because of race. White applicants are protected by the same statutory language. Race data can help investigate whether a landlord, lender, or housing program treats White applicants differently from otherwise similar applicants.^[17]

Scope: Broader civil-rights measurement example; housing-enforcement data are not automatically changed by the Census proposal.

9. Veterans and disability

A national average can hide problems concentrated among White veterans, White disabled adults, or other intersections of race with age, sex, disability, and geography. Keeping race in the data allows agencies and researchers to test rather than assume who is experiencing worse outcomes.

Scope: Broader statistical principle; many program datasets collect race independently.

10. The "default White consumer" problem

When race is not measured, analysts can unintentionally treat the total market as a proxy for White consumers. Explicit race measurement actually makes it easier to see that White consumers are not a single default population: rural and urban, younger and older, affluent and low-income White consumers may behave very differently.^[7]

Scope: Directly relevant to market research; ACS and private research remain available under the current proposal.

WHY THIS MATTERS

If we stop measuring race, we do not become neutral. We become less able to determine which groups are actually being helped, harmed, or left behind - including White Americans.

6. More Real-World Examples: What Becomes Harder to See

The value of race and ethnicity data is easiest to understand through practical questions. In each example below, the data do not provide the answer by themselves. They allow us to ask a better question and test competing explanations.

Example	What the data let us test	Impact under current proposal
Voting districts	A state draws a district that fragments a concentrated Hispanic or Black community across several districts. Block-level race/ethnicity data help analysts test whether the map weakens minority voting opportunity under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act.	Direct, especially at block geography.
Racial gerrymandering claims	A map appears to sort voters heavily by race. Detailed race data can help courts and experts determine whether race was actually used as a predominant line-drawing factor.	Directly strengthened by granular race data.
Language access	A county sees rapid growth in Spanish-speaking households. Hispanic-origin, language, age, and geography together help distinguish where translated services or bilingual staff may be needed.	ACS remains available under current proposal.
Hospital service areas	A health system considering a clinic can compare age, insurance, language, ethnicity, income, and travel distance. Race/ethnicity is one variable among many, not a substitute for them.	ACS remains available; decennial benchmark affects fine-area precision.
Maternal-health research	Researchers can compare outcomes across racial/ethnic groups and then test whether differences persist after income, age, insurance, geography, or access are considered.	Depends mainly on health and vital-statistics datasets; illustrates broader value of race measurement.
Homeownership gaps	Analysts can ask whether homeownership differences by race remain after controlling for age, income, family structure, and region - or whether the gap narrows substantially after those factors are considered.	ACS remains a major source.
Small-business ownership	Business agencies and researchers can evaluate whether entrepreneurship, access to capital, or firm survival differs across population groups and places.	Often relies on Census business surveys and ACS rather than only the decennial questionnaire.
Insurance and financial services	A company can evaluate whether products are reaching different communities, while separating ethnicity from language, income, credit profile, age, and geography.	Market research and ACS remain available.
School-boundary changes	A district considering attendance-zone changes can examine how proposed boundaries affect the racial/ethnic composition of schools and whether the effects differ from neighborhood demographics.	Decennial block data can support fine-grained geography; local school data also matter.

Example	What the data let us test	Impact under current proposal
Environmental exposure	Analysts can test whether pollution, extreme heat, wildfire smoke, or flood risk disproportionately affects particular racial/ethnic populations - or whether the primary driver is income, geography, housing stock, or age.	Often relies on multiple datasets; race is one analytical dimension.
Emergency communications	During a disaster, an area may contain older White residents, recent immigrants, Spanish-dominant households, and multiracial families. Demographic data help planners avoid one-size-fits-all communication.	ACS and local data remain available.
Consumer segmentation	A marketer may discover that generation, income, and cultural orientation matter more than ethnicity for a product. That conclusion is stronger when race/ethnicity was measured and tested, rather than simply omitted.	Direct market-research value.
Longitudinal change	A county that was 80% non-Hispanic White in 2020 may be much more diverse in 2030. A direct decennial-to-decennial comparison shows the scale and location of change. A 2030 break in measurement makes that comparison less clean.	Direct.
Survey weighting	Researchers often calibrate samples to authoritative population benchmarks. If the decennial race benchmark changes methodology, weighting and trend analyses may need bridging adjustments.	Directly relevant to research infrastructure.
Commercial demographic products	Many private vendors build small-area estimates on top of federal population benchmarks. A change in the official benchmark can flow downstream into site-selection, media, credit-risk, and market-sizing products.	Indirect but commercially important.

