

## THE CONCEPT OF "USUAL RESIDENCE" IN THE CENSUS OF POPULATION

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Where people are counted in the United States Census of Population, that is, the area in whose statistics they are included, is important from many standpoints. Of greatest consequence is the effect on the apportionment of representatives to the Congress and to State legislatures. There are also other legal uses of population counts that are affected by the way in which persons enumerated are assigned to a geographic area. These uses include, for example, the distribution of certain State funds to municipalities on the basis of population and the requirements in State laws that a municipality attain a specified population before it is granted certain powers. Moreover, the description of an area's population and the levels of per caput rates that are computed for it will be influenced by the enumeration procedure followed; and these statistics, in turn, affect the use of the data in administration and in scientific research. As this audience probably well knows, the size of some types of areas determines whether certain kinds of statistics will be published, not only in Census reports but also in other statistical reports.

The choice of population concepts and of specific procedures and rules obviously affects the count for States, cities, and other geographic subdivisions. Even the national total is affected, although the effect is relatively slight in most circumstances. At the peak of activity in World War II, however a de facto count would have yielded about 9 million fewer persons than a de jure count.

The Population Census of the United States uses the concept of "usual residence," and there may be some question as to whether that is strictly equivalent to the de jure concept. The Act of 1790 providing for the first decennial census states "...Be it enacted, That every person whose usual place of abode shall be in any family on the aforesaid first Monday in August next, shall be returned as of such family; and the name of every person, who shall be an inhabitant of any district, but without a settled place of residence, shall be inserted in the column of the aforesaid schedule, which is allotted for the heads of families, in that division where he or she shall be on the first Monday in August next, and every person occasionally absent at the time of the enumeration, as belonging to that place in which he usually resides in the United States."<sup>1</sup> Although the rather archaic term "usual place of abode" still remains in the law, the synonym "usual place of residence" was introduced for greater clarity in the 1940 instructions to enumerators.

The Constitution does not mention the type of census to be taken, and Congress has left the definition of "usual place of abode" to those responsible for taking the census; nowadays, the Secretary of Commerce has the authority for making such decisions but customarily delegates

this authority to the Director of the Bureau of the Census. This arrangement implicitly recognizes the need for technical competence and experience in this matter, as well as in such matters as the particular population questions to be asked and the definition of the terms used in these questions. Statistical surveys were in a primitive state at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and no written instructions were published for the census until 1820 and no printed schedules until 1830. As far as the term "usual place of abode" was concerned, however, it is likely that few questions of interpretation would arise in an essentially agricultural society with relatively little physical mobility except for the migration of entire families. The discussion of "usual place of abode" did not cover any points that were not already spelled out in the Act of 1790 until 1850, when the instructions to the marshals specified that,

"By place of abode is meant the house or usual lodging place of a person. Any one who is temporarily absent on a journey, or for other purposes, without taking up his place of residence elsewhere, and with the intention of returning again, is to be considered a member of the family which the assistant marshal is enumerating."

"Students in colleges, academies, or schools, when absent from the families to which they belong, are to be enumerated only as members of the family in which they usually boarded and lodged on the 4th day of June."

The instructions to enumerators in the Census of 1880 contain the following: "The census law furnishes no definition of the phrase, 'usual place of abode'; and it is difficult, under the American system of a protracted enumeration, to afford administrative directions which will wholly obviate the danger that some persons will be reported in two places and others not reported at all. Much must be left to the judgment of the enumerator, who can, if he will take the pains, in the great majority of instances satisfy himself as to the propriety of including or not including doubtful cases in his enumeration of any given family. In the cases of boarders at hotels or students at schools or colleges, the enumerator can, by one or two well-directed inquiries, ascertain whether the person concerning whom the question may arise has, at the time, any other place of abode within another district at which he is likely to be reported. Seafaring men are to be reported at their land homes, no matter how long they may have been absent, if they are supposed to be still alive. Hence, sailors temporarily at a sailors' boarding or lodging house, if they acknowledge any other home within the United States, are not to be included in the family of the lodging or boarding house. Persons engaged in internal transportation, canal men, express

men, railroad men, etc., if they habitually return to their homes in the intervals of their occupations, will be reported as of their families, and not where they may be temporarily staying on the 1st of June, 1880."

