

Opinion: Democracy in danger when the census undercounts vulnerable populations

By Emily Klancher Merchant, *The Conversation*

The 2020 U.S. Census is still two years away, but experts and civil rights groups are already disputing the results.

At issue is whether the census will fulfill the Census Bureau's mandate to "count everyone once, only once, and in the right place."

The task is hardly as simple as it seems and has serious political consequences. Recent changes to the 2020 census, such as asking about citizenship status, will make populations already vulnerable to undercounting even more likely to be missed. These vulnerable populations include the young, poor, nonwhite, non-English-speaking, foreign-born and transient.

An accurate count is critical to the functioning of the U.S. government. Census data determine how the power and resources of the federal government are distributed across the 50 states. This includes seats in the House, votes in the Electoral College and funds for federal programs. Census data also guide the drawing of congressional and other voting districts and the enforcement of civil and voting rights laws.

Places where large numbers of people go uncounted get less than their fair share of political representation and federal resources. When specific racial and ethnic groups are undercounted, it is harder to identify and rectify violations of their civil rights. My research on the international history of demography demonstrates that the question of how to equitably count the population is not new, nor is it unique to the United States. The experience of the United States and

other countries may hold important lessons as the Census Bureau finalizes its plans for the 2020 count.

Let's take a look at that history.

Census pioneer and promoter

In 1790, the United States became the first country to take a regular census. Following World War II, the U.S. government began to promote census-taking in other countries. U.S. leaders believed data about the size and location of populations throughout the Western Hemisphere could help the government plan defense. What's more, U.S. businesses could also use the data to identify potential markets and labor forces in nearby countries.

The U.S. government began investing in a program called the Census of the Americas. Through this program, the State Department provided financial support and the Census Bureau provided technical assistance to Western Hemisphere countries taking censuses in 1950.

United Nations demographers also viewed the Census of the Americas as an opportunity. Data that were standardized across countries could serve as the basis for projections of world population growth and the calculation of social and economic indicators. They also hoped that censuses would provide useful information to newly established governments. The U.N. turned the Census of the Americas into a global affair, recommending that "all Member States planning population censuses about 1950 use comparable schedules so far as possible." Since 1960, the U.N. has sponsored a World Census Program every 10 years. The 2020 World Census Program will be the seventh round.

Counting everyone isn't easy

Not all countries went along with the program. For example, Lebanon's Christian rulers feared that a census would show Christians to be a minority, undermining the legitimacy of

their government. However, for the 65 sovereign countries taking censuses between 1945 and 1954, leaders faced the same question the U.S. faces today: How can we make sure that everyone has an equal chance of being counted?

In 1950, Ecuador's democratic government saw the census as a means of "conquering the national territory administratively." The military mapped rural areas that had not previously been drawn so that the census wouldn't miss people living in remote places. They believed the census would help them establish control in areas that had previously remained out of reach due to decades of political turmoil and economic crisis.

In the process, indigenous communities who feared that the census would be used to further oppress them took up armed resistance. The government promised indigenous leaders that participation would help, not hurt their communities. However, the census did not include any racial or ethnic classification. As a result, the data it produced could not be used to address racial discrimination faced by Ecuador's indigenous communities. It wasn't even possible to determine the size of the indigenous population or to judge whether it had been counted completely.

Meanwhile in Nigeria, the government expected that its first post-independence census in 1962 would provide an empirical basis for representation in what was then a new democracy. Officials in Nigeria's Western Region feared that residents would be unable to participate because the census asked for age, which many people didn't know, simply because there had never been a reason to know. To facilitate participation, officials instructed local leaders to compile lists of dates of local historical events that people could use to determine when they had been born.

Despite these efforts, Nigeria's 1962 census was plagued by accusations from officials in the various regions that some areas had been counted more completely than others. The

government ultimately repudiated the results and repeated the count in 1963. The failure of this census weakened public faith in the ability of the government to either count or rule such a large and diverse population.

In the U.S., demographers began to recognize during World War II that the census was not counting everyone equally. Research showed that African-Americans were less likely to be counted than were white Americans. As a result, places with large nonwhite populations were underrepresented in the House and Electoral College. While the U.S. census has been able to reduce the overall undercount since then, it still disproportionately misses African-Americans and other people of color today.

Historical challenges to census-taking show that widespread participation is key to an accurate census count. These events have helped demographers understand that people are more likely to participate when they understand the process; are not worried that their participation will be used against them; and can easily identify themselves in the categories used by the census. Adequate funding to follow up with people who don't respond by mail, internet or telephone is also critical.

A census that counts everyone is probably impossible. But if the census is to guide the equitable distribution of political power and federal resources, it must also strive to count people as equitably as possible.