Key sources for these examples: Census redistricting files, DOJ Voting Rights Act guidance, and ACS methodology.^[5,6,7]

7. Why the Substitutes Are Not Equivalent

The ACS can soften the loss, but not fully replace it

The ACS is arguably the most important safeguard under the proposed rule because it would continue to collect race and ethnicity along with rich social and economic characteristics. But it is a sample survey. At smaller geographies, estimates carry margins of error and often require five-year pooling. The Bureau does not publish ACS estimates for individual census blocks.^[7,8,9]

Administrative records can be powerful, but they answer a different question

The Census Bureau already uses administrative records and has researched composite race/Hispanic-origin files. Those records can improve coverage and reduce burden. But Census research also identifies conceptual and operational problems: different source systems may disagree, race or Hispanic origin may be missing, and a classification recorded by one agency may not match how a person would identify on the Census questionnaire.^[13,14]

That creates a statistical paradox. A policy intended to reduce sensitive direct questioning could increase reliance on data linkage and inferred classifications. The result may be less burden on the questionnaire but more dependence on the provenance, quality, and transparency of linked government records.

Modeling introduces a new kind of uncertainty

Statistical models can estimate small-area race/ethnicity patterns by combining ACS data, administrative records, geography, prior census counts, and other sources. That may work well for many business uses. But when the data are used in litigation or public policy, modeling assumptions can themselves become contested. Two reasonable models can produce different answers. The debate can shift from "what did people report?" to "whose model should we trust?"

8. The AI Paradox

We are entering an era in which artificial intelligence can analyze more data, faster, than at any point in history. AI can identify patterns across millions of records, combine information from multiple sources, and generate increasingly detailed small-area predictions.

But AI cannot create ground truth that was never collected. A sophisticated model built on incomplete or inconsistent data can produce a precise-looking answer that is still wrong. If direct race/ethnicity measurement is reduced, AI may make it easier to infer missing identities - but inference is not the same thing as self-identification.

THE AI PARADOX
The more powerful our analytical tools become, the more important it is to know what the underlying data actually represent. Better algorithms do not eliminate the need for better measurement.

This is especially relevant for human-centered research. Demographics can help describe who and where. They rarely explain why. Perceptions, beliefs, experiences, culture, motivations, relationships, and trust still require direct human understanding.

9. The Strongest Arguments For and Against the Change

A credible analysis should take both sides seriously. There are legitimate reasons to question racial categories, government collection of sensitive information, and respondent burden. There are also strong reasons to preserve a standardized national benchmark.

Argument for removing the questions	Counterargument / risk
The constitutional core of the Census is counting people for apportionment; race is not required to count total population.	The Census has long supported broader statistical and civil-rights functions, and Congress has authorized the Secretary to collect additional information.
A shorter form reduces burden and avoids asking people to disclose sensitive identity information under mandatory-response authority.	The empirical question is whether removing a small number of demographic items materially improves response or count accuracy.
Government should be colorblind and should not continually place people into racial categories.	Equal treatment and measurement are different. Race-neutral laws may still require data to test whether outcomes are actually race-neutral.
Race categories are imperfect, socially constructed, and increasingly unable to capture complex identities.	That can support better categories rather than no categories. The 2024 SPD 15 reforms were designed to modernize measurement.
The ACS and administrative records can provide the information more efficiently.	The ACS is sampled and does not publish block data; administrative records are not conceptually identical to self-identification.

Argument for removing the questions	Counterargument / risk
Private-sector and state data can fill gaps.	That can make demographic intelligence more dependent on proprietary methods, uneven state systems, and the ability to pay.
Reducing official racial classification could lower the salience of race in public life.	Removing measurement does not necessarily reduce real-world differences; it can make those differences harder to document.
Data linkage can reduce burden on respondents.	It can also increase concerns about invisible inference, data provenance, linkage, and classification without direct consent.