The 1960 Enumerator's Reference Manual has twenty numbered sections on "How to Determine 'Usual residence'." It is remarkable that the three basic principles laid down in the Act of 1790 are still maintained, but the types of problems covered and their solution show some variations in the instructions for successive censuses. With a very few exceptions, the residence rules used in the numerous special censuses taken at the request and expense of local governments, as well as the rules used in sample surveys such as the Current Population Survey, are the same as those used in contemporary decennial censuses.

In modern times, a small proportion of people are listed in one area but are counted in the statistics for another area. This allocation is accomplished by a transfer of forms for persons or families and a check to see whether or not they had also been listed at the claimed place of usual residence. Such a procedure is possible only in a census that covers the entire Nation.

Although a number of statistically advanced countries have always taken their census on the de facto basis, i.e., counting persons where they slept on a specified "census night," there does not seem to have been any serious proposal to adopt this type of census for the United States.<sup>2/</sup> Not only would this type of population be contrary to the Census law but the very notion of a de facto count appears to be contrary to American ways of thinking. The Bureau of the Census in order to secure supplemental information and to check on the completeness of coverage has frequently had occasion to ask for a listing of persons who were present at an address on a given day. No matter how this question is worded, it continues to be mystifying, laughable, or offensive to a surprisingly large part of the general public.

There is a more widespread demand for a closer approximation to a count of the de jure population, or for defining "usual residence" with a connotation of greater permanence. The Statistical Office of the United Nations has stated, however, that an allocation of persons to geographic units by their usual place of residence within the country does yield a de jure distribution of the population.<sup>3/</sup> Neither "usual residence" nor "de jure" is otherwise defined. In fact, these concepts are more difficult to define than de facto or "population present"; and, to the extent that national census reports discuss the terms, they characteristically do so by giving a list of rules. In its 1960 Enumerator's Reference Manual, the U.S. Bureau of the Census introduces the subject with the following paragraph:

"Usual place of residence is, ordinarily the place a person regards as his home. As a rule, it will be the place where he usually sleeps."

It may be seen that this general explanation does not by itself constitute an operational definition.

Possibly from a literal translation of de jure, or from other considerations, it is sometimes argued that people should be counted at their legal residence. One difficulty with this approach is that a person has no unique legal residence in this country. He may have certain rights or duties (voting, public assistance, admission to a public institution, jury duty, certain taxes, etc.) in one State or community and other rights or duties in another State or community. A citizen who has recently moved may not have some of these rights in any State.

The type of legal residence that is probably most commonly cited or implied is voting residence because it seems peculiarly appropriate to an enumeration that will be used to determine the number of representatives to be elected to legislative bodies. Although no accurate estimate exists, it can safely be said that millions of adults are not registered anywhere or otherwise entitled to vote.<sup>4/</sup> It would be necessary to elicit information on voting residence from the respondent not only in terms of a State but also in terms of a specific address so that the person could be counted in a specific enumeration district and political area. Certainly, at least one extra question would have to be added to the schedule. To the large number of children and unregistered adults, we should have to add the number of adults for whom an adequate voting address could not be obtained. In what area would these be counted? The chief objection to using legal residence remains, however, that it is not equivalent to the basis prescribed in the law, namely, "usual place of abode."

Another alternative would be to let respondents determine their usual place of residence themselves without any guidance from the Bureau of the Census or its agents. In all likelihood such a procedure of handling a rather complex concept would not yield very uniform results.<sup>5/</sup> Furthermore, many persons will report an area where they have not lived continuously for a long time but which represents a more or less permanent base of operations to which they can return occasionally. For the unmarried, this place is frequently the parental home; for the married man long absent from his wife and children, it may be the place where these are living. In some cases, it is where the person votes or owns property or even where he was reared. Thus, in many cases, there will be a tendency to report an area to which there is an emotional tie but in which the person does not now live or to which he is unlikely to return except for brief visits.