Emily Klancher Merchant is an assistant professor of science and technology studies at UC Davis.

Thousands of college hopefuls could leave California

By Vanessa Rancano, KQED

High school seniors across the state are waiting on news that will shape the rest of their lives.

This month they find out whether they are among the thousands being admitted to the University of California or California State University.

Both UCs and CSUs are struggling to find space for qualified residents at overcrowded campuses, and tens of thousands of eligible students will be turned away. If they leave the state for college, and don't come back, it could be trouble for the state's economy.

Read the whole story

Psychology of humor topic of talk in Incline

The Psychology of Humor is the title of Kim Bateman's lecture this month in Incline Village.

From mockery (the Darwin Awards) to sarcasm (National Sarcasm Society – like we need your support), comedy can be viewed as a diagnostic tool for the investigation of enduring questions about the human condition.

Bateman's talk will be April 26 starting at 6pm. Doors open at

5:30pm. Cost is \$5.

The event will be at the Tahoe Environmental Research Center on the campus of Sierra Nevada College.

When days and nights get too hot

By Aimee Cunningham, Science News

Some victims were found at home. An 84-year-old woman who'd spent over half her life in the same Sacramento apartment died near her front door, gripping her keys. A World War II veteran succumbed in his bedroom. Many died outside, including a hiker who perished on the Pacific Crest Trail, his water bottles empty.

The killer? Heat. Hundreds of others lost their lives when a stifling air mass settled on California in July 2006. And this repeat offender's rap sheet stretches on. In Chicago, a multiday scorcher in July 1995 killed nearly 700. Elderly, black residents and people in homes without air conditioning were hardest hit. Europe's 2003 heat wave left more than 70,000 dead, almost 20,000 of them in France. Many elderly Parisians baked to death in upper-floor apartments while younger residents who might have checked in on their neighbors were on August vacation. In 2010, Russia lost at least 10,000 residents to heat. India, in 2015, reported more than 2,500 heat-related deaths.

Year in and year out, heat claims lives.

Read the whole story

Multiple art events coming to LTCC

Lake Tahoe Community College Art Department instructor Shelley Zentner will bring her large-scale portraits inspired by stories of freedom and expression to the Fine Arts building's Foyer Gallery in her exhibit "Fundamental Freedoms."

Zentner will host an artist reception and talk on April 19 from 5-7pm inside the Foyer Gallery.

Zentner has created seven works since the presidential election that will be featured in this exhibit. She felt compelled to contribute in some way to the growing voice of protest, saying, "We are in the midst of a great societal and global paradigm shift, and I feel that the role of artists is to use this negative energy as a catalyst for creativity."

Each painting explores different aspects of freedom: the freedom to vote, to learn, to explore the natural world, and to escape violence and enslavement.

To complement this exhibition, a free screening of the award-winning documentary film "He Named Me Malala" will be shown in LTCC's Duke Theatre on April 27 at 5:30pm. A discussion panel will follow.

Local schools are invited to bring groups of children fifth grade and older to learn more about the issues raised by the subjects of each portrait in Zentner's "Fundamental Freedoms" exhibit. The artist will be available for short presentations

by appointment for the three-month duration of the show, and educational materials will be provided. All of the artworks are for sale, and a percentage of sales will be donated to causes and charities connected to each painting in the exhibit.

Zentner is a Welsh artist who has lived in South Lake Tahoe for 14 years. She is an adjunct faculty member in LTCC's Art Department, and is also the founder of Tahoe Activist Artists.

After visiting the Foyer Gallery on April 19, all are welcome to the Haldan Art Gallery inside LTCC's library building for a second exhibit and artist reception from 5-7pm featuring new works created by faculty and staff in LTCC's Art Department. Artist talks will begin shortly after 5pm. Some of the featured pieces in this show include an additional piece by Zentner, photography by instructor Jim Grant, and more.

These exhibits will remain open through June 21. The Foyer Gallery in the Fine Arts building can be accessed Monday through Friday 8am-8pm, and Saturdays 8am-4pm. Haldan Art Gallery hours are Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 11am-5:30pm, and Fridays from 11am-2:30pm.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

- The Pony Express Trail through El Dorado County will be closed April 9-27 for the falling and removal of designated dead and dying trees.

- Gavin Pretor-Pinney, founder of the Cloud Appreciation Society, will give a talk April 14 at the Sports Aviation Foundation's annual meeting at the Carson Valley Inn at 6:30pm. Advance tickets are 40. No ticket sales at the door.

Contact Erin Eichhorst at 775.782.9871 for information or tickets.

- Reno Whole Foods Market is giving 5 percent of all their net sales to the Tahoe Rim Trail Association on April 19.