10. Scenario Analysis: Seven Plausible Outcomes

The following scenarios are planning cases, not probability forecasts. The purpose is to show how different institutional paths would change the implications for government, civil-rights enforcement, research, and business.

Scenario	Planning assessment	Likely consequence	What to do
1. Finalized substantially as proposed; ACS preserved	Plausible baseline planning case.	2030 loses direct decennial race/ethnicity collection; ACS continues; small-area analysis requires substitutes.	Build 2020-to-2030 bridge methods and document that 2030 values come from a different measurement regime.
2. Proposal modified or withdrawn	Plausible.	Direct race/ethnicity question remains, perhaps in revised combined format.	Normal 2030 planning continues, but question-format changes still require trend documentation.
3. Litigation delays or blocks implementation	Litigation is plausible; outcome uncertain.	A court could require stronger justification, delay implementation, or allow the rule to proceed.	Maintain dual contingency plans through questionnaire lock and dress rehearsal.
4. Administrative records become the decennial substitute	Plausible.	Fine-area race/ethnicity products may survive, but they may be based more on records and models than direct answers.	Demand validation by group, provenance documentation, and uncertainty measures.
5. Congress intervenes	Possible; depends on politics.	Congress could mandate questions, tabulations, or reporting requirements.	Monitor the 2027 and 2028 statutory Census reports and appropriations language.
6. Retrenchment spreads to ACS or other federal data	Lower-probability, high-impact tail risk.	National and local race/ethnicity benchmarks erode across multiple programs.	Diversify data sources, archive federal vintages, build proprietary opt-in benchmarks.
7. A later administration reverses course	Plausible over a longer horizon.	Direct collection could return, but a 2030 discontinuity may remain.	Preserve historical data and bridging methodology so the gap stays analyzable.

Key milestones to watch

- September 2026: proposed rule and public comment.^[1]
- April 1, 2027: subjects and types of information report to Congress under 13 U.S.C. Section 141(f).^[2]
- April 1, 2028: specific questions report to Congress and major operational testing period.^[2]
- September 2029: current federal deadline for implementation of revised SPD 15 standards, unless changed.^[11]
- April 1, 2030: Census Day.^[2]

11. Implications for Business and Market Research

For market researchers, the most important question is not simply whether race remains available somewhere. It is whether the source, geography, methodology, and time series remain comparable enough for the decision being made.

Hispanic market intelligence is a good example

There is no single Hispanic consumer. A recently arrived Spanish-dominant immigrant may have little in common with a fourth-generation Mexican American, a Cuban American entrepreneur, a Puerto Rican professional, or a young bicultural family. Country of origin, language, age, generation, income, education, geography, culture, and life stage all matter.

That is why removing ethnicity does not automatically produce a more sophisticated analysis. It can remove an important starting variable while leaving the researcher to reconstruct it through less direct means. The better approach is to use ethnicity as one dimension and then go much deeper.

White consumers are not a default segment

The same principle applies to White Americans. "White" can include rural retirees, urban professionals, recent European immigrants, multigenerational Appalachian families, young suburban households, farmers, veterans, and people with very different incomes, education levels, values, and media habits. Explicit race measurement can actually reduce lazy thinking by forcing researchers to distinguish White consumers from the undifferentiated "general market."

What changes for research practice

- Decennial 2020-to-2030 trend lines may require explicit methodology notes if 2030 race/ethnicity is no longer directly enumerated.
- Small-area market sizing may shift toward ACS 5-year estimates, administrative data, commercial models, or blended methods.
- Margins of error and model uncertainty will matter more in local-market presentations.
- Commercial vendors will need to explain how they rebuild or recalibrate race/ethnicity estimates without a like-for-like 2030 complete-count benchmark.
- First-party research, opt-in panels, and community-based sampling will become more valuable.
- Researchers should make clearer distinctions among self-reported, administratively recorded, modeled, and inferred race/ethnicity.
- The strongest segmentation will combine demographics with language, life stage, attitudes, behavior, culture, and trust rather than treating race or ethnicity as a complete explanation.