Some critics contend that the daytime population of an area would provide a more realistic and useful body of statistics than the nighttime population. Although statistics on this basis would undoubtedly be a useful supplement to the conventional ones, it is highly unlikely that they will replace them.

Before I describe how the decennial census actually handles some of the principal types of problem cases, we may find it useful to consider some of the criteria that should be used in making the "usual residence rules." I propose the following:

- (1) the rules should be understandable by enumerators and respondents
- (2) they should provide for a complete and unduplicated count
- (3) they should produce useful statistics

With regard to the last point, the statistics should, for example, give a description of the population of an area that will meet the greatest number of needs in administration, business, and scientific research. They should articulate with statistics from other sources. It is desirable that the method of counting should keep together as a unit the people who actually live together in households, families, and similar groups. In some cases, of course, a rule made to meet one of these ideals will be antithetical to another ideal.

One class of the population for whom the proper basis of enumeration is often a matter of dispute is members of the armed forces. Although "seafaring men" were enumerated at their homes ashore according to some of the earliest available instructions, the first explicit mention of members of the armed forces (in the 1880 instructions) provides that, "All soldiers of the United States army, and civilian employees, and other residents at posts or on military reservations will be enumerated in the district in which they reside, equally with other elements of the population." In the Census of 1890, military reservations, navy yards, and vessels were covered by special resident enumerators engaged from among the staff; and members of the armed forces have continued to be counted where they are stationed. There is no record that they were ever allocated back to a place of preservice origin.

Although the quotation earlier from instructions for the Census of 1850 shows that college students were at one time counted where they lived while attending college, they were in many intervening censuses counted at their parental homes instead. The earlier method was restored in 1950.<sup>6</sup> The present method is deemed to be more consistent with the usual residence principle. Students who go away to college are away from home for a longer period, on the average, than military draftees of similar age; about one-fifth of them are wholly self-supporting and another two-fifths partially self-supporting <sup>7</sup>; and one-quarter of them are married. Moreover,

most of those who go away to college will never again live regularly with their parents. Leaving the parental home is a gradual process for many young people, and going away to college is often the most significant event in this process. According to the Current Population Survey of October 1958, the address at which college students would be enumerated would be unchanged for at least 55 percent of them if there were a reversion to the 1940 rule. The rule chosen has an important effect upon the population size of college towns but relatively little effect upon other areas.

Where persons in institutions, hospitals, sanatoria, and similar group quarters are counted depends basically upon whether the length of stay is characteristically long or short.<sup>8</sup> This seems to be a procedure of long-standing. Unfortunately, for those who are interested in current population estimates, death rates, etc., the customary procedure in the field of vital statistics is different. Since 1949, the practice has been to allocate the deaths of most institutional inmates back to the area of residence at time of commitment, regardless of whether this is where the inmate would go upon his release.<sup>9</sup> It must be admitted, on the other hand, that an area with a large proportion of its resident population living in an institution will present a most peculiar statistical picture, not only as to the health of its inhabitants but also as to their demographic characteristics, educational attainment, income, and so on. In the 1960 Census, a novel effort has been made to give a better picture of the character of the ordinary population. This takes the form not of allocating the persons in group quarters back to their areas of previous residence but of publishing a table for the areas most affected on some of the characteristics of persons living in households, excluding persons in any type of group quarters.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps the most difficult decisions to be made concern persons with more than one residence. These include those who change their homes with the seasons. We think first of the idle rich who move from Newport to Palm Beach and of the hotel employees and other service workers who move because of them. But, in our increasingly affluent and mobile society with its long vacations and early retirement, the occupancy of more than one home during the year is increasingly a mass phenomenon. Of course, there have also long been classes of workers who changed their residences seasonally with their jobs—lumbermen, fishermen, agricultural laborers, canners, etc. In the cases that involve an annual cycle, the ordinary rule is to choose the residence where the person lives the greatest part of the year—although there is always the temptation to play safe and count him where you find him. Another class with dual residence consists of persons who work and live away from their homes and families, perhaps returning on weekends. In their case the need for meaningful family statistics clashes with the need to include persons in the area

where they are living most of the time. Obviously, we must take into account the length of stay, not only past but prospective. In the end, as mentioned in the instructions of 1880, there are some complex cases that must be left to the enumerator's judgment.