- Anyone wishing to be apply to be on the Lake Tahoe Humane Society's board of directors may pick up an application on April 7 from 5-6pm at the office on Emerald Bay Road.

- The South Lake Tahoe City Council on April 3 approved an ordinance to regulate the use and sale of expanded polystyrene (also called EPS, white plastic foam and Styrofoam) food containers and products in the city.

EDC vehicle thefts surge; statewide numbers drop

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

The number of vehicle thefts in California headed downward in 2017, following two years of increases.

El Dorado County saw a 17.5 percent increase, from 286 in 2016 to 336 in 2017, according to CHP statistics.

Sacramento and Placer County counties followed the statewide trend.

Read the whole story

Earth Day workday in Alpine County

The Alpine Watershed Group will be hosting an Earth Day Work Day on April 21 at Grover Hot Springs State Park.

This event allows for the completion of restoration work to an alpine meadow. Volunteers are needed to help with invasive weed removal, fence rebuilding and extension, and state park maintenance. All are welcome to attend. No experience is necessary.

Gather at Grover Hot Springs at 8:30am for registration and introductions. Volunteers are asked to bring water in reusable water bottles (water refill stations will be provided), sun protection, and appropriate clothing. The workday will wrap up at 12:30pm. Snacks will be provided. Starbucks and Subway will be providing coffee and pastries in the morning and sandwiches for lunch.

The Alpine Watershed Group is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to protect and enhance the natural system functions of Alpine County watersheds. For more information on this event, go **online**.

Meston to resign as acting

SLT city manager

Updated April 6, 5:30pm:

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe acting City Manager Jeff Meston has told the City Council that he wants to step down.

Meston's full-time job is fire chief of the city.

He has had the added responsibilities since Feb. 7. That is when the council put then City Manager Nancy Kerry on leave before eventually permanently separating ways for reasons that still have not been disclosed.



Jeff Meston

Meston sent a note to the council saying, "I am unable to complete my duties as the fire chief while working as the acting city manager. I respectfully request that we move ahead in the next 30 days to find and hire an interim city manager."

Mayor Wendy David was not immediately available for comment.

In Meston's letter he cited the structure of the fire department and how with him being pulled out to do city work not related to his department it is taking a toll.

"We have several critical issues pending which include finalization of the Standards of Cover Document (council goal), hiring additional personnel, our communication system

replacement plan as well as the lawsuit over the ladder truck. I am unable to complete my duties as the fire chief while working as the acting city manager,” Meston’s letter said.

The council also needs a city attorney because the firm acting as interim legal counsel has said they will no longer be performing those duties as of the end of summer.

The council last month had a brief conversation about what to do about the two leadership positions which it has control over. However, it is not clear what the five really want to do.

Meston had told the council he is trying to find a search firm to find a city manager.

The minutes from that meeting were on the April 4 council agenda. They were inaccurate regarding that conversation and had to be revised. The minutes fraudulently stated a motion, conversation and action that never occurred.

The council has not made any official decisions about what it wants to do with a city manager or city attorney. The resignation of Meston as acting city manager will now press their hands to do their job.

K’s Kitchen: Mushrooms and asparagus

By Kathryn Reed

Mushrooms – I could eat them every day, for every meal.

Asparagus – one of the best vegetables to buy right now. Combine them, and, well, it's a party for the palate.

This dish has lots of versatility. It can be served hot, at room temperature, as a salad, as a side and probably other ways.

While I roasted these, putting them on the barbecue would also work. I have a couple different devices I use when I don't want to put veggies right on the grill – usually because they would fall right through.

Many grocery stores now carry a mix of wild mushrooms; this is what I used. They have a rich flavor compared to white button shrooms. Some of the ones I bought were big, so I cut them up before putting them on the baking sheet.

If you don't have unsalted butter, just use what you have and don't salt the veggies.

Putting the mix on a bed of arugula made it a meal for me. Doing so on a platter would make it great for serving if you are sharing with others. The arugula adds to the flavor because it is inherently spicy. Another green would work; your preference.



Roasted Asparagus and Mushrooms

1 pound asparagus, trimmed and cut in half

1 pound wild mushrooms

2 T olive oil

1 tsp kosher salt

2 T unsalted butter

2 T fresh thyme leaves

1-2 C arugula (depends on how you are using it)

Balsamic vinegar

Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Put foil on a rimmed baking sheet.

Place mushrooms and asparagus on sheet. Drizzle with oil olive and sprinkle with salt. Toss to coat.

Cook for about 15 minutes, stirring a couple times. Add butter and thyme. Toss, and cook for another 5 minutes.

Drizzle veggies with balsamic vinegar.

If using arugula, spread on a plate(s) or platter, then assemble veggies on top.