12. What Researchers and Decision-Makers Should Do Now

For researchers and analytics teams

- Archive the complete 2020 race/Hispanic-origin decennial data stack, including redistricting files, detailed demographic products, geography files, documentation, and code lists.
- Create a source map for every recurring metric: decennial Census, ACS, population estimates, administrative records, commercial data, or proprietary research.
- Add a "measurement regime" field to longitudinal databases so direct decennial counts are never silently mixed with ACS estimates or model-derived values.
- Run sensitivity tests now. Compare decisions made using 2020 block-level decennial data with decisions made using ACS block-group estimates. Quantify what precision is actually lost.
- Audit commercial demographic vendors. Ask how race and Hispanic-origin estimates are produced, what official benchmarks they use, how often models are recalibrated, and what happens if the 2030 benchmark changes.
- Preserve first-party demographic measures where legally and ethically appropriate, and make self-identification the preferred method when feasible.
- Report uncertainty. If a number is modeled or inferred, say so.

For companies and public institutions

- Do not treat the absence of race data as evidence that racial differences no longer exist.
- Do not treat race as destiny either. Test race alongside age, income, geography, education, language, disability, family structure, and other relevant factors.
- Use demographic data to identify questions, not to substitute for listening to people.
- Maintain privacy safeguards and clear limits on sensitive-data use.
- Where equity or discrimination is being evaluated, make sure the data system can identify disadvantage affecting any racial group, including White populations.
- Treat federal demographic-data policy as a business and data-governance risk, not merely a political issue.

13. Conclusion: The Larger Issue Is Human Understanding

America should continue working toward a society in which race matters less to a person's opportunity, treatment, and future. But that goal should not be confused with assuming that racial or ethnic differences have already stopped mattering.

There is an important difference between saying, "Race should not determine someone's opportunities," and saying, "We no longer need to know whether opportunities differ by race." Those ideas are not the same.

Good measurement can protect everyone. It can expose discrimination against minority populations. It can also reveal disadvantage affecting White Americans. It can show that a presumed racial problem is actually more closely connected to income, geography, age, education, or some other factor. And it can show when racial differences really are disappearing.

The goal should not be to categorize people more. The goal should be to understand people better.

THE AHAA

You cannot determine whether differences are disappearing if you stop measuring the differences. And you cannot solve problems you can no longer see.

Artificial intelligence is giving us unprecedented ability to analyze information, identify patterns, and make predictions. But technology alone does not create human understanding. Categories without context can oversimplify. Data without judgment can mislead. And sophisticated algorithms cannot compensate for important information that was never measured.

The more powerful technology becomes, the more important human understanding becomes.

That is the real issue before us: not whether America should become more colorblind - it should - but whether, in trying to get there, we risk becoming data-blind instead.

Transparency and Research Note

The concept, central question, framing, examples to explore, and overall direction of this white paper were developed by Preference Analytics. The purpose of the work was to examine the consequences of reducing direct race and ethnicity measurement in the decennial Census without assuming that those consequences would fall only on minority populations.

OpenAI's GPT-5.6 Sol, using High reasoning, was used to support deep research, source review, synthesis, scenario development, and drafting. Preference Analytics reviewed and refined the analysis and takes responsibility for the final interpretation, conclusions, and publication. Primary government sources were prioritized wherever practical; the sources used are listed below.

Sources and References

This white paper distinguishes the proposed 2030 decennial Census rule from broader federal race and ethnicity data collection. Primary government sources are used wherever practical; secondary sources are used only when helpful for context.

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[18. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC WONDER - Underlying Cause of Death, 1999-2020 and related mortality datasets, allowing tabulation by race/ethnicity, age, sex, and geography.](#)

Analytical note: *Examples and scenarios in this paper are intended to illustrate how race/ethnicity data can be used and what analytical capabilities could weaken. They are not claims that every listed disparity currently exists or that race causes the observed outcome. The legal discussion is general analysis, not legal advice.*

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Human understanding in an increasingly intelligent world.