That persons with no fixed place of residence are to be counted where they are found by the enumerator is an instruction that has continued since the Act of 1790 itself. One of the reasons for a "T-night" and an "M-night" on specified dates is to facilitate a complete and unduplicated count of such transients.<sup>11/</sup> It has been suggested that such persons be counted as a class apart in the United States population and that they should not be allocated to geographic areas. By law, however, they must be included in the apportionment population; and the tabulation of other population statistics on a different basis is probably a luxury that we cannot afford and hardly require.

A few remarks may be made concerning the fairly large number of Americans who have their usual residence--by Census definition--abroad and hence are not included in the count for the United States. To round out the description of our national population, data on basic demographic characteristics were first obtained in 1950 for the following classes living abroad: (1) members of the armed forces and their families; (2) civilian federal employees and their families; (3) crews of vessels in foreign ports or on the high seas.<sup>12/</sup> In the 1960 Census, we are attempting to extend both the coverage and the number of characteristics. An inventory of our manpower resources is incomplete that leaves out the fairly numerous technicians on long-time foreign assignments. This information on Americans abroad is being obtained through the Department of Defense, the State Department, etc. Whether we have secured a sufficiently complete count of such groups as American employees of international agencies, employees of private firms, students at foreign universities, expatriates, etc., and their dependents remains to be seen. Statistics for those groups that are adequately covered will be published in a special report.

In conclusion, it seems likely that important statistical needs that are not now satisfied will be met not by changing the "usual residence rules" but rather by providing supplementary information in the tabulations. Some innovations along this line have been made in the 1960 Census. Additional data could be made available by special tabulations, or by introducing new questions in future surveys or censuses.

## Footnotes

1/ Most of the historical information in this paper is taken from: Carroll D. Wright and William C. Hunt. The History and Growth of the United States Census, Washington, Government Printing Office, 1900.

2/ The United Nations has recommended that, for the country as a whole, the de facto population be obtained except that military and diplomatic personnel should be counted in the country to which they belong. This population is called the "international conventional total." See: United Nations. Handbook of Population Census Methods, Vol. III, "Demographic and Social Characteristics of the Population." (Studies in Methods, Series F, No. 5, Rev. 1), New York, 1959:57-58.

For a further comparison of American practices and international standards, see: Henry S. Shryock, Jr. "The concept of de facto and de jure population: The experience in censuses of the United States" in Proceedings of the World Population Conference, 1954, United Nations, New York, 1955, Vol. IV, pp. 877-888.

3/ Op. cit.

4/ According to an article in Washington Evening Star of 30 July 1960, Frank Thompson, Jr., chairman of a newly formed Registration of Voters Committee, estimated that from 30 to 40 million persons were otherwise eligible to vote but had not registered.

5/ Survey statisticians have learned that respondents' replies to such seemingly straightforward questions as "Are you employed?", and "Do you live on a farm?" do not yield satisfactory statistics.

6/ College students have continued to be counted at their parental homes in the Current Population Survey, largely because of the fact that a household remains in the panel for four consecutive months, some of which may fall in the academic vacation period. The feasibility of changing to the decennial census procedure is now under review.

7/ From unpublished data collected in the Current Population Survey of October 1959.

8/ An exception to this principle is that prisoners in jails are counted there despite the usual short sentences. There has been some doubt that their relatives would be inclined to report them.

9/ National Office of Vital Statistics.  
Vital Statistics of the United States: 1950,  
Volume I, Washington, Government Printing  
Office, 1954:36.

10/ This will be Table 31 in Series PC(1)B.

11/ T-night covers large transient hotels and  
motels whereas M-night is for missions, flop-  
houses, jails, hobo jungles, and all-night  
movies. Possibly another special date for

migratory agricultural workers would prove  
helpful.

12/ A wartime innovation in current popula-  
tion estimates that has persisted is a national  
series including the armed forces abroad--but  
not any other Americans abroad. That much-  
misunderstood toy, the "Census Clock", shows  
this population rather than the population res-  
ident in the United Census, which is the sub-  
ject of the regular decennial statistics.